

PAMELA SIMPSON

April 26, 1996

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Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is April 26, 1996. I'm at Washington and Lee University with Dr. Pamela Simpson.

I want to know what attracted you to this place in the first place.

Simpson: I needed a job. I was finishing my Ph.D. at the University of Delaware, and the way you get a job in my field is that you read the placement bulletin from the College Art Association. There was a listing in there for an Americanist who could also do modern and could also teach architecture, and it was a small liberal arts college in the South, and I thought, "Well, this looks like it's tailor-made for me." So I sent off my credentials, and got a very positive response, got invited down for an interview, and absolutely fell in love with the place. And as someone who had worked with American architecture, I felt that I was falling into a treasure trove.

The amazing thing is I accepted that job in the — I think it was about January, probably, and then arrived on campus that summer, and the cover of *Antiques* magazine had Washington and Lee's campus on it. You know, I'd just walk around with my friends and say, "Hey, here, look. This is the place I'm teaching." [Laughter] But it had just been declared a national historic landmark, and in the fall they had all the events and the governor here and the plaques and all the rest of it.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Simpson: Well, it was real exciting. I was shocked when I came down here. They wanted me to teach history of modern architecture, which I certainly could do, but I

said to Professor Doyon, who was taking me around, I said, "With all you have here, why don't you teach American architecture?"

And he said, "Well, if you come here, maybe you can teach American architecture." And then unbeknownst to me, he went ahead and made the provisions for me to be able to do that, so that very first year when I was here, I could teach American architecture, and started a pattern that I've done ever since, which is to involve the students in doing research on local buildings, because I just thought this community was so rich in what it had to offer. I started getting the kids involved in doing research on individual buildings, and I'm still doing it here some, what, twenty-three years later.

Warren: So what year was this that you arrived?

Simpson: 1973. In the fall of '73. It depends on how you figure it, but I was the first woman hired for regular tenure-track teaching, full-time teaching position in the undergraduate school. The reason you've got to do all that is, as far as I can find out in the work I've done is that until 1966 there was a policy that it was an all-male faculty. And in that year, one of the members of the theater department was going on leave and his wife had a master's degree in theater – I mean another theater person had a wife with a degree, and they wanted her to take the sabbatical position. And they actually had to change the rules in order for her to do that.

Well, then from '66 to '73 there had been a number of women who had come on temporary appointments or sabbatical replacement positions, but as far as we consider, I was the first one, full-time tenure track. There were also women in the library, on the library staff, who had faculty status and taught the one-credit bibliography class. So it depends on how you want to do it. They were earlier. They had broke the ice. They had certainly presented the idea that women could be teachers. So I felt that I had plenty of predecessors before me by the time I got here.

Warren: Did you have any sense of being a pioneer?

Simpson: Oh, yeah, I certainly did. In fact, Gerard Doyon was the one who made that very clear to me. In fact, even to the point that in soliciting the letters of recommendations from people, he had put that in that letter that this was a very important position because I would be the first woman full-time teaching at Washington and Lee, so he wanted the people to express themselves as to how they thought I'd fit into that. I had one of my advisors call me, saying, "What do you think I should say? Does he want me to say that you're happily married?" [Laughter] You know, it was like, he really didn't know what was behind all of that. I said, "Nah, tell him how I well I adjust to things." And I think I did.

I'm fond of telling the story about the first year that one of the great things about the South and certainly about the gentlemanly tradition of Washington and Lee, is that no matter what they think about you or may be saying about you behind your back, they're very polite to your face. And that's a level of civilization, a kind of decorum that controls that sort of politeness. And if you're the new person on the block, it actually made it a lot easier to get along, because everything was pretty polite.

To me, the real moment that that came home, though, was at the very end of the year when I went to a cocktail party at Al Moger's house, who was one of the grand old men in the history department, and who had been a tremendous support for me all year long, and I felt that I had a really good friendship with this man and that he was a wonderful support, he got a little drunk at the cocktail party, and he threw his arm around me and he said to another one of our colleagues we were talking to, "You know, I thought bringing women here was a great mistake, but Pam has changed all my prejudices." Well, you could've knocked me on the floor, because I didn't know the man had any prejudices.

That may be part of what I'm talking about, is the graciousness of it, but it also at the same time shocked me, because it meant that I'd been on trial and hadn't necessarily known it. Well, I'm sure I knew I was on trial, but I didn't know I was for Al Moger,

and it sort of reinforced for me that you were being measured in a lot of ways you weren't necessarily aware of. But I was aware of it.

My other favorite story about those early years is that Henry and I faced this thing about were we going to have a family, and one of the great clichés at the time was that you didn't hire a woman because she'd get pregnant and quit on you, or she wasn't able to fulfill her responsibilities, so that was really considered in many people's minds a real legitimate reason not to hire women in the first place. So as a pioneering woman in that situation, I was very sensitive to not letting that be used against me.

And when we finally decided, after I was here – this was so calculated, I'm just amazed when I think back about it and think how calculated it all was – but I decided I was here for two years, I had established myself. I had good teaching credentials. I'd started to do some professional things that were important. I think I was getting along with everyone. So at that point we thought it was okay, we could plan a family.

Well, we did rhythm in reverse, with me taking my temperature every day for September, October, and November so that the kid could be conceived, and born in June, July, or August, so it wouldn't interfere, and we made it in October. Hooray, this is it! [Laughter] And I didn't tell anybody on campus that I was pregnant until I was five months. Part of it was I had to do a major presentation on a sculptor that I did my dissertation on, at a conference in Philadelphia, and I wanted to get that out of the way before I coped with all of this.

And I have to admit, I even chose Dr. Fox, out in Fairfield, as my doctor because I didn't want to go to the one gynecologist in town, because I figured if I walked into his door, that everybody would know what you were there for. So I went to the GP out in Fairfield, so it was a little bit more discreet.

So for five months I had finished the paper, I had done all this. I walked into Dean Watt's office and I said, "I just want to tell you I'm pregnant and it's none of your business, and I want you to know that it's not going to interfere with my job."

And Bill, the dearest man on the face of the Earth, goes, "Ah, that's wonderful news! Oh, congratulations! I'm so pleased for you. Don't worry about this. This is perfect. Oh, we're so excited about this. You know, Helen asked me the other day if you were pregnant." [Laughter]

And I loved it. Because I felt like whether or not the university ever hired another woman depended on whether I worked out. I think I was a little defensive about some of those things, but what I met were people like Bill Watt who were just so wonderful, so embracing, so supportive, and Bill eventually became one of my greater mentors. When I went into the dean's office, he was absolutely the most wonderful person I've ever worked with in my life. And you know, the university is full of people like that.

Simpson: I'm sure you're asking me questions along the way that you want. Tom Wolfe didn't do this for you, huh?

Warren: Not quite. Well, he wasn't to the point as well as you are. He kept talking about clothing. What a surprise, right?

Simpson: Well, you know, clothing, I'll never forget that very first meeting we had as faculty, Sandy Keith, who was the wife of an English department member, was teaching math for the school as a sabbatical replacement, and she and I were the only two women here on the undergraduate teaching faculty, so we sort of clubbed together a lot. But I remember sitting with her in that meeting and one of the other male faculty members, new faculty members, asked Bill what's appropriate dress for teaching. And Bill was standing up there in his pinstripe suit and tie and said, "What I'm wearing." And Sandy and I looked at each other and shook our heads and said, "Nah." [Laughter] And so it was like that, and Bill laughed, too, when he saw us do that. So there were always little bits of things like that.

Warren: So what was the reaction of the students? I guess you're said there were women already walking into the classroom, but was there a sense that the students had any problem with being taught by a woman?

Simpson: Well, I was amused. One kid called me up at one point and said he desperately wanted to get into a class that already had too many students in it, and I was saying, "I'm sorry, the class is closed." And he goes, "This is my senior year. This is my only chance to have a woman as a teacher. Don't you want to let me in?"

[Laughter] This is great. They're going to use everything, right?

I don't know, I think I did feel to some extent there were some students who, because I was one of the few women on campus, there certainly were secretaries that I think had fulfilled this role for a lot of people, Marjorie Poindexter had in particular, but there was a certain femaleness missing in their lives in terms of a nurturing aspect, and I think there certainly were students who looked on me as a kind of mother figure. I formed some very close relationships with students in those first couple years. I remember this one kid who would come in and talk to me in my office, to the point where I would sometimes just have to say, "I'm sorry, David, I have to go home." And then he'd follow me all the way out to the parking lot until I had finally gotten in the car and said, "Sorry!" and then I had to shut the door to get away from him. I think that kid was really lonely and that was clearly the problem and that was certainly only in his freshman year; he made more advancements after that. But I was just someone that he felt he had a sort of sympathetic rapport for. And I've got to tell you seriously about that kid, he ended up becoming a museum professional. We're colleagues now. So he had found the right person when he was obsessive about that stuff.

But I think the real shocking one was a kid that I'd had in several classes during that first year and had really liked. He was the sweetest kid from Little Rock. He had a wonderful southern accent and laid-back style, just real southern mush all over the place. And I loved this kid, he was so neat. But he came in at the end of the year, right

before he was going to graduate, and he said, "I've just got to tell you Mrs. Simpson, I never thought I could learn from a woman, but I have from you." [Laughter] And I was just, "What? You never thought you could learn from a woman? Would you say that to your mother?" But you did run into things like that.

Warren: So what's the southern aspect of W&L? Was it more prominent when you first came? Is it still something that's palpable here?

Simpson: I don't know. That's something really hard for me to identify, but it's certainly something that's here. There's that joke about how many Virginians it takes to change a light bulb, and it's three because one changes the bulb and two have to talk about how good the old one was. There certainly is that sense of tradition that's here that makes it, I think, a very permeating aspect of this place. And I'll admit, I came down here probably a little bit like a kind of Yankee Revisionist. I grew up in the Midwest, but I found out when you came to the South, no matter where you were from, you were Yankee if you weren't from the South.

My favorite one – this is a little bit of an aside. I lived that first year in the house that's right between SAE and Pi Phi, and I got to know a number of the SAE kids very well and a number of them had been in my classes, too. But one of the kids told me, he said, "You know, Mrs. Simpson, you're a good teacher, but you talk too fast. Even the boys from Baltimore say you talk too fast." [Laughter] And I thought, you know, that's as far north as their sensibilities went. And I suppose in some ways what has happened to me as a result of the South is I've slowed down. I talk a little slower, particularly in the classroom. I think there is that aspect of a kind of a greater ease and deliberation, a sense of time to do things that may be part of the South. It certainly makes it one of the most pleasant places to live.

And I'll say that, too, absolutely, this is the most wonderful place I have ever lived in my whole life. I grew up in Iowa and Nebraska. I got my undergraduate degree at Gettysburg. I got my master's degree in Missouri and my Ph.D. at Delaware and

lived in Philadelphia while I was doing that. Probably now, since '73, I've lived here longer than I've lived any other single place in my life and this is home. I adore this place. In fact, there were a couple times when I've had a chance to interview for other jobs and things like that, and, well, why would you want to leave paradise? It's really hard to imagine any place better than this right here. And that's the way I continue to feel about it.

Warren: This is an aside, but do you think there's any connection with that feeling and why a building was once called Paradise?

Simpson: A building is called Paradise?

Warren: You know that.

Simpson: No, what is that. Tell me.

Warren: It's in your book.

Simpson: I've forgotten it. What?

Warren: One of the little buildings that was stuck on the back of Washington College Building.

Simpson: That was a joke, wasn't it? I think that was actually a —

Warren: One was Purgatory and one was Paradise.

Simpson: Yeah, they were the names of two dormitories that were on either side of the Center Building for a while but then got replaced in the 1840s by Robinson and Tucker. No, I think that was purely a sense of student irony that these were probably terrible places to live, and they were making jokes from their classical education about them. No, I mean paradise in a sense that I just can't imagine being happier any other place than here.

Warren: One of the things I was struck by when I first moved here was how many alumni live here. I was struck immediately by how well educated the carpenters in this area are. People don't want to leave.

Simpson: Well, I think that may be true in a lot of college towns, especially small college towns, the real pretty ones. I think you'd see the same kind of thing in Chapel Hill. I certainly saw the same kind of thing at Gettysburg. You get attached to a place, and sometimes the attachment becomes strong enough that you're willing to do some alternative things in order to stay there. Some people have claimed that's why we have so many lawyers in town, too. [Laughter] They graduate from W&L and don't want to leave.

Warren: I do wonder what they all do. You mentioned the name Marjorie Poindexter. Tell me about her. I've heard the mention of her before.

Simpson: I actually did a little research on this recently. Anece McCloud asked me something about the history of black women at Washington and Lee, and so I got on the phone with some colleagues and Ted DeLaney, and we talked about it a bit, and found that actually the presence of black women on campus with staff positions started exactly at the same point of integration, that the 1966-67 decision to integrate the university, bringing the first black student on campus, was also exactly the same moment that they brought the first black secretaries on campus.

The very first woman was a woman who is still here in Lexington. Her name is Pooh Roane. To tell you the truth, I don't know what her first name is, I've heard it, but everybody calls her Pooh. She works at the bank. But she was hired as the secretary for the art department. So it was Doyon who had that honor, and he hired the first black secretary on campus and then he hired me, the first woman kind of thing, undergraduate. He was terribly proud of having done those things. But she was the first and Marjorie was the second.

Marjorie came the year after that. She first worked for Van Pate in the financial aid office. Marjorie was just one of the most incredibly mothering, nurturing people. She had this lively personality and was just adored by every single person who knew her. She, I think, had plenty of opportunity to do that in the financial aid department,

kids who were in need and suffering in other ways, too, were coming to her. But then she eventually became Jim Whitehead's secretary. He was the treasurer and the secretary to the Board of Trustees, so she had a very prominent role there, and her office, when she was doing that, when I first came here it was right in the front of Washington Hall. It was divided up a little differently then it is now. But she was one of the first physical presences you met when you came into Washington Hall. She was just fantastic. She was so lively. She was so much fun. She was so helpful to everyone. Even today, if you ask anybody who knew her, you would find stories about Marjorie. She died really tragically, though. She died of a cerebral hemorrhage, she was sitting at her desk, fell over. God, it was devastating to all of us.

Warren: When was that?

Simpson: I'm trying to remember exactly when it was. It might have been in the early eighties.

Warren: I'd like to have a chat with her. I think she would be an interesting person.

Simpson: Her husband's still in town.

Warren: The context in which I heard about her before is this idea that she was so nurturing to black students.

Simpson: Well, she was, but she was nurturing to everybody.

Warren: What was your sense, by the time you got here in '73, were black students assimilating?

Simpson: In '73, yeah, actually, the first year I was here they had a man who was the Director of Minority Affairs, who wasn't very effective. He had left by the end of that year. He was a little strange, too.

Then they replaced him with a guy who was a law student who continued his law work while he was doing this. He was younger, sort of with it. I think he really had a good rapport with the students themselves, and it was within that period that they

started the Chavez House. They didn't call it that; they called it the Minority Students Center.

They started SABU in the period before that, which was the Student Association for Black Unity. And they'd had regular dances. You can imagine the problems, being an all-male campus with few black students on it was part of the problem with social life. What was your social life? And they had started the SABU organization to provide that. They'd have some dances, they'd try to bring in black students from the other women's colleges in the area and things like that.

But you're right, Marjorie really was like a second advisor for that whole group. And then Johnny left and we hired Anece. In fact, Anece came right at the point we made the coeducation decision. So I think she's made a tremendous change, but also coeducation has. I mean, you can imagine how much easier it is to recruit black students when you've got both sexes on campus, rather than just one, especially in the South with all the social things that were built in to that. So we've got something like 2 percent minority students now. That went from having four students to having forty-some. It's been a tremendous change.

Warren: Let's make the shift to talking about the long trek towards coeducation. You can do this without any questions.

Simpson: Well, you know, I came in '73 and what I remember, I think it was '74-'75, it might have been '75, the university did a study of whether or not we should go coed, that Lou Hodges was part of. I think he was chair of it at that time and Bob Huntley was president. And the decision at that point was, no, we're not going to. And I think in a way that was an opportunity in which we could have done things in a much more normal pattern. The fact that schools were single sex, was of course, historical accident. It had to do with the much broader issues of social changes about attitudes to women. Everybody, Harvard, Princeton, Davidson, everybody was single sex, but in the late

sixties and early seventies, they all changed. They all changed, and Washington and Lee didn't.

So when you think about the ten years beyond, '75 to '85, what happened was that we were a single sex no longer because of the historical accident; it was choice. And the choice aspect of it becomes something that gets examined and reexamined. What were the reasons for that choice? Was it the loyalty of alums? Was it some very special character of maleness? Was it something that we were offering an alternative that other elite schools couldn't offer?

On the other hand, it also clearly was becoming a liability. Bill Watt will tell you about grants and things that we were simply not invited to participate in because we were single sex and they didn't want to touch that. It was much safer to go with coed schools.

And I think ultimately what it ended up doing was, of course, challenging our conception of ourselves. There isn't any doubt about the fact that by the time we made the decision, Washington and Lee had a reputation for being a better school than it actually was. We were facing the reality that that quality was slipping and that given the demographics that lay ahead of us, we had to make a choice. And the choice was between remaining all male and becoming increasingly a sort of school with more mediocre students and with a much less selective admission policy. Or as John Wilson articulated one meeting I was in, deciding for excellence and deciding that you wanted to be in that top 20 elite-ranked liberal arts schools. And it was a very clear decision that was laid out for us.

It's difficult in some ways to talk about this in a way that you think other people are going to hear about it, because one of the awkward things is the sensitivity of the men in those last few all-male classes, because what they have heard is that they were dumb and that we had to bring women in to save the university, and look what they did, now suddenly we're smart. That's, of course, a real oversimplification. There isn't

any doubt about that in those last male classes there were kids as bright as any that we have today.

I'll never forget Jack Sharman, who was a Rhodes finalist, and to this day, one of the most brilliant people I've ever known, and he was in one of those last classes. But you didn't have to look very far in terms of the statistics to see that if you're talking about the bottom third of the class, there really was a slipping. We were talking people that we would never accept today.

And what happened in the classroom as a result of that was you felt like you had two different groups of students in class. On the one hand, you had people like Jack, who, whatever level you were teaching at, really wasn't high enough. He was always right there ahead of you. And then you had other kids in the class who had no idea what you were talking about and were lost. That was the only time in my whole teaching career here that I really felt that. When I first came in '73, I was amazed at how bright these kids were, how much work they do, how good they were. And I really felt that in the early seventies, but by the early eighties it was different, there isn't any doubt about it.

I'll never forget, I had this one class, it was American Architecture, and I had two kids in there who flunked the first test, and they both came to see me, they just couldn't understand. They worked so hard. They tried to do this. I ended up tutoring those kids. I never had to do that before. I met with them at least three hours a week outside of class. I went over every lecture and every slide with them. I got them to do extra work. I would monitor their reading, have them write little essays after their reading. Before the exams, we would go over outlines that they had made. I think back on it, and talk about extra work for the faculty. I did it because these kids really wanted to learn, and they couldn't keep up unless they had that extra thing. What it means in terms of your faculty time, though, is this Remedial Reading 101, is that what you want your faculty to be doing?

I'll never forget a board of trustees member who said to us in one meeting, "What's wrong with this faculty? Don't they believe that mediocre kids need to be educated?" It was like that's the Roman H_____ argument. Don't mediocre people deserve to be represented on the Supreme Court? Yeah, well, yes, and there are institutions that are particularly geared to do that. In fact, all you have to do is look at the difference of Washington and Lee and Hampden-Sydney to see the result of that. Hampden-Sydney one time had the pretense of saying that it was academically just as good as Washington and Lee. They don't say that anymore. What they say is they're the kind of institution that gives somebody a second chance. That was the issue.

Do we want to change our mission? Do we want to change our whole historical concept of who we are? Or is academic excellence the most important thing for us that we should make the adjustments to ensure that that is going to happen? And that's the decision the university made, and clearly it was the right one, too.

Warren: Tell me about it.

Simpson: One of the things we did, this was in the eighties, I will never forget when Bill Hartog stood in front of the faculty in that great big science room we used to meet in, with his flip chart, and he showed us statistically what was happening with the pool of eighteen-year-olds and that we were really going to face a drop in the number of eighteen-year-olds, period, moreover and a more severe drop in the number of eighteen-year-olds who traditionally would be going to this kind of college. And then we face the reality, of course we were already cutting ourselves out of half the pool. And I think for a lot of people that was one of the most convincing arguments. It was like where were your students going to come from, and the reality is we always could have filled the class, but the question was who do you fill it with. And that reality of declining quality was something, as I said, we were beginning to see in our classroom, too.

So the school undertook the whole study to do it. At the time I think there were eight women on the faculty when we did this, and two of us had tenure. Nancy Margand had come two years after I did, but there was a ten-year gap between us and the next woman who was eligible for tenure, who was Kathy Koberstein. So when we went coed, there were eight women on the faculty, two of whom had tenure and I think only another four were actually in tenure-track positions. The others were temporary. So there was a pretty small group. We decided, all of us, everybody on the faculty was invited to write our own opinion about the coeducation thing. This was a study that was, I think, much more administratively and board-directed rather than more inclusively involved on the campus. They did ask everybody.

Warren: This was under Wilson?

Simpson: Yeah, right. When did he come, '82?

Warren: '82, I believe.

Simpson: Bill Watt once said to me, when I went into the dean's office in '81 and I worked with him for two years and Huntley was first and then Wilson came after that, but Bill Watt said to me, "Coeducation is necessary. It's going to happen. I just don't want it happening to me." Because he just knew all the work that was going to lie ahead of it. When Wilson came in, he stayed for that first year and then they hired John Elrod to replace him. So the actual sort of instigation of it was really Wilson and Elrod, and I think there's some kind of comfort there from the outsiders who were doing it.

But the faculty were asked to submit their opinions, and we did that, but we also got together as a group of women and had a series of meetings in which we tried to talk and articulate among ourselves what we thought were the most compelling reasons for Washington and Lee to go coed. And I remember Jean Dunbar as being terribly articulate in talking about these things.

There had been an incident in the Mock Convention parade in which one of the floats was from Massachusetts and it was of a pool table with a girl on the pool table

and fraternity guys standing around with beer, simulating sex, and the title was, "The Gang's All Here." And it was in reference to that very famous Massachusetts rape case that ultimately became the movie that Jodie Foster was in. Clearly bad taste, right? But also inconceivable that it could get into the parade, that it could go down the parade street, that nobody tried to stop it. And for us, that became one incident that marked that there clearly was a gap here in perceptions of what was appropriate. And I think some of that may have even been almost in a Freudian sense. Here we were talking about coeducation and these guys were striking back in one of the ways that men have traditionally struck back, which is violence and control. It was a real ugly thing, believe me, but it was one of the things that sparked these meetings.

I remember Jean saying that in some ways, given the shrinking pool, what had happened was that the people who were choosing Washington and Lee were choosing it in part because they saw it as a safe place that wouldn't challenge their perceptions. I'll never forget one student who said to me what he valued most about the single-sex Washington and Lee was that it was like those New York mens' clubs used to be. Like those New York mens' clubs used to be. There was that sense that you could still safely project yourself back into the past at a time when women weren't equal players, when they weren't challenging men roles, when men were in control and in charge and knew it and very comfortable with their old-boy clubs. And the idea that somehow Washington and Lee had become an old-boy club for some of these students, it was safe, and they could do those "boys will be boys" things without anybody challenging them or saying it was inappropriate. And in that sense, I think it was breeding some really negative things within the community.

We tried to articulate that to the trustees. I'm not sure that we sold anybody on it. In fact, in some ways I think the trustees probably would have said, "Yeah, that's right." Whenever you say that, you've got to balance it with the other side, too, because there isn't any doubt about, for every kid who felt that way there were probably two

kids who would have been shocked that somebody felt that way. Just for all the kids that couldn't make the grade at the bottom of that thing, there were plenty at the top who were representing the finest traditions we ever had. So it's like anything, any period, as you try to retell the story, it's so easy to try to tell it black and white. It's so easy to try and tell it as right and wrong. And the reality is history is always a lot messier than that, but there are always multiple discourses going on at any single time and at the same level, conflicting ideas that all equally have their own valid stance. I think that was very clear at the time we were debating the coeducation.

The one thing that was absolutely clear, though, was that we had two traditions, one was academic excellence and one was being all male, and we had to choose between them, because you couldn't go on having both. And to its credit, when they surveyed the alumni, the alumni made it very clear that they did value academic excellence over the all-male character of the university. That's another kind of very special character of this place. And ultimately the board made the same decision, too, that when you came down to it, all the arguments for single sex, whether you want to talk about the fraternity system, the athletics, the tradition, all the rest of it, none of them actually held up. The only thing that really held up was that feeling inside the heart, that resistance the change, that feeling that there was something so special here, that we were losing that. And that was the hardest, most painful thing for those people, but they did it, and there's no doubt at all that they were right to do it. All you've got to do is look around at what's happened to us since then to know how right it was.

Warren: Take me to July 14, 1984.

Simpson: 1984. Actually, I was sitting in a friend's house and we were watching the TV, because we knew that the news conference was going to come on, and there it was and they were in the Commerce School and President Wilson and I remember Chris Compton from the board were there, and they came in and made the announcement

that Washington and Lee was going to go coed, and we all just whooped and hollered. It was wonderful.

And interestingly, Compton, who was a Supreme Court justice on the Virginia State Supreme Court at the time, said that he had earlier been one of the people opposed to the idea, but that he was persuaded by the arguments and that the board had decided that this was the right thing to do, and there was no appeal. I thought that was a wonderful sort of legal thing there. There wasn't any going back; we were doing it. The arguments, the study was done, the vote was taken. Now what we had to do was go forward. I can't remember the actual day of the conference. It might have been on a weekend. I think it might have been a Saturday.

On Monday morning, President Wilson called a bunch of us into a room that formed the beginnings of the planning committee. "Okay, we've made the decision. What do we do next and how does it happen?" Well, luckily the admissions people had already anticipated this. They had a mailing ready to go and a late call on the College Board things. It was startling how quickly that happened. They were all a little scared, you know, and especially when you think what they were asking admissions to do. They had to have a class for that following fall. We made a decision in '84, and by the fall of '85, they had to enroll supposedly 100 students. Well, they very conservatively were saying, "Well, we'll aim for 100 women and we might get 80." Between July and December when early decision was made, they accepted 39 women applicants. The amazing thing was how quickly it happened.

In fact, my favorite one was a former trustee who had opposed the decision, on Monday morning called up the president and said, "I want my granddaughter to come for an interview," and that was Lucy Anderson, and she was part of that early class. She ultimately went through and not only was an undergraduate major here, she also ended up graduating from law school, too. That had always been part of it, that the trustees

not only had sons, they had daughters. They not only had grandsons, they had granddaughters, and they were sending them to us. This clearly was happening.

Hartog told me the other day that they had 600 women applicants for those positions that they had. We ended up enrolling, I think, 110 freshmen that year. We also had a small number of transfer students; there were about eight that we took. And we were happy to have them because then they came in and helped us as dorm residents, resident advisors within the dorms. We didn't have enough to go around, and they were willing to do that to help us out. So we had some older, more experienced women who were transferring in from some other schools.

But by and large, it was a decision that we were going to gradually add women to the student body, and the idea was that you would do it with about 100 with each entering freshmen class. We were about 1,300 undergraduates at that point, and the idea was that you would gradually build it up until you had 1,000 men and 500 women.

Well, long before the ten-year projection that that's what we were going to do, we got to the point where we had more than that and they adjusted at that point to 1,600. Even that, admissions is not an exact science. What we've got now is what 630, 640 women, something like that. It actually is exactly a 60:40 ratio; it was last year anyway. But as President Wilson said to me at the time, and I said, "What? Quota systems? What are you talking about?" And he said, "This is the process of evolution, not revolution." And that's the way Washington and Lee has always done things. Maybe that's part of the southern thing, too, that you gradually did this. The argument was we're not going to take more women than we are prepared to deal with, that we've got to do this gradually to make sure we're doing it right. In some ways I think that there's good evidence that that was a pretty successful strategy.

What happened in that Monday meeting that I was referring to was that I was named as the chair of the Coeducation Steering Committee. I also thought that was terribly funny because in 1981, when I became associate dean in college, I was the first

woman administrator they had ever had. So when they made that decision in '84, I was the only woman administrator they had on the staff. I often joked that they looked around and saw that I was the only woman administrator they had and knew immediately they had to have some more, and they did. Almost the next decision was to upgrade Julia Kozak's position, which she had been centrally secretarial staff rank, upgraded to assistant director of admissions, which is what she had been doing all along, at a time when Jim Farrar had been ill, she had run the place. I think she should have had that position a long time before that. So, anyway, she got into a professional position. We hired Anece McCloud and we hired Anne Schroer-Lamont. We hired Cinda Rankin, all these women that immediately came in on administrative levels and helped us shape that.

So we had this Coeducation Steering Committee, and our job, according to the president's charge to us, was to look into every aspect of the university's operation to decide what the impact of coeducation would be.

Warren: I need to flip the tape.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: So what did you find?

Simpson: Well, it was funny, some of the things we found. It was a pretty big committee. There were, I can't remember exactly how many people were on it. It was over a dozen. And they represented not only various administrative offices, but also students and staff. We really tried – we said, "My God, how do we do this?" Well, the obvious way to do it is through subcommittees. And I also really had a strategy at that point, which was that I thought that if this was going to work, that the more people we involved, the more people who felt they had a hand in shaping what was happening, the more commitment they would have to make coeducation work. So every committee had a subcommittee and several subcommittees below that. We had students, janitors, staff, secretaries, fraternities, every imaginable aspect of the university was brought in

to some aspect with some subcommittee. In fact, I had to laugh at one point, I figured out that I had somehow managed on my own to either be on or in charge of eighteen committees. [Laughter] I thought, "Wait a minute."

Warren: Did you do anything else besides go to meetings?

Simpson: Not much. Not much. In fact, I even added it up one semester, I had spent fifty-two hours in committee meetings in that term. [Laughter]

Warren: That's not hard to do around here.

Simpson: It was kind of staggering, to tell you the truth. It was such an overwhelming task. The only way you could do it was to break it down into little groups. We did have some consultants come in and talk to us, and we tried to keep the big picture. One of the most useful things of all was that we had ten years of experience from all those other schools who had done it. So we got this huge library of material that came in and we read all of the reports and stuff from Princeton and Williams and Dartmouth and Davidson. We went around and did visits. One of the most useful things we did was a three-day visit to Davidson. They were fantastic. We interviewed faculty, we interviewed students, we met with the administrators, with the athletic people. They all were there, okay, they had done it in '72-'73, and here we were in '84-'85, and they had all this experience to tell us about. I think it was incredibly useful for these universities to be able to anticipate all of that.

We also went to Franklin and Marshall for another interview like that. And then we read all of this stuff, too, and had these consultants. Sam Spencer came and talked to us. We had a woman who was a dean at Hollins who had also been a dean at Barnard, came and talked to us about her experiences as well. And there were all these committees studying their individual problems. So in some ways there was a substantive thing. We had to decide things like where the women were going to live.

But there was this other thing of just making sure that everybody felt that they were participating in this, that somehow they were thinking about how this was going

to change. We also tried repeatedly to say it's not just the presence of women, it's that we're going to be a coed school, so we've got to think about both men and women. We've got to think about coeducation as the new thing that we're doing, and meant to be inclusive like that, so that people could feel that they could participate in it. And we did.

The funny things that we found out, I'm fond of telling these anecdotes, is that we also, by the way, we had the great benefit of having women in the law school. The law school had to go coed in '73 or else they would have lost their ABA [American Bar Association] accreditation. So, they had, again, over ten years of experience of having women there. We invited a group of law students to come talk to us about their experiences on campus. We heard things we'd never heard before. They talked about things like the bushes were too big, the areas that they didn't feel comfortable walking on campus because they were too dark, or the boxwood had overgrown them.

One kid told this wonderful story about she was walking home one night and this car followed her, and she was really alarmed, and managed to get home, rushed in, called up the police because she had gotten the license number of the car that was following her, and they said, "That's W&L security." Well, she didn't know that, because the cars are unmarked and because all of our security people didn't wear uniforms. That had always been a mark of our low-key security stuff, that they didn't. And the guy had been following her home to make sure she was going to get home safely, but she was terrified. Things like that told us that maybe we have to change some attitudes. Maybe uniforms will be important to give a signal of presence on campus, have vehicles designated as security, that these are changes that will be helpful for everyone.

The funniest was when we realized that in the gymnasium, all of the mirrors had been hung so that if you were 5'2" or shorter, you couldn't see anything above your

nose. There it was. There were things like that that told us about, so there was a kind of pervasive maleness on the campus that somehow had to make some adjustments.

The biggest issue of all that we first dealt with was where to house the women. There were trustees who simply assumed that what we should do is have a women's dormitory with hours when they would be locked in and not allowed out, and we had based our study on the experience of all these other schools, and one of the things they told us right away was, you don't do that in contemporary student housing. You don't put all the women in one space. For one thing, it's not safe for them. You should never have women on the ground floor. They should always be on the upper floors. If you have them on the ground floor, they're going to be subject to harassment, peeping toms, all the rest of it. They're much safer, security-wise, if you actually sandwich them between a layer of men, a floor of women, then another floor of men and then on top of that. It is a much more secure arrangement for them, so that was the mode that we went for.

But then it became that issue of do you lock them in or not. Well, we had a policy, our male students had absolutely open hours in the dormitory and totally free open access, too. And it was like, well, do we have different roles for the women than the men? No, that's unfair. One of our guiding principles is that we treat our student's equally. Well, then do you lock the men in, too? That would have caused a revolution, especially in the kind of atmosphere of that period of how students expected to be treated in dormitories. You couldn't do that.

So we actually reached a compromise where we decided that every student on that hall could make their decision. They could vote as a hall as to when they wanted their doors locked, or if they did. That worked for a while. Ultimately we went to this card system, and I think that's a lot better anyway. The idea is you still have got to treat them equally. I can't tell you how many hours we spent on that. Oh, God, the nuances.

In some ways, people, I think, may actually have accused our committee of overthinking the whole thing, that we had spent so much time and anticipated so many things that there was such a sense of the specialness, these women that were coming. On the other hand, we didn't anticipate everything. And we told the administration as our final comment, at the end of that first year, we said, "The most important thing to remember is that you've got to have some money set aside so that you can respond immediately when problems arise, because they will." And there are things that we couldn't have been able to anticipate.

One of the first things that happened was that we discovered that women did their laundry more often than men, and we didn't have enough washers and dryers in the freshmen dorms. People were having to get up at two and three in the morning to find the time when they could do their laundry because of that. So, you know, they immediately took out the ones that didn't work and put in others, and it was all pleasant.

I will never forget a student letter in the newspaper, by the way, from one student, a male student, who said he had put all of his laundry into the dryer and had gone off to work on a paper and had totally forgotten about it, and it was three days later when he came back to try and find if his laundry was around, and there it was all neatly folded up, with all of his socks matched and rolled into balls, and he just wanted to say that he thought that coeducation was a great addition to this campus. [Laughter]

Warren: That is a fabulous story. I love it.

Simpson: So there were lots of things like that.

Warren: That's great.

Simpson: Another one like that is that in our second year, our Coeducation Steering Committee went on for a second year, too, and we, at one point, went in and had hall meetings. Members of the committee went around, and we went to every single hall group and had a discussion with them about their experience, what they wanted. These

were male and female students in their individual halls. We heard things like they clearly weren't getting the message about intramurals and what was available there, and we knew we had to do something about that. The funny thing in the male students was they complained because we had put these little baskets in the women's showers, to hang over the nozzles so that you can put your shampoo and soap and stuff in the baskets, and they said, "Why can't we have baskets?" So, it was like, "Well, you can. I'll make sure you get baskets." We immediately went and told the president that he had to go buy baskets for all the men.

There was another funny thing that happened like that, too. The women actually got upset because the women from the other schools – and this was the reality of the time – they would come here for visits, they would stay with the men in the dormitory, and before that, when it came to showering in the morning, the men would just go to their shower and say, "Okay, the women are coming in now," and so they'd all clear out and just let the women go use the showers. Well, once there were women in the dorms, they just assumed their dates could go use the women's showers. So the women felt very territorial about not only the fact that these imports were coming in and using their showers, but they were using their shampoo, and that was the most outrageous thing of all. These kids were just coming in there and using up their shampoo. We had a couple of letters in the student paper about that one, too. [Laughter]

Warren: How about the classroom? What happened there?

Simpson: That's a lot harder to measure. One of the things that we did in, what was it, '93-'94, we did the Coeducation Review Committee, in which we measured ten years of what's happened with coeducation, and we found that there certainly were changes when you look at what's happened, what had become the most popular majors, what had happened in terms of the distribution of where people are going within the various departments. There has been a decline in the number of people majoring in Commerce School. There's been an incredible increase in the number of English, history,

journalism, biology majors. The biology program is incredible how it's grown with the presence of women. But one of the top-ranked majors for women is journalism.

Art department is another example. When we went coed, we had seven majors, that's counting juniors and seniors, and now we've got thirty. There's a range between thirty and thirty-five. Talk about impact on your program and on your department, it's been incredible. Some places like in the business administration and accounting classes, it's still about 80-20 percentage with male/female. There's still a majority of men there. In fact, that's one thing the women in the Commerce School have sometimes talked about, is that they still feel very isolated and that they may very well be only one or two women in a class. And art, on the other hand, is the reverse of that. We probably have 75-80 percent women and 20-25 percent men. I imagine some of the men might feel a little isolated occasionally in some of our classes. But those are the reversals that have happened. I think there are other ways to account for that. I think the business recession in some ways has made the business majors perhaps a lot more unattractive, and so people went around and majored in things that their parents might have thought were useless, like philosophy, when they might not have before.

Warren: You might wind up a college president doing that. Be careful. [Laughter]

Take me into the classroom those first couple of years. Was there a different feeling?

Simpson: I'm not sure. I really don't know that there was that much of a difference. The most immediate thing was the realization of how good they were, and that's been something that's continued to happen. If you look at what's happened with the GPA, when we went coed, I think our GPA was something like a 2.5, 2.6, and now it's about a 2.9. Even more significantly, though, if you add up all of the women classes we've had, the women have never had a GPA below 3.0 and the men have never had a GPA above a 2.9. There's the quality gap there, because we've got these restrictive admission

policies that guarantee we're going to get smarter women, and they've performed that way all the way through.

So it's almost a guarantee that if you've got a class, and I've heard lots of faculty talk about this, if you've got a class, the brightest kids in the class, women will be among them. There will probably be men there, or part of there, too, but the women will be among them, almost guaranteed. If you've got kids that have problems, there will always be men, there will never been women. That's pretty universal as an experience here. They've performed that way. I think it was the number of people receiving honors, it was like 10 percent of all the women students get the highest Latin honors and only 5 percent of the men do. It's like that wherever you look.

Warren: I was impressed with the numbers of Phi Beta Kappa induction.

Simpson: That's true. But if you look where women have taken leadership, it's in those areas where they're judged on quality, then they're in the biggest numbers. That's measurable.

I think, in some ways, I've heard administrators complain that they think it's taken the faculty a little while to catch up on how good the students are, and I have felt that, too. And with that sense that I can keep increasing the demands, that I can keep increasing the expectations, because they've gotten better every single year. There was this amazing sixty-, eighty-point jump in the SATs in that first class, but it is has gone on. If you measure where we are with our SATs now compared to where we were then, its over two hundred points difference, so all of the kids are better and that means everybody can get more out of them. In terms of the quality of what's happening in the classroom, that really is something that you notice.

Warren: I've heard that there were physical manifestations of the resistance of the male students who were here and had chosen to come to an all-male school who were now faced with coeducation.

Simpson: Yeah, I think, to a large degree, the last all-male classes, and part of the result of that gradual idea of bringing in women was that that first year you still had three all-male classes ahead of them. In fact, I heard Bill Hartog make a joke about when he was trying to recruit that first class, he said, "I represent the only small liberal arts coeducation school in the country that has 1,400 men and no women." That was our situation when we were trying to recruit that first class, and then we brought in what, a 110, the next year maybe, what, 120, 130. It was so gradual that they really were a minority. That was clear. And some of that hostility was there, and it was expressed in T-shirts in particular. The class ahead of the women, when they graduated had a T-shirt that said "The Last Class with Balls." It had soccer balls and footballs and stuff on the back. I remember some of the women students complaining about, and I said, "Well, why don't you develop a shirt that says 'The First Class with Brains.'" They didn't. [Laughter]

But there were others like that, too. There was a shirt that very first year that was a well-made, well-designed shirt that had that international "no" symbol, the circle with the diagonal through it, which had a profile of a professional women with a briefcase, and it said underneath it, "Coeducation: The Beginning of a New Error," which was a play on the official policy line of beginning of a new era. A new error. That hostility was there. By and large, the women took it on the chin and laughed with it.

I think that was one of the things that we had anticipated as the Coeducation Steering Committee, that in those first classes women were going to want to fit in so much that they would really not complain about stuff, because they wanted to make it work. And it wasn't just the women, there was a significant number of men there, too, all wanting to make it work. So those other incidents were peripheral and they represented something that we all knew was passing and all you had to do was be patient and you could get around it.

Warren: Well said. Let me ask you something that was pointed out to me just recently. I did an interview with one of the first black students here, and he had a lot of, I'd say remorse would be the word, that none of the same kind of care and concern was put forth for the arrival of black students that was put forth – he was very supportive and thought it was great what was done for the women, but he felt that it hadn't been done for them.

Simpson: Well, I don't know. It depends on your perceptions, too. I will tell you that the administration bent over backwards to try, from the very first, and part of it was learning about new attitudes. When they decided in '67-'68 that they were going to admit the first black person here, they didn't have anybody that applied and they finally got Dean Gilliam's maid's son to apply. There was that whole southern thing of separation and relationship and patriotism and all of that, that was built into it. It took a while to learn. And of course the country itself was going through some rather racial transformations at the time. I think it wasn't until the early seventies that we had the Black Power Movement. It took a while for everybody to begin to figure out where they fit in these new racial attitudes.

But I got to tell you, from my firsthand experience, I know how hard the administration tried. To blame them is to say, well, why do you still have a 1960s' racial consciousness when you should have a 1990s' racial consciousness, when you look back on it. I have no doubt at all that the perception that the kid offered you was absolutely sincere and that he felt like that.

I think one of the most moving things I ever heard was when we created this minority student house, and even that had been controversial. There were people who were saying, "Well, wait a minute. If you create a house just where the black students can go, aren't you marginalizing them even more? Aren't you saying, 'That's where you belong and you don't belong out there on the campus'? Isn't this the difference

between a new kind of segregation versus integration?" That was one of the great racial debates at the time, too.

But I remember one of these kids saying that they had a saying that it was a kind of joke, "When is a nigger not a nigger?" and the answer was, "When he's in the house." What they meant by that was at what point could you feel like you were a real human being was when you were inside that minority student house, when you had your own territory, your own turf, your own friends, and you didn't have to worry and you didn't have to think about being black. You didn't have to think about how you were being perceived. But outside the house, that's how you felt all the time. So I totally understand how he felt. But I've got to tell you, everybody tried.

Warren: Who would be a good administrator, or someone who was the administrator at that time, to talk to, to get that perspective?

Simpson: Well Anece could certainly talk to you about her experiences from the point of coeducation.

Warren: Yes. No, I'm talking those early pioneers.

Simpson: Yeah. The earlier period. Novack might be able to give you a little bit of—

Warren: Who is that?

Simpson: Dave Novack. And I think Bill Watt could talk about it, too. In fact, I think you ought to interview Bill Watt, for sure. He was through so much through all of it. He was actually associate dean when they made the decision to integrate, and he was dean through that period you're talking about. Ted DeLaney is another person you should talk to.

Warren: Yes, he's definitely someone I want to talk to. He was a student, right?

Simpson: Well, he came on the staff and was the technical assistant of the biology department when I was first here, and then gradually started to take one class here and one class there until he had accumulated enough that he could just finish if he went full time. So he had the perspective of both professional staff and also student.

Warren: Yes, he's someone I'm real interested to talk to.

Simpson: You know someone else who could probably tell you a little bit about it is Rodney Hubbard. He's in town, too. He works with the juvenile justice system, probation.

Warren: And who is he?

Simpson: Rodney Hubbard. You don't know him? He's from Natural Bridge. He's on the school board. He's a real community activist. He's a great guy.

Warren: But what's his connection to W&L?

Simpson: He graduated from here.

Warren: Okay. In what time period?

Simpson: I think probably in the early seventies.

Warren: Okay. Good. Something that occurred to me last night, as I was doing my homework for this, is Bob Huntley kind of really squeaked in there between the two, didn't he?

Simpson: Between Gaines or Cole?

Warren: No, between the admission of blacks and the admission of women. He didn't really face either of the tough issues, did he?

Simpson: Well, I suppose he had his own tough issues to face. One of the things he had to do, they had an enormously successful capital campaign that he ran, that added some buildings to the campus, too, that more than doubled the endowment. That had been a terribly important thing to do. He actually had been the legal advisor to the board of trustees when that decision to admit blacks was made. He did have a role in it.

Warren: That's good to know. I'm going to be talking to him soon.

Simpson: And Huntley, I'll never forget, in that '75 study on coeducation, he said publicly in his speech one time, "Washington and Lee is not going to go out of business offering a product nobody wants." And it was a sense that when we really felt that being single sex was challenging who we were, we would do it. It was almost a kind of

prediction there and it came true, in his successor. I think in some ways having the outsider do it was the only way it could have been done. You have a new president, they bring new ideas, the board is willing, and everybody knows they have to make adjustments. You get reappointments in all your top administrative levels. It probably was the only way to do it.

Warren: So was there a sense when Wilson arrived that things were really going to change? Because he made some enormous changes very quickly.

Simpson: Well, he sure did. And certainly coeducation is the most important legacy that he brought to us, and one of the toughest things to do. But he said himself, he came in with an open mind. He came in saying, "I think you should study it. I don't have a recommendation for you one way or the other, but I'm absolutely certain that you should study it." So when he was hired, they knew it was one of the first things on the table to study, but I don't think anybody predicted the outcome of it.

Warren: So you were not actually on campus that day. You were in someone's private home watching television.

Simpson: It was Saturday, yes.

Warren: Last night I was reading the article that was in the alumni magazine about that. This is the first time I've listened to somebody talk about that I haven't started crying listening to it. It just seems so dramatic to me. Last night, reading this article, the tears started flowing.

Simpson: To me, it was a little bit the way I feel about the 60:40 thing right now. It was so clear what the right decision was that if the institution decided not to do it, they'd be making the wrong decision and that would have been so painful. It would have been a step backward. It would have been an embrace of all the wrong things. I still would have loved the place. I probably still would have stayed, but I would have been so disappointed. And I would have also been convinced that they would have had to

change, too. They would have, just like Hampden-Sydney, they would have to face it sometime.

Warren: It seemed to have been very strongly pushed by the faculty. Do you think they would have started losing faculty on that issue?

Simpson: I don't know. Maybe. I certainly probably would have felt a little more of an urge to put out my résumé, as much as I loved it here. Yes, I probably would have.

Warren: It just sounded like there were a lot of faculty who were so disappointed in what they were doing in the classroom or frustrated by it.

Simpson: Well, it was frustrating, but there also was this sense, Wilson had laid it out, "What do you want to be? Do you want to go on being all male and mediocre, or do you want to be the best? Which is going to inspire more inspiration, hard work, goal of the future?" Oh, let's just slide down this hill or let's aim for something better. Let's try to grasp that ideal. Yeah, there would have been a lot of people who would have been disappointed if the board had made the other decision.

Warren: Before we finish, there are a couple of other things involving women. I found references that there were special students here and that would have been during your time? Who were they?

Simpson: We had an exchange program with the neighboring single-sex schools, and it was Mary Baldwin, Randolph Macon, Sweet Briar, Hollins, Randolph Macon-Ashland and Hampton City as well as Washington and Lee. There are seven schools in the consortium. As associate dean, I was actually the institutional officer in charge of administrating that program. It had actually been set up by Sam Simpson and some of the others in the '70s as a means for these single-sex schools to both broaden their curriculum by having opportunities for students to go to another school where you might be able to take something that you couldn't take here, and for us the most used aspect of that, that continues to be, we still have exchange programs, is Mary Baldwin's Teacher Education Program.

So Washington and Lee didn't have to have teacher education for the two or three students a year who really wanted to get certified to teach. We could send them on the exchange program to Mary Baldwin and they could take care of doing their student practicum teaching right here in Lexington. The Mary Baldwin people would come down and supervise them. It was a great arrangement in terms of curricular opportunities and expansion. But another part of the thinking about it would be that it would bring a certain coeducated presence on the campus, expand those kinds of social interactions and thinking as well.

Warren: Was it significant? Were there many girls?

Simpson: I suppose I had more women students in my class because they were art. Out of a class of twenty-five or thirty, I might have regularly had two or three exchange students in there all the time. So a lot of people felt like in some ways we were prepared for coeducation because we'd always had women on campus, women in the classroom, and those transfer students had been brought in.

Kathleen Plant is someone you should probably talk to. She was from Hollins and had come here as a transfer student, and when we were doing the thing to decide to be coed, she wanted to transfer. We had a rule under the consortium agreement was our students could not transfer. If you had been an exchange student at another school, you could not transfer to that school. You could imagine why, to protect yourself from Hampden-Sydney stealing Washington and Lee and vice versa, etc. So she dropped out of school for a year, from Hollins, to establish her independence so she could apply independently as a transfer student in order to come to Washington and Lee. She was the first woman to graduate from Washington and Lee's undergraduate program. She later went on to law school, too, by the way.

Warren: Where is she?

Simpson: I don't know where she is now, but I bet the alumni office can tell you. I tell you another person I think she should talk to is a woman named Valerie Pierson, who

was in that first group of women and served on our Coeducation Steering Committee. She was a crackerjack kid. She's from Greensboro, North Carolina. Boy, if you want to talk to someone who had a rough time, she came in as the brightest, most energetic, with-it kid. I remember at one point she came to me with tears streaming down her face and saying, "Mrs. Simpson, I've become a feminist. I wasn't a feminist before I got here. Washington and Lee has made me a feminist." [Laughter] They really felt that resistance in a way that was extremely frustrating for them. She was a great kid. She fought through it. She did.

Warren: And I guess we should make mention of those other great benefactresses we've had here.

Simpson: You heard me do this presentation the other day. One of the things that Debbie Rindge and I did, when I was in the dean's office, Debbie took my position here in the department, she was an art historian and taught most of my classes. I still taught one class while I was dean. She was director of the gallery, too. We got the idea that one of the things that we should do was to do an exhibit in that opening period of coeducation that did something to recount the history of women at Washington and Lee. I think we called it the Tradition of Women at Washington and Lee. We went through and gathered up the wonderful oil paintings and portraits that were around on campus, we put together objects and we had newspaper clippings and things like that. We had pictures of the women who named our buildings, given us the money for buildings, Ruth Parmly, Letitia Pate Evans, Jessie Ball duPont, Mary Moody Northen. We had those pictures in there.

A wonderful [unclear], quality-wise, in term of the painting, was Jack Beale's double portrait of Sydney and Frances Lewis, which was on our main back wall, a gorgeous painting. But also one of my favorite things was we discovered that the university mace, that great big club that the Proctor carries in all of our academic processions, was carved by a local woman. I just thought that was such a wonderful

example of how something that you take for granted that's an absolute icon of the school, women had played a role in, here a significant role in creation. So we wanted to tell those stories to say that women had always had a role, always played a part.

We did things too, like at one point Katherine Anne Porter had been a visiting lecturer in the English department, a visiting scholar, she had been here for about a week on of the Glasgow things. So we had pictures there from the fifties of Katherine Anne Porter sitting around the table with students and Severn Duball and all the rest of them with it. We showed that there's always been this presence of women on campus. It gave you an opportunity to buy into the traditions rather than feeling that you were alien to them. That's something that I think is important. Those are stories I think that need to keep being retold.

Warren: Well, you're doing a great job of telling it. You are a great asset to this place.

Simpson: Thanks. In other words, I talk nonstop. [Laughter]

Warren: You're wonderful. Anything else you want to say?

Simpson: Oh, I don't know. The only other thing that I'm sure you can get this from statistics, but I think one of the most impressive things that's happened in terms of change here is the fact that when I left the dean's office in 1986, there were eight women on this faculty, two of them had tenure, and now ten years later we have something like twenty-seven women on the campus and fifteen of them have tenure. By the end of this year, once the board approves it, there will be even more. It's just been a tremendous change when you look at that kind of statistics, doubling, tripling, quadrupling, the numbers. There is a commitment here to making things work, and that's one of the great things about being at Washington and Lee.

Warren: Well, that sounds like a great way to end. Thank you, Pam.

[End of interview]