

Steven E. McConnell '03
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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DONIN: Today is Tuesday, April 9th, 2013. My name is Mary Donin, and we're here in Rauner Library with Steve McConnell, Dartmouth Class of 2003.

Okay, Steve, by way of background, how is it you ended up coming to Dartmouth from Canada?

McCONNELL: That's a good question. We don't send a lot of athletes, a lot of students to the U.S., but I went to a Catholic high school, and Catholic schools in Ontario are publicly funded, too, so it wasn't a private school; it was just a Catholic school. And did pretty well and was looking to do sports in university. I looked at Canadian universities and had a good friend who went to the University of Vermont, and I had a cousin—she was All-American at Providence in track, so she was really good, and they suggested that I should look south of the border, and, like, my coach said that the Ivies have a really good academic—or financial aid, so I contacted some of the coaches and wanted to do track, so I talked to Carl Wallin, and he was really excited. I was a decathlete, and he was really excited about that, and so was I, so came to visit. And this all happened senior year, senior fall.

DONIN: Fast!

McCONNELL: [Chuckles.] Since I've been in the U.S., I've sort of realized what things people do to get into university and what a big ordeal it is in junior years.

DONIN: Starting in, like, seventh grade, it seems to me.

McCONNELL: Yeah, right. And I started probably September or October of my senior year.

DONIN: Amazing.

McCONNELL: Yeah, I wrote my application essay in one night and just kinda had no idea and wouldn't have got in if it weren't for

being an athlete. But came to visit, arrived on the bus in a blinding snowstorm.

DONIN: [Chuckles.]

McCONNELL: And met everybody and played some pong and loved it and was never in doubt after that.

DONIN: So did you look at any other schools, or was Dartmouth it?

McCONNELL: Actually, 'cause my cousin was at Providence, I applied there, and I got in there and got a scholarship there, but they were a distance running school, so I didn't want to—I'm not a distance runner, so that wasn't a good fit. And I applied to a bunch of universities in Canada and got in. But, like I said, once I came here and saw the place and met everybody, I was pretty much settled.

DONIN: So what settled you on it? Was it the location or the people in the athletic department or pong or—

McCONNELL: Yes.

DONIN: Yes to all of that.

McCONNELL: Yes to all. You know, the location was good. My sister went to school in Quebec. (We're from Ontario.) So she was about five hours from home, and this is about six, so, you know, it's a good distance. You can always go home, but it's far enough to keep the parents away.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: So the distance is good. I love the snow and being outdoors, obviously. The size was good. I didn't like, you know, going to a huge university with 20,000 people. You never know everybody, and be a stranger and places you went here—it's a good size. Seems everybody—you always know somebody, but you never know everybody, so it's perfect that way.

The history, the athletics, the social scene were all—oh, the academics, too. [Chuckles softly.]

DONIN: Oh, yeah, that.

McCONNELL: Oh, yeah, the academics.

DONIN: [Chuckles.] So it was an easy sell.

McCONNELL: Yeah. For sure. Like I said, I wouldn't have gotten in if it weren't for being an athlete and being international, which is good for me, but—

DONIN: So had anybody from your high school gone to Dartmouth before?

McCONNELL: No.

DONIN: Wow!

McCONNELL: No. Out of my whole hometown—my hometown is about 100,000 people, and I think two people in my year went to the U.S. There was another girl who ran track and went somewhere—DIII [D3] in Michigan or something. Yeah, pretty rare, at least from my hometown. I remember I took the SATs, and everyone—it wasn't just our school; it was the whole town, so 15 or 16 high schools in the town, and there were about 25 of us in the room, taking the SATs.

DONIN: You don't need those for the Canadian university system.

McCONNELL: No. That's right. It's just people thinking about going to the U.S.

DONIN: Oh, so it's not such a big draw.

McCONNELL: No.

DONIN: Well, no surprise. I mean,—

McCONNELL: The cost is—

DONIN: Huge.

McCONNELL: —huge, compared to staying at home, yeah.

DONIN: Yep.

- McCONNELL: And I didn't really—didn't realize the huge disparity in reputation and quality between different universities here. In Canada, everything's pretty comparable, you know. There's not the very well-regarded ones and the ones that are just party schools. But I learned all that when I got here.
- DONIN: And did you feel prepared academically?
- McCONNELL: No, not really. Academically or athletically, things—you know, high school's pretty intense in the U.S. I'm a high school teacher now, and so I can say that—whew! I didn't do much homework. I didn't struggle in school, in high school. And I got here and just kind of passed my classes and took my credits and didn't set any records, that's for sure.
- DONIN: But, I mean, you made it. And being an athlete, that's a big chunk of time that goes towards that endeavor.
- McCONNELL: Right. It's funny. I was talking to my wife, who's a professor here now, that—"Oh, I'm gonna have to give this person a B." I said, "What's wrong with that?" [Laughs.] "I loved to get a B, and I was happy, super happy with a B."
- DONIN: Back in the day, they used to call it a gentleman's C.
- McCONNELL: Right. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Back in the '40s and '50s, and there was nothing wrong with that.
- McCONNELL: Right. Mm-hm.
- DONIN: But times have changed.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, really. The race to get As and GPAs. It's pretty intense these days.
- DONIN: Yeah. So that was striking to you when you first got here.
- McCONNELL: Well, I didn't really have any concept of it. I just took my Cs and Bs, and that was great, and I was happy, and I got my credits and I went to practice. I didn't have any problem with that. Then I met my wife and—you know, 3.9—whatever.

“Like, you got As in all your classes? Really?” But, yeah, I was happy. No problems.

DONIN: Well, it was probably less stressful for you than the—

McCONNELL: It was, yeah. And being an athlete really is like a full-time job, you know? Physically. Just the time you’re at practice but being exhausted after practice as well. Drained any energy you have to study. And track’s especially long because we have two competitive seasons, so we’re on all year.

DONIN: And when you’re not actually competing, you’re training like crazy all the time.

McCONNELL: Right. Exactly. Yeah. There’s an official off season where you train full time, and so in a sport like—a spring sport like—what am I thinking of?

DONIN: Baseball.

McCONNELL: Baseball, yeah. So their off season’s the winter, but in the fall they can pretty much do what they want. They have workouts and stuff, but their time is pretty much their own. But track, our off season’s the fall, and then we compete winter and compete spring, so we’re always on full time.

DONIN: So how would you describe, when you got here, your efforts to find a group of friends, a community, so to speak, outside the classroom? So you were in a dorm.

McCONNELL: I was Richardson.

DONIN: Richardson?

McCONNELL: Yeah.

DONIN: Did you do the trips thing?

McCONNELL: I did. Yeah, we did canoeing. I’m still friends with especially one girl—she’s Canadian—who was on my trip, and that was great. I loved that. That was a good set of friends for the first year, but being on a team is an automatic set of friends. That was the best thing ever, especially the track team. It’s co-ed and not just a bunch of guys, you know, being macho

together, but having a co-ed team like that is automatic friends, and seniors can party and do things that freshman normally can't, so it's great to have that sort of [chuckles] social mentoring.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

McCONNELL: But, let's see, automatic friends and a big team, you know there's a hundred kids on the track team, so—

DONIN: So that becomes your community.

McCONNELL: Yeah, right off the bat, right away.

DONIN: How was it on your floor at—what were you in, Richardson?

McCONNELL: Richardson. I didn't really know anybody in my dorm. My roommate was [whispers] crazy.

DONIN: Crazy?

McCONNELL: [Whispers] Yeah.

DONIN: Oh, boy.

McCONNELL: Yeah, it was bad. In hindsight, I probably should have moved out and talked to the dean. There was—[whispers] he was kind of crazy.

DONIN: And you stuck with it the whole year?

McCONNELL: Yeah. Like I said, it didn't occur to me to complain or raise a fuss or anything. I just [chuckles] went to practice.

DONIN: Well, you're such a nice mellow Canadian.

McCONNELL: Yeah, yeah.

DONIN: If it was an American kid, they would have—

McCONNELL: I've been accused of that before.

DONIN: The helicopter parents would have been zooming right in there and—

McCONNELL: True.

DONIN: —and made a change.

McCONNELL: Yeah. And these days, for sure. Ten years later it wouldn't have—no one would stand for it, but even ten years ago I wasn't quite—like you said, the helicopter parents weren't out in full force, and there wasn't entitlement and stuff like that that there is now.

DONIN: So that was tough on you, but it didn't get to you so much 'cause—

McCONNELL: No.

DONIN: You weren't in your room that much.

McCONNELL: Exactly. That's what I was going to say. I met my wife my freshman winter, and so I didn't spend much time in my room after that, between practice and socializing and hanging out with my wife, my girlfriend.

DONIN: Your then-girlfriend.

McCONNELL: She wasn't my wife yet.

DONIN: Right, right. So how was it sort of navigating your way through all the social opportunities, like whether or not to do the Greek system or—whether or not to do that? What was the message you were getting from your teammates, who'd already been there and done that?

McCONNELL: Well, it was a clear message from Carl Wallin. Obviously, it was “Don't join.” There were a few guys in houses. I did rush, and I got a bid to a couple of places but didn't join, mostly because I wanted to be able to go everywhere and I wanted to not have to pay for beer dues, which was—

DONIN: Beer dues. Oh.

McCONNELL: The Canadian dollar was very weak at the time. [Chuckles.] But, yeah, just being able to go everywhere and not be tied

to a single house. Like I said, I already had a big group of friends with the track team, and so I didn't—

DONIN: You didn't feel the need.

McCONNELL: Right.

DONIN: So was there any sort of a stigma attached to the fact that you were unaffiliated?

McCONNELL: Yeah. Well, Wednesday night is the meetings night at Dartmouth, and a couple of guys that weren't on the track team—we would get together and drink in a dorm room, and we'd call it our GDI meetings, because GDX is one of the fraternities, but GDI stood for God Damn Independents.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: We were independent of any frat, and we were just kind of hanging together for Wednesday night and maybe meet up with the guys after for drinking that night, but not a lot of drinking with, you know, always being on—in season.

DONIN: You can't when you're competing, right?

McCONNELL: Right. I mean, not if you want to be any good.

DONIN: So there's no actual rule against it.

McCONNELL: No.

DONIN: Oh. I thought that you couldn't drink when you trained. You managed. [Chuckles.]

McCONNELL: No, I never signed anything or swore an oath to not drink, but it was kind of understood and it didn't make any sense to.

DONIN: Now, in Canada, what was the legal drinking age?

McCONNELL: Nineteen. It varies from province to province, but it was 19 in Ontario.

DONIN: So you found it sort of silly here, didn't you?

- McCONNELL: Yeah, very silly, actually. One time a friend who was in a house—they were having their—they were being inspected, and he brought a big box of liquor over.
- DONIN: [Laughs.]
- McCONNELL: He said, “I need you to hang onto this till tomorrow.” I said, “Okay, whatever.” Like, we used it as a door stop. We were sharing rooms in Topliff at the time, and so we had TVs and computers in one room and beds in the other, across the hall, and the door was propped open with this beer. And at two in the morning, Safety and Security walked down the hall and saw the alcohol sitting there and wandered in and said, “Who’s is this?” And they said, “Oh, it’s one of our friend’s.” And they said, “Oh. Well, whose room is this?” And technically the room with the TVs was my room, and this other guy, who was a soccer player—he was off at a game or something, and they were technically in the other room, so it was technically in my room. But I was asleep in the other bedroom. So at two in the morning, Safety and Security woke me up and said, “Is this your liquor?” And I said—I didn’t want to rat on my friend, so I said, “Yeah, yeah, that’s mine.” And they said, “How old are you?” And I said, “I’m 20”—you know, thinking [chuckles], *What’s the problem?* They said, “Oh, it’s illegal,” blah, blah, blah. And I said, “But I’m Canadian.”
- DONIN: Ooh!
- McCONNELL: I actually said that! And they said, “Well, you’re in the U.S. It doesn’t really matter.” And so they wrote me up, and I was supposed to meet with the dean, I think, but I never went. It just—
- DONIN: Went away.
- McCONNELL: —went away, yeah.
- DONIN: That sounds like a pretty good argument, but I guess it didn’t wash.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, in my groggy state.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: “I don’t understand.”

DONIN: Fast thinking. Yeah. I mean, it used to be 18 here a long time ago.

McCONNELL: Right. My mom talks about coming across to the U.S. to drink in Watertown, New York, and stuff instead of—she couldn’t drink at home.

DONIN: [Chuckles.] So wha’d your parents make of you immigrating here to go to school? Emigrating, I guess I should say.

McCONNELL: They were, like I said, not really understanding the whole Ivy League, elite—like, this is the great opportunity. And obviously the cost was a bit of a shock, but financial aid was pretty good. It was. It made it comparable to a Canadian university. So that was the only reason that it worked.

DONIN: Now, did you have to have a job as part of your financial aid?

McCONNELL: I did, yeah.

DONIN: Wha’d you do?

McCONNELL: I worked in the athletic facilities office.

DONIN: That’s convenient.

McCONNELL: It was. I was the gym—you know, the front desk of the gym, swiping cards.

DONIN: The monitor?

McCONNELL: Yep. And then I was in the office. I graduated to the office for a while, being the supervisor, and mostly I worked in the hockey rink. They had a late-night Zamboni assistant. Basically our job was to keep the Zamboni driver awake, I think.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: So from I think it was ten till midnight, three days a week, I would be done there, just hanging out with the Zamboni driver.

DONIN: Why'd they need one so late at night?

McCONNELL: Well, like I said, I guess it was just to keep him awake because there were—

DONIN: Were there games going on?

McCONNELL: —intramurals and things going on.

DONIN: Oh, intramurals. Yeah, of course. Yeah.

McCONNELL: So the Zamboni had to run, but I think they wanted us to keep the guy awake.

DONIN: That's a sweet deal.

McCONNELL: Yeah, it was pretty, you know, taxing sitting there for—

DONIN: Doing your homework.

McCONNELL: —50 minutes out of the hour, and then watching him do the Zamboni.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: And I would melt the snow that came off and then sit there for another 50 minutes.

DONIN: Well, fulfilled you—

McCONNELL: Somebody's got to do it.

DONIN: Yes, someone's got to do it. Somebody's got to do it.

So if you had to describe the sort of evolution of your community—I think I know the answer to this, but how it changed from when you arrived in September of—let's see here, what?—'99—

McCONNELL: Ninety-nine.

DONIN: —to graduation. I assume Kelly played a part in this transformation, but how would you describe it? I mean, was there a sort of constant group that you stayed with, or did you migrate, and did it change in any way?

McCONNELL: No, I pretty much stayed with the same group. The year I came in, we had a pretty big group of track recruits, and we stayed friends. I was at the house of one of the track guys a couple of months ago in California.

DONIN: Wow.

McCONNELL: Yeah. So that was good—we stayed friends. I had lunch with another track person Tuesday.

DONIN: And, of course, you see Coach Wallin every day. [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: Yeah. I see coach. Yeah, so that was, like, a constant group of friends, and, like I said, guys and girls, such a good mix to have both in a group of friends and on a team, I think. But it did change, being the youngest and being the freshman and being, you know, sort of looked down on by the seniors but taken care of, more than anything, and then growing up and having guys come in after you and kind of doing the same thing for them.

DONIN: So you become the mentor instead of the mentee.

McCONNELL: Yeah. I mean, it sounds cliché, but really it does—

DONIN: True.

McCONNELL: —it does work that way. So it's good on a team like that. Actually, I was hurt a lot. Didn't excel, and so by senior year had grown tired of sitting in the training room, getting treatment on my legs and stuff, so senior year—probably, what?—December of my senior year, stopped doing track. I said I stopped doing track and took up beer—

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: —to replace it. And so that last year I had a chance to kind of branch out. All my time wasn't taken up with that, with

track, so I partied a little more. But, you know, senior year you want to kind of get out and go skiing at the Skiway. Skiing is a big no-no; you can hurt yourself and be injured, and obviously while you're competing—

DONIN: Oh, good point.

McCONNELL: So things like that, that I didn't have a chance to do, didn't take advantage of, my senior year was able to, so that was good.

DONIN: Were there other restrictions to your activities because of being an athlete?

McCONNELL: Well,—

DONIN: Just the really dangerous stuff.

McCONNELL: Right, the common-sense things. You don't want to hurt yourself and don't want to drink yourself so that you can't be competitive.

DONIN: And I assume athletes can't take advantage of things like study abroad programs?

McCONNELL: Yeah, exactly. Right, 'cause we had three seasons where we were on—there wasn't really a chance to go abroad.

DONIN: Did you do a sophomore summer or anything—

McCONNELL: I did.

DONIN: You did.

McCONNELL: Sophomore summer is obligatory, unless you get a waiver. But I did and took the fall off so I could compete winter and spring.

DONIN: Oh, I see, uh-huh.

McCONNELL: But I took that fall off, junior fall and stayed home, trained there as best I could with my old high school coach and stuff. But, yeah, it limits some things, but—

- DONIN: Were they still doing—what do they call it?—Tubestock in the summer?
- McCONNELL: [Chuckles.] Yeah.
- DONIN: Were they?
- McCONNELL: Yeah, it was pretty heavily policed, but it was still kickin' back then. It was fun. Yeah. You mentioned my wife, and she was a senior when I was a freshman, and then my sophomore and junior year she lived in Boston, so I spent a lot of time driving to Boston and back to see her. I'd go down—if I had class, you know, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, I would go to class Monday and then go to practice and then maybe go down just for the night and come back the next afternoon for practice. She had a car, so I basically drove that back and forth to Boston a lot. I'd go down and come back for morning class, 9 a.m. class, you know?
- DONIN: Ooh!
- McCONNELL: But she was working as a management consultant, so she was pulling in the big bucks, living downtown Boston. So that was fun. But, like you said, at the time I was only 20, so I couldn't go out to the bars. She and her colleagues would go to the bars after work, and—
- DONIN: Yup, "Have a good time! Bye!" [Laughter.]
- McCONNELL: So that was pretty annoying.
- DONIN: That *is* annoying.
- McCONNELL: That was all right. But senior year, she came back to Dartmouth and did a master's, so we were back together. We lived just by the Catholic Church in the college-owned, off-campus housing.
- DONIN: Oh, St. Denis?
- McCONNELL: Mhm. Sanborn Road.
- DONIN: Oh, yes. Right, right.

McCONNELL: Number one in the front of the parking lot of the Indian food restaurant.

DONIN: Yes, yes, I know it well.

McCONNELL: Whew! The smells!

DONIN: [Laughs.] They're either great if you love Indian food—

McCONNELL: I do.

DONIN: —or they're horrible.

McCONNELL: It was hard to resist.

DONIN: Yep, yep.

McCONNELL: I think we cut it down to once every couple of weeks that we would go there.

DONIN: So your life really was fairly well defined—

McCONNELL: It was.

DONIN: —by your team—

McCONNELL: Mm-hm. Yep.

DONIN: —and your girlfriend.

McCONNELL: Yep, that's true.

DONIN: Pretty nice.

McCONNELL: That's pretty true of my entire life, actually.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: Yeah, it was good. I mean, you go to class in the morning, go to lunch and then have about an hour, practice usually two or three, practice 'til five or six, go to dinner, come home, try to do some work, go to work. That was the off season, especially. And then competing, do that, and then throw in meets on the weekends. You leave Friday, usually Friday

night, come back Sunday night. Saturday night, depending. It was good.

DONIN: So did you ever have—you know, one of the lenses that we're using to look at this change in the Dartmouth community in the last 60 years is the lens of how people often experience, at some time in their life, that they don't belong somewhere or they're sort of an outsider. Did that ever happen to you here, in any way?

McCONNELL: Yes. I think in groups there's always—you know, in certain groups there's always that feeling of, *Oh, this isn't my crowd. I don't know anybody here*, in going into a fraternity or something like that. It would be kind of—guys would be looking at you, like,—

DONIN: Who's he?

McCONNELL: “You're a first-year guy. You're a college guy. You should be in a fraternity somewhere. Why are you in *my* fraternity since you're not—,” you know. And that's fair. [Chuckles.] But there was always that group that I *did* belong to in the track team, which was nice. But, yeah, I mean, there were groups that I would have liked to have belonged to—DOC and—I would have liked to have done more like that, but kind of made my bed in choosing track and was happy with it and I'm happy I did, and it worked out well. But, yeah, I think that's normal that everyone feels that at some point, but it was really nice to always have a group that you could, you know, just walk into a teammate's room and flop down on the futon, sit there for an hour and not bother them, really, and have somewhere to be and somewhere to party and someone to study with, if you did that. [Laughs.]

DONIN: So you really had sort of an automatic family when you arrived her.

McCONNELL: Yeah, that's exactly how I explain it: automatic friends, automatic group of people, and it updates itself each year as people leave and new people come in, and it's nice. It's great. Like I said, like I've said, the co-edness and the—

DONIN: It's very good.

- McCONNELL: I think it really tones down any sort of—especially with guys—
- DONIN: That super masculine kind of attitude.
- McCONNELL: Right. And softens the edges and makes things more human.
- DONIN: And doesn't being an elite athlete, which is what you are when you're on a team at an Ivy League college—whether it's DI or DIII, you're still an elite athlete. Doesn't that automatically sort of put you a notch above everybody because—I mean, you may not feel that personally, but people's perceptions of you are, "Oh, you know, he's on the track team!"
- McCONNELL: Yeah—
- DONIN: Did you ever get treated that way?
- McCONNELL: No. [Chuckles.] No. And especially not here because something like a third of the school is on a varsity team, so everybody's an athlete, you know? And being in Hanover, it's not like you run into other people outside of the school, so no, that didn't really—you know, I guess going home, stuff—and I'd get e-mail from my old coach or from teachers and stuff. Say, "Oh, I have a student who's thinking about going to the U.S. for sports. Can you talk to her and tell her what it's like?" But that was the extent of it, really. Here on campus, everyone's an athlete, it seems. Everyone I knew was an athlete, pretty much.
- DONIN: Well, you traveled in this sort of protected world, I think,—
- McCONNELL: Right, that's true.
- DONIN: —of this athletic bubble.
- McCONNELL: Mm-hm. For sure. And being always on and having such a big team, such a big group of friends to draw from. Didn't really need to branch out more, which was good and bad.
- DONIN: Yeah. I mean, it saves you from that awkwardness of—both social and—

McCONNELL: Loneliness and—

DONIN: Yeah.

McCONNELL: Yeah. But also maybe cuts off others that—

DONIN: Opportunities.

McCONNELL: —that you wouldn't necessarily know that you're going to be friends with.

DONIN: Right, right.

McCONNELL: I'm meeting people now who—one of Kelly's colleagues was an '04. He was in Tabard, and he's someone I never would have met, you know, never would have run across on campus, and Tabard has a reputation that wasn't really track affiliated. [Chuckles.] But now he's, you know, friends.

DONIN: Here he is.

McCONNELL: Yeah.

DONIN: Right.

McCONNELL: Things are great.

DONIN: Right. So it *is* sort of limiting a little bit, isn't it?

McCONNELL: Yeah.

DONIN: In terms of your experience.

McCONNELL: For sure.

DONIN: You missed certain opportunities 'cause, as you say, you make a commitment to being an athlete, and that's sort of it.

McCONNELL: Right. Full-time job, yeah.

DONIN: Did the faculty react to you differently as an athlete, in general?

- McCONNELL: Uh—
- DONIN: Did they cut you any slack?
- McCONNELL: Don't think so. Maybe. Academically I wasn't a high flyer. [Chuckles.] I wasn't really—
- DONIN: What was your major?
- McCONNELL: English. English major. Did a War and Peace study minor, and that was great, sort of history/sociology. Interesting. But, yeah, I think my GPA was 2.8, something like that. Mostly Cs and Bs, some Bs. But, like I said, I was happy with that. I don't know if I've actively said it, but I was mostly here to do track and enjoy college, which is rare, I think, at a school like Dartmouth, but I didn't really have any conception of everyone got A's all the time. [Laughs.] That's crazy.
- DONIN: You didn't have that competitive edge—
- McCONNELL: Not in the classroom.
- DONIN: —bred into you. Right, right, the academic edge.
- McCONNELL: Exactly, no. So I don't think I got any slack. I just got my C's and was happy with that, and the professors weren't gonna chase me down to give me a B, you know, so—
- DONIN: But you got the work done. I mean, you did it.
- McCONNELL: Did enough, yeah.
- DONIN: Right.
- McCONNELL: My wife would laugh at me because I would [chuckles] get the reading list for the class and I would pick two books I was going to write my papers on, go to the library and get them, and read them and write my books on those, and not really read the other books in the class, because I was tired and busy and—you know. So maybe I didn't get the most out of my Ivy League education that I could've.
- DONIN: But, as you said, your focus was competing.

McCONNELL: Right.

DONIN: Athletic competition.

McCONNELL: Mm-hm.

DONIN: So you were here during—Jim Wright was the president while you were here.

McCONNELL: Yep.

DONIN: Did you ever have any interactions with him?

McCONNELL: Not really. I think I shook his hand.

DONIN: Yeah, probably at convocation and—

McCONNELL: Exactly.

DONIN: —then at graduation.

McCONNELL: Yep. They tried to—I never really liked—never had much use for the athletics department. They tried to cancel swimming and diving while I was here, that big hoopla.

DONIN: Oh, my goodness. So he got in big trouble for that.

McCONNELL: Yeah. I forget was the AD's name was. Joanie, is it still? Something?

DONIN: Oh, Josie Harper.

McCONNELL: Josie Harper, yeah.

DONIN: Yeah, that was a tough time—

McCONNELL: Mm-hm.

DONIN: —for them.

McCONNELL: And they outlawed kegs while I was here, which was just—it's ecologically irresponsible. It doesn't have the desired effect, and all it does is create more waste. But some things like that, you just shake your head at, but—

- DONIN: Right, right. Well, that keg thing—you know, they try it from time to time, and—
- McCONNELL: There's a lot of cans in basements, I've seen.
- DONIN: Yeah. You see just piles of them in plastic bags supposedly being recycled, so who knows?
- McCONNELL: Who knows?
- DONIN: Right. You don't know where they end up.
- Okay, so it's interesting. We haven't talked to a lot of athletics, and you've got a very different story because your community is just sort of ready-made for you.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, it's nice.
- DONIN: It frees you up from a lot of the sort of personal and social challenges that most students face.
- McCONNELL: Most people. It's true. Yep. It's good, and I wouldn't have changed it for anything. But, like we talked about, it was limiting a bit, and I was lucky my senior year to kind of branch out a bit and do some Outing Club stuff and skiing and go to plays and be here on weekends in the winter and spring, and so that was nice.
- DONIN: How did you and Kelly meet?
- McCONNELL: In class.
- DONIN: Oh.
- McCONNELL: Yep. French class.
- DONIN: Oh, that's right, because she decided after physics or something that she wanted to do French, right?
- McCONNELL: Yeah, she was physics originally, yeah, yeah.
- DONIN: Yeah. But you were spot on with the English. That was what you intended to do when you got here.

McCONNELL: Yeah, I looked at English and history, was interested in both those, but moved towards English. I always loved to read. And kind of did a bit of history with the War and Peace minor, so that was good. But, yeah, I always knew—I mean, from my one math credit that I had to get, my QDS credit that I needed to get, I took linguistics.

DONIN: What's QDS?

McCONNELL: Quantitative and deductive science, I think. I think one of the graduation requirements is sort of math, and I took linguistics [chuckles] as my math.

DONIN: Oh, and that satisfied it.

McCONNELL: That satisfied it, so I didn't venture into math much. That was good. But, yeah.

DONIN: So you met in French class.

McCONNELL: Mm-hm.

DONIN: Great.

McCONNELL: Yep.

DONIN: She was pretty proficient, though, at the time you got here. Were you also proficient?

McCONNELL: I was not. In Canada you take core French for 30 minutes a day all the way through grade 10 in Ontario, but, you know, it's just core French and it's once a day, and you don't really pay attention, and I would never have any use for French, so why would I study or learn or continue with it? And then I came here and needed a second language, so I took French and, you know, passed but still wasn't very great. And then two years ago we moved to France.

DONIN: That did it.

McCONNELL: Yeah, exactly. So after two years, I'm pretty much—

DONIN: Fluent.

- McCONNELL: Fluent, yeah. It's not pretty, but it's functional.
- DONIN: [Chuckles.] "It's not pretty." [Laughs.] Well, it got you through two years of living there.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, that's true. It was good.
- DONIN: Great, great.
- Okay, Steve. Well, unless you have other thoughts or comments, I think we're pretty well done.
- McCONNELL: Great.
- DONIN: Thank you very much, unless you've got something else to say.
- McCONNELL: I don't think so. I was thinking about is Dartmouth changing, communities and things like that. I think it's changed a lot, especially since, you know,—
- DONIN: Oh, that's a good point.
- McCONNELL: —back in the days.
- DONIN: Now that you're back here, what, almost 10 years later?
- McCONNELL: Yeah.
- DONIN: Nine years later.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, nine years.
- DONIN: Do you have an opportunity to observe that it's changed, either—
- McCONNELL: Well, like you said, my focus was pretty narrow while I was here, and I knew athletes and spent time with athletes, and I didn't have much exposure to other students. Once I met Kelly, I was kind of blown away by her academics and stuff, but she had some different groups of friends, international students, and she had an ex-boyfriend who was an international student, Southeast Asian, and so she knew

those guys, and Saturday night they *didn't* go to the fraternities. [Chuckles.] All those groups of people like that. That's crazy.

But being back, I don't know if—like I said, I've been working in high schools, and I think the whole culture has just changed—like you said, helicopter parents and entitlement, and so I think a lot *has* changed. I think relatively, Dartmouth is still sort of like it was. Back in the day, Dartmouth had this reputation for being, you know, kind out up in the woods and outdoorsy and smart but, you know, liked to play hard and work hard. And I think we still have that reputation and that kind of student, but everything's kind of shifted, you know, so everything's a bit more hands-off and a bit more PC and a bit more international and multi-ethnic and multi-everything, and so I think there's still—have the same reputation, but everything's shifted, you know? Which is good.

DONIN: Kelly and I were talking about this in the context of the level of interest in Greek life, and because of the changing face of the Dartmouth undergraduate population—

McCONNELL: Right.

DONIN: As you say, more international students, more students from different religions and faiths and ethnic groups—

McCONNELL: Right.

DONIN: —and financial groups as well, economic groups, that perhaps the level of interest in Greek life is going to be watered down a little bit.

McCONNELL: Yeah. I don't know if it is or not. Is it?

DONIN: I don't know. I don't know.

McCONNELL: I haven't seen any numbers.

DONIN: It's an interesting question to know. Or maybe it'll have a positive influence on—

McCONNELL: Diversifying those groups?

- DONIN: Yep, and being a little bit more open to different types of people becoming members.
- McCONNELL: Right. There was—I don't know if it will be just different groups. Each fraternity sort of had an identity.
- DONIN: Yes.
- McCONNELL: The hockey frat and the football frat and the Asian frat and the—you know. So it's hard to say how it would affect—
- DONIN: The geek frat.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, exactly. The druggie frat.
- DONIN: Yep, yep.
- McCONNELL: So, yeah, it would be interesting to see if those lines become blurred or if there becomes a different—you know, Latino frat and an international students frat and different groups having their own—
- DONIN: One would hope that they could mingle a little, but—and, you know, these incidents that have been in the press and happened on campus in the last few years—some days, you think nothing's really changed. I mean, there's still sexual assault going on. There's still racial bias incidents all over the place.
- McCONNELL: Right.
- DONIN: Homophobia. You name it, it's there. But one can only hope that it's gonna—
- McCONNELL: Better everything?
- DONIN: —get better.
- McCONNELL: Mm-hm.
- DONIN: We shall see. Well, thank you for adding that. I forgot the focus of you guys are now back here as faculty.
- McCONNELL: Parents. It's crazy.

DONIN: Parents, too. Not to mention parents, yeah.

McCONNELL: It's great to be back, though. It's great to be back.

DONIN: Living here.

McCONNELL: Yeah.

DONIN: Yeah. The phenomenon of the number of Dartmouth alums who come home to "Mother Dartmouth" afterwards—

McCONNELL: Really?

DONIN: I don't know if it's different with other Ivies. I've no idea. It just seems there's a lot of alums who live around here.

McCONNELL: I find, and I've heard the number is something like 75 percent of Dartmouth people marry Dartmouth people.

DONIN: Oh!

McCONNELL: Something astronomical, which is—you know.

DONIN: That's a good question. I don't know!

McCONNELL: It seems like everyone I know—

DONIN: Is married to—

McCONNELL: —is married to a Dartmouth—yeah.

DONIN: That's sort of scary. [Laughs.]

McCONNELL: Well, if you think about it, I mean, who else are you gonna meet here in your prime years for finding someone?

DONIN: Right.

McCONNELL: It's not like you can go to town or there's another school nearby, right? But I guess to a certain type of person, it's a Dartmouth person—find other Dartmouth people and—but, yeah. In my experience, that's true.

- DONIN: But it seems that there—I don't know the percentage of people who actually meet people during their college years as opposed to after college. That just seems high: 75 percent!
- McCONNELL: That's what I've heard, that number.
- DONIN: Very scary. But it's a pretty nice place to come home to.
- McCONNELL: Who better than a Dartmouth person? Yeah. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Right. And you guys are all biased, obviously, in favor of—
- McCONNELL: No, no.
- DONIN: —green bloods.
- McCONNELL: Yeah, that's true. Mhmm.
- DONIN: [Laughs.] All right. Well, thank you for that, Steve.
- McCONNELL: Great.
- DONIN: Got us back on track and filled in that gap that I didn't ask you about. Okay, let's turn this off.

[End of interview.]