

Dartmouth College Oral History Project  
The War Years at Dartmouth  
Interview with Robert Levinson '46  
By Mary Stelle Donin  
February 25, 2010

DONIN: Today is Thursday, February 25, 2010. My name is Mary Donin. I'm in Manhattan in the Garment District or the Theater District? What is this called here?

LEVINSON: Garment District.

DONIN: Garment District.

LEVINSON: On the edge of.

DONIN: On the edge of. And on the edge of Time's Square, too, right? Not too far.

LEVINSON: Right.

DONIN: —with Robert Levinson, Dartmouth class of 1946. Okay, Mr. Levinson, first I'd like you to tell me where you grew up and where you went to high school.

LEVINSON: I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland and I went to high school in Baltimore, Maryland—a public high school called City College, believe it or not. That was a senior high school, and we had a junior high school, and we had, obviously, the first twelve grades someplace else.

DONIN: Right. And how is it that you—How did you end up coming to Dartmouth?

LEVINSON: Well, I graduated high school in 1943, and I enlisted in the navy, because I had flat feet at the time and had a very difficult time taking them up so I could get into the navy. I went to boot camp and took a test, because the V-12 program was just starting in 1943 and they announced that anybody who would like to take the test and be eligible for officer's training could take the test.

I was a very poor student; I was probably, I would guess, a C student in high school, and I thought: well, I'll take the test. So I

guess I must have passed the test because I was admitted into the V-12 program, and in the end of June of '43, I had taken a job as a counselor at a camp, thinking that I wouldn't be called until the fall, and I got called in late June and they said, "You're in and you report to Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts." So I got on a train, went to Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and was there with the V-12 program to study engineering to be a line officer, deck officer in the navy. They soon discovered that I had flunked trigonometry twice and I couldn't draw a straight line, and therefore I think after—I got there in June and by the end of the year they had decided that I was in the wrong place. They had two choices, I guess: to send me back to the ranks as a seaman second class or third class—whatever it is—the enlisted in those days, but instead they sent me to Dartmouth, transferred me to Dartmouth in February of 1944.

I had never been in such cold weather in a long time. It happened to be one of the coldest days or coldest weeks up in Hanover and I was told not to worry about it because at Hanover, everybody sits on a radiator during these periods and stays warm while you're trying to study. [Laughter] So that's how I got to Dartmouth: I was transferred from WPI in Worcester to Dartmouth in February of '44—January or February of '44.

DONIN: So did you bring credits with you from WPI?

LEVINSON: I have no idea. This was not an academic exercise where I had control over everything. There was an ensign Brown who said, "Here's where you're going. Go."

DONIN: So what did you know about Dartmouth before you went?

LEVINSON: Well, I had obviously heard of Dartmouth as a well-known institution and, I gather, academically, very highly respected and a member of the Ivy group of colleges, but I would have had no opportunity under normal circumstances to have been admitted to Dartmouth. So, for me it was a very fortunate occurrence. I was very lucky and as you hear a little bit about my early life at Dartmouth, it was probably one of the most formative periods of my life and for which I'm eternally grateful, and I guess that's why I'm still a member of the alumni association.

DONIN: Well, as you said, once they get you, they never let you go. Now, you mentioned in your fiftieth anniversary memoir that you wrote for

the reunion book that you were profoundly influenced by two professors at Dartmouth: Rosenstock-Huessy—

LEVINSON: That is correct.

DONIN: And Professor and later Dean Bob MacDonald.

LEVINSON: That's correct. I didn't know—Did I write that?

DONIN: Yeah.

LEVINSON: I didn't know that, but that's true.

DONIN: In what way? I mean, what were the courses you took with them, first of all?

LEVINSON: Well, you didn't have a lot of choices, as you may or may not know, when you were in—because the navy gave you the basic courses they wanted you to have and the alternate options that you had were very few, and I think I had an opportunity to take a music course. I think I took a woodworking course—I learned how to make a frame for a picture—and maybe one little English literature course. So, I don't know how I got into this course, but I really was into philosophy and I was fortunate enough to have Dr. Rosenstock-Huessy as a philosophy teacher.

And he deeply influenced me about the role of women in our society, and he had us out, if I remember correctly, chopping wood in the woods while he lectured to us, so that you had that kind of experience: a physical experience, and then an emotional experience, and a learning experience as he talked to us. And that better understanding of the woman's role in society and relationships to men and children led me to do some things later in life that I'm very pleased that I was involved in. I was one of the founders of the first women's bank in New York, because at the time, when we started that bank, a woman could not go into a bank and easily get a loan if she didn't have a husband to guarantee the loan, even if she may have been working and earning a very good salary or have some assets, it was almost impossible for a woman to deal with a banking relationship as a woman without a guarantor or a husband.

So, we started the bank, opened it on 57<sup>th</sup> Street and between Park and Lex, if I remember correctly, in a building there.

And we had a woman from the Federal Reserve who we brought in to run the bank, and there were three men on the board—I was one of three—and there was another one from a telephone company, I think, and the third one I forgot, and a number of women who were very political in all of their aspirations. But what we accomplished, I think, was as soon as we announced we were in business and what we were going to do and everything, most of the other commercial banks in New York opened their doors to women at that time. So, without doing a lot, I think we accomplished something at the time and, I think, hopefully it's continued; I don't know.

DONIN: So, what era was this?

LEVINSON: I think that had to be—I moved to New York in 1950. I would guess that was probably—I went back in the navy from '52 to '54, so I would guess that it was probably in the late '50s.

DONIN: What was the bank called?

LEVINSON: First Women's Bank.

DONIN: Oh, perfect name.

LEVINSON: That's what it was called, and actually, it's interesting to be in that position at that time, because there were male politicians who were running for office who wanted to garner the women's vote, so one of them wanted to come on the board and effectively contribute so much money to the bank and so forth that he really wanted to buy his place, because he was running for the Senate. And I didn't like it, so I left soon thereafter.

And the other person was Bob MacDonald. Bob MacDonald was a professor of mine in economics at the Tuck School, and when I graduated from the Tuck School, because I went back after the war on the G.I. Bill, he said to me, "What do you want to do now?" And I said, "I'd like to go in the State Department." He said, "Do you have any money?" And I said, "No. No money whatsoever in the family." And he said, "And you're Jewish." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "You haven't got a chance." He said, "They're going to put you in Timbuktu and you're going to be so frustrated." He said, "This is no way for you to go." And he said, "I'm going to get you enrolled in the London School of Economics on the G.I. Bill." And he said, "I'm going to get you a job teaching economics over there to help you pay your way while you're living in London, and then

when you get out of there, make some money and give it to an appropriate party, a political party. Get yourself appointed to a position where you think you can make a difference and that's what you should be doing."

DONIN: Good advice.

LEVINSON: So I went to the London School of Economics.

DONIN: That's terrific. On the G.I. Bill. They accepted—

LEVINSON: Yes, they did.

DONIN: That's terrific. Were there other Americans doing that?

LEVINSON: I don't know. I met Canadians. I don't remember being the—it was an eye-opening experience for me, because I don't remember being in the company of—there were two Canadians. I don't remember being in the company of any Americans. It was the days of the Labour government right after the war and I was fortunate enough to have Harold Laskey and Hayek, now a Nobel Prize winner, and Dr. Anstey and others. We spent a lot of time in their homes in little small groups, talking about their respective professions or interests, and then we spent a lot of time at Parliament, because the government was in power, so we met all the people there.

And when I was teaching, I was teaching students who were much older than I—they were mostly Brits who had been in the war since 1939—and I was only twenty-one or twenty-two. And they really weren't interested in what I teaching; I was reading the book one page ahead of them. [Laughter] I was a real fraud. So, we'd have a question and answer period. And I would arrange to take them around to different factories, just to show them what productivity was. I was teaching a course called the—certain aspects of international trade—and I would take them around to certain factories for export experience, and they were all very aged because of the war. And they really weren't interested in the factories; they weren't interested in what I had to say in the book, and I forget whether I was reading [inaudible] book, or whatever it was, and teaching them from the book. And all they wanted to know was what country could they go to to really advance to get out of the U.K., which was—first of all, it was a very bad winter. We had three months we couldn't see—the sun never came out in three

months. And we were still on rationing—rationing coupons in '46 and '47, so my teaching experience was very limited and I decided I wasn't going to be a teacher.

DONIN: That cured you.

LEVINSON: That cured me and I'm sure they cured me: the students.

DONIN: So, just to get the chronology here—you went to LSE right after you got your degree from Dartmouth?

LEVINSON: Yes.

DONIN: Oh.

LEVINSON: As you probably know, when you went back, it was like a twelve-month education; there was no such thing as summer vacations or this or that. So, I went back to Dartmouth. When the navy came to me I was on duty with a destroyer—an escort group out of New Jersey in the Atlantic Ocean. Very short period of time, because the war—that was only about six months and then the war was over. And the commanding officer came to me and said, "Do you want to get out of the navy and go back to school?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, then you have to stay in the reserves." And I said, "I'd be pleased to stay in the reserves." If I may digress. I'll tell you a little story about that.

In 1952, I got recalled by the navy for the Korean War. I had been living in Baltimore in 1947, '48 before coming to New York in 1950, but I had been dating a young lady in Washington, D.C., who was at George Washington University. So, when I go over to George Washington University, waiting for her to get out of school, it occurred to me, as I met some other fellow ensigns from the period that I was in the navy that the automatic advancement to Lieutenant J.G.—junior grade—was automatic after eighteen months active or reserve. You became—you didn't have to have any talent whatsoever; you got moved up one. And all my friends that were now J.G.s who were in the same group, and I was still an ensign.

So, they said to me—So I went over to the Bureau of Naval Personnel and they said, "Well, yep, you're still an ensign. Go back to Baltimore, put your hand up, and get sworn in as a J.G.," which I dutifully did. When I got recalled in the navy and I looked at my

paycheck—so much for active duty and so much for continuity in the reserve—and I found it very short. I said to them, “I think you made a mistake. And they said, “Well, we’ll check it and next pay period, you come see me and we’ll let you know what happened.” Well, apparently they made a mistake and discharged me from the navy, and when I went back and I reenlisted in 1947, that’s why I got called back for two more years in the navy.

DONIN: Amazing.

LEVINSON: So, it was an amazing experience.

DONIN: So where were you—so ’52 to ’54, you said?

LEVINSON: Yes. Because I—You want to hear about this?

DONIN: Yes.

LEVINSON: Because I was a supply officer, at that time there were three different services: there was the army, navy, and the air force, and they were separately run and there was no such thing as the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time. They decided that they were going to have a purchasing group, which was going to purchase for all three services. So they formed a little group with an admiral, and a general, and a captain, I think, or something, in the air force. And they opened an office on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, and I was living as a bachelor on 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, and I had just been in the training program for Burlington Mills in the textiles, which is why they put me into that office, because they thought I would buy the blankets and the sheets and everything. And in April of that year, they gave me \$66 million—I was twenty-eight years old—and they said, “You have to spend it by June or we have to give it back to the government.”

DONIN: Amazing. A lot of money.

LEVINSON: It was an interesting experience, because as much as I had, the other officers who were there who had—there were five of us—who had different purchasing availability—I found that I was offered tremendous opportunities to be very rich very soon by having that kind of money, and I was either—I think I was either better educated or not educated enough, but I decided I wasn’t going to take any of the bribes that were being offered to me, including some substantial portions of some very profitable businesses, stock ownership. End of story. That office—A.S.A.P.A., Armed Services

Apparel and Procurement Agency —was closed after six months and I think I'm the only one that didn't go to jail. I think the other four, I think they all went to jail. So, they had a good reason to close it.

So, then they didn't know what to do with me, so they sent me down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and I worked there for the admiral doing some things, but then he called me in one day and said, "I'd like to put you on Dr. Teller's staff and send you out to Bikini, because they're going to be shooting off hydrogen bombs—the first hydrogen bombs—out there." And I said, "Admiral, I'm going to tell you what I told others. I flunked trigonometry twice. You don't send me out—I never took physics—you don't send me out there, because I won't know what I'm doing." He said, "I want you to write me a report as to what the other services are doing in the nuclear area when you're out there, and send me that report on a weekly basis." So, I said, "Admiral, I guess you're saying I'm a spy. Is that right? On the other services?" He said, "Something like that." [Laughter]

So, I went out to the Pacific and I worked at ground zero. I spent a lot of time—I spent time out there for the first three hydrogen bomb shots, and I just recently, about six or eight months ago got clearance from the Defense Department, because I had Q clearance and they were afraid—Q being the highest security clearance—

DONIN: What is it?

LEVINSON: Q. It was called Q clearance in those days. And because I was exposed two ways—number one, the radiation; the other to a lot of information—I was considered a valuable asset, so they demonstrated to me that if I was ever captured during the war for whatever reason that I was out there, the information that I had could not be given to the Chinese or the Koreans. So, they showed me what waterboarding was like, so they gave me a little experience in that, a little experience in this and that. So, I had a very interesting experience out there, and I learned a lot. Some of what happened in the first shot has never been fully reported. I just got clearance from the Defense Department to write an article about that. I'm thinking I'm going to write it for the World Policy Institute journal about what really happened out there.

DONIN: How interesting. Could you adapt something for the alumni magazine, too?

LEVINSON: I think so.

DONIN: In sort of layman's terms?

LEVINSON: Yeah. It's all layman's terms because I am a layman. I mean, all I could tell you is that I know that when they told me that it was going to go off at x power, and it went off at twice that power and we weren't ready, and the damage... It's sort of interesting that I was twelve miles standing on a ship when the first one went off and I was thrown back against the side of the ship. When the Defense Department gave me the okay, they told me there was a periodical that had been published of that particular series, and they gave me a letter so I could go to the public library where they have a special restricted area. And I found this article, which had a lot of statistics in it about how much radiation—because I didn't know how much radiation I had had, because we had a dosimeter every day that measured the radiation that we turned in every day, but they never told us how much radiation that we'd absorbed. So, I opened up this document and I see pictures I had taken up there. My pictures are in the document.

DONIN: Unbelievable. Did you ever suffer side effects?

LEVINSON: Yes, when I came back. I was there for the first three shots and that was getting near the end of my two years, and I was coming back to get out of the navy, and I was going to get married two or three months later. And they asked me—I planted some instruments around ground zero on the atoll, and they asked me if I would pick up my instruments before I left, when I go. So, I said, "Sure." Nobody knew much about radiation in those days.

So, I went in a helicopter and they dropped me on the atoll by myself. The helicopter went off to shore and I ran around and found all of my instruments had been vaporized by the power of the blast. I even buried some beer under the sand. That was also gone. [Laughter] So, I kept calling the helicopter pilot back to drop his ladder so I could get out of there, but I was there—the Geiger counter I was carrying, the needle went right off the side, as soon as I landed, it went right off the top, so I was getting a lot of radiation. And I got radiation sickness. When I came back, they put

me in a naval hospital. Nobody knew what it was, but that's what it was. And I survived and I'm still here.

DONIN: Yes. Amazing. So, let's go back to your arrival at Dartmouth. So that was in the... What did you say?

LEVINSON: That would be February of '44.

DONIN: In the dead of winter. For a kid from Baltimore, Maryland it must have been pretty cold.

LEVINSON: Pretty cold. It was cold.

DONIN: Do you remember where they put you up, what dorm you were in?

LEVINSON: No, I don't.

DONIN: They say—I mean, a lot of these fellows that I've interviewed so far say that the dorms were sort of run like a military operation.

LEVINSON: Oh, they were.

DONIN: Four bunks, and reveille in the morning, and calisthenics before marching into Freshman Commons, or whatever it was called then.

LEVINSON: Yeah.

DONIN: And you wore your uniforms, right?

LEVINSON: Absolutely. Every day.

DONIN: And formations on the green with both President Hopkins and, you know, the military fellow.

LEVINSON: When we had a reunion, we did a march around the green. Because for some reason I was a brigade—I don't know. Maybe because my initials. My brother was also in the navy, because the letter L was halfway through the alphabet and everything, he got—I don't know how I got [inaudible]. I was brigade commander, or something like that, so we used to march around the green and we'd salute to Hopkins and so forth, and lower the flag, and raise the flag. So, yes, we used to do all that. There were officers. There were officers who had been assigned to the V12 program at Dartmouth. I know at WPI they had a couple officers.

DONIN: Was any aspect there like a regular college experience? I mean, did you do any athletics?

LEVINSON: Yes. I was on the wrestling team in high school in Baltimore, so I think I did some wrestling up there. And that's it, I think. I think I also— I was not athletic, but I think I also must have been the debating society or something or other, because now I'm starting to get letters from them. They must have found something in your archives that I was involved with the forensic society at Dartmouth.

DONIN: You were the manager of the Forensic Union.

LEVINSON: I guess that's what I was doing.

DONIN: That's what the *Aegis*, the yearbook, said. And you were a member of the Outing Club?

LEVINSON: Yeah, I was. That's right.

DONIN: So you sort of embraced that piece of Dartmouth, the outdoorsy kind of stuff.

LEVINSON: Well, I learned how to ski at Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

LEVINSON: In those days they had the old—the ski troops had the big wooden skis. So we'd go out to the golf course and strap those skis on. So, I learned how to ski at Dartmouth. Learned as much as I learned how to ski at Dartmouth. So, I was involved in some of the outdoor activities and—

DONIN: And it says you did intramural wrestling and softball.

LEVINSON: I think I did softball. Yeah, the wrestling I remember; the softball I'd forgotten. That's right.

DONIN: So the V-12ers were mixing with the regular undergraduates on these teams?

LEVINSON: Yes, I guess. You know, it's hard to remember, but I remember undergraduates, but they had to be a very small percentage of the student body at the time. And I think if I had to make an observation

about being there—as I said, I would never have been there if it wasn't for the navy—but I probably would not have met the type of people that I met who had never been there without the navy. So, there were blacks, and there were no blacks at Dartmouth that I knew about prior to... And people from the Midwest and other areas who got there the same way I got there: through dint of the navy. And coming from different religious backgrounds, religious, economic circumstances... So, it was an interesting mix to—it was really America. And you don't always get that opportunity unless you have a big scholarship program. That always interested me and that's why I have a small scholarship up at Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh, do you? That's nice.

LEVINSON: Yeah, fun.

DONIN: Targeted at any particular group?

LEVINSON: Not yet. Not yet. I haven't given that much. I think you have to give \$250,000 for your target. I have enough confidence in the governance at Dartmouth that I have to worry about that. I'm not sure that I want to target any group, because I'm involved in other areas where I used my life experience to do what I want to do in other groups.

DONIN: So, were you aware that there were other Jewish kids there as well?

LEVINSON: Well, I knew they had a quota under Hopkins, and I think it was 6 percent, which I think represented maybe the Jewish population of the United States at the time. I don't remember how the quota system worked. It wasn't just Dartmouth; every Ivy League and a lot of colleges had a quota system. I never really thought very much about it, very frankly. So, I can't say that I sought out other Jewish members nor recognized them. I know that there had to be other Jewish members in the navy, certainly.

DONIN: But you weren't aware of them in your sort of—Well, what was your—Did you have a social group that you spent time with?

LEVINSON: Yeah.

DONIN: Was it other V-12ers?

- LEVINSON: All V-12ers.
- DONIN: All V-12ers.
- LEVINSON: Yeah. I don't remember knowing anybody who was not either V-12 or—I think V-5 was there at the same time.
- DONIN: Right.
- LEVINSON: And was there V-1 there at the time?
- DONIN: There may have been. And V-7.
- LEVINSON: V7. That's right. Yeah, I don't remember socializing or—I mean, if you asked me who were civilians at the time, I don't remember one. I know there were, because I remember they weren't dressed in uniform, but I think they were—I don't—maybe you have the statistics. I have no idea what percentage of the student population were in the service or out of the service.
- DONIN: Small. There were some conscientious objectors, I think.
- LEVINSON: Were there?
- DONIN: Who did sort of the civilian conservation corps kind of thing.
- LEVINSON: Really?
- DONIN: —that I think Rosenstock-Huessy was involved in: one of these work camps.
- LEVINSON: That was not the camp I was in when he was chopping wood. That was a teaching experience, I think.
- DONIN: Right. Now, did you get involved in Greek life, in fraternity life at all?
- LEVINSON: Well, there were no fraternities.
- DONIN: They were shut down, right?
- LEVINSON: They were shut down and only after the war when I came back, I joined—At that time, you know, fraternity life was not meaningful in any way. There was no food. I mean, everything—I don't know what they're like today, but unlike some other colleges, it was just a

social gathering place and I think they—I'm not even sure they had rooms available at the fraternity house where you could live there. And I got involved in the Jewish fraternity up there, whatever it was.

DONIN: The Greek letters are right here under your—or is that part of...

LEVINSON: Gotta find this yearbook. That's probably it. I get a letter from them every now and again. I didn't really enjoy that environment.

DONIN: The fraternity environment.

LEVINSON: I was there for a year and I think I left. It didn't mean anything to me.

DONIN: So, let's get the chronology here: so you went into V-12 and then you were shipped out, right, to duty. And then you came back.

LEVINSON: I came back in—I came back, I think in—I got my A.B. in February. I must have come back—the war was over in the summer of '45; I must have gone back in September. And whatever credits I had and whatever I had to do, I think I got my A.B. in February and then continued right straight through and got my MCS at Tuck, I think in September or something, because I know that I was on a ship and landed in England on—I had just gotten out. I think it was Halloween—October 30<sup>th</sup> I was in England.

DONIN: Oh. Of '46.

LEVINSON: Of '46. So, we just went straight through all the whole summers; there was no summer.

DONIN: You didn't actually get a graduation ceremony; it was just a...

LEVINSON: Well, I did at Tuck. I didn't get it for my A.B. I don't have—my A.B., I gave to my brother to hold that and my wedding license, I think, when I got married and he lost them both. And I think when they changed the MCS to the MBA, I think they reissued a certificate under MBA. I've got that someplace. And I did graduate because I have a picture of myself in the graduation gown with my family at Tuck, so I graduated from Tuck. They had a ceremony.

DONIN: Oh, nice. And then off you went to LSE.

LEVINSON: Off I went to LSE.

- DONIN: So, where is it that—Where does your attachment to Dartmouth come from? Is it the friends that you made there, or was it the experience with these two professors that influenced you?
- LEVINSON: I think if you had to put your finger on it, it's these two. When you have two professors who change your life, and they did in many respects, or opened up a world to you, that's it. I don't remember— See, you know that because after the war there were a lot of mixed up classes. They came to me and said, "What class would you like to be? You can be '45, you can be '46, you can be '47. Where are your friends?" Well, because I graduated high school in '43, I should have been '47 under normal circumstances, but I guess I had a few friends who said that they wanted to be '46s or they were '46s, so I said, "Okay, I'll be a '46." That's how I got to be a '46.
- DONIN: Yeah, it was pretty random, wasn't it?
- LEVINSON: Yeah.
- DONIN: But you managed to develop a sense of belonging to that class.
- LEVINSON: I did, but much later. I didn't go to reunions for a long time, and it's as Dartmouth is so good at, they throw a hook out and they decide where you're going to bite. And many years later, I got invited up for one of these weekends. I forget what they—Horizon Weekends. Is that what they call them? Horizon Weekends.
- DONIN: Good memory.
- LEVINSON: And that weekend—I think it had to do more with English literature, or something like that. I forgot. I don't know what the follow up was other than to get you involved and maybe ask you to give the department money. I'm not sure what it was. But, in my business career, at one point I was the chairman of a public company—a New York Stock Exchange company—and the analyst who came to see me from a company—from a firm down Wall Street—was a Dartmouth, a young Dartmouth guy. And he ended up being the chairman of Hop/Hood, and he said to me, "Why don't you get involved? Come up and spend the weekend." They had also the Horizon program for the arts. And I said, "Fine."

Now, I had probably at that time gotten involved with the Brooklyn Museum. I don't know if this is all part of your history or

anything, but I was chairman of the Brooklyn Museum for eleven or twelve years, I think. Something like that. So, I had now my eyes opened to the visual arts and Mickey Straus, who was Melville Straus. So, he got me. I came up there, and he said, "Come on the board." So, that's how really I got back involved with that and the fiftieth-year reunion. But my annual trips to Hanover having to do with the Hop/Hood board and my appreciation for what I saw there and the students, because they do a wonderful job of mixing the students in with you at meals and other interactions. It was just wonderful and I was thrilled to see these bright young people and to learn from them.

DONIN: So, speaking of the Hop, did you have any personal memories yourself of ever interacting with President Hopkins?

LEVINSON: Not at all. Not at all. Hopkins to me was a distant figure.

DONIN: Same with Dickey when you were there?

LEVINSON: Yes, roughly. I think a little more with Dickey. I think I was in his presence a couple times, but Hopkins left when? It must have been soon thereafter.

DONIN: Well, he left in fall of '45.

LEVINSON: Yeah, so he was gone by the time I came back and it was Dickey, I guess. You know, the Hopkins Center... I knew about the quota system. I guess you have to have some feeling about that. I think Hopkins was for it to the best of my knowledge. He didn't rail against it. And the world's changed, of course, since then. No, I think the only person I really got to know personally and spend some time with was Jim Wright.

DONIN: Yes.

LEVINSON: He was terrific. Next week on Wednesday night I'm looking forward to meeting Jim Kim, because there's a reception for him here next week. And I had written a note to him with a small check for the Partners in Health in Haiti. I must say, the development department at Dartmouth does a great job, because I got a wonderful letter back signed by Jim. I mean, he signed it obviously, and it was just well done. I'm looking forward to seeing him. Now, I hear he's being honored—the Mount Sinai hospital is giving an honoree—the Mount Sinai Medical School. My wife happens to be on the board and so I

have a lot of contacts up there, so I'm looking forward to meeting him next week. So, I've had a succession of—I didn't know the other presidents.

DONIN: The others in between, right.

LEVINSON: Right. Not at all, yeah.

DONIN: Okay, let's see here. Oh, I meant to show you these. You probably—I don't know if you got these or not, because you—well, maybe you did. These were letters—no, this one's too early and this one's too early. These were letters that Hopkins sent out to the men when they were at war, but I can see by the date they're too early.

LEVINSON: Yeah.

DONIN: You weren't there yet.

LEVINSON: Nope. They could have sent it to me at Worcester and I may have written [inaudible]. No, I never saw these.

DONIN: Let's see here now. Now, when you came back, had Dickey started the Great Issues course yet? Did you do the Great Issues course?

LEVINSON: I knew about it. I think I did.

DONIN: Usually it's in the senior year, but a lot of you were going on to Tuck, so...

LEVINSON: Well, one of the problems there is that I had a poor education. It had nothing to do with Dartmouth College, I mean, but these are the courses you had to take. I don't know if you know what a plimsoll line is, but I know what a plimsoll line is and that was taught at Dartmouth, and that's the line at which the weight of a ship shouldn't go below that line otherwise it could turn over. So, you know, you learn these kinds of things at Dartmouth; you wouldn't normally learn about that. So there were many courses really having to do with the navy.

DONIN: Yeah, I was going to say.

LEVINSON: So I never really got to the literature that I would have liked to have had. I would have like to have learned some more of the sciences.

And, of course, there were no arts at Dartmouth at the time, but the forerunner of the Hop and of the Hood, particularly. I remember it had to do with Alaska, and the Arctic Circle, and all of that. I didn't get a well-rounded education because of the war.

DONIN: But it was sort of a—It seemed like it was sort of a combination of a little bit of liberal arts thrown in with a lot of military training for you all.

LEVINSON: That's right. That's correct. And so, you know, when I had a chance to take a philosophy course, when I had a chance to take a music course, or I had a chance to take a course in literature, but they were—Some of them made it to the main purpose of our being there, which was to train us for our responsibilities in the navy. So, when I say I wasn't that well educated, I know given the opportunity, what I might have done if I had been there as a civilian.

DONIN: Now, when you left for the first time to go do your service—your first round of service—had you arranged with Dartmouth to come back and matriculate as a—

LEVINSON: No, not at all. I didn't know that I even had that opportunity. No, when I was asked if I wanted to get out of the navy in 1945 to go back to college, I then got in touch and said, "Can I come back?"

DONIN: Oh, interesting. It must have been very crowded with lots of people like you wanting to get back on campus when you returned in '46... Forty-five.

LEVINSON: Forty-five. Well, you see a lot didn't come back from the campus. It was crowded. I can't tell you what the size—Oh, we had the largest class, I think, in Dartmouth history, I think.

DONIN: Forty-six?

LEVINSON: Forty-six. Because of everybody that came back after the war.

DONIN: And did you find a room to live in, I assume, off campus?

LEVINSON: No, I lived in a dorm.

DONIN: Really? Oh.

LEVINSON: Now, we lived—we had double-decker bunks, I think, still then, but no, we were accommodated.

DONIN: Did you get a part time job? I know a lot of guys were really broke and they got part time jobs.

LEVINSON: I was a—I worked the Hanover Inn. I went there early in the morning; I squeezed the orange juice and I took care of the tables, breakfast at the Hanover Inn.

DONIN: And they fed you in return, I hope.

LEVINSON: I got breakfast and I got paid.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEVINSON: I got paid. And then a little later, I sold beanies, Dartmouth beanies. Had somebody make Dartmouth beanies. I was an entrepreneur at that time.

DONIN: That was the beginning of your textile career.

LEVINSON: I guess so. [Laughter]

DONIN: We just took in one of those beanies; somebody donated it to us.

LEVINSON: Really?

DONIN: They're the cutest little things. They're much smaller than these huge baseball caps that these kids wear now.

LEVINSON: Oh, yeah. They were little beanies.

DONIN: They look more like a yarmulke almost. They're really very cute with a little tiny brim on it.

LEVINSON: That's right, that's right.

DONIN: Made out of nice wool.

LEVINSON: Yes. That's what I did: I sold those on campus.

DONIN: Because the freshmen had to wear them when they were wandering around.

- LEVINSON: I think they did. I guess so. I don't remember that, but...
- DONIN: Yeah.
- LEVINSON: Those were my two activities working at Dartmouth.
- DONIN: Did you have an opportunity to have any kind of social life with girls? Some people talk about either road trips to the other schools around, or going to White River Junction.
- LEVINSON: I never went to White River Junction. A bunch of us used to pile into a car and go down to Vassar, or Holyoke, or...
- DONIN: Colby Junior?
- LEVINSON: Colby Junior. Well, that was the closest one nearby, so we went to Colby, yeah. It was pretty hermetic—whatever it was—to be there. People say, “Why do you have such a large—why are they so loyal?” I say, “If you were as isolated as everybody was up there, you'd reach out for anything to have companionship.” So that's why they have a loyal student body.
- DONIN: Exactly. You know, a lot of people say that that, you know, that isolation really does play into the experience.
- LEVINSON: Yeah. And that was before the, you know, before the interstate routes and everything. And we were on Route 5, if I remember correctly, driving down Route 5 in all kinds of weather, trying to get a little sleep in between so we could go to school the next day. Yeah—No, I had a girlfriend at Vassar that I had met in Baltimore, so I used to go down and visit her at the time. And once in a while we'd go up to Canada to go to Montreal.
- DONIN: Oh, to Montreal. Of course, yeah.
- LEVINSON: Not for girls, but for skiing. [Laughter]
- DONIN: Skiing, right. Okay. Any closing thoughts? Well, let me ask you one more thing. Do you think you were a better student when you came back after the war than before you left?
- LEVINSON: Absolutely. I was such a poor student in high school, for a lot of reasons, and—no, I was—I didn't really care about degrees so

much, but I think one of—maybe it's Dartmouth. I'll blame Dartmouth. I have always been curious in my life and I continue to be curious even at my old age, and I try to get my children to be curious because I say, there's something to be learned every day. And I think that when I went back to Dartmouth I was curious about a lot of things and so, when I got to London and met a disciple of Gandhi's—and I had studied—I think I studied—I did. I studied comparative religions at Dartmouth. So, I was interested in other religions and how they worked. So, I think I can credit Dartmouth with aiding and abetting my curiosity, and hopefully having that continue because I think when you stop learning something, it's over. So, I followed that in my learning experiences in life, in my day job, and then my other jobs, which happened to be in the non-profit area, with children and with others, where I tried to influence them in their life to be curious, to open up new doors, and to try to walk through them.

DONIN: And you learned that at Dartmouth?

LEVINSON: I think I was very much influenced by that at Dartmouth. Certainly by Rosenstock-Huessy; certainly by the openness of the faculty to new ideas and thoughts. I didn't find it overly structured to where you couldn't reach out and explore a new area without being centered and finding that you were encouraged, and I think that was very meaningful to me.

DONIN: Great. Okay.

LEVINSON: Had enough of me?

DONIN: Closing thought?

LEVINSON: I'm happy that you're doing it, not for my purposes, but I'm involved in other organizations; I've been around one since 1825, another since 1925. And our archives there—one of them—along with the organization called the Institute of Current World Affairs, and we send young students around the world for two years; all they have to do is write a monthly newsletter. And those archives are now going all to Columbia University—these newsletters—and out of that has come ambassadors, and academics, and business people: really a great group of people. It was started in 1925. And another organization, 1825, which is the National Academy, so—

DONIN: Oops. Is she trying—Is she knocking on the door?

LEVINSON: Yeah. That's all right. So— Yes? [Voice outside]

DONIN: Let me just pause this.

**[End of interview]**