

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Walter Fisher '50
By Mary Donin
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FISHER: When I first came here to Dartmouth, I recall being told by the headmaster of the school I went to, "Walter, you can't go to Harvard. I can't keep you in Harvard, Harvard's out." My older brother went there at 16, and my father and all of that stuff. "So Walter, we're going to have to have you go to Dartmouth." So that was when I was 17. And I went off in the Marine Corps and I had an understanding with the college that if I wanted to come to the college, I would let them know. So I came up here to enter in 19..., or I guess to pre-enter, or whatever, and with the dean, Pudge Neidlinger, who was really running the school. John Sloan Dickey thought he was running the school, but he was full of baloney. He was off in some ethereal world that this school didn't even understand. So Neidlinger was running it, and I went in to – not his office – I went into dean—the new dean. And the dean when I first applied here, I had a call from this fellow, this headmaster of my school, Frank Boyden of Deerfield, called him up, and I was right there at his desk, from Deerfield. He said, "Mr. Strong, I have a nice fellow here who would like to go to Dartmouth and I'm sure you'll like him." And the reply on the phone apparently was, "Well, send him up, Frank. It's fine with us." So I had this letter acknowledging that receipt of my acceptance. And I came up after the War, whenever that was, '46, '7, '8, '9, '10, 1947.

DONIN: So you—not to interrupt; I'm sorry. So you graduated from Deerfield in 19—

FISHER: Nineteen forty-three.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And then went right to war.

FISHER: Yes, well, that's right.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And not directly to war because I spent a year on Parris Island as a drill instructor. That's the other end of the war. You created the war as a drill instructor. But, yes, I did. And I came up here to apply to

come to Dartmouth, a new dean. I think it was dean—God, I can't remember.

DONIN: Dean of admissions, you mean?

FISHER: No, dean of freshmen.

DONIN: Oh.

FISHER: Whoever that was. Dean Strong was the one who said I could come. It was okay with him. When I arrived, I had this appointment with this fellow, and he sat across the desk, very official. And referred to me as Mr. Fisher—called me Mr. Fisher. I had never until that moment ever been called Mr. Fisher. Twenty-one years old and all that. Never called Mr. Fisher. And he said, "Mr. Fisher, you know we have the GI Bill, and it's a very busy time for all the colleges. And especially here at Dartmouth we find a lot of pressure." He said, "We're going to have to sort of let you know when you might matriculate." So I go in my shirt and pull out this letter, which my father had saved. Although he was a Harvard man, he did respect certain things with any college. And I handed it to him. He reads this letter, which basically said, when you're ready to come to Dartmouth, fine; let us know. "Mr. Fisher, when would you like to join us?" [Laughter] I'm not sure he did me a favor when he said that because from there on, it was four years of hell. [Laughter] This institution was trying to educate me, and I was uneducable. No question about it. The headmaster of the school, Frank Boyden, said to me one day at five in the morning when I had returned from an excursion of mine back home to our farm, he said, "Walter, I can have a few boys like you here, but not too many or I couldn't run the place."

DONIN: [Laughs] You must have been a handful.

FISHER: Well, not really a handful. I just was—I was not an institutional person. Haven't been since. Or ever, I guess. And this fellow said, "Come on up." So I got all ready to come to Dartmouth. And when I got here I was with an old friend—Bobby Merriam was his name; he's a great All-American athlete they had here for years. And he was my roommate. And Bill Embree was here, and he was my roommate. And Bobby Hunt who never sort of made the grade through the college, no fault of the college's. [Laughs] He just didn't make it. His father had started Emery Air Freight, and he wanted to be in the air freight business. So he went where he really should

have been. And of those four roommates, I distinctly remember Bill Embree became the head of the glee club with his pitch whistle and all that stuff. I was walking down the street one day with Bobby, who stood about five foot four, and I was maybe six one at the time, but shrinking rapidly. And this big tall, happy guy about six seven comes walking down the street smiling saying "Hi, there." And I said to Bobby—turned to Bobby and I said, "Who the hell is that?" He said, "Walter, that's the president of the college, John Sloan Dickey." Oh. [Laughter] Was all I could say. From there on I don't think I ever saw Mr. Dickey for four years because he was out making Harvard—Dartmouth into a Harvard, you know, that sort of thing. And he did a pretty good job of doing what he was up to. And beyond that, my academic ins and outs were not dismal, but they were not spectacular in any manner of speaking. I recall very vividly my senior year, after I'd been married to Cappy, we were up here in John Neale's—my speech professor's—house; he was on sabbatical. And we were sitting his house. That was a good deal. No question about it. Maybe we paid some rent, but it wasn't much. And I'm taking Oriental history from Professor Wing Tsit Chan. And he was a genuine Chinese, this guy. You could hardly understand him. And he said to me one day, he said, "Mr. Fisher, you no pass Oriental history, you no graduate." I said, "No, sir, I've used up all my GI points. There's nothing left." He said, "Mr. Fisher, you take our exam over again." [Laughs] And I took it over again, and apparently I passed it. But those were in the days, I think, when college professors had two pressures: One is to educate the youngsters that came before them, and to put up with these GIs who were—I started at 21 years old, not 17 or 18. And he had one guy in our class who was 46 years old and had four children.

DONIN: My, goodness!

FISHER: So there was a variety of these youngsters, and they had a real challenge, I think, in educating them. And many of them never probably thought of going to college—many of them. I was sort of brought up to go to college. But I'm not sure I wanted to go to college. And I'm not sure it did me any good at all. Because when we graduated, I'm married, and the GI Bill was paying us \$110 a month. That's when you were married; you got \$55 a month if you were single. I don't think the new GI Bill is much different, which is absolutely absurd. I don't understand that one. Something ought to be done about it real fast because they've got these youngsters coming back from these little wars we're in, and I just don't really quite understand that. But I do think that the education for me was

at Dartmouth didn't mature me a goddamn bit! I'd already been a drill instructor, and 64 men were—I was God Almighty to 64 men. I was also a field sergeant major out in the Pacific. And I didn't need maturing. I needed something, but it wasn't maturing. So I don't know what its function was for me. Because when I got out, the first job that I was offered—it was the only one I think—was Owings Corning Fiberglass, a new product in the world, in the textile division. And I was paid I think it was 50-some dollars a week. Our rent anywhere was certainly 100, 125 or something like that. You were just poor as a church mouse. And I said, well, if this is what a college education does, I ain't too damned interested anymore. I probably was right about it in the first place. So I then took some jobs that advanced my way of doing things, like the boiler business and stuff like that. But at Dartmouth probably the highlights of my time here—although I wish the college had gone through, like it does now, a year off and this and that, I might have fitted much better. Or do it, get it over with, in two and a half years.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: The four years was a tortuous affair for me. I had to go home to our little farm, and I worked that. My family weren't in the farming business; they were in the cattle business. But I was on this farm down in Connecticut. And I would work that, and I would get all my frustrations out. Then come back here and take some damned history course, which just didn't interest me at all. And I couldn't type. They didn't require you to type in school, which today is not only a requirement, you can't even go in the front door without typing. Well, to this day I don't type, which is really remiss because I can't take the challenge of these computers and all of that that's around me. But I think that was a lacking in the school at the time. I do think our class was the most murderous time for any college to take on anywhere. And John Sloan Dickey, on our tenth reunion, down here at the Inn—it's the only reunion in an organized fashion returned to—he said to that class, "Gentlemen, of course you realize that but for the GI Bill, many of you never would have been here." Well, that wasn't the right thing to say to that class. If it wasn't for the GI Bill you wouldn't be here? You know that's just not a smart thing to say. But the man was in some other world. So I don't think he was a particularly attractive, what do you say? emulator or whatever to emulate. Whereas Hopkins was quite different. I think he was the only previous one. I think Hopkins had resigned or had retired. Or maybe he'd died. I don't think he was a

particularly good leader. But the highlight really of my probably term here was Tom Dent and his lacrosse team.

DONIN: So how did you get involved in playing lacrosse?

FISHER: Well, at the school I went to, we played lacrosse. It was pioneering in those days, I guess, in the thirties and the forties. I was damned good at it. I was a good lacrosse player. And I came up here after being on the varsity football team, the varsity hockey team, and the varsity lacrosse team, came up here after three or four years of not being in condition, that kind of condition anyway, athletic conditioning, and went out for the football team. At the first practice, the guy I was opposite's hand was as big as my whole head. [Laughter] And I weighed 178 pounds playing right tackle. Well, the average right tackle was 278 pounds. And so Tuss McLaughry said, "Walter, you as a freshman, GI freshman, you can play on the varsity." But he said, "But let's try you out on the freshman team." Well, I was in the starting lineup until a fellow by the name of Bill Carpenter showed up, right there. He's an old Dartmouth family. Big guy! Twice my size, or certainly a third bigger. And I find myself starting on one game; I was on the bench the second game. The third game I was the third man down. And then it was suggested by the coach, "Walter, why don't you try Jeremiah's hockey?" And Jeremiah ran a real good hockey group here. And I got on that. I didn't even go out for the varsity there. They were—Reilly, Rondeau, Harris and other notorious Irish from Boston. They were just—this was class A hockey. So I was on the freshman team. And I started out the first defense, first game. The second game, I was second defense. Third game I was third defense. And that was when it was suggested by Jerry Jeremiah...he said, "Walter, you know, your sport really is Tommy Dent's lacrosse. Why don't you try that out." Well, Tommy Dent had 11 people—a sport that carried 11 people on a team. And there were 11 people out for the sport. You couldn't help but start up. That's a little exaggerated. But the fact of the matter is there wasn't a helluva lot of competition. And Tom Dent himself couldn't even play the game. He didn't even know how to throw the ball. But he knew people and he had this fellow Fisher. The first game I played, I remember down on Long Island, I was yelling and screaming out there. I thought I was back in the bloody Marine Corps with a bunch of boots and telling them how to do things. I was giving directions to all of these guys on the field. And I heard myself. I thought, Oh, this is not good. So I pulled myself out of the game. Asked for a substitute. And I sat down, and Tom Dent comes over. And he literally said, "Fisher, what the hell are you

doing over here on the bench?" "Well, Tom, I'm out there yelling and telling these guys to do...." "You get out there! You keep doing that, and don't you ever stop doing it!" [Laughter] That's the only substitution I ever had. We played for four straight seasons. But Tom was a fine guy, outstanding person. And he was probably the highlight of my averaging time here. Although I had some good professors. But they had a lot of work to try to get to me. It really was hard work; I know it was. And when I got the degree, I can't even remember where we had it. Whether it was the Bema or some other damned place. I don't remember. See, I was married. And your life is quite different than the undergraduate average—although we had a lot of married members of the class. But I remember the graduation, and I didn't remember—I wasn't drunk or anything. I didn't have any booze or anything like that. It's just I don't remember it. And I'm told that the diploma, I walked up, and I picked up a diploma. I don't know whether I shook hands with John Sloan or not. But I walked away with it. And somebody took it from me, and that's all I remember of the entire graduation. [Laughter] We got in our car and left town. And I swore to Kappy after a few years—that's my wife—I said, "Sweetheart, there's two places I'm never going to be at: one is I don't want to return here to this goddamn Hanover place; I don't want to see the place again. And number two, I don't want to ever be seen in a nursing home." Today I'm back here, connected with a goddamn pretty nice nursing home. [Laughter] And Dartmouth is where I'm sitting here and talking in the Rauner Library or whatever, Webster Hall. I don't know really.... The feelings I have, you enjoyed, although you were quite older. You were a mature person. You learned a helluva lot of life that hadn't kicked you around a little bit. And so it must be quite different from these youngsters. Because I remember when I was asked to be a Deke, which the house burned down and never got replaced—it's a parking lot. I built the stone wall out in front of it myself personally. I don't know whether it's still there. But the house certainly isn't, and it never got reestablished here. And the other was when I was asked to be a Sphinx, and I went in that place, and that's where I studied. I studied in that bloody place. It's got a library and a big meeting room and a bathroom and a little kitchen. That's what all that dumb building's got in it. Now, having spent, I don't know, a million dollars on it here to try to fix it up here recently.

DONIN: What were they doing to it?

FISHER: Oh, it needed help. Oh, it hadn't had help, Mary, for I suppose a hundred years. The toilets were in terrible shape. Kitchen was zip.

The kitchen was a small kitchen. And the roof, totally re-fixed. So it needed fixing if it was going to stay there. But I have since felt about senior societies and even fraternities that they're really—they're a fine way for people to get together. But you begin to wonder about those people who don't become members who very well would have been outstanding members. But somebody didn't know them, or they didn't socialize. I don't know. I question about that. Then I asked here whether you still have... What do you call it? Ladies' fraternities.

DONIN: Sororities?

FISHER: Sororities. And I understand there are sororities here. Took a while. Because when I asked that question originally, there were no sororities. So I don't know. Dartmouth is a—I was told by, and I think I mentioned, my headmaster... We were all Harvard guys in the family and stuff. Walter, I can get you into Harvard, but I can't keep you there. Well, I'm not sure. If I'd gone to Harvard, I might very well have fought it differently. It's in the city. It's a different environment. I'm not sure whether that would have helped in my education. And I'm not sure whether the education I absorbed—not that it was taught—but that I absorbed really was that damned helpful. I got introduced to a bank once. I introduced myself. I went in unannounced and gave them my grandfather's calling card. And I ended up by being hired by this bank. This was well into my business career, because I was redirecting my efforts. And the guy asked me, he said, "Well, where did you go to school?" And when I told him Deerfield and Dartmouth, that was it. They couldn't put me out in the street. That's the only time I sort of felt, well, goddamn! They're going to accept this as maybe some prestigious background or something, which is absurd. But that's the way the world worked. I don't think it works that way anymore. I don't think the Ivy Leagues need it and all of that.

DONIN: So do you think you were able to perform better here—I know you said it was still a struggle for you—but do you think you were able to perform better here as a result of your time in the military?

FISHER: Well, I don't think it helped particularly. The military is so darned different. I'm not sure—that's a good question. But I'm not sure I can answer that. I don't think.... Did the military help prepare me for Dartmouth College? I don't know as it helped me. When I was here at Dartmouth, I left the school three times. Upped and left. And I wrote a little note to my friends: I'll see you later. I'm going home.

First time I got as far as White River, and I didn't get much farther. The second time I got as far as Springfield, Massachusetts, and didn't get much farther. And then I had to get down to Connecticut, I did get home. Another time I borrowed a friend's car and went over and became the king of the Knox School Winter Carnival because my girlfriend was the queen.

DONIN: Oh....

FISHER: So I was the king. And that's—I don't know whether that's.... I don't see where my military in any part of this helped. I think the military is a gap. It's not a learning process unless you're an itinerant difficult S.O.B. And I follow the rules. When I see the rules are broken, I get upset.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: I was a rule follower. And the services are rules.

DONIN: But surely your time in the military matured you in a way that made you a different student than you would have been if you'd come here directly from Deerfield.

FISHER: I think that's probably quite accurate, yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: But the willingness or the availability of yourself to learn.... My thesis was on Franklin D. Roosevelt. And I became interested in this fellow because he was, in my whole maturing life, he was the president of the United States. Most of it anyway. And I remember taking that very seriously. I couldn't type it out. Kappy had to type the damned thing out to turn it in.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And I'll never know whether I passed it or what I did. I don't know what you do with a thesis. I don't know whether I even got it back. And I don't know whatever happened to it. I guess I turned it in to the history department—I don't know who—because that was my major. But I don't see the military helping me, helping being a part of my personality and absorbing the school better. I had become...when you're in the Marine Corps and you were a drill

instructor, then you go up the ranks and become a sergeant, you're a tough bugger.

DONIN: Hmmm.

FISHER: Now you're not really tough. But there's this façade. You've got to put on this damned façade. Well, all that stuff in the military has I don't think helped me. I grew up; I was 21 years old when I entered this college. So that's about your age of graduating and graduate school. It's theoretically at that age that you absorb some of the special—law school or medical school or stuff like that. I can't answer that question, whether it was helpful.

DONIN: So how did it feel to come here and have to be a freshman and wear a beanie? I mean you were a sergeant in the Marines.

FISHER: Oh, I've got a story on that one. Oh oh! The beanie?

DONIN: Yes.

FISHER: Mary, the beanie wasn't worn by many people.

DONIN: I see.

FISHER: In my class. I remember one—I'm coming out of New Hampshire Hall, and I was rooming with Bobby Merriam. Everybody knew the guy. He went through school here. While I was out in the Marine Corps, he was going through school here. He was captain of two sports, an All-American in two sports and played three sports: soccer, hockey, and lacrosse. He was known. Everybody knew Bobby Merriam. And I'm walking out of New Hampshire Hall up the hill here by the Hood Museum and stuff. And it was that time of the moving in when people are moving furniture around. "Hey, Frosh!" Yes, well.... Bobby saw these guys coming down, and they saw he wasn't wearing a beanie—or whatever the hell. But they saw I was a new boy. And the guy was putting up his hands to get my attention. And Bobby goes by, he says, "George, I wouldn't do that." [Laughter] George kept walking. But that was.... But we quashed that real fast, I think that class.

DONIN: Because you were GIs or because...?

FISHER: Sure. We were older!

DONIN: Right.

FISHER: You're not going to kick us around. As you say, we're not 17 or 18. We're 21 or 22.

DONIN: You were the same age as the seniors, essentially.

FISHER: Yes, that's correct. So the class on the whole I don't think suffered from that. Although I think a third of this class of '50 are normally matriculated students. So there were a bunch of them wearing.... I had to ask one day, what's that? Well, Walter, that's freshman beanie or whatever. And that just passed over. We just didn't fool around with that. Just didn't fool around with that at all.

DONIN: What did it do to a feeling of sort of class cohesion to have this huge age spread and maturity and experience?

FISHER: I think it was a good class. I was looking quickly through the book here. This fellow... or the Fitkins both were younger; they hadn't been in the service at all. And a lot of these guys I knew very well. And they're all quite younger; some of them are quite younger. I don't know—they don't give ages on here. I think Field, John Field, was.

DONIN: It didn't hold you back to—

FISHER: It didn't make any difference. I don't think it made any difference at all. I didn't feel any different.

DONIN: Were your roommates all GIs? Or were they—

FISHER: Yes. Yes. And Bobby Hutton was in the Marine Corps. Bill Embree was in the Army. Bobby had gone through the V-12, was in the Navy. He was the only officer. So we kicked him around a little. The rest of us had been enlisted, you know. There is a difference in the service for those things.

DONIN: Now, do you have memories of favorite professors?

FISHER: Well, Wing Tsit Chan became a friend. [Laughs] No, I was thinking of that. It's the one thing I did think of. John Neale I remember because we rented his house, and he was very helpful in some of the speech. It was speech. Like don't complain, have a complaining voice, or whatever. Have your feelings expressed in the voice that

you want to—that sort of thing. My history professors, on the whole, either they're an absolute blank—absolute blank. Probably if you ran a bunch of names by me at one point or another, I'd have recognized them. But as I say, the academic side simply....

[Pause] Christ! There's Embree on the same page. Isn't he cute?

DONIN: Who's that?

FISHER: Bill Embree.

DONIN: Oh. He's one of your roommates, right?

FISHER: Yes, our freshman year.

DONIN: Okay. So no history professors that are memorable.

FISHER: No. And I'm trying to think.... Doc Pollard was Hygiene I.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And a couple of other courses that we took which were for the GI or the military side were just—don't bother us with it! But the school had to bother with it because they had about a third of that class that weren't—hadn't gone through that. It was difficult.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And Pudge Neidlinger handled 'em in almost military fashion. I mean he didn't fool around. I remember once when—it was Neidlinger, I think—reported that I was walking by, going to the field house or the gymnasium with my wife. And out of the fourth floor of New Hampshire Hall a bottle of beer, corked bottle of beer, came flying and crashed right in front of us. And he knew what was going on. He probably knew who was in that damned room after that. He made sure he knew who was in that room. But he let that go. But he let the residents, namely myself and a few others, that you don't do that. You're not going to do that anymore. If you think you're going to do that here, you're nuts. And he sort of treated the GI with respect just like he would anybody else. But he also treated us with understanding. I never saw the guy in his office ever. Only time I saw him was when I married Kappy, I asked Tommy Dent permission to—we were in the cage up here practicing; used to be a baseball cage down there—I don't know whether it's still there, off

the tennis, this end of the gym. We were practicing up there. And I asked Tom would it be all right if I got married. He was very familiar with my lady whom I was interested in because she'd gone to some of the games and stuff like that. And he said, "Fisher, that's probably a good idea because if you don't, you're going to get in trouble. So, yes, you get married." So we set a date to get married, February 3rd of 1950. And about two, three weeks later, Tom says—we were practicing—he says, "Fisher—" he called me Fisher. It wasn't Mr. Fisher. It was Fisher. Walter occasionally, but most of the time Fisher. As he had understood the military very well; that's what he was in was the Black Watch and stuff. And he said, "Have you talked to the dean about your getting married?" I said, "No, Tom, I haven't talked to the dean. Why have I got to talk to the dean?" "Talk to the dean and tell him you want to get married!" Yes, sir. So I went up to the dean's office, that same building I think it was over there. It probably housed the administration. And I walk in there. And he had already been called, I think, and Tom Dent had talked to him about this Fisher person. And I almost got into his office. I'd never been there before. He puts his hand up and says, "You've got one week and that's it!" Yes, sir. I had one week to get married, and have a honeymoon, and get my tail back here at the college. I had one week's leave.

DONIN: [Laughs]

FISHER: That was Pudge Neidlinger.

DONIN: Yes, yes. So let's hear how it was that you came to meet Mrs. Fisher and how she came to be on campus and how you got married and all that.

FISHER: Oh, God! That's a Dartmouth affair from start to finish. I do remember in my mind seeing Kappy when she was maybe 15, and I was 18 or 19. I guess I'd seen her when I was 20, 21 or so because that's when I came back. And she was maybe 16, 17. She's four years younger than I am. So whatever that is. About 17. I remember her seeing her. So we're having a Winter Carnival up here or Green Key or something like that. And one of my very closest good friends, a fellow by the name of Dick Van Deusen, who was engaged to Barbara Condon. She was with the Smith... the Smithenpoofs; they were singing around the various places around campus, the clubs and so on. And I was being host. And I remember having a beer at the whatever, Delta house or something. And then we'd go to another place and I'd have another

beer at that particular fraternity. And by the time I'd had my third beer—I'm known as "Two beer Fisher." So three beers, you've to watch Walter. And that's all I've ever drunk all my life is beer. I've maybe swerved off occasionally on something. But that's about it. And about the third beer I realized that an engaged couple, you don't escort them, you don't do nothing. You just forget 'em. You make sure they haven't been destroyed or something but you don't bother with them because they're not bothering with you. So I go into this Psi U house or the Theta Delta, I can't remember, down here by the church a couple of houses down there. Go in there, and I'm looking around. And they're singing, Smith is singing their songs. And Dick, he's a great politician. He was the president of our class at Deerfield. And was an undersecretary of HUD and met Mitt Romney's father, the governor Michigan. He had been playing this racket all his life. And he was a corporate lawyer. I go in there, this fraternity, and he was circulating. And I look in the living room, and there's a bunch of people sitting down on couches. And there's Jake B_____, the manager of this lacrosse team I was on. And a damned good manager he was. And he had a date. And as it turned out, it was a total blind date, and the date was Kappy Blodgett, my present wife. And I recognized her. I don't know how I recognized her, but I recognized her. And I engaged them in conversation. And I did write her a note. She went to Briarcliff before it became a part of Pace College, right. Briarcliff before it did that. And wrote her down there if we could have a date. She lived in the town next to—my town was New Canaan, Connecticut, and her town was Darien, Connecticut. So I made a date with her. And my family, we had a farm, and we went riding. And that was our first date. From thereon it was a determined effort on my part. And she finally acquiesced after a year or so. And we were—how the hell did that go? I was flat broke. My family were not penniless. My family had done very well one way or another, and so we were not short of cash. But I had no allowance, I had no money coming in at all that I didn't have to ask for or earn. And I said to my father who ultimately was my best man. He had half a dozen children, but he was my best man, which was the smartest thing I ever did. Because as the best man I charged him all the presents to my ushers, which was all right, I charged them to him. And I charged this and charged that. Finally when Kappy and I came home, either on a vacation or visiting, from one place to another, or traveling on business or whatever, and we stopped in at the club my family belonged to. My father had taken his clubs away with him off down to the ranch, and I had no clubs. So I charged a set of clubs, a modest set of clubs, but a set of clubs. Which I figured could be used. I mean this wasn't

a waste. And about six months later I saw my father. And he said, "Did you charge—did you get a set of clubs at the country club a while back?" "Yes, I did." "We won't do that again." [Laughter] He's talking to a 26-, 27-year-old person with, I think I had two children on the ground or certainly Connie was on the ground. "We won't do that again." But he was my best man.

DONIN: [Laughs] Yes.

FISHER: I didn't take advantage of him. He was my best man. But that was— Our first car—we had to have a car; I didn't own a car at all. Never did own a car. And we had to have a car. So my best man buys a 1938—this was in 1950—1938 Buick Limited from an old friend of his who was trading it in, who was also in the cattle business. And he bought that car. It was a limited car; it had pup seats in the back. It was a limousine of its type—big car. Not terribly big, but it was big. And we're up here, and we went on a honeymoon in it, and went to the Wilmington Country Inn up near Lake Placid, next town to Lake Placid. And came back here, and the car was there, and I was off to classes. And Kappy was doing some shopping or something. And she tried to park that car in Hanover. And in those days it wasn't like it is today. But it was crowded. And people would stop on the side of the road and watch this young lady try to park this goddamned car. And it was apparently a source of quite a lot of amusement. As a matter of fact, when she was back in town, New Canaan, when she was parking it in the middle of town, my father'd be on the sidewalk or something, happened to see her, and he'd say, "George, come over here and watch this." [Laughter] "Harry, want to see a sight?" Side parking. Well, that's where you had to back into the darn place.

DONIN: Yes. Terrible.

FISHER: Yes. Well, she's borne with me now coming 57 or 58 years. And she's been a gem. She's just been wonderful. We have four children, all girls. And that's when one of my friends, Sandy McCulloch, who was at one time the chairman of our board of trustees here and who's a very close friend of mine.... What was I going to say?

DONIN: Something about the car? About watching her park the car?

FISHER: What the hell brought Sandy into this?

DONIN: Did he ever watch her park the car?

FISHER: No, no, no, he didn't. I don't know what the hell brought him in. But I've seen him recently. He's still raising hell up here in the background.

DONIN: Oh, I know. I'm going to be interviewing him.

FISHER: Are you? [Laughs]

DONIN: Yes.

FISHER: You want to watch him now. [Laughter] Keep your eye on him. He just had a triple bypass.

DONIN: He's a remarkable man.

FISHER: Yes. Well, I remember when he had that. I'm a quadruple bypass 25 years ago.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: He was having some heart trouble, and they put these stents in him. And I said, "Sandy, I'm no goddamn medical genius. But those are temporary." In those days it was definitely temporary. And he said, "Aw, but it's what I want to do." Well, since this triple bypass he's had, he's going to be a helluva lot better off.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And I haven't had the opportunity to tell him that since, that I told you so.

DONIN: [Laughs] So you brought your wife back here—she was now Mrs. Fisher—in what? I guess in the spring of 1950.

FISHER: February 3rd...February 10th. He had given me one week. We were married on February 3rd. And one week later we were here.

DONIN: So you only had to get through that last term as a couple up here before you graduated.

FISHER: That's right. Yes, yes.

DONIN: And that's when you were housesitting for Professor Neale.

FISHER: For Professor Neale, yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

FISHER: Which was a coal-fired furnace. Coal-fired!

DONIN: You had to scoop the coal in?

FISHER: You're damned right. You had to bank it, you had to learn—I'd never done that. We'd had wood. I knew how to handle wood. But coal is different. You have to bank it if you're going to leave it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Otherwise it collects gas, and then pachew! It doesn't blow the whole thing up, but it raises Cain with the process. And so I learned that from, what the hell was his name? Leslie or whatever, the manager of the Deke house. Our janitor down there. Oh, God, what was his name? Nice guy. He had to come up there and teach me how to do it.

DONIN: Mmm. Mm-hmm.

FISHER: I mean I don't think we almost burned the place down. I do remember that cute house. This is the first house—you go out here and you come to the Co-op.

DONIN: Oh, yes?

FISHER: You come to the Co-op and to the gas station. Then you come to a nursing home of some sort.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Then you come to an assisted living, to the first house beyond that, a white house, cute white house. Hasn't changed a bit in 50 years. That's the house we were in. And once again, what the hell was I going to say? Had something to do with I think Kendal. Oh, when I say—oh, when I talk to people at Kendal, they say, "Well, what brought you here?" I tell them, "Oh, our first house that we lived in is about a quarter of a mile down the street." Some remark like that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So did you—was she able to do anything that semester while you were finishing up?

FISHER: You mean like work at something or whatever? No, there wasn't anything anybody could do. The wives of most of our students, there wasn't really employment unless you did it like Nelson Graves. He was married, I think, well, into our—or Stewart Kaye. They were married for several years. They had established certain, you know, living habits and so on. But there was no—the female in those days was not a working end of things; you just didn't. They occupied themselves very usefully in whatever they did. But it wasn't in employment. There just wasn't any opportunities, I don't think.

DONIN: Well, especially if you're only here for a semester.

FISHER: And then you're gone in the summer and stuff like that, which is something we missed. I wish we'd had summers off, sophomores in the spring and in the summer and stuff like that.

DONIN: Now when you— At that point were there still married GLs living in some of the dorms and like in Sachem Village and Wigwam?

FISHER: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes, yes. Absolutely.

DONIN: Fayerweather?

FISHER: There were two, Sachem Village and one down over here, which were two-story PB huts, they were.

DONIN: Wigwam?

FISHER: Wigwam, yes, yes. I thought of going into one of those. But this Professor Neale's situation came up, and I was seeking an alternative. Because as I recall, everybody—when you were on the second floor, you took the rug up during the day so the heat out of the lower one would come up and heat your place. And these were separate heaters. You got your own fuel and all that stuff. And everybody knew when everybody's child was conceived.

DONIN: [Laughs] Yes.

FISHER: And Jesus! I didn't need that. You know [Laughter] I just didn't want that sort of thing. So I sought out some other alternative.

DONIN: I guess there were a lot of babies born those years.

FISHER: Oh, yes. That's the so-called booming—boomer generation.

DONIN: Yes, Baby Boom.

FISHER: Baby Boomer.

DONIN: The beginning of it, that's right. That's right.

FISHER: Yes, yes.

DONIN: Did you find that your social life was more oriented towards other married couples, or did you still go to Deke house and socialize?

FISHER: Didn't have a social life. You really didn't. You saw people by accident. You may have gone over to the Graveses' or otherwise for supper or something.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: But you didn't have—you were studying, you know. There was no social life to speak of.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: You were supposed to be studying. If I hadn't studied, I never would have gotten through Dartmouth College. I looked at studies as a necessity, not an inquiring pleasure or whatever. Which is too bad. Too bad. But how many students do take pleasure in their studies? I don't know. I tend to think college is probably wasted on a decent percentage of people. Just plain wasted! And I'm sorry it was wasted on me because it was. I do remember calling Mr. Boyden up after I'd been here a couple of years and said, "Mr. Boyden, I think I'd like to go to law school," because all my relatives were lawyers or had law degrees and all that. Had an old brother who went to Harvard when he was 16, graduated when he was 19. Stuff like that. I was at war in a lot of that. But Mr. Boyden, it took him quite a while to write me back. I was on three of his varsity teams, and he knew me three or four different ways. And academically he knew plenty about me. And it took him about a month. And he would be driven around by a guy that Charles Dana—not Charlie Dana. That's another story. Charles—oh, God, he's a stockbroker.

Merrill Lynch, Charles Merrill of Merrill Lynch who would send to Mr. Boyden and say, build this building and do that building. Well, he sent him a goddamn Cadillac limousine with a driver. And he'd had it a long time. And Mr. Boyden would drive in this car. He'd sit in the front seat. He'd say, "Sit in the backseat" to somebody else; a faculty member or somebody would be in the backseat or nobody. Oh, he would have—his secretary went with him. She would sit in the backseat, and he'd sit in the front seat, and he'd dictate because he had a pretty heavy schedule that way. It took him about three weeks to write me back. And that's unusual for him. And it said basically, "Walter, you're sure you're not trying to sort of postpone the inevitable?" It wasn't thoroughly well thought out. But what he was trying to get to me is he didn't want to say, Walter, you probably won't get through the first month of law school, much less graduate as a lawyer. But he sort of discouraged it. So that, if I had gone to law school and gotten interested in something of a political or otherwise nature, I probably would have gotten a heck of a lot more out of education. As it was, my business was either my family's business, which was reorganized, the cattle business; I had to leave it because my father had died in his middle fifties. We were 28 years old and two or three children, and I couldn't stay on that because my older brother was running it. So I had to leave that. If I had, I think, stayed in that, I probably would have had a whole different life. But as a result, I went into the power plant equipment business: boilers, steam generators. And then I went into finance. That's when I walked into a bank in New York.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

FISHER: And went into the banking business.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And I did the vice president's bit or this bit or that bit; the head of this department or all of that stuff. But I was not going to be the head of the bank, and I should have been. Would have made a damned good head of a bank.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: But I didn't play their game, I just didn't. Because I didn't know—not because I didn't know how; I just didn't play that game. And as a result, I ended up by leaving the banking business when I was 55. Joined another bank who created a position for me called vice

president of commercial development, something like that. Then they collapsed the job after two years, and then the bank collapsed a year after that. I was 58 years old, and I needed employment. I remember one of my children, our youngest youngster, was looking for a job while her father was looking for a job. And I answered an ad, a little ad no bigger than an inch by an inch in a local paper around New London, Connecticut, where we had moved, to Mystic, Connecticut. And it said: Leading commercial enterprise—financial commercial enterprise—looking for, I don't know, I don't know how they worded it. But they didn't say agents. Well, it was a goddamn insurance company. And I responded to it. I met this guy, and he made me into an insurance agent in about six weeks. I became the leading insurance agent for that company in the Northeast for a number of years. Made enough out of it to where we were in good shape. Then at around 75, which is more or less ten years ago, I left it. That I think my education did come to the fore because people, when you're out there talking about what did you do? Or you're talking to a company to get his 401K plan or smaller businesses. I came up here once on some post-retirement medical benefits, a big program we had. Just a beautiful program. Well, they wanted to know the background of the person they were talking to. That was the only time, only period, in my life, and it wasn't just that—I suppose it may have happened in the banking business—like where did you go to college?

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Well, Jesus! I hated to answer that question. Not that I objected to being at Dartmouth. But I hated that that had anything to do with the price of beans. But it did. I don't know whether it still does, do you suppose?

DONIN: Maybe in some of the more traditional fields like banking, it probably does.

FISHER: Yes, yes.

DONIN: I suspect.

FISHER: Otherwise you're a producer, and you either produce or you don't. Yes. So I think maybe my education—I belittle it simply because I wasn't brilliant at the academic side of it; I wish I were better. Every once in a while I'd get a little spurt. I took up the piano when I was 70, and it took five years for me to come to the realization that I was

not [Laughs] going to be able to play the piano worth a ding-dong. [Laughter] But every once in a while I'm playing the piano, and I got pretty good at diddling around with it in a disciplined way, every once in a while I felt like oh, if I could just hit the right note there. It just didn't come. And that sometimes just—that happens with people. I think they reach a point, and if it works, great; doesn't work, you'd better give it up and try something else. And if you get a kick out of something, then do it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Do it. Play it. Now I think that's where education, a Dartmouth College, to the 17, 18, 19, 20, 21-year old, that era of four or five years, is helpful. I think that's one of the reasons why you exist is to take these young persons and give them something to go by. But I missed that. I was never a teenager. Never! I worked on our farm, and I worked all the time. I never did teenage things. And then for crying out loud I was in the goddamn Marine Corps. I just never—the childish things never were a part of me. I took work very seriously. I was a hard-working guy. Still am. We run this little farm; I rebuilt the whole damned thing. Barns, fences, pasture. When I was 75 we came up here, and for the last eight years have been building this bloody place. So I'm still doing that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: I think maybe education, that is a different kind of education, but you acquire it sort of differently. I think colleges miss, probably miss, getting to a lot of students because they can't quite get to them. There are professors, teachers, and people who really want to make a very sincere effort to get to that youngster because that's what you're trying to do, to get to them. And I think colleges probably could do very well—McCulloch started fooling around at Dartmouth here. He had a lot of money. He had a successful family business which he almost screwed up. And then turned around and married a girl who had more money than Carter had liver pills. Her father was an original partner of Merrill Lynch, and they just had a lot of money. And he started throwing it around. And he makes no bones about it; he was an alcoholic. He was an alcoholic because he was a spoiled brat. And he needed to be straightened out. Well, he straightened himself out. And he, I think, has tried this getting to the student. Getting to them. Because they never got to him. He's a smart guy. He got Bs and As. And Christ! He didn't have to work. He went off to France with Funkhouser for a year and played

school. So it never got to him. But I think he has that feeling. And that's why I think he did so well by this guy they made president who brought in the computer world. Sandy didn't understand the computer world. But he got this guy, and he became president. I forget which president.

DONIN: [John] Kemeny?

FISHER: Kemeny, I guess.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Yes, Kemeny.

DONIN: And Sandy McCulloch was also chair of the search committee that hired Jim Freedman, who was the president after David McLaughlin.

FISHER: Right, yes, yes. He's good at that.

DONIN: Yes.

FISHER: Sandy's been very good at that. And it's hard to sort of relate to some of the things in our undergraduate years. The performance of—I think Sandy's a year or two younger than I am, so those are pretty critical years there. I think he'll tell you he's just 80—if he's 80, just 80 or is just 81. I'm about to be 82 or 83. So that difference in years in growing up are getting in these undergraduate.... I think as an undergraduate, Sandy was not a star. And I don't think he liked not being a star. He associated with the stars. I've sort of been that way. I've had good friends that were, you know, recognized or whatever as being what they were, the president of the class and stuff like that. But the president of our class was [Robert] Bob Kilmarx. He was the handsomest sonofabitch in the whole place. He was a good-looking guy.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And like there's another guy we had here married an actress. Cary Grant? No, something Grant. Married that comedian lady. But these were guys that were natural politicians. And Kilmarx today is the same damned thing. He's just a good-looking, friendly bugger. And these guys can disregard or otherwise absorb and put it in a pocket somewhere things that aren't quite right. And if I know something

isn't quite right and I'm a part of it, I want to correct it. These guys learn how to dodge around that correction, the brutal treatment of it. And come around the backside and maybe give it a slice in the tail and get rid of it that way. I just never learned that. Haven't learned that even at Kendal. We have a bunch of Dartmouth guys up there at Kendal.

DONIN: Sure do.

FISHER: I don't dare admit that I went to Dartmouth. [Laughter] Oh, my....

DONIN: So did you participate—I think everybody had to as a senior—did you participate in Dickey's Great Issues course?

FISHER: Oh, yes. Now that you mention it, that was a course—that wasn't even a credit course. It had nothing to do with your undergrad, I think you took it. I'm not sure you got points; maybe you did. One of the reasons why I probably did graduate. I enjoyed that—enjoyed it is hardly the word. I appreciated that, what it was all about. Reading the papers and all of that stuff. I'm not sure whether...I continue to look at newspapers and periodicals as a more reliable source of learning or hearing about current events and so on...much more reliable since the television has gone absolutely bonkers. I swear at the television set more than it talks to me. I talk back to it. You know I've got a lot of company, I think, when it comes to that. So I think the Great Issues course was a good deal, yes. Dickey did a good job on that. He had [Robert] Frost in here as a professor. And of course Frost is where one of our daughters lives up here in Franconia is not a nice man, you know. He beat his wives, and beat one badly and stuff like that. Since then I've not been a Frost seeker. But he had Frost. And we'd all meet around like a meeting. And he'd get up there, and he never got to me. Never got to me, like mending fences and walls and whatever the hell all this stuff. This is a bunch of gobbledy-gook. I wrote poems. But no good poems I've ever written—made no sense at all because they're your thoughts. And you get a thought here, and there's not much continuity in a lot of them. You rhyme 'em, but you don't rhyme 'em. Maybe the fad is you don't rhyme it. This is not a rhyme. That's a poem? Frost never got to me. I think I appreciated what he was doing, but he never got to me I don't think. That was one of Dickey's contributions.

DONIN: Sure. And I think he invited a lot of sort of his connections from the State Department as well.

FISHER: Oh, big boys, oh, yes. Some big stuff. Well, he was in the State Department, you know.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: That's where they picked him out of. He was a Roosevelt Democrat. And Jesus Christ! That alone is dangerous, I mean highly volatile. Here at Dartmouth College I don't think there was a Democrat in the whole darned school up until the war. Wouldn't dare. But it is a versatile world we have.

DONIN: Yes, it is.

FISHER: [Laughs] Yes.

DONIN: So what have I forgotten to ask you about?

FISHER: Oh, God!

DONIN: Did you stay connected to the school after you left?

FISHER: I rarely— Two reasons for that: Physically we were not that close; we were in Boston and Florida and Philadelphia and Chicago. So it wasn't easy to come here. I think my tenth reunion, after the tenth reunion, where I might have been a disgrace, I don't know; so was McCulloch and a few others a disgrace. But I didn't really feel that connected. And once—we used to go to a football game occasionally when we were out of Boston and all. But I didn't know a soul on the team, of course. And then when they became somebody's children, that was very, very seldom, I couldn't get accutely interested in the football. Baseball was not a sport I was interested in—or I didn't get much out of baseball. Takes too much time. There isn't enough action. Coming back—the only times we've come back, we've come into town tailgating. And the friends we were with would go to the football game, and we would go with Stewart Kaye and his wife to the girls' field hockey because their grandchild was one of the players. And that was fun. I thought that was. People would say, well, aren't you going? No, we're going to go over to the field hockey. The field hockey? Really? And they'd play it on Tommy Dent's field that was named after Scully; gave some money to.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

- FISHER: So coming back in athletics.... There have been some, I very—not deliberately so much—is I didn’t make myself available to some of these regional meetings they have to discuss one thing or another. I’ve been a class agent for my school down there. And it’s gotten a little discouraging because they changed headmasters, and now they’ve got a headmistress. And we don’t give \$100 million to get on the board. I don’t have \$100 million to get on the board. I can put some money in there, but it wouldn’t even come close to that. McCulloch, he’d buy his way onto a board like that, boom, he was there. That’s not a criticism. It’s just the goddamn fact. And that bothers me a little bit. At Deerfield I told the headmaster I wanted to be on the board. And I had several brothers there and myself. And Mr. Boyden and my father were very good friends. As my father said to him, as a matter of fact, said to him when my older brother was applying and I was there on the trip: Mr. Boyden said, “Well, we’ll have Brad. Brad’s, you know, we’d like to have Brad.” And my father says, “You take one, Mr. Boyden, you take ‘em all.” [Laughter] Yes, Okay? Those were in the days....
- DONIN: It was a package deal.
- FISHER: When you made those deals.
- DONIN: Yes.
- FISHER: And my father said, “And I’ll pay you when I can.” Okay. [Laughter]
- DONIN: Times have changed, haven’t they?
- FISHER: Yes. Well, the events of the school have not been a part of our life to a great extent.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- FISHER: We’ve gotten together with people we know. But it had nothing to do with school.
- DONIN: Right. So are you mostly friends with people who were also GIs? Or who were also traditional undergrads?
- FISHER: Oh, in the businesses I’ve been and in the social environment we’ve been in, it’s a mix. It had nothing to do with colleges.

DONIN: Oh, I see. Right.

FISHER: Yes. Our social life has had nothing to do with the college. In other words, what you're really suggesting is maybe your college life goes into your mature years.

DONIN: Right.

FISHER: Well, that's true of a number of my classmates – I've gotten these communications – I know have done that. They've felt comfortable doing that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: I have not done that at all. Not at all. Not deliberately not done it, but certainly haven't had I don't think the time or the inclination. Some of us are very comfortable in an institutional sort of shelter, environment. Whenever I see that happening, I want to bust the bloody thing wide open and forget it. I don't feel comfortable in that. And recently here at Kendal they've made me—I was made, asked to be, I'm on several committees up there. But one, I was asked to be treasurer. And I was the 18th person asked to be treasurer. And they were pleased to have me because they'd asked 17 people before me, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I saw why they wouldn't take it.

DONIN: Oh....

FISHER: And I started changing things and doing this and doing that. Oh, no, Walter! Can't do that. And I was gotten together for an hour by two people and they as much as told me that I needed to excuse myself. The environment. Or the institutional sort of sequestering. Well, yes. So I'm still trouble. Not trouble. But I'm probably suspicious of it, yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Yes. Maybe independent—this may be the word.

DONIN: That's a good word.

FISHER: But you can't survive that way. Not in this world. You cannot survive an independent. Like a self-made—there's a term that you're a self-made person. Well, that's one big bunch of baloney. You can't be a

self-made person! It took two people to get you there in the first place.

DONIN: Right.

FISHER: And to get anywhere in the world, you're not self-made. Somebody somehow, and lots of people helped you do what you're doing, including what my life has been. And Dartmouth's been a part of that, no question about that.

DONIN: Right.

FISHER: I could probably give a talk to a freshman class that might discourage the hell out of them. But it might also identify some of the avenues that are available.

DONIN: Sure.

FISHER: Sort of like that. But I think I was going to say I wanted to be a trustee of Deerfield.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And this headmaster—his name is Widmer; he just became the headmaster of King's Academy, which is the King of Jordan's new school over there, imitating Deerfield's environment. They built it, and Widmer went over there because the King of Jordan went to Deerfield. And I asked him, I said I'd like to talk to you about being a trustee. The man never talked to me again. Never! He wouldn't talk to me. He avoided me on the football field. I do down there on the way to... because that's on the way back from one thing or another and I stopped in there once. Said, "Well, I'll see you down at the football field." He got on his goddamned bike after the game and rode out. There I was. He wouldn't talk to me. And I got a letter from Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC, where anybody who is anybody lives on Massachusetts Avenue, I'm told. And this letter said, "Walter—" I think this was the chairman of the board of trustees then or some member of the board of trustees. "We are going in a different direction." That's really all it said. They didn't know what the hell direction I was going to go in! They knew one thing: They weren't too darned sure what direction I would like to address things at. And I'm not sure that independent kind of way hasn't helped me. And I think Dartmouth helped me there. I never got quashed here.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: Nobody ever beat on me. The only beat-ups I ever got here at all was from Tommy Dent who would have to lecture me every once in a while.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: And at the time I was elected captain, I wasn't there. And they had a meeting down at the field house; that's when the varsity teams dressed underneath there in the cellar. There was a meeting to elect the captain. Well, I knew it, and being a Sphinx, I went to the Sphinx. I wasn't going to go to that meeting. I knew goddamn well that if put somebody put my name up or they had a discussion or whatnot, I didn't want to be there.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FISHER: [Laughs] So I wasn't there. And various other people were put up, I understand. And I understand that when it came to a vote, Tommy Dent said, "You can vote for anybody you want here, but I can tell you when you're all through, Fisher's going to be the captain." [Laughter] That's loyalty! That is loyalty!

DONIN: Great. [Laughter]

FISHER: Oh, God!

DONIN: Okay, I'm going to turn off the tape.

FISHER: Yes, ma'am. [Laughter]

[End of Interview]