

Raymond B. Johnson '59
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
November 26, 2012

DONIN: Today is Monday, November 26th, 2012. My name is Mary Donin, and I am in Noank, Connecticut, at the home of Dr. Raymond B. Johnson, Dartmouth Class of 1959.

Okay, Dr. Johnson, we always like to start these interviews with a little bit of information about how it is you ended up coming to Dartmouth, whether somebody recommended it to you or it was in your family, or how is it you ended up coming to Dartmouth?

JOHNSON: I'm smiling because it's quite a story. When I was in high school, I received the Dartmouth Bible for being the outstanding sophomore in my class.

DONIN: Where were you in high school?

JOHNSON: At Dunbar High School in Washington, DC. And in my junior year, I received a Harvard Book Award as the outstanding junior. Well, I had never heard of Dartmouth. I had heard of Harvard, of course. And nobody in my family had ever gone to college before. And so when it came time to apply for colleges, I applied to several colleges, and I said to my parents, "Well, I suppose I should apply for that Dartmouth [pronouncing it Dart-Mouth] school—"

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

JOHNSON: "—(I didn't even know how to pronounce it)—since they gave me the Bible. And since I try to pray every once in a while, I should pray that I'll be accepted." So I applied purely on that basis. There was no persuasion on anyone's part. In fact, my first choice of college had been Amherst. And of the six or seven schools to which I applied, Amherst was the only one in which I was on the alternate list. [Laughs.] And one of my best friends, who was one of the salutatorians in high school,

and I was the valedictorian, was the one who got accepted to Amherst.

DONIN: Oh, that must have hurt.

JOHNSON: It was surprising. But I was not disappointed. I didn't know a lot about Dartmouth, so that was the gist of the story. And they also gave me the largest scholarship award. My parents—my mother was a government worker; my father was a house painter, who was illiterate, and it meant a great deal to me, the financial support, so I went to Dartmouth on a full scholarship in freshman year.

DONIN: Were you the first and only child in your family, or were you the first child in your family?

JOHNSON: No, I'm the oldest. I have two sisters, younger: one, six years younger, one, sixteen years younger, whom we call "the mistake."

DONIN: Oh, yes! [Both chuckle.]

JOHNSON: No, but I was the only one at that point who went to college. My sister next to me never went to college. My younger sister went to college for about six months or so. And of my children, my son (who's the youngest one) went to college and finished up at Boston University. My middle daughter didn't finish college but then subsequently did degree work and now is a nurse.

DONIN: Oh, terrific.

JOHNSON: And works in a gastroenterologist's office, of course.

DONIN: It's a perfect fit.

JOHNSON: Exactly right.

DONIN: [Laughs.] Great.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: So when you arrived there in the fall, that was the first sight you had of Dartmouth?

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: And were you prepared for being so—I assume you grew up in the Washington, DC, area if you went to Dunbarton [sic] High School. Were you prepared to be so far out in the boonies, so to speak?

JOHNSON: Dunbar High School.

DONIN: Dunbar.

JOHNSON: No, I had not a clue what the campus was like. My parents and I drove up, and I was the primary driver. My mother got a license after she bought a car. I drove the car alone until she got her license. My father did not drive. He had visual problems. And so we got lost several times getting there, but when we arrived, I was impressed by the beauty of the campus. I was unimpressed by the smallness of Hanover, coming from Washington, DC, but—and we were there, and I was ready to start school. I was not coming up to see it and then come back. I was coming to go, because we couldn't afford going back and forth.

And my parents—when I was in school, I would call home every once in a while, and Mother said, “Why don't you call more?” I said, “For what? You have to pay the phone bills. There's not an awful lot of money. I don't ask you for any money”—because I knew I would get a dollar or something like that. “And so no news is good news. I'll write you if there's a problem.”

So I didn't have any clue as to what to expect there, and coming from a totally segregated school system in Washington, DC, *Brown v. Board of Education* having preceded me just by one year—I graduated in '55—and I didn't know what to anticipate there.

I did know, however, that in selecting a college it was important for me to get away from home, not because I had any problem with my parents—we got along very well—but because I knew that, had I stayed in the Washington, DC area with my classmates, many of whom went to Howard University, that I would be in the social rut of that. And I did

not want that. I felt that it was important for me to get away, where I could claim independence and be my sole survivor, so to speak, for the nine months of the year. That was crucial to me. I really felt that going away to college was really the beginning of one's independence from home, and that was very much satisfied at Dartmouth.

DONIN: To be sure.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: You were very brave to go, first of all, so far north, because essentially in those days Washington was a pretty southern city.

JOHNSON: Yes, very much so.

DONIN: And to the cold, snowy New England climate.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: And did you have any clue how many black people would be there when you got there?

JOHNSON: Nope. None at all. There were, among the four classes, less than twenty. As I recall, in my class there were about six. And two of those were actually from Washington, DC. Three of them, actually, were from Washington, DC, in addition to me. One went to Dunbar with me; the other two went to other schools in Washington, DC. So we had four from Washington, DC. The other one from Dunbar dropped out. He was the son of a physician who, after freshman year—because we weren't allowed to have cars in freshman year—his father bought him a convertible, a little sports car convertible. He spent most of his time driving around in his sports car and didn't do any work, and so he left, only later on to die before we even got out of college.

DONIN: Oh, gee!

JOHNSON: Yes. We don't really know what the cause of his death was, but it was a sad story. The other two did indeed graduate, also went to medical school.

DONIN: Oh, that's interesting.

JOHNSON: So the three of us have that in common. And then there were two other African-Americans there, one from Cleveland, Ohio, as I recall, and I don't remember who the sixth one is. Oh, no, there were two more: Gil Griffin from California, I think, and Ray LaSure from Newark, New Jersey, who was really my best friend there.

DONIN: So what did you find there, your freshman year? Where were you living? What dorm were you in?

JOHNSON: Streeter.

DONIN: Did you have a roommate?

JOHNSON: No, I had a single room and I loved that. And I can tell you, Mary, that coming from a segregated school system in the Washington, DC, area, where we weren't even allowed to go into the theaters until late in the game and then had to sit in the balcony, I didn't know what to expect. This was my first venture into a, quote, "white," unquote, world. And so I went with all the prejudices that one would think about. I realized somewhere in the second half of my freshman year that I was my own worst enemy from that standpoint, because I went expecting people to be prejudiced against me, and so I looked for that. And if you look for prejudice and discrimination, you'll very easily find it.

And then I woke up one morning and realized, *You're your own worst enemy, so why not accept people for who they are and how they treat you, as opposed to what you expect or anticipate?* From that point on, I was able to adapt to the environment much better and be much more responsive to what the school had to offer.

DONIN: So that first year in Streeter, how would you describe who your—how did you make friends? Were you able to look past the color of people's skin?

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes. Very good friends, actually. Almost all the rooms were double rooms. Because I had a single room, it became a premium for Winter Carnival—

DONIN: [Laughs.]

JOHNSON: —because I didn't have dates initially, because I couldn't afford to have a date up. And so everybody was bargaining for my room.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

JOHNSON: Which I would loan out, and I would go to Baker Library and study, and they knew what time I was coming back. We had a signal. They would turn my name tag upside down in the door if they were in the room and put it back upside right when they left the room, and they knew if I came back beyond the closing of the library and the name tag was upside down in the door—a knock would come on the door.

I did that for probably the first half to three quarters of the year until I came in one day and found soap melting down my radiator, and so I terminated it. No more contracts.
[Laughs.]

DONIN: No. No more deals.

JOHNSON: No more deals.

DONIN: Wasn't it, like, violation of parietal hours or whatever they used to call those rules about women in your room?

JOHNSON: Women could be in the room until a certain hour.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: Then they had to leave the dorm after a certain hour.

DONIN: Right. Right. So you were a popular guy.

JOHNSON: [Laughs.]

DONIN: For the wrong reasons.

JOHNSON: That's right. No, but before that, actually, I had really established some good friends, and I took a couple of trips to one of the colleges in Maine with one of the guys in the

dorm, and became quite close to all the people on my floor. At that point, I had never shaved before.

DONIN: Aw!

JOHNSON: I had an electric razor that my uncle had given me. [Clock chimes.] And then, because I didn't have much of a beard, on the shaving days there would be an announcement, "Ray Johnson is shaving! Come down!"

DONIN: [Laughs.]

JOHNSON: So that happened about every three months. [Laughter.] No, but I established some good friends.

DONIN: It's interesting, because many of the people we've talked to so far—they say that their first set of friends ended up being their floor mates, as they called them, because that was just the easiest way to connect with people, were those people who you lived with.

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes.

DONIN: Did you feel prepared academically for the classes?

JOHNSON: That's interesting. And the answer is yes. I was quite concerned, actually, about my preparation, because so many of the young men who came to Dartmouth at the same time were from the outstanding prep schools all over the country, and so it was my anticipation that the preparation they would have received in the prep schools would have far outstripped mine in high school, a local high school in Washington, DC.

It turns out, however, that Dunbar High School was the academic school in Washington, DC. There was a vocational school, there was a secretarial school, there was another vocational school, and Dunbar was the only academic school that was focused on that. And so, if you didn't go to Dunbar, you were not adequately prepared academically.

And at that time, the schools were zoned. You were supposed to attend school in your neighborhood, in the closest school to you. But Dunbar was far enough away from me that I had to take a bus, and so I actually had to get

another address for somebody who was a relative or friend to list as my address to be able to get into Dunbar. My mother had gone to Dunbar High School as well.

And the academic preparation at Dunbar was outstanding. The teachers at that time prided themselves on the preparation they gave the students, and I not only felt that I was adequately trained in English and math and the basic subjects, but I had also taken German in high school. When I took the German aptitude test at Dartmouth, my score was such that I could go beyond freshman German and went into a higher level of German.

And, indeed, Hitler would turn over in his grave now because I became the president of the German Club, Germania, with Professor Schlossmacher.

DONIN: Schlossmacher. We were just talking about him, with this other fellow I met today.

JOHNSON: Yes, yes, yes. I recall those little monkey hats that they had, sitting there as the president of the German Club, who couldn't believe that I'm there. Jesse Owens and I— [Laughs.] He really would've rolled.

DONIN: That's fantastic! So what did the faculty make of black students? Did you sense any discrimination from faculty?

JOHNSON: No, I did not. I can truly say that I felt totally accepted by the faculty and respected for what I could bring to the table academically. There was not a single faculty member that I could recall where, if I walked into his class—I had no female instructors—that there was any concern about racial prejudice. So I would have to say that, with all due credit to them, I was readily accepted for who I was and what I could present for my academic abilities and for my own personality.

DONIN: When did you figure out that you wanted to be a doctor? Was that during your time at Dartmouth?

JOHNSON: When I was six years old.

DONIN: Oh, my goodness!

JOHNSON: And my grandmother, to whom I was very close, and actually I look more like my grandmother than I do either of my parents—she had bad asthma, and I can recall when I was six years old saying to her, “Nanny, when I grow up, I’m going to be a doctor, and I’ll take care of your asthma.” That was my focus. From that point on, I never, ever lost that goal. So I achieved the physician part. I was unable to take care of my grandmother’s asthma to the point where she—she didn’t die from her asthma, but she lived with it as long as she could. And I never, ever changed that. From the time that I went to Dartmouth, it was pre-med all the way. And even though I didn’t go to Dartmouth Medical School, because I didn’t want to remain in that cold for another year—

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

JOHNSON: —I never lost sight of that.

DONIN: Wonderful.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: Wonderful. So you don’t major in a particular subject; it’s just pre-med.

JOHNSON: That’s correct.

DONIN: You could fulfill all of those—

JOHNSON: I majored in psychology, actually.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

JOHNSON: And if anyone had said to me when I took freshman psychology, which I thought was really Mickey Mouse garbage, that I would major in psychology, I would say, “You gotta be crazy.” It turned out that I really did enjoy it very much, and I particularly enjoyed the experimental psychology, where I was doing lab studies and that kind of stuff. I recall a Professor Green, I think his name was, who was very influential in my career in psychology, so that was my major.

DONIN: I don't know if this was even appropriate, these kinds of relationships back in the '50s when you were there, but was there a particular professor who you could say was any kind of an adviser or a mentor to you? I don't know if there was faculty advising back then. I don't think so.

JOHNSON: Actually, the dean was.

DONIN: Really!

JOHNSON: And I can recall going to the dean, like in my sophomore year, something like that, to say to him, "I need more money." And I said, "And don't tell me that when you were in college, you didn't have but one suit and that kind of stuff. I don't want to hear that." So I said, "But I need more money." Because then I was on loans, after the freshman year. But I would sit and talk with him, and I found him very responsive, and I said to him one day—I said, "You know, Dean, I'm not trying to butter you up, but you have quite a positive reputation with the students."

DONIN: Which dean? This wasn't Neidlinger, was it?

JOHNSON: Seymour.

DONIN: Oh, yes, Thad Seymour, yes.

JOHNSON: And he said, "Really?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I'll tell you a secret." He said, "Most of the students who come in here—they have their problems, and they say, 'Dean, I've got this problem.' They lay it out for me. And then they say, 'I thought about doing this,' and all I would say is 'Why don't you do that?' And they thought I was the greatest guy in the world."

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

JOHNSON: They had their own solutions.

DONIN: So easy.

JOHNSON: Exactly right.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

JOHNSON: I never forgot that.

DONIN: So, because you were receiving loans, did that mean you had to have a part-time job?

JOHNSON: I had at least one part-time job. I was working in the dining hall. Then I got a job in the library, in addition to working in the dining hall, where I was doing this, making recordings and that kind of thing. And then I also had a job in the speech department. So I had three different jobs. But I had to pay back my loans. I paid my loans back myself. My parents, after the freshman year, would pay six hundred dollars a year, and everything else was loan and I took care of that after my own graduation. I didn't ask my parents to pay anything on that.

My parents were tremendously giving to me. There was never any question in my mind about their love. And while my father, as I indicated, could not read, my father graduated from the school of life, and the lessons I learned from him about how to interact with people and how to respect people were invaluable. And to this day, it's like yesterday, those lessons impact upon me, because my interactions with people today are very much influenced by the lessons that I learned from both of them, particularly him.

And my mother had only completed high school, and she had gone to Dunbar, as I said. But she was the one to whom I would turn for academic input. And I can recall vividly an assignment that we had in English one time, and one of the questions was: What do you want to be when you grow up, so to speak. And would you want to do the same thing that your father does? I said I wanted to be a physician, and I said to my mother, "I want to answer this question, 'No, I don't want to do the same thing my father does. I think I can be better than that.'" She said, "You don't need to say that." I said, "Why?" I said, "That's the question." She said, "Your father works diligently every day to make your life. You don't need to put him down like that. You respect him like you expect others to respect you."

And those are the kind of lessons, you know? He was the one who told me, “As you go up in life, don’t look down your nose at anybody, because when you come back down in life, they’re the same people you’ll be looking back up to.” And so—

DONIN: A valuable teacher.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: Very valuable. What did the two of them make of their son going to this all-white, cold, locally cold, fancy private college up in the boonies of New England?

JOHNSON: My parents were never judgmental of any decision I made. They were strongly supportive. First of all, they both were tremendously proud of what I had been able to accomplish, and I accomplished that with not only their support but others’ as well. My scoutmaster was a very positive influence to me.

My friends, with whom I interacted most—many of them ended up being killed or in jail because that was the kind of life that they led.

DONIN: These are your high school friends?

JOHNSON: No, friends in my neighborhood.

DONIN: Oh, your neighborhood friends, right.

JOHNSON: And so my parents—if I came home and I was dissatisfied with a grade that I got in a class, the question they would ask me is, “Does it reflect the best that you could do?” And if I said yes, they said, “Then don’t second guess it.” If I said no, “Then you work harder to try to live up to what your expectations are of yourself.” So I was my own worst judge.

So my selection of Dartmouth was not something they pondered over, thought about, because they had no idea what else was out there. I wasn’t one who visited schools with them. I didn’t visit any other schools, myself. I wouldn’t know the Amherst campus today if I saw it in front of me, or any of the other schools to which I applied. So there were no

second thoughts about it. It was a decision that I made. They said, “Fine. That’s fine. Go for it.”

DONIN: That’s very empowering for a young, eighteen-year-old male or female—

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: —to have that much support from your family.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: Wonderful.

JOHNSON: And, you know, quite frankly, I never gave a second thought to that, what you just said about how empowering it is. It was what I wanted to do and the way I wanted to go, and I knew what I expected of myself, and I was going there for an education.

DONIN: So let’s jump to sophomore year and, just to get it in the record here, Michael Lasser wrote this article that documents what we’re going to talk about in your sophomore year, and that was in the May-June 2011 edition of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*.

JOHNSON: Right.

DONIN: So we don’t need to retell the story in great detail because it has been so well documented by him, assuming it’s accurate.

JOHNSON: Yes, it is.

DONIN: It is accurate. Before we get into your personal story about that, what did you make of this Greek business with the sort of exclusionary (that’s my opinion)—exclusionary clubs, men’s clubs in those days, where you had to sort of try out to join one of these fraternities? What was your reaction to that when you first learned about it?

JOHNSON: I never gave much consideration to it because I was unfamiliar with fraternities. I was unfamiliar with the whole college scene. And so I didn’t have any family members who

had gone to college, who had been in fraternities or sororities or anything like that, so I had no knowledge of it.

What influenced me, however, was that—and it wasn't until I had to be forced to think about this that I recalled what interested me in DU in the first place, because someone asked me, "What brought you to DU as opposed to the other fraternity?" And it was only after I reflected on that for quite some time that I recalled that one of my dormitory friends, Bob Willing, the Class of '57 [sic; Class of '58], came to me and said, "You know, it's going to soon be coming time for fraternity rushing and I think you would like DU." He was a DU member. And it's interesting because some of the '57s don't remember him at all. But he was the one who made the recommendation that I even look at DU.

The blacks who were in fraternities or who pledged fraternities were mostly in the two Jewish fraternities. TEP [Tau Epsilon Phi] and Pi Lambda Phi, because they were readily accepted there. I went to both of those fraternities, and I didn't like what I saw. I didn't particularly care for the brothers whom I met, and I didn't like what I perceived that they portrayed.

Dartmouth was known to be a heavy-drinking school. I had never drunk alcohol in my life and wasn't considering making this my goal. I had already seen that weekends meant getting drunk and doing crazy stuff, and I disliked that whole scenario. And when I went to DU, I realized that other fraternities spilled more liquor than DU drank. [Laughter.]

DONIN: That's a great description.

JOHNSON: But the more important thing was that I thoroughly enjoyed everyone whom I met there. They seemed like they took themselves seriously. They seemed to be not so much locked into the, quote, "Greek world." But they seemed to really be a brotherhood, and that impacted upon me very positively, and I liked what I saw.

And so when it came down to making a selection, for me it was going to be either DU or nothing at all. I didn't want to be in a fraternity so badly that I was willing to accept anything that I got. And if I couldn't get into DU, then it didn't make

any difference to me. I didn't feel like my life would be lost or my four years in college would be in despair if I didn't get into a fraternity. It just wasn't a goal of mine when I went to Dartmouth. It certainly was not a goal of mine just because I could pledge. So I felt that I could be selective in making that decision, and if it didn't pan out, it didn't pan out, and I wouldn't take that to my grave.

DONIN:

And just by way of background, one of the sort of legacies that John Dickey, who was president at that point, is known for is the fact that he started this effort to try and open up the Greek life to everyone and get these restrictive clauses out of the contracts of these various Greek houses. Did you ever have any interaction with him or experience?

JOHNSON:

He came to our house one time during this whole episode and spoke with us. But it was not until I read the article by Michael Lasser that I was even aware of this effort which apparently began in '54. I was totally unaware of it. So I cannot say that I was a beneficiary of the newly-found policy with regard to racial discrimination et cetera among the Greek fraternities.

It was also from the article that I learned that I think twenty-one of the twenty-four were national fraternities and six of them had outright discriminatory clauses, and I certainly was unaware, when I pledged DU, that there was anything about the fact that any brother from any chapter could blackball any pledge. And so, none of that factored into my thinking.

I think it's important to put in perspective that I have never been a marcher. When I say that, I mean that in my life then, certainly, and in my life subsequently, I have never been one who marched down the street with signs. I respect those who do, and I respect those who want to have that voice. My feeling has always been that if I can change the attitude of one person on the basis of what I represent and who I am, that's the way I operate. And that's more meaningful to me than marching with a banner or with a placard.

And so it wouldn't have made any difference to me, knowing that that policy was in existence, because what was more important to me was being a part of the brotherhood of DU

and having them judge me on the basis of who I was and how I was, as opposed to what I was.

DONIN: So how did you feel at the time that this blackballing effort was taking place and then DU was pushing back? And, again, we don't need to go into all the details because it's so well documented. How did you feel being the focus of this effort, especially since you say being an activist or whatever you want to call it isn't really your way of leading your life?

JOHNSON: It was discomforting. It was discomforting to me because I felt that I was impacting on the lives of others and on my fellow pledges. And, as the article points out, that had it not been for me, they would have been able to be pledged, quote, "on time," unquote. And so as far as my own life was concerned, I was still focused on my education, and I didn't go to the fraternity every day worrying about what was happening each day. I didn't let that dominate my life.

But I was aware of the fact that there were a couple or three pledge brothers in my pledge class who probably were not quite as strongly supportive of it as were others, as were most, and I knew who they were, and I've never been close with them. I wasn't close with them in the house, and I have not been close to them subsequently.

But there was a nucleus of pledge class members with whom I felt very close, and they have been lasting friendships to this day. But I respected the feelings of those whom I knew felt, "if it weren't for Ray, we'd be over this whole thing; we'd be pledged." So it impacted upon me that way, because it didn't take much for me to put myself in their position and to realize what a commitment it took to put yourself in the position that it's either all of us or none of us.

That was the singular, most important, impressive message to me, that here we were—these were not men; these were teenagers, college freshmen, college sophomores, juniors and seniors, who were willing to put their voices, their thoughts, their reputations on the line for me. And the fact that they committed themselves to that venture so thoroughly and, for the most part, so consummately, was overwhelming to me, was overwhelming to me.

As the article points out, I was not aware of all that was transpiring behind the scenes. I didn't know about all these trips. I knew that they had made some trips. I didn't have a clue with whom they were meeting. I suppose they probably had briefed us on things, but I was never aware of the day-to-day adventures that they were going through, trying to get this thing pushed through.

DONIN: So they didn't share all this with you when it was going on.

JOHNSON: No.

DONIN: When did you first learn about the effort that was involved?

JOHNSON: I knew that an effort was being involved at the time. I knew they were meeting with people, but I didn't know with whom. The only name that I really knew was the guy who was the last holdout, Burner, or whatever his name is. I wasn't aware of meetings in Chicago and New York and the one-on-one talks with Tom Herlihy, et cetera. Tom Herlihy subsequently, I think, wrote a paper in getting his law degree, and his wife tells me all the time, "He made money off of you." [Laughter.] "He made money off of you." He got a special scholarship or something because of the paper that he wrote.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

JOHNSON: And to this day, I have great respect for him. As a matter of fact, Dick Sunderland, who was my big brother in DU, who lives in the Baltimore area—he and his wife, Carolyn, Arlene and I are going to Wilmington the 4th or 6th of December, and we'll be meeting with Tom Herlihy two days, for dinner.

The Class of '57 have become special advocates to me. As you saw in the thing – in my reflection, when Arlene and I had a chance to meet with them, I think it was 2007, at Tom Macy's home, I was blown away by the warmth that they shared with us, because Tom had called and said, "We're having a few '57s over. We're getting ready to go up to our reunion. They've expressed a desire to have you and Arlene come over. Would you want to do that?" I said, "Sure." I couldn't believe it. I could not believe the hospitality they showed us.

In May of 2010—there were about six to eight of us '59s in DU who would get together in the Wilmington area to have sort of a—just a little reunion with our spouses, and thoroughly enjoyed it. We met in Wilmington because of Vinny Sawyer who was one of the two who recommended me for the honorary doctorate award from Dartmouth. His wife was from Wilmington, and she knew all of the area, and she knew Tom Herlihy. In fact, she used to date Tom Herlihy. So she was the one that put together the weekend, so we would go to Wilmington.

Well, in May of 2010, we invited the '57s to come with us as well, and one '58, one from the Class of '58 from DU. It was a phenomenal weekend, a phenomenal weekend. And the closeness that was generated then was just unbelievable. Following that, in June of '09—well, actually, that was before that, June of '09, which is actually what precipitated [it]. The '57s came to my honorary doctorship because they felt such a part of this whole scenario. And Sam Swansen, the troublemaker, as he's described in the article. And Vinny Sawyer nominated me for that.

And the '57s felt so strongly about the bond that we had established that I think there were probably eight or ten of them or more, there. They then had an evening where they had us all, the '59s and our spouses, at a wonderful dinner, at which they asked me to make a few remarks. The camaraderie that was created by that evening was what springboarded into the thing in May of 2010.

And right now, as we speak, there are plans afoot to have something repeated between the Class of '57 and '59 because they were the ones who were seniors, who were really spearheading this whole effort. [The] '58s were there, but they were not as much involved as were the '57s. So we've established a special bond with them as well. Dick and his wife Carolyn have just been great.

I was reading some of the e-mails that were sent to Michael Lasser, copies of which they sent to me because—Arlene gets e-mail; I don't get e-mail—talking about how important the relationship has been between the '57s and '59s of DU. And it's just really special.

- DONIN: It sounds like it's if not *the* most significant, one of the most significant activities—not activities, events in their lives and yours, as Dartmouth students.
- JOHNSON: Yes. They look back upon it as an experience in life that they never anticipated in college. It was a turning point for many of them in the whole scenario of race relations and the depth of discrimination at that time. [Clock chimes.] They felt it first hand for the first times in their lives. I look back upon it as an opportunity to have learned from what others did for me and the impact that it made upon my life, that it really helped me sort of blaze a path about what I wanted to try to communicate in my life and what was important to me. It has become, as I say in my reflection, the hallmark of what I feel about my honesty and my integrity and my sincerity. And so, it has been a life-changing experience for me, and a standard bearer for me, if you will, as to how I proceed in life.
- I talk about, in my reflection, about the core values at Natchaug Hospital, and core values are something which are very important to me. And the most important core value of all to me is respect. And with every organization with which I have been affiliated that has core values, it's interesting that every one of them has respect as one of their core values. And to me, that encompasses so much because it reflects, first of all, respect for yourself, because if you don't have respect for yourself, you can't respect others, and if you don't have respect for others, you can't expect respect from them. And so, I think it encompasses so many different planes, and, to me, it is the singularly most important core value of all. And the basis of my relationship with Arlene is respect and trust. I have such respect for her and such high regard for her, that she is the be-all and end-all of my life.
- DONIN: Wonderful.
- JOHNSON: Yes. We were talking this morning, because one of our friends has been having a struggle with her husband and her son by a previous marriage, and her attitude is, her children come first. And I said to Arlene, "Not for me. You're always first." And we agreed that if there was something catastrophic as far as our kids were concerned, we'd obviously be there for them, but she is the most important

person in my life today. I wouldn't deny it to anyone. And nobody knows it more than she does.

DONIN: Lucky her.

JOHNSON: Yes. And lucky me.

DONIN: And lucky you.

JOHNSON: Right, right.

DONIN: So this blackballing thing—it must have been a huge distraction for everybody. With everything else that goes on when you're in college, did it impact your experience in any way negatively in terms of preventing you from doing other things—

JOHNSON: No.

DONIN: —or missing out on other experiences—

JOHNSON: No. I think it impacted more upon those who were actively engaged in trying to make negotiations, were trying to work out the deal, so to speak. I don't think that we, as pledges, were as much impacted as they who were at the forefront of the efforts to try to get the whole thing taken care of.

DONIN: The officers of DU.

JOHNSON: Exactly right, exactly right. I cannot truly say that it really had a major impact upon my life from day to day. My goal in going to Dartmouth was to try to obtain the best education I could obtain, and had I not felt that that was possible there, I wouldn't have gone there. And so, I never wavered from that goal. My social life did not change. And [chuckles], as I said in the thing, I used to—I loved the Nugget. I used to go to the Nugget all the time, the theater. I would do all of my studying during the afternoons, so by dinnertime I was finished studying, most of the time.

DONIN: Wow.

JOHNSON: And so I would go to the theater frequently. That was the one luxury that I would allow myself, while other people were

studying. I never studied late at night. My classes were such—except in those afternoons when I had labs—that I could get my homework done in the afternoon. And so when I went to dinner, I was usually done.

DONIN: So you didn't participate in intramurals or any kind of athletics.

JOHNSON: No. No. I'm trying to think whether we had—I played baseball in high school, I swam in high school, but I didn't play any sports at Dartmouth. And I did not feel that I was—I'm trying to think whether I even went out for the baseball team at Dartmouth. I may have. But I knew I didn't have the ability to do that, although I did well in high school. And I considered myself a pretty decent athlete, so it was not a matter of not enjoying sports; I enjoyed sports very much. I would play stuff on the Green, football on the Green, that kind of stuff. But, no, I was not engaged in anything else.

DONIN: So you didn't get pulled into learning to ski or do all that stuff?

JOHNSON: [Chuckles.] You know, I couldn't afford to ski.

DONIN: Oh, that's true. That equipment is expensive—

JOHNSON: And the tow fees and that kind of stuff.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

JOHNSON: But every time I had a second thought about skiing—*Maybe I should try to put aside some money and learn to ski*—somebody else would come into the dorm with a broken leg or a broken arm—

DONIN: [Laughs.]

JOHNSON: —and I'd say, *Who needs that? Who needs that?* [Laughs.]

DONIN: It's a good policy.

JOHNSON: [Laughs.] I learned to ice skate on Occom Pond.

DONIN: Oh, yeah! Well, there you go!

JOHNSON: I had never ice skated before. I played golf occasionally there. I've actually played golf more, subsequent to my graduation up there than I did during school, because I wasn't playing golf then. I played tennis after I left there. So there were no active sports in which I was engaged on a regular basis while I was in college.

DONIN: Well, you learned to skate, anyway.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: I mean, you can't skate in Washington, DC.

JOHNSON: No.

DONIN: There's no winter.

JOHNSON: Exactly right. And I loved it.

DONIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: I really loved Occom Pond.

DONIN: Yes. But those deep, dark winters with tons of snow and freezing weather—you probably never experienced it because you didn't have that in Washington.

JOHNSON: We had snow in Washington, but we didn't have the depths of snow. We didn't see the ground at Dartmouth from October to April, and slump season was really slump season.

DONIN: Yes. Terrible.

JOHNSON: So I enjoyed the fresh snow. What I didn't enjoy was walking out of the dormitory in the morning and have the hairs in my nose freeze up. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Freezing, freezing cold.

JOHNSON: Yes, exactly right.

DONIN: So once the blackballing thing was behind you—or let's back up. During this period that this was going on, and you obviously didn't know the details of what was going on, but did you ever experience any sort of pushback from people, either from within DU or outside of DU about this blackballing event? Probably not, because nobody knew about it.

JOHNSON: No.

DONIN: So it really was under wraps.

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes. I don't think—I really don't recall, Mary, having conversations with my black friends at Dartmouth about this whole thing. I probably did, but I just don't recall that being a major topic of discussion with anyone. And so it was not something that was a constant topic of discussion between me and anyone else. And aside from those few brothers that I said I felt were very much ill at ease with the whole thing, it was not a big deal.

I think that, if anything, it may have created a greater closeness between me and some of the other pledge members, because they realized that had they been in the same position, how challenging it may have been for them. And so when people are in a position of potentially being down, that's when we become more dynamic in reaching out. Even at that age, the compassion and the concern for another's welfare I think are such that you tend to reach out because you realize that there, but for the grace of God, go I.

DONIN: So is it fair to say that that group that went through the pledge process with you at DU—did that become your sort of inner circle of friends?

JOHNSON: They certainly have been the major point of contact since I left Dartmouth. As I think about my fraternity brothers at Dartmouth, my three roommates in my senior year stand out.

DONIN: Oh, you had three roommates.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: Senior year.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: What dorm were you in?

JOHNSON: This was not a dorm; I was in the house.

DONIN: Oh, you were at the house, of course.

JOHNSON: I was in the house in the senior year, yes.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: I moved into the house in senior year. And they were Vinny Sawyer, Jim Neff and Stu Summers. And what determined whether I was going back for reunions were whether they were going to be there. Lee Gilliatt in Shelby, North Carolina, is another one, to whom I feel very close. Sam Swansen and his wife, Donna, I feel very close to. Chuck Hoyt. So those were the six or eight guys that, as I mentioned earlier, we would have at reunions in Wilmington. And we didn't extend it beyond those people because they were the ones upon whom I based my interaction with Dartmouth.

And reunions got to be something that I wasn't that enamored with. I went to the first few, maybe five, ten, fifteen years, I don't know. But it became readily apparent that it was, "What are you doing?" "How many children do you have?" and "What are your problems?" Then at fifty years, it was "I've got this ache, that ache, this surgery," and I stopped them one day. I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Do you realize that since we've been in this room, we've been doing nothing but talking about all of our surgeries and our ailments? No more!" [Laughs.]

DONIN: Move on to more important things.

JOHNSON: Exactly right. But they're the ones that my friendships are closest with, and the '57s that I've talked about.

DONIN: So that experience really defined—

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONIN: —who your circle was.

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes.

DONIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yes. And it also helped me leap into my life. When I say that, I mean that the values which were established as a result of that experience were the same values that enabled me or made me desire to be a part of my community and to do the work that I've done with kids, with mentally ill patients, children, adolescents, adults, to be involved with other hospitals, the Dime Bank, et cetera. Giving back was something very important to me.

In the black community, we have been notorious in the past for not reaching back and helping someone else. The analogy is that we have been like crabs in a basket, that every time one of the crabs is trying to get out, the others will pull him back in. But once that crab gets out, unfortunately it doesn't come back to reach back.

So it's been very important to me to be able to give back for all that's been given to me. And were it not for all the people who have been supportive in my life, I wouldn't be where I am today. I try to never lose sight of that. I try to never lose sight of who I am, where I came from, what I was given, and what I have to offer. And if I can benefit someone else on the basis of what I've been able to achieve personally or what I've been able to experience personally, so be it.

And there goes that business about influencing people by what you do and what you represent, as opposed to carrying a placard. And believe me, I never decry those who choose to do it that way. We need everything we can get. [Clock chimes.] But that's just my modus operandi.

DONIN: Well, you're setting an example by living your life the way you have.

JOHNSON: Well, I hope so.

DONIN: For sure.

Now, I think—I'm just glancing at these questions. Yes, I think we've pretty well covered them. You've covered them in a very eloquent way.

JOHNSON: Oh, thank you.

DONIN: Unless you have anything else you want to say, I think I'm going to turn off the recording.

JOHNSON: I would like to say something else.

DONIN: Good.

JOHNSON: It is very meaningful to me that you're here—

DONIN: Oh, I'm glad.

JOHNSON: —that you made contact with me. And, as I mentioned to you when I called you back, it was something I reflected upon. It was not something that, when I received your letter, I just jumped to the conclusion that I would do it. And I debated about it, and when I looked at the reason why I was debating about it, I think that the basic underlying concern was that I did not want to make more of this than it was due. But when I spoke with Michael Lasser yesterday and I told him about it, that I reflected about it before I called you back, he said, "Ray, there's no downside to it." I said, "That's the conclusion that I came to." And I really felt that if this interview helps one person in a positive way, then it's worth the effort. And it takes nothing for me to give the interview.

And so I respect the fact that you're doing what you're doing. I think the effort is tremendously admirable. I'm particularly gratified that you included me in the process, and I'm very, very hopeful that it will be productive in what you're trying to do, that it will help achieve the goals that you have set for yourselves, and, most important, that it will reflect upon what Dartmouth has to offer, because I'm not sure that this experience would have necessarily gone the same way had I been someplace else and had I been surrounded by a whole different genre of people.

But because of the young men with whom I interacted at Delta Upsilon fraternity, who decided that they were young

men and made many decisions which were life-changing experiences and decisions, I am where I am today. And I owe them a debt of sincere gratitude.

DONIN: Thank you, Dr. Johnson. I'll turn off the recording now.

[End of interview.]