

Parker MacDonell '74
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
November 17, 2012

DONIN: Today is Saturday, November 17th, 2012. My name is Mary Donin. We are here in Baker Library with Parker MacDonell, Dartmouth Class of 1976, along with Steve Severson, also with the Class of '76.

SEVERSON: Seventy-four, actually. He was Class of '74.

DONIN: Sorry, '74

SEVERSON: Martha [Hennessey] is Class of '76.

DONIN: Right. Steve is '74.

MACDONELL: You *are* Class of '74, not "were."

DONIN: Are.

SEVERSON: You are.

DONIN: Right. Okay. So, Parker, just to put this into sort of historical context, what are the circumstances about your life or is there a story about why you came to Dartmouth?

MACDONELL: Well, I came to Dartmouth for a couple of reasons. One of which was that my mom, you know, pushed me to try to go to the most challenging school to which I could be admitted. (How's that for grammar?) I grew up in a town called Lima, Ohio, which is a town of 50,000 people in northwestern Ohio, halfway between Toledo and Dayton. And there were three guys from my hometown who all came to Dartmouth the year before I did. Now they went to a different high school, but there was that connection, that recent connection between Lima and Dartmouth.

And I came up here to visit one of them in the fall of my senior year in high school and was all set to go to Williams until that weekend when I visited Dartmouth and Williams,

and I had such a great time at Dartmouth, I changed the order of priority.

And I met Steve that weekend, right? Because you were living in Fayerweather Hall, where I visited Dan Wright and those guys. So I came here because of my mom and because, you know, it's a great school.

Now, I never thought about the fact that it wasn't a co-ed school, because when I got here it was not a co-ed school. It became a co-ed school just as I got here, but I never thought about that.

DONIN: I mean, your class was the first class of fully integrated women.

MACDONELL: Well, we could talk about what fully integrated means, but I'm proud to say that I was in that class. Some things happened that I wasn't proud of, some that I observed and even probably a few things that I did, but I'm still proud to be part of that class—it's an historic class. It was the first class to which women had ever been admitted in the then 203-year history of the school. And I was proud of that. But I didn't think about the fact that I would get here and go through kind of a huge change of culture. It never dawned on me.

DONIN: But is it fair to assume that you came from a high—you didn't come from an all-boys high school, right?

MACDONELL: No, I didn't. I came from a big kind of urban high school in a small town. "Big urban high school in a small town" doesn't sound like the right mix, but it's what it was. It was a high school of 2,000 kids and 35, 40 percent of them were African-American, and 95 percent of the kids weren't going to go to college. It is a factory town. So I just wasn't very aware. I just didn't think about it.

DONIN: But you knew before you came that women—

MACDONELL: I knew that women would be part of my class, and somehow in my seventeen-year-old brain, that translated into, *Well, it's gonna be like going to a co-ed school.* I just never thought about what it would be like culturally here in that way.

DONIN: So what was it about Dartmouth that made you change your mind and come here instead of elsewhere, when you made that first visit and met Steve?

MACDONELL: I really think that at that age, kids have a fine enough sense of themselves so that they know where they fit and where they don't, and I knew when I got here and started hanging out with these guys—I just knew that I fit here. I went to Williams the next night, and I knew that I did not fit there. I mean, the people that I met were great people, I'm sure, smart, hard working, but it was just luck of the draw. But I'm sure I made the right decision. It was fit. It just fit.

DONIN: So describe "fit." What did you see here that you identified with, that made you feel like you fit?

MACDONELL: This is a weird example, but—well, part of it is, you can tell when you meet somebody whether you like him. You know, first impressions are worth something. The thing I remember—I don't know if you remember this, Steve, but there was a guy in Fayerweather Hall who had a bootleg Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young record. And I had never seen a bootleg record before. I was from a little town in Ohio. I thought, *This is really cool*. "Do you have any more of these?" So it was that kind of a thing. I just sort of thought—

Then the other thing that happened was that somebody took me out to the ski jump. Remember the ski jump?

DONIN: It was out on Lyme Road, yes.

MACDONELL: It's now torn down, but it was out on the golf course. And I remember going out there and hearing that sometimes when it was snowing in the winter, that guys would, like, get on trays from Thayer Hall and go down the ski jump and hope that they lived.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: And so I just thought, *I don't know. It looks like the kind of place—*

The other thing that was true was that I visited Dartmouth in June of that same year, and I heard the Dartmouth Aires sing, and so that was a strong attractor, too. I mean, I heard the Aires sing. It was the “Sometimes in Winter” era, and I thought, *Boy, that’s really cool. I would love to do that.* And I wound up singing in the Dartmouth Aires all four years I was here.

So I think those were the things that attracted me: music and danger (*said sardonically.*)

DONIN: Now, I’ve done a little background checking on you, and a big part of your life is music.

MACDONELL: Mm-hm.

DONIN: Did you already know that? I mean, had you already sort of identified that before you got here?

MACDONELL: No, I had no idea. I had no idea what I wanted to do when I came here. I mean, I probably—I was asked that question. I probably made something up. But in reality I had no idea what I wanted to do.

DONIN: So when you got here, were you able to identify a group that you sort of felt comfortable with, whether it was your floor mates on your—were you in Fayerweather when you started?

MACDONELL: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

DONIN: Was it your floor mates, so to speak, or was it classmates in a particular class or an athletic team?

MACDONELL: It was two groups of people. One group was the people that I hung out with at Fayerweather Hall. Not all of them, but some of them. I made some lifelong friends, people that I still, you know, talk to to this day, including Steve Severson, you know? Not including, but *starting with* Steve Severson. That was the first group.

And the other group was the Dartmouth Aires. I auditioned for and joined the Aires in the fall quarter of my freshman year, and that was really my fraternity here at Dartmouth. I

joined and resigned early from two different fraternities here. I tried to fit into the fraternity scene, but I just didn't fit into it.

DONIN: How so?

MACDONELL: I don't know. I haven't thought about that. But part of it was that I had the sense that I didn't have enough time to study, be in the Aires and the Glee Club, because you had to be in the Glee Club, too, to be in the Aires. And then also be in a fraternity. And so I joined Tri Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa] first.

Remember Charlie Stevens?

SEVERSON: Sure.

MACDONELL: Was he in the Glee Club? "Chucka," they called him.

Anyhow, I joined—I met some guys from Tri Kap who invited me to join there, so I thought, *This is what you're supposed to do at Dartmouth*, so I did. But then I resigned from that. And then some of my friends from Fayerweather Hall, including Steve, belonged to Phi Delt, so then I joined Phi Delt, but then I left that at the end of my junior year. So, yes, that was the story of my—those were my social circles at Dartmouth. I tried the fraternity thing, but really the Aires and the Glee Club were my thing.

DONIN: Was it a time management question, or was it that you just couldn't sort of fit in with that Greek thing?

MACDONELL: I think it was more the latter, to be honest. I talked about "fit" already, but I felt like I should fit in. I felt like I should be a backslapping, towel-snapping—"backslapping, towel-snapping"—I gotta write that down.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: [Tearing a piece of paper from a pad.] Have you heard that song, "Mississippi Lawyer" that I put on that CD? I didn't write that. [Chuckles.] Thank you. [in response to having been given a pen or pencil. He writes.] "Backslappin', towel[-snappin']"—

DONIN: Is this for a song?

MACDONELL: All right. Sorry.

DONIN: That's okay.

So it was the Greek—the backslapping—

MACDONELL: Towel-snapping, yes.

DONIN: Hail fellow, well met stuff?

MACDONELL: Yes. I didn't fit into that.

DONIN: Why, though? In what way?

MACDONELL: I don't know. It turns out I'm a sensi—I know you don't think this, given my sarcasm, but, I mean, I think I'm—I mean, I just—you know. I can't articulate it. I was going to make a joke and say I'm a sensitive New Age guy. Does that term mean—have you heard of Christine Lavin? She's a New York singer-songwriter. She has a song called [sings], "Sensitive New Age guys." And I'm not really that, but—because I'm not New Age, right? I can't tell you why, but I wouldn't self-describe as a man's man or a macho guy. That's just—you know, that's not me.

DONIN: Did you have moments of sort of feeling that you were not suited for Greek life because of who you were? Or you just chose to step back from it?

MACDONELL: Well, I think that Sink Night at Phi Delt was the night I figured it out—I mean—funny, I don't remember going through Sink Night at Tri Kap, although I must have. The night when they've already invited you join, but then they have to initiate you. Is that Sink Night? Is that what that's called?

SEVERSON: [No audible response.]

MACDONELL: And I don't remember that being, like, off-putting or dangerous at Tri Kap, but it was at Phi Delt. I mean, it was dangerous and off-putting—you know, with just excessive drinking and the macho behavior turned up to eleven.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

MACDONELL: On a scale of ten. So—but I was fascinated by it. I would never have said, *I'm never gonna go in one of those places*. It wasn't like—you know. I mean, today I say—one of the things I hope to be able to say that I never did, on my deathbed, is go to a Hooter's restaurant, for instance.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: You know, just because. I'm sure nothing bad happens in there. It's not like a strip bar, but—but it wasn't like that with me and the fraternities. I wouldn't say, *I'm never steppin' foot in that place*. I just didn't want to spend most of my time there.

DONIN: Well, that's pretty significant. I mean, you know this project is about trying to sort of describe the Dartmouth community and how it's changed over the last fifty or sixty years, and we're happy to find people that are not comfortable with Greek life. I mean, it gives a different side to the sort of Dartmouth profile of the typical frat boy.

MACDONELL: It turns out maybe I should have gone to Williams. Williams had banned the fraternities. Are you aware of that? You know what they went through?

DONIN: Yes.

MACDONELL: And actually, you know, when I went to graduate school—there were three Williams graduates in my business school class at the Yale School of Management, and all three of them were really smart and really hard working and really serious. And I thought to myself, *Man, it's a good thing I didn't go here. I would have flunked out.* [Laughter.] But, yes, I'm not a frat guy.

It'll be interesting for me to talk to you, Steve, after you do this and hear how you answer this, these same questions. But we'll talk about that later.

DONIN: So can you describe what you were looking for as a community when you came here? Clearly, it was not Greek life. Were you impacted by the sort of sense of belonging

to—I mean, singing seemed to be the thing that attracted you.

MACDONELL: It was.

DONIN: You were in two different groups.

MACDONELL: Yes, well, you had to be in the Glee Club in order to be in the Aires. The Aires—do you know about the Dartmouth Aires?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

MACDONELL: It's an a capella, twelve- to sixteen-man group, self directed, like an IRA only a little more fun. (Get it?)

SEVERSON: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: Self-directed IRA?

SEVERSON: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: So, I mean, when I found that—I mean, that was it for me. That's what I loved. And I didn't recognize at that moment that I ought to be playing music for a living. I did later, but—but I guess I didn't come here in a planful way. I didn't come here saying, *All right, the first thing I have to do is find a community. The next thing I have to do is pick a major, and then start applying to grad-*—I mean, I didn't—I just didn't think about that. I just sort of—you already have a sense of me. I'm just not a—I just kind of live life.

DONIN: Let's talk about academics for a while. Did you feel well prepared for classes when you got here?

MACDONELL: No. You know, I came in second or third in my class of 750 kids in high school. Didn't really have to work very hard for that. No, I got my doors blown off. I actually got—I don't know if you know this, Steve, but I got two Ds my freshman year. I got a D in economics, which is interesting, being a banker for twenty-five years. I got a D in geology. There was a course that was known as Rocks for Jocks, and I like to think that the quarter that I took it was the quarter that the professor had gotten mad about the fact that his course was known as a "gut." You know what that term means.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

MACDONELL: And he decided to make it more difficult. The truth is that I just didn't have any interest in geology. What's so ironic about that is that I married a geologist.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: So opposites do attract.

DONIN: Yes. I think that happens to a lot of first-year students, not necessarily just at Dartmouth. They don't really know how to study to meet the standards of wherever they're going to school. But you pulled yourself out of that.

MACDONELL: Well, I had something traumatic happen at the beginning of the spring quarter of our freshman year, which really snapped me back into line. I was in a little auto accident on the way back from a Grateful Dead concert in Boston, I believe it was, about two in the morning, that bad turn on I-89 near New London. Charlie Brumback was driving a car home from the Grateful Dead concert, and—

[Addressing Steve Severson]: Do you remember this?

And he put it into the guard rail. So that was—it was traumatic not because I thought I was going to die but because it just sort of jarred me, and I said, *I've gotta, like, snap to here*. And so I got better grades that spring quarter than I had gotten before, obviously, and that I ever got after that. I think I got two As and a B. Not "I think." I did. I got two As and a B. I don't remember what courses I was taking, but—so I was all over the map. Are you surprised?

DONIN: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: Really, are you surprised? Surprise Mary.

DONIN: No. [Laughs.] I'm not surprised.

MACDONELL: Yes.

- DONIN: So if you were talking about Dartmouth to someone that didn't know about it now, how would you describe the difference between what the community at Dartmouth was like for you back then and what you see about it now when you come back to campus?
- MACDONELL: Well, what I'd say about it—what I'd say is that I was there during a time of great transition and upheaval in the culture of the place and that when I visit now, it seems like a perfectly healthy coeducational school, although I've come to learn from my friends that that's not necessarily so. What I don't know is whether Dartmouth's any worse or any better than other comparable schools in that respect.
- DONIN: The upheaval you mention—is that the arrival of women?
- MACDONELL: Yes, the change of the school from all male to coeducational. On top of that, it was—I mean, this is just a small piece, but the removal of the Indian as the mascot. That happened at the same time. So I joined a group that was called the Injunaires, and literally, like two weeks later, the decree came out: "No more Indians. We are the Dartmouth Green." So we went from being the Injunaires to the Aires.
- DONIN: So the Injunaires were a singing group?
- MACDONELL: Yes, the Injunaires are now known as the Dartmouth Aires, but they were the Injun—I-n-j-u-n-aires.
- DONIN: I see, and you dropped the "Injun."
- MACDONELL: Yes.
- DONIN: Oh. This is the first time I've heard this.
- MACDONELL: Oh, yes.
- DONIN: So that was what, 1974?
- MACDONELL: Fall of '72. No, fall of '72. I got here in the fall of '72.
- DONIN: Oh, right away.

MACDONELL: And Steve was a sophomore—or junior, and I was a freshman.

DONIN: So was there a lot of conflict over that?

MACDONELL: Look, I mean, as you know, there were people who applied to Dartmouth and were accepted, thinking it was an all-male school and probably thinking it was going to remain an all-male school. And they applied to a school—it was called the Dartmouth Indians, and so that had resonance, I'm sure, for at least some if not most of the guys who applied for the years prior to mine, the three graduating classes prior to mine. And, you know, I mean, I hate to say it, but college is just like a really expensive consumer good in some ways, right? You're buying a brand, and you're buying a certain experience. It's not exactly like buying a car, because you don't identify for the rest of your life with the car you owned when you were eighteen, like you do with your college, but I think there were people who felt like they'd been victims of a bait and switch. Not "I think." I mean, I know. I mean, I remember talking to people and hearing that from them. "This isn't what they promised me."

But, you know, I mean, we were talking about this this morning at the breakfast table. You have to expect a place to change. You don't have to like it, but if it stays the same as it was twenty or two hundred years ago, then that's not good. So I don't know what the question was.

DONIN: Your concept of what the community was like then and now.

MACDONELL: Here's an example: When I got out of college in '76, I decided to make music my life, my vocation, and I was singing, playing the guitar and writing songs. And eventually I decided to stop playing clubs in L.A., where I lived, and go on the road, and I went on the road to play the college student union circuit.

One of the places I got booked to play was Dartmouth College, and so I got a chance to come back here seven or eight years after I graduated. And by then, it seemed to me like a very different place because, you know, I'd come to the show, and half the audience would be women. It just seemed like—at that point, like—on the surface, it seemed like—and

I got to know some of the women. I sort of went out with one a little bit, you know?

DONIN: While you were an undergrad.

MACDONELL: No, when I came back. I took up with a young lass whose name I don't remember now, but just a short kind of fling, I guess. According to her, things were just fine at Dartmouth. Now, that's a sample of one, so—

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: So my perception was that it changed pretty quickly into being a relatively healthy coeducational school, albeit with all the pressures that come with, you know, an "Ivy League" school.

DONIN: Right, right. But the men—

MACDONELL: Put "Ivy League" in quotation marks, please, Mr. Transcriber.

DONIN: Okay.

MACDONELL: Ms. Transcriber.

DONIN: And not that this is going to become a discussion of coeducation, but, you know, the women didn't have parity with the men until 1995.

MACDONELL: Oh, yes. It turns out I was completely wrong. I mean, the aha moment for me was probably ten years ago, at what must have been our twenty-fifth reunion, the twenty-fifth reunion of the Class of '76. My wife Betsy and I were invited to stay at Steve and Martha's house here in Hanover. And on the second day or third day of the reunion, Martha was hosting a brunch for the women of the Class of 1976, so, being semi-deferential, I said to Martha, "I'll clear out of here because I don't want to"—and she said, "No, you don't need to clear out. If you want to hang around, that's fine with me."

And what a great opportunity that was! Because I got to hear fifteen or twenty women, who were my classmates, really let down their hair. And Betsy was there, too. I've talked about that experience a fair amount. What I say is, these women—

many of them were still scarred twenty-five years later by what happened. And I hadn't really thought about the human impact of, you know, being a woman here at Dartmouth. But it makes perfect sense in retrospect.

And a couple of them said, "You know, I knew that if I came here, it was going to be tough, but I thought that would prepare me for the business world." One of them said, "Well, you know, I grew up with four brothers, so I kind of thought I knew what I was getting into." But there were women who said, "I've still never gotten over it."

DONIN: They were like pioneers.

MACDONELL: They were.

DONIN: Brave pioneers.

MACDONELL: Yes. But I guess what I'm reflecting on is—yes, they were. But what I'm reflecting on now is not how it changed but how I learned about what it was really like, because I didn't really have any women who were friends at Dartmouth except for one, and that was Martha, Martha Hennessey.

DONIN: Oh, that's interesting.

MACDONELL: What I learned from Martha was how to be friends with a woman that I wasn't going out with, which is an important thing to learn in the world, right? Because you can only go out with so many women, particularly at one time. If you can't be friends with the other 99.99999 percent of them, it's going to be kind of limiting. So—

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: So that was good. But other than Martha, I didn't really—you know, I didn't really make friends with any other women. I mean, Adrienne, sort of? Not really. (I'm looking at Steve here, sorry.) I didn't go out with any Dartmouth girls. I mean women. I just didn't have the—didn't have what it took, I guess, or whatever. I had a girlfriend back home. That was a whole 'nother story.

DONIN: Well, and also isn't that what people joined the Greek life for, because they feel like it's going to improve their social life? That seems to be what I've heard.

MACDONELL: Depends on your definition of "social life." I mean, I guess that's right. I guess that women would come to the fraternity parties, but what came along with that was a lot of posturing, a lot of drinking and, you know, a lot of hubris. So that was not—I mean, maybe my testosterone count was low, but that was not enough of a motivator for me to jump into the whole fraternity life.

DONIN: So when you think of, say, your close friends that you were saying goodbye to at commencement, for instance, the only woman you were sort of saying goodbye to was Martha.

MACDONELL: Yes. From my class, yes.

DONIN: From your class.

MACDONELL: Yes.

DONIN: Right, right.

MACDONELL: I mean, there may have been others that I said goodbye to, but that's what sticks in my mind.

DONIN: Well, you probably weren't the only one in that case because, as you've said, you were not expecting to—when you first signed on for Dartmouth, you weren't expecting to have women in your classes.

MACDONELL: Well, I didn't think about that. I didn't come to Dartmouth thinking, *One of my goals here is to meet my future wife*. I just didn't think about that. I figured that would happen when it happened, if I thought about it at all. So, right, I didn't come here for that reason. I just didn't.

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: I came here because I had met these guys that I really liked, and I thought this would be—and obviously it had brand appeal, Dartmouth, an Ivy League school and all that.

DONIN: Did you do any athletics?

MACDONELL: No.

DONIN: So music was really your world here.

MACDONELL: It was.

DONIN: What did you end up majoring in?

MACDONELL: Music.

DONIN: Really!

MACDONELL: Yes.

DONIN: Oh, so you really—

MACDONELL: You probably haven't met many music majors, huh? Because there weren't that many of us. I mean, there were five or six, at the most, in my class of 800 kids.

DONIN: Five or six?

MACDONELL: Five or six.

DONIN: Wow.

MACDONELL: One wonders how they were able to keep a music department going.

DONIN: Yes. Well, it supports all sorts of other stuff—

MACDONELL: Right.

DONIN: —throughout the curriculum.

MACDONELL: It wasn't just for the music majors.

DONIN: Right, right.

MACDONELL: And a lot of people wanted to come and take piano lessons or voice lessons, or they wanted to learn music without being music majors. You know, there were plenty of music classes,

and they weren't just populated by music majors. Even my theory classes—there were people that were probably going to be doctors and lawyers who wanted to learn music theory. So, yes, it was good.

DONIN: Right. There are a lot of—not a lot. Some of the people that we've interviewed so far talk about the experience of feeling like an outsider when they were here, for various reasons: whether they are, obviously, you know, women, but—oh, I don't know, first-generation college students, the first in their family, or economically they felt like an outsider because they felt they were surrounded by rich white prep school people. There are hundreds of ways for people to feel like they were an outsider. Did you ever experience that when you were here?

MACDONELL: Oh, I did, but not in either one of those ways. I came from an upper middle class kind of family, so that was not an issue, and I was not first generation. But I think if I felt any kind of apartness it was because this was a school dominated by kids from the Northeast, and I was from the Midwest. And there's a certain kind of style and hipness and coolness that I associate with people from the East—you know, a certain kind of way of talking that I didn't have. But a lot of my closest friends here were people from the East, so it wasn't like I was a complete outcast.

And I felt a sense of apartness also in the sense that I felt like I wasn't really—it wasn't that I wasn't smart enough, but I wasn't really prepared very well for this, and it seemed like a lot of the other kids were. But we didn't sit around and compare notes about—we didn't, like, share our grade cards with each other.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: Whatever they were, grade cards or—but I never felt so alone or apart that I thought, *Oh, I should transfer to Kent State University* or something.

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: And some people did. Sharon Smith, for instance.

- DONIN: Transfers. Yes, I mean, that's pretty common, I think.
- MACDONELL: You didn't know Sharon Smith. (I'm looking at Steve.) But, yes, there were people who came here and said, *I just don't fit in here, and I'm leaving*. And I never felt that. I mean, I loved this place, and I was determined to gut it out and make it through, because I had this sense, which turned out to be true, that I was developing lifelong friendships here, and so why would I walk away from that?
- DONIN: Did any of your sense of belonging have to do with the location here? Sort of being out in the middle of nowhere a little bit?
- MACDONELL: Belonging or not belonging?
- DONIN: Yes. Either one.
- MACDONELL: I mean, I knew that I was getting into a situation that was in a remote location, and that didn't either attract me or bother me; it just was what it was. No, I mean, if I had been in a big city, I don't feel like I would have melted away into the—you know, [that] I would have gone to the jazz clubs in Harlem or something like that.
- DONIN: Right.
- MACDONELL: I never felt that. I loved the place. It was beautiful. I had a little challenge with the place in that I had always had bad hips and I couldn't walk around very much, so as a result, winter quarters were difficult for me.
- DONIN: Ooh.
- MACDONELL: Because I rode my bike around a lot. I was known as the guy who rode his bike.
- DONIN: Was that to save your hips?
- MACDONELL: Yes, because I couldn't walk very far. It was too painful to walk, but I could ride my bike.
- DONIN: That's a little tough in winter.

MACDONELL: Yes. Well, a little dangerous.

DONIN: It's also dangerous, yes. [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: Not as dangerous then as it would be now, now that I've got artificial hips. You know, you don't want to fall down on an artificial hip.

DONIN: Right, right.

MACDONELL: You don't want to have to go through that experience again too soon—

DONIN: No,

MACDONELL: —after you've been through it.

DONIN: So the location thing—it doesn't sound like it really impacted you very much.

MACDONELL: I don't think so.

DONIN: No. Okay. Good.

So I think we're almost done here.

MACDONELL: Oh, really?

DONIN: Let me just check my—

MACDONELL: I was just looking at—

SEVERSON: We're just getting started.

MACDONELL: Yes. [Chuckles.] And now: The second quarter of my freshman year.

SEVERSON: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: I'm just kidding. [Laughter.]

DONIN: Are you able to put into words how you feel that your four years here—were you a different person when you graduated?

MACDONELL: Well, I'm sure I was.

DONIN: I mean, obviously, developmentally everybody is, but if you're able to describe—

MACDONELL: I think I was different in the sense that I had pretty much decided by then that music would be my life. I didn't know that. I knew that music was my gift when I got here. I didn't think there was a way to make a living until the time that I left.

You know, I think there's something to be said for going to school in a different part of the country than the one in which you grew up, and so I think that changed me, although I tended to gravitate to Steve and people like Steve, who hadn't grown up in the East. I mean, Ed Jaick—you remember Ed—was a good friend, and Paul Lazarus. I guess he wasn't really a Chicago guy, as it turned out, but—but, you know, I think it changed me. I don't know how it changed my view of gender, which—isn't this kind of what this—

DONIN: We're trying to document how the Dartmouth community—meaning who makes up the Dartmouth family—

MACDONELL: Yes.

DONIN: —how it's changed. But gender is the very obvious thing, especially for people in your era because of the whole coeducation question, but, you know, there are so many other ways the faces of Dartmouth have changed in the last fifty years, not just gender. But clearly that was the thing that probably had the biggest impact on all of you, obviously.

MACDONELL: Yes, but I think—I mean, I was changed in the sense that I had a group of friends that I knew that I would be friends with for life, which I guess you don't think about when you're growing up and going through grade school and high school, although those people always are with you.

But Steve and Martha have been like touchstones in my life. I won't bore you with all the ways in which they've been that. You helped me get my first real gigs, Steve, through your

high school buddy in Denver. I mean, you know, just all kinds of stuff. So I think I had the sense when I graduated that I had made lifelong friends, and I didn't think about that going in.

In fact, what I'll say is I remember—I didn't go back to graduate school for nine years, or eight and a half years later. I started in the fall of '85. And I remember saying to my mom, who for some reason was with me in New Haven, Connecticut, the week that I started at the good old Yale School of Management—I remember saying to my her, "Mom, I've got to get to bed because I'm going meet people tomorrow who are going to be lifelong friends." And that's what I expected out of my time at the Yale School of Management. And it turned out to not be true at all, or not be true in the same way.

DONIN: Now, is the message here that it's the undergraduate experience where you make lifelong friends or that it's not Yale?

MACDONELL: Well, I think it's a third message. I think it's a little bit the undergraduate experience because you're away from home for the first time (unless you went to prep school), and you're living cheek to jowl with a bunch of people your age for the first time. There's a lot of freedom, a lot of discovery.

But I also think that—I mean, Yale wasn't a bad place, but I think that there was a sense of—this is where the sense of place and Hanover enters it. I think that people who go to Dartmouth as undergrads tend to hang out with each other more because they can't melt away into the city. And in graduate school there was a lot more coming and going on the weekends, and I had classmates who had boyfriends or girlfriends or spouses down in New York or up in Boston, and you had people who were living in Branford, twenty miles away from New Haven, so there just wasn't the same kind of—you know.

DONIN: So the experience is not the same.

MACDONELL: No.

DONIN: You don't bond the same way.

MACDONELL: No. But, you know, if I had gone to Yale College, maybe I would have had the same experience there that I had here. I just don't know. It's hard to say. But, I mean, part of what I'm saying sort of is an obvious reflection on the location. I mean, the thing that you say about Dartmouth is: Well, people are a lot more tightly knit because they can't go anywhere, you know? That's true, but it's maybe a little too cute. But I think there was a difference between Hanover and New Haven in that respect.

DONIN: Well, yes, urban versus the boonies, although this isn't so much the boonies anymore.

Do you keep up with your class activities? Do you come back for reunions?

MACDONELL: I do. I've come back for every reunion, and I also come back every time that the Dartmouth Aires have an all-alumni reunion. That happens now every three years.

DONIN: So that's a real subset of the community that you stay plugged into.

MACDONELL: Yes.

DONIN: And do the Aires and the—what's the women's group? That Martha sang in.

MACDONELL: When Martha cofounded them, they were called the Distractions, but now they're called the Woodswind or—what are they called now, Steve?

SEVERSON: Decibelles.

MACDONELL: The Decibelles.

DONIN: Decibelles, that's it. Decibelles, yes.

MACDONELL: And there's no contact between the Decibelles and the Aires.

DONIN: And the Aires?

MACDONELL: Yes.

- DONIN: So they never sang together or anything?
- MACDONELL: Well, at reunions we don't. There was back then—the Distractions and the Aires were both subsets of the Glee Club.
- DONIN: Oh, I see.
- MACDONELL: So we sang together a lot—sang together a lot. But since those days, there has been very little contact between me and any of the women who were in the Distractions/Woodswinds/Decibelles.
- DONIN: So how do they organize the reunions? Is it from all classes?
- MACDONELL: Yes, it's an all-class Aires reunion.
- DONIN: Oh, so it's a big group!
- MACDONELL: It can be. It can be. I think there were—what?— sixty, seven Aires plus assorted spouses and friends, significant others.
- DONIN: Oh, great. Uh-huh.
- MACDONELL: It's great. And that's a real brotherhood. That whole thing is a real brotherhood because it's not like coming to a Dartmouth reunion, a class reunion where you can talk together, you can play golf together, you can go to lectures together and you can drink together. When you're at an Aires reunion, you can sing together. You can do something together that's—I don't want to say it's more meaningful than playing golf, but it takes more coordination.
- DONIN: [Chuckles.] Right.
- MACDONELL: Yes, it's very cool. But, then, I'm a musician, so I would—you know, I like that.
- DONIN: Mm-hm. Okay. Unless you have—
- MACDONELL: No, this is good. This did not at all go the direction I thought. I thought this was going to be more about gender issues. I

was prepared to admit to some, like, really—one really embarrassing—

DONIN: Bad behavior?

MACDONELL: One piece of—in retrospect, bad but not, like, overtly bad behavior, but [chuckles] I'm not going to talk about it since I don't have to. [Laughs.]

DONIN: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: Steve, I'll tell *you* about when we go over to the gym.

DONIN: You did say that you only had one female friend here. I think that's amazing.

MACDONELL: Well, yes.

DONIN: I mean, that doesn't count—so you didn't include girlfriends in that—

MACDONELL: Well, I never had a Dartmouth girlfriend. I never—like, I don't recall going out on any dates or having a girlfriend who was a Dartmouth student. And that was in part because I had a high school girlfriend, and I thought the deal was, we were going to kind of not date other people. It turned out that that was my definition and not hers.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: But that's all right, because it all turned out for the best. But in retrospect, I mean, I was probably just sort of hanging onto that as an excuse to not jump in and compete for dates with the few women who were here.

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: And I also thought that—I mean, when I got here, you know, there was still this tradition of going down to the girls' colleges, the all-women's schools.

DONIN: Oh, the road trips.

MACDONELL: Road trips. And the Aires facilitated that. You know, we would be invited to go down to Mount Holyoke and sing with the Mount Holyoke women's group, and so that was a thinly-veiled excuse for us to drink and ogle [pronouncing it correctly as OH-guhl] each other. Or is it ogle [pronouncing it AH-guhl]? Is it OH-guhl or AH-guhl?

DONIN: OH-guhl, I think.

MACDONELL: Oh-guhl, yes. But I never had what I would call a romantic relationship with a woman here. I had Cindy Hickey—that's right, it *was* her name—who came up to visit me on occasion.

DONIN: But the percentage of women here those years was small.

MACDONELL: Yes, it was small. Yes, but I just—I mean, I actually kind of fell for—when I was a—this is a good, embarrassing story. You'll like this. I actually—my senior year, this woman showed up as a freshman from Los Angeles, and her name was Sharon Smith. (Sharon, are you out there?) She looked like she was from California. She was blonde and beautiful and, you know, very attractive. And she would walk around in the middle of winter like she was at the beach at Santa Monica or something, with sandals on. She was the one who gave up and transferred to Stanford after her freshman year.

But I sort of imagined that I had fallen in love with her, and I wrote a song about her. And actually the funny part of the story—I don't know if you know this story, but I was in this band in Los Angeles, and we got some work being the backup band for Chuck Berry. We were playing with Chuck Berry up in San Francisco, and I invited Sharon to come hear us at this nightclub. It was actually a concert hall. And [chuckles] she said, "Gee, I'd love to come. It's good to hear from you again. But can I bring a friend with me?" I said, "Yeah, I'll put you on the guest list, Sharon Smith plus one."

So I get up—and we were not only backing up Chuck Berry that night on stage—you know, playing his songs with him, but we were also the opening act, so we got up and did our own little songs. And I had written this song for Sharon—

DONIN: [Sharp intake of breath.]

MACDONELL: —which is really embarrassing. If I sang it for you, you'd laugh out loud. But I got up and did this introduction. I said, "Tonight's a special night for me because when you're a songwriter, mostly you write songs about people and experiences that are real to you, but you don't often get to share those songs with the people that inspired them. But tonight I'm going to get—the person who inspired this next song is in the audience, and I'd like to sing this song for [sings] "Sharon, everything I am I'll give to you forever if I can."

So I sing this song. [Laughs.] And after the show, she comes up to the stage. "Oh, Parker, thanks. It was a great concert." And she said, "I want you to meet my friend, Mike." So she had her boyfriend with her. And my cousin, Jeff Powell, who was also at Stanford, was standing there, and he saw the whole thing.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: He's never let me live that down.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: So that was the extent of my—it was like a fantasy romance.

DONIN: Right.

MACDONELL: But it was a pretty good fantasy romance.

DONIN: Yes, it was. And to be able to sing a song to her, even if her boyfriend was there—

MACDONELL: [Laughs.]

DONIN: —it's pretty great.

MACDONELL: "Sharon Smith plus one, please."

DONIN: [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: Oh, the life and times. Well, thanks for letting me run my mouth here.

- DONIN: This is great. So you call yourself Parker, but your yearbook calls you Richard. Did you change your name?
- MACDONELL: Richard is my first name, and Parker is my middle name, but you can call me Speedy, because all my friends from Dartmouth know me as Speedy MacDonell.
- DONIN: Because you were on the bike?
- MACDONELL: No. I got the nickname Speedy the day after I was born. My dad called his brother-in-law, my Uncle Hugh, to say, "Martie's had a boy." "What did you name him?" "Richard Parker MacDonell." My Uncle Hugh says, "RPM. We ought to call him Speedy."
- DONIN: [Laughs.] That's cute.
- MACDONELL: He had that kind of sardonic sense of humor. So I was known as Speedy all the way up through college graduation. And when I went to L.A. to seek my fame and fortune, I thought to myself, *I can't stick with Speedy. This is my time to—*
- DONIN: Make the break.
- MACDONELL: —*change*. I didn't like Richard or the nicknames that went with it, so—
- DONIN: Plus the fact when you're a performer you need a name that sort of sets you aside a little bit.
- MACDONELL: Yes, that's right. It turns out one of my idols is Jackson Browne. I don't know if you've ever heard of Jackson Browne.
- DONIN: Of course, yes.
- MACDONELL: You know, Jackson is his middle name.
- DONIN: Ah. Ah.
- MACDONELL: So you probably want to know what his first name is.

DONIN: Yes?

MACDONELL: Clyde.

DONIN: Oh. [Chuckles.]

MACDONELL: “And now, singing his new song, ‘Running on Empty’— here’s Clyde Browne.”

DONIN: Clyde Browne. [Laughs.]

MACDONELL: Well, he’s so good that it probably wouldn’t have made a difference, but Jackson Browne sounded a little—

DONIN: It’s great, yes. Clyde’s unfortunate. That’s an unfortunate name.

All right, I’m turning this off.

MACDONELL: Okay. Thanks. We’re going to go work out.

[End of interview]