

RICHARD SESSOMS

November 12, 1996

—
Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the twelfth of November, 1996. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, with Dick Sessoms. My first question to you is, how does a Hampden-Sydney guy switch his allegiance to Washington and Lee?

Sessoms: [Laughter] Well, I'm glad you asked me that. I've had that question a time or two, so I have my answer down. Mame, I tell all my Hampden-Sydney friends it finally took a tiger from Hampden-Sydney to come up to Washington and get this place straight. I tell all my Washington & Lee friends that there's not a W&L male alive that would take this big a cut in salary to take this dumb job. [Laughter] So that's the superficial answer.

I married into the Washington & Lee family. I married, in 1962, the daughter of a Washington & Lee professor. Francis Drake is my father-in-law. He's now in his mid-eighties. He taught romance languages here for forty-three years as head of the French Department and head of the romance languages for a number of years, a great teacher, as sworn to me by many alumni that I've run across on the road.

I came to Lexington in 1960. I had been a reporter for the Roanoke newspaper, and I was offered a job next door at Virginia Military Institute, as director of—well, as business manager of the Athletic Association and director of sports information. That brought me to town on July 1st, 1960, the same day that General George R. E. Shell went to work at VMI. He and I always kidded each other about starting together.

In any event, after I'd been in Lexington for a year or so, my roommates and I were giving a party, as we frequently did, over in east Lexington. One of my roommates was none other than John A. Jennings, who at that time was a brand-new instructor in the journalism school. John had worked for the Roanoke Times World Corporation, so he and I knew each other from working at Roanoke. Anyway, the day that my announcement was made in the newspaper that I was coming to work at VMI, John called and said, "I've got a great place for you to live up here. Come in and move in with Dr. Bill Old and me and a young Washington & Lee graduate of the class, just graduated last month, the class of 1960." That was a fellow named Press Rowe, who has since—well, at that time he was Frank Parsons' assistant. Press is now a member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame.

Warren: Press Rowe?

Sessoms: Press Rowe, yeah.

Warren: R-O-W-E?

Sessoms: R-O-W-E. The newspaper Rowe family from Fredericksburg. His Uncle Charlie was a trustee here. So Press was from that newspaper family. So Press was my roommate, along with Bill Old, Dr. Bill Old, a surgeon, and John Jennings. I guess we'd been there together maybe six or eight months, or whatever, we were giving a party one time and they invited the Drakes, who said, "May we bring our daughter?" We said, "Of course," and that's how Sally and I met. Dr. Drake, I think, took a shine to me, because he was a French professor and at that time I was driving a brand-new Peugeot, and he must have figured I had something on the ball.

[Laughter] So I guess Sally and I had our first date maybe two or three months later. I wasn't that swift in those days, and I was working pretty hard at VMI.

But anyway, after a year or two or marriage, two or three years, I guess, maybe just one year that we were married here in town, but it was my third year at VMI, I got real lucky and was offered a job at Colonial Williamsburg, and Sally and I

moved to Williamsburg. I spent, oh, I think fourteen and a half years, the best years of my life, working on the PR staff there. I had many, many experiences that still permeate my existence, learned a lot working for the Rockefeller organization there. Some of that experience came in very handy to me in my W&L—still does, come in handy up here, as well as some of the things I learned at VMI. So I think I've learned along as I've gone.

When I moved to Williamsburg, we, of course, by that time had known a lot of the VMI family and, of course, I knew the W&L senior faculty through my father-in-law. So many of the people who I came to know early on, Frank Parsons, mostly through Press in those days, but Dr. Jenks and Dr. Starling, these were great friends of my father and mother-in-law, and Bob Huntley, at that time, was just a young professor, I guess, around here. But I met a lot of people that way, so when I say I married into the Washington & Lee family, that really is, I think, kind of the case. Years later, as people in Lexington tracked my career in Williamsburg, I guess it would have to be Bob Huntley who started me on my way back here. I'll tell you that story if that's of any interest.

Warren: Sure.

Sessoms: We were talking one day, I guess I was director of special events in Williamsburg for about ten of those years, and everything that happens down there tends to be a special event, I guess, but this must have been an occasion, probably our prelude to independence event, in which college presidents from the state were invited. I think Bob and Evelyn were there. He and I had a conversation in the palace gardens about Lexington, and one thing led to another, and two other people that were involved with us on a peripheral basis, one was a man named Justin Moore, who was the wonderful chairman of VEPCO in Virginia, but Justin was a chairman at one point, along with Ross Millhiser, who later was a W&L trustee, Ross being with Phillip Morris. They were trustees of something known as the

Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges, which we all know Lea Booth ably pioneered and lead with Dr. Gaines for many, many years.

Of course, I knew Dr. Gaines early on. As a matter of fact, one of my treasured wedding pictures is a picture of Mrs. Gaines and Mr. Mattingly. Mr. Mattingly gave the names in the receiving line at our wedding reception, and I have a picture of Mrs. Gaines coming through. I think Dr. Gaines at that point, this is 1962, was still alive but too ill to come to the wedding. So I go back a little way through the family, and I guess when people say to me, "How is that you left your Hampden-Sydney ties and worked all these years at Washington & Lee?" it really goes deeply into family roots on my wife's side.

But back to coming up to W&L. I think Bob and Justin Moore and Ross Millhiser were all thick as thieves, great personal friends, and they were looking to the future of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges and thought that I might be a worthy successor to Lea Booth in this job over in Lynchburg. So as a total shock, I guess, to my colleagues and friends in Williamsburg, where I'd raised both my daughters and was very happily ensconced in a brand-new house that I had built there, one day I'd decided that I needed something new to do with my life. So off we packed the family to Lynchburg, Virginia. That was 1980—I'm sorry, that was 1977, because I came here in 1983. About two and a half years later, Washington & Lee was in the final concluding stage of the previous big campaign.

Now, W&L tried a campaign back in 1949 in concert with the then bicentennial, and had not succeeded, but the big campaign that we did in 1970 to sort of shore up the physical facade, along with the Colonnade historical national landmark, built the law school, built this library that you and I are sitting in today, that campaign which had been ten years in length and way too long by everybody's reckoning, was coming down toward the final two years, and it was decided over here, and I've always been grateful that it was a decision that Bob and Farris

Hotchkiss and their consultant made, was that they really hadn't contacted a broad enough group of alumni. They had really worked pretty much at the top of the pyramid, but the base had been pretty much ignored.

I had just a little bit of fundraising experience in two and a half years with the VFIC, Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges, concentrating primarily in the corporate sector, some foundation work, but mostly businessmen in Virginia. VFIC, I think, still has about a thousand supporters and we led the nation in the average gift for college. So it was a successful operation. In fact, I quickly determined that the towering Lea Booth really didn't need me. He was so good and he still is good and remains one of my dearest and closest friends, and a man who, I must say, taught me what little I know about fundraising, along with Farris and others. But I think when we were coming toward the end of that campaign and recognizing that we still had a long way to go, it was decided to take me on as a little insurance, I think, to develop some area campaigns around the country and go a little deeper into the constituency. So as a result, I was offered a position which I accepted in about eleven seconds flat, because I really was very anxious to come back over the mountain. I was close now, I had gotten from Williamsburg back to Lynchburg. So now the next sixty miles was the easiest of all. My kids were in high school at that age, so we'd already rooted them up once, which was difficult, but now it was a little easier to come back. So off we came. I think I started to work at W&L on the first of November, 1980. So that's sixteen years, just about right now.

Warren: I started on November 1st, last year.

Sessoms: Well, now good for you.

Warren: We share an anniversary.

Sessoms: I'm fifteen up on you, Mame, but anyway. So that's how I got over to Lexington and it's been a honeymoon ever since.

Warren: So you arrived here in 1980. So you've seen some interesting things going on.

Sessoms: Yeah. The last two years of the previous campaign were fascinating years, I thought, and I'll never forget the sense, especially in, I guess it was December of 1981, the campaign was over that month, and it was an awesome feeling to sit there in that development office, which at that time was the Howard House, where now we have personnel and Rob Fure's Alumni College Special Programs Office. All of us in development were jammed into that little house in those days. What I saw come in over the transom the last month of that campaign, I can't remember the number, how many millions it might have been, but a huge decade-long effort as coming to its conclusion and a lot of people were making gifts that last month, and it was an unforgettable experience to be part of that, the great joy that we had in going over the goal. I think I've gotten more of a thrill out of it then than I did in our more recent campaign, if only because it was newer to me, maybe, and I had not been involved in many of the—well, the cultivational work and the solicitation work, and therefore most of the gifts that were coming in were people whom I didn't really know that well. It was awesome, to me, as a relative newcomer.

Now, having said "relative newcomer," the fact of the matter is, in the two and a half years that I worked in that job, I did go out and immediately—I remember Farris said to me, "I can't apologize and I won't apologize. No one has the time to take you by the hand, so you just have to get out there on your own and swim." Now, of course, I wasn't exactly wet behind the ears. I was in my early forties, I guess, and therefore I had a lot of experience and a lot of public relations positions and all, and I'd had two and a half years of direct fundraising solicitation experience with the VFIC.

So I knew generally what I was about, and one of my first experiences—I can't imagine why I would remember this, but its the sort of thing you do remember. The

first trip I took on behalf of Washington & Lee in the month of November 1980, I hadn't been here even a full month, was to run down to Fort Worth and to Dallas, and at that time, the Texas economy was better than it is now, for sure, or—well, it's coming back now, but it was booming. The oil business was really going. So we were going to try to develop some area campaigns in those two cities. In Fort Worth, where I started, my chairman was to be a fellow by the name of Frank Bailey, class of 1966, who remains one of my finest and dearest friends, and I was just chatting with him last week—isn't that amazing, sixteen years ago, but he was calling me because of a young freshman here, this year's class, the class of '00, who he'd recruited and he was so pleased that the freshman had come to see me and we'd gotten to know each other.

Anyway, in 1966, I presented myself in Frank Bailey's office, the Frank Bailey Grain Company in Fort Worth. In those days, I think I just had to sell myself, first of all, because who was I to come wandering in—

Warren: "Who's this Hampden-Sydney guy?" [Laughter]

Sessoms: Exactly. Who was this Hampden-Sydney guy? So it's really funny, remind me to tell you more about that, but in the days when I used to be introduced as the alumni secretary here, the first one or two times that happened, the chapter president would read my résumé or read my biographical sketch and that happened about twice, and I said, "Just forget the VMI Hampden-Sydney background. People will assume I'm a Washington & Lee person." That's the way it's worked ever since.

Warren: That's great.

Sessoms: Really. But I went down to Fort Worth and I was in Frank's office, and I remember Dick Haynes, the trustee—well, at that time he was a trustee over in Dallas. He was certainly the lead attorney in the great Haynes & Boone law firm. Dick called, and I did not know Dick either, of course, and he called Frank Bailey and said, "A fellow named Dick Sessoms's in your office." This was around three o'clock

in the afternoon, and he said, "Yeah, he's right here, he just walked in the door."
He said, "Could you put him on?"

So I got on the line, and Dick said, "I am really sorry, but I've been called to Chicago and I got to catch a plane tonight, and if you want to see me about getting a campaign going in Dallas, you'd better get over here right away and maybe our friends in Fort Worth will let you come back over there, since we're only thirty miles apart."

So that was okay with the Fort Worth folks, so I remember saying to Frank Bailey, "Well it's been a long time since Colonial Williamsburg travel had me in Dallas. I've been to Dallas a time or two, but it's been so many years ago." Dick worked that time at the First Interstate Bank Building. I said, "Tell me how to drive over."

He said, "Well, you just get on Route 30 and just go on into town."

I said, "Well, where's this address?"

He said, "Don't worry, it's the tallest building in town, you won't miss it."

I said, "Come on, give me a little bit more than that."

He said, "No, that's all you get from me. Just go on over there."

I thought, "Well, this is a part of getting hazed by Washington & Lee alumni. He's not going to help me here, so I'll have to find it on my own."

So off I drove to Dallas, so help me gosh, I pulled right into town. I remember going through the Dealey Plaza, where President Kennedy had been assassinated a few years earlier, and looking up I saw a great big tall building, I saw a parking lot, and I pulled into the parking lot and it turned out to be the First Interstate Bank Building. So from that point on, I've trusted everything that any Washington & Lee alumnus ever told me. I never doubted from that moment. [Laughter]

Anyway, I got going with Dallas, and that night I went back, or a night or two later, back over in Fort Worth, and I caught up with Frank and some of his great

friends, Frank Bailey's friends. One of his great friends was Frank Young, now deceased, a classmate of his, who was in the Marshall R. Young Oil Company, had two brothers, George and Kelly, who are still living, a little bit older than Frank, but the three of them were great supporters, still are.

I remember going to dinner that night at a wonderful restaurant in Fort Worth, and I never go to Fort Worth without frequenting this place, and you can ask any Texas kid from either Dallas or Fort Worth and they'll know all about Joe T. Garcia's. It's a wonderful restaurant in Fort Worth. So that night I went to Fort Worth and had dinner with Frank Young and Frank Bailey and one or two others.

We were having a wonderful time, and they asked me about my first day of working with Fort Worth alumni. I had visited a fellow who later became a great friend, but maybe was a little suspicious of me because of my background, and had worked me pretty hard that day, I thought, because I was trying to immediately get a gift and he wasn't having much of it. So after a couple of drinks in this wonderful Fort Worth bar, they said, "Tell us about your afternoon. What did you think of old So-and-so?" I'm not going to give you that name, because this guy is still alive and he's a good friend of mine now, but in that first instance, I said, "Well, he's kind of full of it." I said a couple of things I probably wouldn't have said about him had I been sober, maybe. But they thought that was outrageously funny, but apparently they agreed with my assessment. I remember Frank Young looking at Frank Bailey saying, "You know, this guy's not like those other development people at that school. He's telling us what it's like."

So to make a very long story short, and I've made this story too long, I got back to campus, and about a week later I got a phone call from President Huntley. He said, "I want you to go back to Fort Worth and Dallas and do some more drinking with your friends."

I said, "What could that be?"

He said, "I've got a check in my hand here from Frank Young for \$400,000."

[Laughter]

So I said, "Well, Bob, I'm sure I didn't have that much to do with that," but that was a great way to start my career as a development officer at Washington & Lee, in honor of my visit. It was a gift, I'm sure, that he was going to make anyhow.

Warren: That's marvelous.

Sessoms: It was a great way for me to start. People always ask me, "Why do you spend so much time in Texas?" I said, "It's kind of like why does Willie Sutton rob banks? That's where the money is." At least that's where the money was at that particular time.

So with that as a kind of development beginning, Farris and I began a long and dear relationship. We've been working together and are best friends for, what, sixteen years now. We don't see that much of each other out of the office. We probably see so much of each other inside and we've dealt with so many issues together over these years, and I think whenever you find the strong development program, you'll find the kind of maturity that we have here. At least it's my observation that schools that have strong development programs have great continuity in their senior people. So Farris and I kind of—I guess my sixteen and how many for him, thirty, I guess.

Warren: Can you count that high for Farris?

Sessoms: Yes, he's up there. He came to work here in the late sixties, so he's closing in on thirty years now, probably in another year or two. Isn't that amazing? Sometimes I wonder how he can stagger to another homecoming or another event. It does become a way of life, and it isn't work and it never has been for me. I think enthusiasm in what you do, if you enjoy what you do, you're going to be generally good at it. So working here, I've always felt that way. I've enjoyed the time.

So anyway, the background for those first couple of years working in the development office and doing area campaigns all over the country, we did twenty-two area campaigns in 1978 and '79 and '80, in those years. No, I'm getting my chronology wrong. I guess '80 and '81. Then I continued in '82. At that time I began to do more corporation and foundation work. One of my early assignments there was to do the beginning research on what turned out to be the Lenfest Center. We were anxious to build a performing arts center. As I used to always say to people—I'm quoting Buddy Atkins now—fine arts at Washington & Lee was in a phone booth in those days, and we were determined to do something about that. I remember doing the early research on potential foundations that might support us.

Went several times to the Owen Corporation Foundation, Owen Foundation in Minneapolis-St. Paul. I think I made three trips up there at one point. I came back and told Bob Huntley I really thought I had them sold on the whole project. They were only interested in doing the entire building. And there's an Owen Hall over at Roanoke College. So they were building theaters, or they had previously. So we did a lot of research in those days to figure out where on Earth we could raise the kind of money that would take to build a performing arts center. There were a lot of people who doubted that we could raise it within our own family, and indeed it turned out to be a very difficult task. We raised money for gosh, what, four, five and six years. I guess we had gotten up to about \$6 million before Jerry Lenfest came into the picture. I presume you have that story.

Warren: I've talked to Jerry. I've talked to John Wilson and I've got Frank. I've got all three of them telling the story.

Sessoms: You've heard that many times.

Warren: That's a wonderful—and they all tell the same story. That's what I like. I know I'm on to something when they all tell the same story.

Sessoms: I wonder if I have any different version on it, but you know—oh, I won't get into it, because I wouldn't want to tamper with the official version. [Laughter]

Warren: When you get such consistency, you do begin to feel you're getting the official version. One thing I would like to talk about with you—

Sessoms: Yeah, I'm droning on here.

Warren: No, you're doing great. But you're making me think about all kinds of things. I have had the honor of interviewing a number of these major donors and a lot of other people who've gone to this school. What is it about this place that makes people so generous years out of it?

Sessoms: That's a many-faceted—I guess the answer to that, there are many facets. I think of the wonderful Jimmy Leyburn, Dean Leyburn's quote that we used in the campaign. He'd asked the same rhetorical question, "What is it about this place that makes us love it, the moonlight walk on the Colonnade, and all those wonderful things?" I've always had an immigrant's kind of a feeling about Washington & Lee. I mean, I immigrated here, and immigrants love the place in ways that those who are of the place will never know. You're so proud to be involved and pleased to be here, and that sort of thing.

I think it has to do with the close the relationships of faculty and students, and administrators and students, just close personal relationships that people develop. Of course, the great courses and the victories and all the things that Leyburn referred to, the going down the road and all the things that sort of make up the experience of being at Washington & Lee, and I think that's remained true in our more recent years when the school was a little bit larger and we've had women introduced to the undergraduate divisions as well as the law school.

I think this is a special little town. I think it's a special place in the Shenandoah Valley. I know John Wilson used to refer often to the architecture of the school, almost in the way that it's shaped the way people felt about it. He used to

refer to that little ridge line, this little college on that ridge line. Blue Ridge Valley, Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Scotch-Irish coming down the valley road, that kind of fierce independent streak, building the cabins and the churches and the schools, this is a great pioneer school, a frontier school. I think the root is so deep, historic root is so deep. So when you get through the history of the place that we take almost for granted, I really feel that, it's all around us, yet we do almost in a way take it for granted, Washington's saving gift in 1796, two hundred years ago this year, and then, of course, moving ahead by sixty or some years, sixty or seventy years to General Lee's leadership and all that's come thereafter, which we've always had great leaders. I think of the leadership of Mike Denny, the president early on before Gaines.

Then of course, Gaines, had a great twenty-nine-year run as president. Gaines, in my view, really put this place on the map in a way that perhaps it needed to be or perhaps in a way that it had not been previously, and I'm not sure has been there yet, or since. We're certainly widely known in many educational circles. We don't have a national [unclear] alumni like, say, Notre Dame does, but we tend to be known well in the right places. Dr. Gaines was an educator, if I could use that word. He entertained the greats and the near-greats at Lee House. To look at the guest book at the Lee House during his years there, and I guess there's probably not a guest book, if there was one we should've developed it years ago, I guess. But I read "Penny" Gaines' book, Dr. Gaines' son, Pendleton Gaines, who had been president of a college out in Arizona, and he wrote a chapter about growing up in Lee House. He published in that chapter of his the people that his mother and father had entertained during his time there. Well, it was a "Who's Who" of Washington politicians, governors, ambassadors of foreign nations, great writers, poets, newspaper editors, people who were influential and who were opinion-makers all over the country. I don't know that we've ever had an occupant of Lee House that

did that for the college. Now, Gaines was great copy, too. Everybody that's listened to his speeches heard his great eloquence. But Gaines was a thoughtful man who seemed to put in context his mission here as president of this great Southern institution. He had a great feeling for it and its place in American higher education, and he articulated that so well.

Washington & Lee made editorial pages more so in those days than I think we do now, and I suspect it was because of Dr. Gaines' great standing in America, not just in the educational community, he was simply well known.

Warren: What do you mean it made the editorial pages?

Sessoms: I mean people would write—maybe I dreamed this up, because I can't produce the evidence, if that's the case, but I have this sense that Washington & Lee was held in this great high esteem because of its leader, because of this man who everybody loved to hear. I was over at the Greenbriar Hotel within the last two years, and they have a nice little museum not many people know about, but it's in the area of where General Lee used to stay, those rooms in that particular wing, Cottage Row, is still there. I was struck as I went through that museum, looked at the photographs, where you see the great Duchess of Windsor or the great VIP visitors that they had in the early—well, not the early days, but earlier days in this century, and in just about every other picture frame, Gaines was in the picture. That should tell you something. He walked with the mighty. That had an enormous impact on this university in ways that I don't think people recognized then, and perhaps I'm trying to recognize it now.

Warren: Dick, I'm just sitting here absolutely fascinated, because you didn't know Francis Pendleton Gaines.

Sessoms: Well, I knew him barely.

Warren: Did you?

Sessoms: Yes, I knew him barely.

Warren: But you didn't experience all this yourself. You have absorbed this, sort of like I have. I have heard the Francis Pendleton Gaines stories. Is that your experience that people bring him up when they talk about Washington & Lee?

Sessoms: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, I think the alumni that we've raised all this money from over the last two campaigns revered Gaines and revered Dean Gilliam. In fact, I have a saying that no one else uses, but early on, in working, when I became director of major gifts and was working with other gift officers and, in fact, helping Farris hire the very capable young staff that we have today, Tom Jennings and David Long and Mike Boyd and younger people that are so good now, early on I remember saying to my fellow gift officers at a meeting, "I don't want to hear you or anyone else claim that you got such and such a gift. We don't get—" You know, the accumulation of experiences leads up to someone making the kind of major gift that I described earlier, that Frank Young was making. Now, it's a cute little story for me to think that I had a tiny credit in there. I was just a messenger at the last at the end of the line, the food chain there. But when a great gift comes in from someone of enormous proportions, I say, "Well, that's a Gaines and Gilliam gift."

I like to think that some day, long after all of us are dead and buried, someone's going to say, "That's an Elrod," "That's a Wilson gift," or maybe, "That's a Sessoms gift." It's the sort of thing, I think you have a great cumulative sort of experience here. I think it's because the school has a very deep historic root that people feel the history and know that it's not going to wash away with the next fad, and we know we're going to be strong. Strength begets strength. So you're adding to this cumulative experience and cumulative enterprise, and it's been a great procession over almost two and half centuries now, when you trace our family back to 1749.

So the great gifts that have come have come from people who feel and who believe that their gift can make a difference. Why do people make these major gifts?

Good question. I think it's because if you get them involved enough with the university, you don't have to ask, they step forward, because they are aware. That's the Jerry Lenfest experience. He asked Frank—well, Frank Parsons was talking about Gray Castle's gift at the reunion. I'm telling that story again now, but it's so apropos, telling the story about the gift of what is now the Castle House, but at that time a man named Joe N_____ lived up there, in the house above Liberty Hall athletic fields, next to Liberty Hall. Joe was a VMI man and had been for years. When he and his wife decided to move over to the Westminster Canterbury and that house was free, he offered it Washington & Lee, first refusal.

Maybe I will tell you this story, because this is a story that you wouldn't have gotten from John Wilson, because I don't think John Wilson knows this story. The truth is now going to come out. John Wilson and Jim Ballengee, who was then the rector of the board, initially did not want that house. You know the one that I'm talking about now?

Warren: Describe it for posterity.

Sessoms: For posterity, it's the house that sits above the now Liberty Hall athletic fields and is within two hundred yards of Liberty Hall itself. It's a painted white brick, slate roof on five acres of land up there. It had been owned by Joseph D. N_____, who had been the executive secretary of the VMI Foundation and the man who raised the money for the Marshall Foundation, to get that whole operation started. I had known Joe N_____ during my VMI days quite well.

In any event, that house was going to go on the market. The VMI Foundation had agreed to buy it, but Joe wanted to offer it to W&L, wanted to give W&L first refusal, because he felt that it was so close to Washington & Lee property and we were beginning to sort of fence him out. We were developing athletic fields in what was his front yard. He had used it for entertainment purposes up there, many VMI

parties over the years. There was a heated swimming pool out in back, and it's a pretty nice piece of property.

So he had approached, I guess, Frank Parsons and he told Farris and so forth, and they had, with great enthusiasm, relayed this up the line to John Wilson, who was in his early years as president. John consulted with Jim Ballengee, and between the two of them, pretty well concluded that the \$300,000 asking price or thereabout, that we could use that \$300,000 for better things and we really didn't need this property. Farris and Frank, I'm sure, were a bit disappointed, but that was the way the cookie was going to crumble, and I don't think they were going to fight City Hall over that, but I was not so encumbered.

So what happened was that I got a phone call from Joe N_____ in dismay, and he said, "I probably should've called you first, but it looks like Washington & Lee is not going to buy the house." At that time I was serving as alumni secretary. Joe said, "I figured you would've wanted this house for all the receptions and things that you might've used it for, for homecoming and Parents Weekend and other things.

I said, "Oh, Joe, indeed I would've wanted it, I just would love to have it." So at that point it looked like it was a lost ball in the high weeds, as they say, but because I was fearless in those days and didn't know better, I began—well, we had a meeting, we had a board meeting coming up. We had a Development Council, and I happened to talk to a couple of people who were on that Development Council, who later became trustees, but they weren't trustees at that time, and one was Gray Castle. The other was Bill Lemon over in Roanoke, and another fellow at that meeting was Ted Van Leer. The three of them really made that happen. They had more to do—do you need to change the tape?

Warren: Let me flip the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Sessoms: So we were having a meeting, a trustee meeting, and I got the three of them to the side, and I said, "Something's going to come up. You're going to hear something come up at this meeting that I feel very strongly about," and I did feel very strongly about it. I said, "We're making a huge mistake, in my personal view. We're going to let this property go by the wayside. VMI will buy it. It's not that the man can't find a buyer, it's just that he's given us the opportunity, and John and Jim, John Wilson and Jim Ballengee, aren't that interested in it, and I think that's a criminal mistake, and I hope we'll get it."

So they agreed with me and they immediately said, "Well, what if we offered to buy it for the university?"

I said, "Well, I can't imagine then that the trustees would turn it down. It's a gift. Why would they turn it down?"

And that's exactly what happened. The issue came up at the trustee meeting. It came up because it was a significant enough offer that I think President Wilson and Jim Ballengee, the director, felt like the board should know. They also said, "We just aren't going to acquire it." At that point my little friends raised their hand and said, "We'll buy it for you." And so we got that house.

Now, it became important in the Lenfest story, because it was that house that Frank Parsons was talking about in his great talk to the thirty-fifth reunion class of the class of 1953, their thirty-fifth reunion in 1988. Now you're going to know the rest of the story, because that's what most people pick up. They don't know the background. But Frank was talking about a gift that a member of that class had made, and Lenfest is in the audience. What happened was that Gray, in the final analysis, said to Ted Van Leer and to Bill Lemon, "Look. I want the privilege of doing the whole house. Linda and I want to make that gift of that house to the university ourselves." So the others back away and Gray did it.

So Frank, in making the talk to the thirty-fifth reunion class banquet, I think it was, mentioned that a member of the class had made this wonderful gift. Well, the purchase price turned out to be about \$250,000 or something, about that number. Then Lenfest, after the speech, said to Frank, "If you ever have something akin to that kind of a need come up again, I hope you will let me know." And Frank was thinking \$250,000, as I'm sure you have heard. At that time, that was the cost of what was going to be this all-weather track around Wilson Field. We had the center track then and it was the last center track in North America. Every high school in the state of Texas has an all-weather track, but Washington & Lee University didn't. So that's how that happened.

Then Lenfest said to Frank, Frank said, "We want a quarter of a million dollars to do this track."

⁶ Jerry says, "Well, I had something more significant in mind. Aren't you trying to build a theater?"

Frank says, "Well, yeah, but that's a \$3 million shortfall there."

⁶ Jerry just didn't blink an eye and said, "Well, send the president up to see me." So that's how all that happened. But I don't think to this minute you could send this tape to John, and John Wilson would be amazed to know that my little finger was in the gift of the house that caused ⁶ Jerry to—

Warren: What's that house used for?

Sessoms: Well, right now we have, I think, a professor up there. It has been used, in the seven or eight years now, gosh, it's been eight years. That's where Randy B^{ERANSON} was used to attract the new dean of the law school. So the B^{ERANSON} lived there when they first came to town. After them, Michael Walsh, the athletic director at the time. At one point, Litzenburg lived there. So it's been used early on as a place to, in effect, attract—it's a wonderful house. I would love to have had it.

To finish the story, after we did get the house and the university was gifted the house by Gray Castle, it was now in our possession, I went to the president and I said, "John, now that we own that—" I still hadn't told him what my little part had been in Gray Castle's decision to give it to us, but I said, "It truly is right there. We've got all the parking. Could we write into the contract, into the rental arrangement with whoever you put in there, that I can use the house with the alumni program a couple of times a year for like homecoming and spring reunions and things?" It's a marvelous place. I could just see blue and white tents all over the lawn and great parties out here and the parking is all worked out.

He said, "Not a chance." [Laughter] So he never let me use it the way I wanted to.

But that house, to this minute, I think I could make a case for its institutional use, the grounds thereof. Of course, I felt strongly about it, I'm sure Frank and Farris and others did, too, early on, because it is so close to Liberty Hall. It is absolutely within spitting distance of the great cradle and the great origins of this university, and the thought that we couldn't control that property would drive me up the wall, causing me to do things behind people's backs that I shouldn't do. But I really felt that—of course, that little bit relates to all my years in Williamsburg. One thing you learn there, of course, it's a great, that whole Rockefeller organization there, the way the real estate was acquired there, a great American example of acquiring property. If you can control it and it's contiguous to your property, whatever the price is, you go get it. That's just something you learn, particularly if you have any sense of the history and the preservation and all that.

Jim Ballengee said to me one time, "Damn it, Sessoms, you're always trying to get us to buy some old house." I feel just as strongly about the Sigma Phi Epsilon house that the university let go a year and a half ago, which now a private owner has come in and beautifully restored. So now it's restored to its elegance. And I

think that's criminal. I think the university has had a very spotty record. We've done well to preserve the historic national landmark, but in terms of some things that were close to the university that we didn't do, that house that I'm talking about now is the house that the Civil War poetess Junkin, described, Margaret Junkin, described the bombing of VMI from that front porch. She wrote that poem or whatever—

Warren: For posterity, where is this house?

Sessoms: Well, it's at the end of Lee Avenue and the intersection today of Lee and Preston Street, next to the Phi Gamma house. It had been, in recent years, the Sigma Phi Epsilon house. I thought it would make a wonderful faculty club. I also would've taken it in a heartbeat and considered making it a sorority house, too. I mean, there are just a lot of uses for a house that size.

Warren: I'm sorry. I shouldn't interrupt.

Sessoms: No, no.

Warren: You know who would be interested in probably helping out with a faculty club? Jack Warner. He took me to lunch once at the University Club in Tuscaloosa. He's very proud of that.

Sessoms: We don't have a faculty—the Alumni House tends to be the closest thing we have to a faculty house. Only a few of the faculty go over and drink coffee every morning, but our faculty ought to have that kind of a facility. We built one of the great teaching faculties in the country and that's the sort of thing that I hope as we evolve, we will think about doing. It's not a high priority. It's the sort of thing that you have to find a donor, someone that really wants you to have that for your faculty. But that particular house, because it is so historic, General Preston of VMI owned that property. What just absolutely floors me is that sometimes it is possible for a college, even as old as ours, and as mature as we are in many ways, to make decisions in board rooms without full knowledge of the history of what we're

dealing with. I felt like in the case of that particular house, the board of trustees were not aware of its history. Had they been aware of the house's history, they might have felt a little bit more precious about selling it. People make decisions to sell things without knowledge, without the knowledge of that history.

Warren: You mentioned much earlier that there were things you learned in Williamsburg that you put to work here. I presume this is one of the things. Are there other things that you learned there?

Sessoms: Yeah, maybe. In the last few minutes I've been talking about my great interest in preservation and in preserving old things and having a feeling for old things. I went to Williamsburg as a staff writer in their press section and had a wonderful experience dealing with radio and television, as well as the writing press. Because of its international and national standing, whatever you want to call the attention that Williamsburg receives, I was coming from a little PR job in Lexington, Virginia, working with the Roanoke newspaper and the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the *Washington Post*, maybe, at the highest possible level and local radio and TV stations, and you go to work for the public relations staff for Colonial Williamsburg and suddenly you're dealing with *National Geographic* and *New York Times* and network television, and it was moving to a whole different league.

I had a wonderful mentor there, who was a former Nieman Fellow, Clark Mollenhoff, of all people. My boss down there was a fellow named Don Gonzegos [phonetic]. Don had been president of the White House Correspondents Association and president of, I guess in those days, the State Department Correspondents. My big boss there, the president of Colonial Williamsburg, Carl Hummelsein [phonetic], had worked under five Secretaries of State and had been on General Marshall's staff in World War II, the youngest colonel in the Second World War for the United States Army. So I had some pretty strong people to learn from my whole fifteen

years there. For whatever reason, they took me under their wing, but I was given a lot of responsibility at a very tender age and became, after a couple of years in the press area, where I had done such things as coordinate—one time I coordinated a Barbara Walters/Hugh Downs television special in Williamsburg, a two-hour show that emanated there.

I did a lot of funny things. Once I worked on the "Lassie" television show. Lassie even visited Williamsburg. [Laughter] I had a lot of interesting experience working with writers from around the country and the world. Lots of film crews and lots of magazine writers and photographers of every kind.

Warren: How have you brought that experience to Washington & Lee?

Sessoms: Well, just general public relations background and making decisions. I was—gosh, if you get me on the Williamsburg stuff, I'll go all night.

Warren: That's why I'm pulling you back to Washington & Lee.

Sessoms: Yeah, right bring me back. I guess maybe the most specific thing, just beyond the general PR experience there, seeing the big picture, probably, the greatest thing I learned there. Know the detail, but always keep the big picture in mind. In terms of detail, the one job that I had there that I can absolutely have applied to my Washington & Lee experience was that for nine of ten years I was director of special events at Williamsburg. Now, in terms of special events, I have to talk a bit about that, then I'll bring it back to Washington & Lee. But there, for example, I was in charge of, over my years, the visits of something like sixty or seventy visiting foreign heads of state. I worked with the State Department and the White House on visits of—well, let me think. Hirohito, the Shah of Iran three or four times, King Hussein, Sadat, presidents and prime ministers of all these countries.

I was the first person that worked—I mean, I was the person who got the phone call from the State Department. "Dick, we want to bring President So-and-so," or Prime Minister So-and-so. "Can you make the arrangements?" So in making the

arrangements for everything from dietary—from meals, menus, I wrote the operations plan, in other words, for the visit of those sorts of people. You learn an awful lot when you do that. You work with embassies. You work with the State Department. You have to do a lot of research on the country that you're entertaining. Of course, we were a great stopping place on official visits to Washington. So I worked many, many nights, I can't tell you, with Secret Service, about security matters. One of my proudest, I guess, possessions is an award I got from the Secret Service when I left Williamsburg. They don't give many of those, but I've got a wonderful award from the Secret Service.

In any event, the detail of planning all that and planning such things as the Williamsburg Forum Series, within my job description, I also handled the Antiques Forum, the horticultural event, the Williamsburg Garden Symposium, and I handled board meetings there. In other words, I did the logistical detail, just like Farris Hotchkiss does of the Washington & Lee trustee meetings, I made the arrangements for board dinners, for evenings at Carter's Grove. So I had to develop after-dinner entertainment, not only for the prime minister of Australia, but for our own board of trustees. And let me tell you, the Williamsburg Board of Trustees is a pretty powerful group of people. We had a lot people on there that have remained friends of mine.

Not to digress too much, but last night I happened to watch this wonderful program on David Brinkley and the great career of this wonderful journalist and the impact he's had on television. Well, it just so happen that David Brinkley was a trustee of Colonial Williamsburg. In fact, I handled his wedding, his second wedding. I did all the arrangements for David's and Susan's wedding.

The other time I've been a wedding consultant was I did the same thing for young Winthrop Rockefeller. So you handle a Rockefeller wedding, I mean, I'm talking about getting everything from doing not the bridesmaids' dresses, but I did

have to get the tuxedos and the morning coats for all of his groomsmen, because they were all flying in from all over the world. So I've had those kinds of experiences.

Now, what did that mean to Washington & Lee? Very few people up here really know what I did down there. Farris knows. I think there are a few people up here that know what I did down there. I guess the quickest example I could give you would be when it came time for us to do the campaign for Washington & Lee, this most recent campaign that I was—

Warren: On the Shoulders of Giants?

Sessoms: On the Shoulders of Giants. I think I'm the person that said, "Well, we've got to start at Mount Vernon." That was my idea. I was very much in favor in taking something I wanted to call the treasures of Washington & Lee on the road, a traveling exhibition. Well, we didn't have the wherewithal to do it as big as I wanted to do it, but a piece of my idea did get involved. That is to say taking the old George statute and the two portraits, all of this was part of a larger concept that I had to engender the kind of spirit that I wanted to have around the country. I would never come up with those sorts of ideas had I not had those fifteen years in Williamsburg, where that sort of thing was my job there. We routinely did things of that nature.

Another example might be probably one of the best alumni events that I well remember that I did in my seven years over in the alumni office, was once we did a big reception at the Swiss Embassy in Washington, and that's a great story in itself. I'm going to tell you because it's a funny story and it's a good story.

Professor Doyon, in our art department, had made me aware, several years before this came up, of a painting of Robert E. Lee by a Swiss artist by the name of Frank Buxser [phonetic]. Buxser had painted Lee from life, only the third time General Lee posed for a picture. The Buxser painting of Lee had been done in 1867, I

believe it was, or '68, or maybe it was '69 even, but it was before the general died, of course. The Swiss government had sent this famous artist over to paint American heroes, and he was in Washington painting everybody, generals and so forth. People in Washington said, "Well, you've got to go to this little town, Lexington, Virginia, to Washington College, and paint General Lee." So he came down and painted Lee, and Lee and he got off on a good start, and Lee, I guess, enjoyed posing for it and whatnot. Well, the painting, the completed painting, went back to Switzerland right then and there, because it had been commissioned by the Swiss and had resided for a hundred and some-odd years in the Swiss National Museum in Bourne, I think it is.

Well, I happen to pick up the paper one day and see that a new ambassador had been named and had arrived in Washington, that the Swiss had sent over, a man named Bruner. Ambassador Bruner, it so happened, had brought this painting of Lee. Okay. Now, I have that information. He's got the painting of Lee. It's only the third painting of Lee from life. We got the Benjamin West, I guess, down in Lee Chapel, and there's one other.

So I called Ambassador Bruner and it took a little temerity, I guess, to do that. But I called him and I said, "Ambassador Bruner." I got through to him. First of all, it's hard to get through to ambassadors sometimes, but I knew how to do that. I said, "I'm Dick Sessoms, I'm director the alumni program of Washington & Lee University, and I'd like to talk to you about something, an idea I've had that would involve your embassy."

Of course, he said, "What on Earth is that?"

And I said, "Well, our university's developed a nice tradition of celebrating one of our patron saints' birthdays." I said, "General Lee's birthday is January 19th every year, and we celebrate it. Our alumni all around America celebrate it with receptions, etc. General Lee is a man who is greatly revered by the alumni of this

institution and we have our largest alumni chapter in Washington. I propose that you give us a reception and let us come see your painting, because we're fascinated to know that it's here and we would love to see it, and before you answer, let me tell you now what I'm going to do for you. We have in Washington a group of alumni that I personally promise I can deliver, and I'm going to just drop eight or ten names, but these are people I think that you would want to entertain. I'll start with the Supreme Court Justice Louis L. Powell, Jr., the Washington correspondent Roger Mudd, and Charles McDowell, U.S. Senator John Warner, Robert E. Lee IV, a direct descendent of General Lee, and the Secretary of the Army John Marsh," and I just kept going. "Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher." So I dropped every name I could—former Governor Linwood Holton, I just rolling them off. I said, "I promise you they will all be there." And incidentally, I made that happen. Every single one of them came, because I called them and wrote them. I said, "This is very important. I promised, and you've got to come."

He said, "Well, that sounds interesting." He said, "Suppose we do this on the nineteenth." Of course, I had the schedule, it was a Friday night. "We'll do it here at my residence. Would 150 people be about right?" I wanted more. but obviously I was going to accept whatever he was going to offer.

So I said, "That would be wonderful."

I then wrote a letter to the, what, twelve, thirteen hundred alumni in that chapter, and I said, "You're going to get an invitation in about a week, and it's a first come/first serve deal. You must respond quickly. No exceptions made. First come/first serve, because we anticipate a heavy response." So this was a November letter I was writing or December, probably somewhere in late November. So the invitation went forward. Of course I worked all this out with the embassy, they worked out the exact language for the invitation under the sponsorship of the ambassador, etc., etc.

The invitations arrived and then the response came in. On the very first day we had 150, thereabout, responses, the first day, return mail. The second day, double that number. So I picked up the phone and called Ambassador Bruner. I thought about this a long time, of course, before I made the call. Mind you I hadn't cleared this with anybody down here. I mean, John Wilson was amazed to discover himself at the Swiss Embassy a month later, wondering how in the devil he got there. So I called Ambassador Bruner. I said, "Ambassador Bruner, I have this wonderful response to this great party you're doing for us, and I have another proposal to make."

He said, "Well, what is that?"

I said, "I want to offer to pay for half of the party."

He said, "Why would you do that? I've already offered to do that."

I said, "Well, Ambassador Bruner, I want to bring twice as many people."

[Laughter]

He said, "Okay." So now I was up to three hundred. What I finally did, Mame, and again this is based on my experience at Williamsburg a little bit, I doubled, I overbooked it. I think we wound up accepting three hundred and fifty people, and it shook down to the three hundred, because there's always a no-show factor.

Warren: Especially on January nineteenth.

Sessoms: Particularly in January. So the ambassador's social secretary could've killed me. She was woman who had been there for a while, I guess, and, boy, I was the last thing she needed. In working with them, I decided to pull back on some of my Williamsburg experience, so I called one of my dearest friends who was for many years under Richard Nixon and, I guess, in those Republican administrations, the assistant chief of protocol, a man named Bill Curtis. I called Bill and I said, "Bill, I want you to do me a big favor and go with me out to the Swiss Embassy." So I took

him with me, and, of course, when you walk in with a protocol^g assistant chief, and as soon as he saw Bruner, well, they had met at Senator Mansfield's two nights earlier and whatnot, and we just overpowered the social secretary, who was about, I'm sure, going to kill me for bringing three hundred people. They had to move furniture. They had to do all these things for us.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I think you can check, but there are plenty of alumni that are still talking about that Swiss Embassy party, it was perfect because it had everything that you wanted. First of all, there was a reason for it; the painting was everything. The interest was in the painting. The locale, even to our so-called jaded and sophisticated Washington alumni, hey, they were dying to get to the Swiss Embassy for a party. We had more than seven hundred people who wanted to come. I dare say it will be a long time before we'll do another alumni event in D.C. that would draw seven hundred people.

Would I have done that without the Williamsburg—I would never have—in fact, people then said, "How on Earth, why, how could you have done that?"

I said, "Well it starts with knowing what the ambassador's job is. Look. That ambassador could kiss me. Why? Because I got him a wonderful, I've got to tell you, a huge article in the *Washington Post*." Maxine Cheshire, one of the great society writers, came and did a huge article on this party and the Swiss Embassy and the new ambassador, and, of course, it is his job to relationships with the American public. That's the only reason they've got an embassy there. So from his point of view, here comes a guy that's coming in with my kind of experience, saying, "I'm going to bring all these wonderful people to your embassy for a party to see something you've got." So it was a master PR stroke for the embassy of Switzerland, in addition to being a great alumni event for W&L. So that's too long a story.

Warren: No, that's a wonderful story. I'm just thrilled. That's [unclear].

Sessoms: Somebody, John Falk, the president of the Washington chapter, had an event at, I guess, the Supreme Court Building. John grew up in northern Virginia and lived next door to Chief Justice [William] Rehnquist, used to mow his lawn.

Warren: I wondered how that happened.

Sessoms: Yeah, and so John was able to do an event that Barry Sullivan spoke in Washington at, at the Supreme Court the other day. He called me up and he said we had two hundred and fifty or two hundred and seventy-five people. It was a huge success. He said, "My greatest compliment came when one of the alums, someone up there said, "This is a Sessoms-style event."

I said, "Well, that made my day, too, to have you tell me that."

Warren: That's great.

Sessoms: But one of the things that I've learned about Washington alumni in all this is that they do respond to quality in whatever form it takes. So whether it's quality in the events we do or in the way we do the magazine or the way we do anything here, our people expect us to do it well and they respond best to imagination and some creativity. So I've tried to apply that not only to the Washington and Lee alumni program, but to the development program and the so-called development events. You get me talking about this stuff, Mame, I'll be here all day.

Warren: Well, that was a good one. I want to switch gears a little bit to talking about Washington & Lee here. You came in 1980. There were some things happening on this campus and around this campus that were not its finest day in 1980. I was living here at that time.

Sessoms: Yeah, that's right, you were.

Warren: It was not its finest days in some ways. Can you describe that?

Sessoms: Well, the fraternity scene was just totally out of control in 1980. In fact, sometimes when I think about the faculty today and the complaining about too

many parties or whatnot, I say, "Gosh, you don't remember. You're suffering from a total memory loss." It is so much improved today compared to the early eighties, it's mind-boggling. Maybe we don't want to tell the students that, but the fact is that we have things under greater control than we did in 1980 when totally it was just out of control.

But in the early 1980s, we had still some of the brightest students, as bright or brighter than we have today, not across-the-board bright, but at the top of the pyramid, the kids in those days were just as bright as ever. I think the university's decision to coeducate probably provided me with the greatest, maybe, personal challenge in my sixteen years.

Warren: Let's talk about that.

Sessoms: Well, in 1983, John Wilson came as president, and in February that year, I think, or March, maybe it was March, I became John's, I think, first significant appointment because I was named to succeed Bill Washburn as alumni secretary in the spring of 1983. So I was, I guess, the first "cabinet-level," if you think of the Monday group in those days, known as the Monday lunch bunch, John's first appointment at that level. John probably saw something in me that he saw not unlike himself, an immigrant, maybe. He knew that I had gone to Hampden-Sydney. He knew that I had worked in Williamsburg, and John, I think, appreciated that background of Williamsburg. I guess I was being promoted by Farris and others. I'd been here for two and a half years, and when Bill Washburn had resigned, he resigned only because he was sixty-five years old, he was retiring. I don't mean to say that he left for any other reason. He'd been in the job for twenty-five years. But there had been a national search for his successor, and that's why I can tell my earlier story about not a Washington & Lee man would take that big a cut in pay to take that job. They had looked for almost a full year and had not come up with the person they

wanted. I think they had made an offer, one or two offers, for all I know, but they just weren't coming up with the right person.

In the meantime, Bob Huntley retired, the man that brought me here, really, and John Wilson was in the saddle now. I think somewhere along the line, I got a phone call to come up and chat with John. It later turned out that that was the conversation, I guess he was just trying to size me up a little bit, get to know me a bit better. But in the final analysis, Farris later told me that, "Well, we decided that you had all the PR communications background, the skills, special events training that that job could really best use, so it was kind of dumb to say, well, just because he isn't an alum, we aren't going to think about him for that position."

So you could've blown me over with a feather. It said a great deal about Washington & Lee, too, that they would hire, for a position like the alumni secretary, a non-alumnus. So the qualifications and experience really drove that bargain. So I went into the Washington & Lee alumni office on the first of July 1983, when Bill retired. I had about a week with him. I had known Bill and admired, I still love Bill. ^{WASHBURN} Bill Walsh is a man that has a zillion friends, and people think well of Bill and always will, and certainly I lead that charge.

I went in over there, and within, what, one month, two months, of my taking on that new job, suddenly this bold and new president had unleashed this great controversy for the next few years, which was this whole coed debate. I was engulfed immediately. It was almost unfair, because suddenly I became, along with John Wilson, the agent of change. If you could imagine how an alumni would feel, "What's going on now at Washington & Lee? A new president and, my God, they've got a guy running the alumni program who's not even an alum." You can sort of understand the kind of reaction that John Wilson and I would get when we've move around the country together. Talk about the blind leading the blind. I'm out there taking John to all these chapters and he was relying on me, and I'm

wandering into a mine field in practically every city in the country because of the strong feelings that people had. Now, there was a lot of support, too, but there were questions, to say the least. I think if I hadn't have had my Williamsburg just plain public relations experience, I would never had survived that job, because those were trying times for John Wilson more so than me, I'm sure. But I got my share of nasty phone calls, too, in those days.

Warren: What kind of things did they say?

Sessoms: Well, "What are you guys doing to ruin—I resent that you're tampering with my university. How dare you sort of tell us what we know is best for your university? You're sort of Johnnies-come-lately to the scene." John was getting that, not so much me. There was just questions, I suspect, about me. I'd been there long enough to have had—two and a half years, I had been around the country in twenty-two cities running area campaigns, so I had enough people who knew me that knew where I was coming from. But I determined from day one, I think my previous PR experience taught me this, to try very hard to empathize with people.

I knew that the only way I could truly survive would be not simply to go down the middle on it, but to understand people and where they were coming from, because what I learned, and what I think we all learned, was that what people brought to the debate, they took away from the debate. Logic did not work. This was an emotional issue. So it wasn't a case of convincing anyone. Just forget it. What they came with, the way they were built, the way they fought, wasn't going to change. So I determined in my own mind what I was going to do, was that every time I got a phone call and it was someone who was absolutely opposing the decision that he felt was being made, I would take the other view and tell him all the things that coeducation, all the benefits that it could bring. Now, flip-flop, if someone called and said, "Oh, my God, I'm so proud of Washington & Lee. We're finally getting into the twentieth century. We're finally admitting women. Praise

Allah, thank you, Dick, thank you, John," I would say, "You have to understand what the other side is feeling here. It's an emotional thing. It really is tearing them to pieces. Please help us with this crowd." So I was working both sides of that street, just as indeed, John Wilson, I guess, was. John could articulate the reasons for it, for remaining all male, better than any of the all-male proponents. He could also, of course, disarm that argument, and he did.

Warren: He could articulate anything.

Sessoms: He would articulate both sides of it, but he would beautifully disarm his own argument for remaining all male.

Warren: We need to pop in a new tape.

[End Tape 1, Side 2]

END OF INTERVIEW