

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Nelson Bryant '46
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: My name is Mary Donin and I am here in West Tisbury, Massachusetts with Nelson Bryant, Dartmouth class of 1946 and yes, it is his birthday today. Nelson, we may be repeating a little bit of what you and I talked about in the car while we were driving here from the ferry but tell us for the purpose of the recording how it is you landed at Dartmouth, matriculating at Dartmouth in the fall of 1942.

BRYANT: I believe that tape was correct but I do want to check it again. I was graduated with the class of '41 here at Vineyard Haven High School and I had no idea what I was going to do. But we had some summer friends named the Hulls, Daniel and Margaret Hull, were the parents. And they were much in favor of youngsters furthering their education. But one of my problems was my family was just getting by. So there wasn't any money to go to college. Well, then they suggested— Margaret Hull had a relative named Dick Leach, who ran a boys' school in Norfolk, Connecticut. There were only, as I recall, about a dozen students. And Dick Leach proposed to me that I could go to Norfolk at no cost to myself and attend two courses a day. And the rest of the time I would spend working for the school, either cutting wood that they used to heat all their buildings, or working on a farm that was associated with them, plus other things. So I agreed to do that. And one day I was using a neighbor's horse. I happen to remember her name because I was very fond of her. Her name was Nellie. And turning over some new ground. And this gentleman, retired Army officer, whose name escapes me, lived down the hill a little ways, and he had walked up and was standing there looking at me. And then he indicated he wanted to talk to me. So I stopped Nellie. And he said, "Young man, I like the way you work. I think that you'd be a good candidate for Dartmouth." And I said, "That's very nice Colonel—" or whatever he was—"but I don't have a pot to piss in, and neither does my family." And he said, "Never mind the money. We'll get you into Dartmouth. Is that okay with you?" And I said, "Sure." So a few months later I was informed that I'd been accepted at Dartmouth. But I still didn't know how I was going to pay for it. But then my

mother's father died and left her a little money, enough— And I keep thinking, as I mentioned to you earlier, Mary, I keep thinking it was less than 500 bucks for a summer semester at Dartmouth. Anyway, I went to Dartmouth that summer and it was a strange experience for me. For instance, I believe it must have been [Ernest] Martin Hopkins who was the president then. There was a long line of new students greeting the president, or the president greeting them, and everybody before me, he said, "Oh, I remember your uncle." "I remember your father." And when he got to me, there was nothing for him to remember. But I realized that I was in kind of a special place where well-to-do people were attending. So I started my studies, about which I remember very little. But then we, all the freshmen, were eating at a place called the Commons. And some sort of food disease struck 90 percent of us, and we all wound up in Dick's House. So most of my summer semester was spent getting well at Dick's House. And that takes me through to the end of that semester. And then I decided— Do you want me to just keep running on like this?

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

BRYANT: And then I decided— The war was on and had been on. And I decided that I really should go do my bit. So I came home. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I mean what branch of service. But I came home. And so my way of dealing with that was I volunteered for the draft. And I wound up in an outfit in Washington, DC, called the Second Signal Service Battalion. And I later discovered that it was—I don't know how to describe it. It was an intelligence, cryptography outfit, specialists in languages. And I think the reason I was chosen [was] because I scored very high on my English. But I apparently wasn't bright enough to be one of the decoders—if that's the word. So I wound up in the supply depot of the Second Signal Service Battalion, handing out shoes and socks. And this to me lacked the romantic quality of combat. [Laughter] And as a matter of fact, there's one funny little anecdote. I went to Washington one day just to look around the town. And a young ensign was walking down the street. I can still see him. He had white gloves on. And he came up and said "hello." And I said, "Hello." And he said, "Who are you with?" And I said, "I'm with the Second Signal Service Battalion." And apparently he was in something similar because he took off one of his white gloves, and he said, "I've heard about the wonderful work you're doing." Well, I didn't tell him I was handing outsocks. So anyway, I went to my company commander, and I said, "I would like to leave the battalion and volunteer for the

parachute infantry.” And he said, “If that’s what you want, Nelson, you can have it.” So I started—I wanted to get in shape. So I started putting on a gas mask and running around our parade grounds. I’d do three, four miles a night.

DONIN: Wow!

BRYANT: And then I came back to the barracks one night, and told my buddy in the barracks, I said, “Something’s wrong. I don’t feel right.” And the next thing I remember were an ambulance heading for DC, where a doctor looked at me. Oh, then I sort of blanked out. But it turns out that I had spinal meningitis.

DONIN: Oh!

BRYANT: And the doctor told me that—what did he say? He said, “Nelson—“ Oh, I’m sorry. I’m leaping around. Anyway, I got over the meningitis. I got in the Airborne. I qualified. And then I came back in my paratrooper uniform to see my old buddies in the Second Signal Service Battalion. Oh, and I met the doctor who was still there. And he said, “Jesus Christ!” He said, “This is amazing.” He said, “You know, Nelson, I never told you.” He said, “But I was completely befuddled by your symptoms because there had been no cases of meningitis in Washington. But I figured that’s what you had to have. And that’s what that was.” So that carries me into the Airborne.

DONIN: Is meningitis—it’s contagious?

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: So they don’t know where you got it?

BRYANT: No. The only thing is I thought of that gas mask.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: That I put on. I don’t know. But anyway with the meningitis I came down here on the Vineyard for a month and a half of relaxation and getting well. And then I went into jump training in the paratroopers.

DONIN: Where’d you do the training?

BRYANT: Fort Benning.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

BRYANT: And I guess that's the correct chronology of that one.

DONIN: Right. So you had this amazing war experience, which is going to be devoted to another whole interview someday. But just to complete the Dartmouth piece of it, you spent—When you left Dartmouth, the arrangement with the college is, I'll be back when I'm back.

BRYANT: Well, of course again, serendipity, Mary. I had gone. So apparently if I wanted to return, I was in. And of course the GI Bill stepped in and made it possible. You know it was an enormous revolution. So instead of being a strange little lad from a poor family, I had many of my own peers with me. There were quite a few who had been through what I'd been through on the return. And of course another nice thing I seem to recall now is I was very bad in math. And for some reason, I may be wrong, but for some reason I don't think there were any required courses. I think I could take what I wanted, which was mostly English and biology and philosophy.

DONIN: So you had declared a major. I guess you had to declare a major when you came back?

BRYANT: I think so, yes. And it was English.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. And some people talk about these credits that they earned. They got credits for some of their time in the military because of all the training you did and that sort of thing.

BRYANT: Yes. I cannot remember that. And I'm wondering if the idea that—I don't remember any required courses. But I'm really not sure about that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

BRYANT: And of course it was a different ballgame because I had married by that time. And we had a kid coming along. So I worked for Virgil Poling in the student workshop which is now—I guess it's Bissell Hall. Is that the one opposite the campus? What's the hall— If you're standing in the Hanover Inn and looking at—or near the Hanover Inn and looking at the campus—there's a building off to your right there?

- DONIN: The three big white buildings that are lined up facing The Green?
- BRYANT: Yes. Well, not the one on the hill. The one on the same level as the Hanover Inn.
- DONIN: Well, there's Wilson Hall to the right there.
- BRYANT: No, it wasn't Wilson.
- DONIN: Maybe it is Bissell.
- BRYANT: It might be Bissell. But Virgil held sway there for a long time. And he just dug into his own budget and was able to—I think I worked three hours a day.
- DONIN: It was what kind of a workshop? What were you doing in there?
- BRYANT: It was all woodworking.
- DONIN: Oh, woodworking. Oh, I see. Oh, cool.
- BRYANT: So what I would do is help students and professors who came in. Of course I'd learned how to be a carpenter down here.
- DONIN: Oh, before you came to Dartmouth.
- BRYANT: I had begun my apprenticeship in cabinetry.
- DONIN: So when you returned to Dartmouth, you had a wife and a child with you?
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: Oh.
- BRYANT: And we lived—for a while we lived right in town behind Al Losier's supermarket in an apartment that was pretty rough digs. Jean worked for some lady who had this stenographic service named Florence McCann. Either that or she worked as a waitress at the Hanover Inn.
- DONIN: Oh, yes.
- BRYANT: And I worked for Virgil.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Why didn't they put you in married housing? They were putting all the married vets either in Wigwam or Sachem.

BRYANT: Well, Wigwam didn't exist then.

DONIN: Oh, in '46? Oh.

BRYANT: As I recall. Not in '46. Yes, it'd be '46.

DONIN: You came back in '46.

BRYANT: Well, that's—see, now this is a problem because after I came back from the war, I went to work over at the—I didn't immediately say I'm going back to Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh, I see. Okay.

BRYANT: And I worked the better part of a year for the Oceanographic over here in Woods Hole.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

BRYANT: On board the schooner, Alliance.

DONIN: Oh.

BRYANT: And then I finally decided I'd better get my ass in gear and go to Dartmouth. So this is something I haven't straightened out yet. I think it was about a year.

DONIN: Well, we can straighten all that out in the Archives. We'll find your records and pin down the dates.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: The dates are easy to find. So whenever it was that you returned there, there was no married student housing.

BRYANT: To my knowledge. It might have been financial because we were really hard up.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

BRYANT: Because even with the GI Bill. It might have been that it hadn't started yet because we later moved to Wigwam Circle.

DONIN: Oh, did you?

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Oh. There's some great stories about Wigwam.

BRYANT: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Fun, fun time it was.

BRYANT: We spent most of our time at Dartmouth in Wigwam.

DONIN: Yes, yes. And it seems like there were a lot of guys coming back from their service at that time period. And a lot of them were broke. I mean guys were describing the fact that even though the war was over, people were still marching around campus in their uniforms because it was the best suit of clothes they had.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: I guess you're given a brand-new set when you enlist.

BRYANT: As I mentioned earlier, one of the big changes for me was that I went from being about the only poor kid in town to suddenly having a great many people beside me who'd done the same thing.

DONIN: Right. And it was—It sounds like it was a pretty diverse group of men that were there at that point, both in terms of age.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Economic status. And a number of them were part of the V-12 and V-5 training that went on there that decided to return to Dartmouth rather than return to the school from which they had originated.

BRYANT: Right.

DONIN: So that you had a mixture of, you know, age ranges and background an all sorts of things. I mean it was no longer this sort of traditional well-to-do Dartmouth.

- BRYANT: No, it was a much more democratic makeup.
- DONIN: Yes, yes. And I guess there were some challenges, probably not for the older married vets, but some challenges that came in terms of offering—in trying to discipline.... You know you had these undergraduate students that were veterans of a war and had seen terrible things and had matured in ways beyond which most of us couldn't even imagine. And yet they were being treated like undergraduates of the college and getting in trouble for, you know, drinking beer when they weren't supposed to be drinking beer.
- BRYANT: Yes. I didn't have any trouble like that. For example, I can answer the liquor problem, and I am a heavy drinker and have been since I could afford it.
- DONIN: [Laughs] Right.
- BRYANT: But, for instance, Jean, that's my former wife, from whom I was divorced about 15 years ago, our budget for that sort of thing was a quart of beer a week.
- DONIN: Wow.
- BRYANT: We'd get it on a weekend and celebrate. So that wasn't a.... And of course there was no impetus to get involved in the fraternities. You know it was just a life that was completely full and totally occupied.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. And did you have any—especially in the English department, I suppose—teachers that were particularly important to you?
- BRYANT: Yes. I tracked some old friends, teachers I had, included—but he was only there a little while—Robert Frost. And I think, I may be wrong, but I think Dick Wilbur taught for a while there in that period. But I may be wrong on that one. But also one of my favorites was Tom Vance.
- DONIN: Oh, yes.
- BRYANT: And what happened there was that the relationship became—Oh, there was another English teacher whom I liked very much, although some people said, "How can you like him when he's gay?" But the word gay didn't exist then. But Joel Egerer was a nice, good teacher. Tom was very close to me. But what happened, Tom

Vance and Alex Lang were friends, and Alex and Dillis Lang. And they used to—and Jean with me—we used to go to Alex’s house quite often. Tom, Jean, and I, and also Phil Booth who just died. And we’d go and read our poetry. At that time I was working on what I thought was going to make me another Whitman. It was a huge war poem. But it wasn’t a teacher-student relationship. It was just friends.

DONIN: They treated you as an equal.

BRYANT: Yes. And another English teacher that came on a little later, of whom I became very fond—as a matter of fact he invited me salmon fishing ten years ago, but then he up and died—was Harold Bond. I don’t know if you’ve ever run across his name.

DONIN: No.

BRYANT: He was a nice fellow.

DONIN: Uh-huh. You had a funny story you wrote to me about doing some substitute teaching for Tom Vance when he was indisposed at some point.

BRYANT: Oh! Well, to show you the relationship between Tom and me, we were in Wigwam Circle then. And I don’t know how the hell he got a hold of me because we didn’t have a—the only phone was a pay phone. But anyway, he got a hold of me or somebody said Tom Vance is trying to reach you. It was in the morning, a Monday morning. And, “Mr. Bryant,” he said, “this is Tom Vance.” He said, “I wondered if you could take over my class for me this afternoon.” And he said, I’ll have Professor Whoever-he-was, So-and so, sit in with you. But you’ll run the class. And I said, “Sure.” And I said, “What’s the matter?” And he said, “I got into a little trouble here in New York City.” I guess they put him in jail overnight or something. [Laughter] So I ran the class. And an interesting anecdote pops out of that one: There was a guy that I was friendly with named Walter Barney—I think Walter Barney, Jr.; yes, it was—who had never contributed anything in class. So I got up in front of the class, and I forget what the subject was, which poet. And I digressed for a while. And I said, “And Mr. Barney? What do you think of this?” And he went aba aba aba. And he did it for about 30 seconds.

DONIN: Oh, dear.

BRYANT: So then I said, "Mr. Barney, apparently my question has overwhelmed you." And after class he said, "You sonofabitch!" He said, "Why did you do that?" And I said, "Walter, I thought you might have fun answering." He said, "Why do you think I don't answer?" He said, "I stammer."

DONIN: Oh.

BRYANT: But he didn't stammer in normal conversation. Just under pressure.

DONIN: Right, right.

BRYANT: So that's the Tom Vance.

DONIN: That's amazing that they were able to get away with that sort of thing, to get a student to come in and teach the class. It's wonderful. Certainly wouldn't go today.

BRYANT: I thought it was terrific.

DONIN: Yes. It's great.

BRYANT: And I was very happy to try it.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Test out your teaching skills.

BRYANT: Pardon?

DONIN: Test out your teaching skills.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: So life there for you as a married vet was clearly different than the traditional undergrad.

BRYANT: Yes. You weren't looking for liquor and love.

DONIN: Right. [Laughs]

BRYANT: And you could barely keep ahead of the game.

DONIN: Right.

BRYANT: And that was it. It was a perfectly happy existence. But there wasn't any slack time.

DONIN: So you stayed there until—so how long did it take you to get your—enough credits to get your degree?

BRYANT: I think.... The only thing I can tell you is—There again, I'm....

DONIN: Well, one thing I was curious about was— What were the dates on these articles? That was one thing that was going to help me figure out— You see here you were still— This is March of '49. This here says it's March of 1949. That you're writing a column for The D, which means you were still an undergrad then.

BRYANT: For what was this?

DONIN: The D, the *Daily Dartmouth*.

BRYANT: Oh, okay.

DONIN: So you must have maybe taken until—Maybe you graduated in June of '49?

BRYANT: Well, I didn't. I'll tell you what. I graduated in the winter. There was a split thing because I'd gotten some little bit of credit from that first semester.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

BRYANT: So I didn't have a full four years. So it was something like three and a half years.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Did they give you any credit for that PG year that you did at Norfolk? You didn't get credit for that?

BRYANT: I couldn't tell you. I don't think so. I don't think there was any.

DONIN: So did they actually have a graduation ceremony, so to speak?

BRYANT: Not for me because I didn't—

DONIN: For the students that were finishing in the middle of the year.

BRYANT: No.

DONIN: They just handed you your diploma.

BRYANT: As far as I know, I walked away.

DONIN: Right. Handed you your diploma and—

BRYANT: Of course at my age it may be that my memory's failing me. But my feeling is I just finished it up, and that was the end of it, and I came home.

DONIN: No, I think that was the case. Other people said they got their diploma mailed to them.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: They finished up, and off they went.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: So by the time you returned back as a married veteran to continue your education, you had a new president there. It was John Dickey.

BRYANT: Oh, it was Hopkins who greeted me, and Dickey—yes.

DONIN: Who must have signed your diploma.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Yes. Maybe I should look for my diploma.

BRYANT: [Laughs] Well, I know for a fact that Dickey became president, I believe, in 1945.

DONIN: That's it then. So did you ever have any interactions with Dickey?

BRYANT: No. No, I didn't.

DONIN: Did you have to take his Great Issues course? Remember the Great Issues course?

BRYANT: Yes, but I don't think I did.

DONIN: You didn't take it.

- BRYANT: No. Then I'm trying to think about—no. No, I don't think so.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. So was your social life comprised of other veterans?
- BRYANT: There was Jean and me and the Langs and Phil Booth and that was it.
- DONIN: That's pretty nice, hanging around with future poets.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: That's wonderful.
- BRYANT: Oh, I have a nice anecdote. I'll tell it about Phil now. He's not here anymore.
- DONIN: Right.
- BRYANT: We would take turns reading our work at Alex's house. No, this was when Phil had us all at his house, he and Margaret. And poets are notoriously jealous, you know. [Laughter] They were all oohing and aahing. Oh, I once asked—I'm leaping around. I'm sorry. But I once asked Tom, I said, "Tom, I'm looking at something I read to you last week, and it's really not good. It's sloppy." And I said, "How come you didn't mention it?" He said, "Nelson, because the fire was burning in you so bright, I didn't want to do anything to diminish it. I just wanted more of this coming out." But anyway, at this party at Phil Booth's house, the older men got very excited about something I had done. And not too excited about what Phil had done. And it was in summer—or warm weather, I'll say. And when we were saying goodbye to Phil, I had just a thin white shirt on. As I shook his hand, I saw his other hand moving, and I felt this exquisite pain in my right upper arm. He'd taken a hatpin and shoved it right through.
- DONIN: Oh! That's terrible!
- BRYANT: I never said a word. I said, "Goodnight, Phil." And when I got in the car, the stain was....
- DONIN: That's terrible.
- BRYANT: Isn't that kooky?

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: And I never mentioned it to him. I just thought I wouldn't pay any attention to it. That it was an aberration and the hell with it!

DONIN: He was probably very frustrated that you didn't mention it. [Laughs] So did you continue working the whole time that you were at Dartmouth? You had a job.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Was that the case with most of the people that you were familiar with there, that they all had jobs, part-time jobs?

BRYANT: No, most of them weren't married.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: I may be in correct in this. But most of the guys I knew weren't married. And I don't know what they were doing. For instance, when I went up there, I knew I had to do something. I went to see—I still remember his name; this isn't a nice story, but I'll tell it anyway. There was a Professor Neef. I forget what he taught. Maybe psychology, something like that. Some desperate subject. But he also had something to do with finding work for people like me. And I sat down with him, and he said, "Well, maybe you could deliver papers around the campus." And I said, "I'm a skilled workman. I'm not going to deliver papers around the campus." And then he said, "I don't know why you guys—

[Pause to change cassette]

DONIN: Ok, keep going.

BRYANT: Yes, so this is Professor Neef, and after I'd turned his job of delivering papers, he said, "I don't know—" He really pissed me off. He said, "I don't know what you guys are thinking of getting married before you finish college."

DONIN: What's that got to do with anything?

BRYANT: Yes. And I said, boy, here's one guy I'm going to stay away from.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Did he end up finding anything for you?

BRYANT: No, no. I went over to Virgil.

DONIN: Oh.

BRYANT: I heard about the workshop.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. They must have been glad to have you with your carpentry skills.

BRYANT: Oh, he was good. He dug into his own budget. And it was fun because a lot of strange things went on over there in that workshop. [Laughter]

DONIN: Such as?

BRYANT: Oh, the one incident I remember: There was one professor whom I really liked. But he was inept when it came to machinery. Are you familiar with a belt sander?

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: Like this. You hold it and go like this.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: Well, we had long work tables, and I saw—I can't remember his name—I saw him go and get the sander out. It's a big room. Get the sander and a lot of noise. Put it down on a workbench where 20 guys were working. And I saw it, and he didn't look at the switch or anything else. And then I saw him go toward the wall with the plug. But I couldn't get to him in time. And he plugged it in, and that sander went the full length of a 30-foot table, with tools flying in all directions. It was a good time. I don't think the workshop exists anymore, does it?

DONIN: There's a woodworking shop in the basement of the Hopkins Center, where the students can do woodworking. They have a shop

for woodworking, and then they have a shop for jewelry-making as well. Side by side.

BRYANT: Where is Hopkins Center? I can't—

DONIN: If you're standing on The Green looking at the Hanover Inn—

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: —it's immediately to the left.

BRYANT: That's where. That's the thing I was trying to get at earlier. It was Hopkins Center. But it was, as I recall, it was one story up.

DONIN: Well, and the Hopkins Center wasn't built until after you left.

BRYANT: Well, there was something else there then.

DONIN: Exactly. There was probably another building there.

BRYANT: Oh, that's the one. That's why I'm confused, yes.

DONIN: The Hopkins Center is a modern building. How long has it been since you've been to campus?

BRYANT: I drove up there with Ruth a couple of years ago. But it was so crowded, I just kept going.

DONIN: Yes, yes. You don't want to be there on the weekends.

BRYANT: There was no place to stop or park or walk.

DONIN: No.

BRYANT: I wanted her to see Baker and The Green.

DONIN: Right, right. But it's become sort of, you know, a touristy kind of place on the weekends. And the crowds are terrible. Okay. What have we not talked about yet, relating to Dartmouth. Let's see here.

BRYANT: Let's see. I'm trying to....

DONIN: Did you feel like you were a better student when you came back from the war?

- BRYANT: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I was a more functional human being. I wasn't sure I was going to come back. I wasn't going to waste it this time. Oh, yes. Yes. And also of course another advantage I think was that if I—I had no qualms if a professor said something and I didn't understand it, I'd say, Come on, what are you talking about? It wasn't that feeling of awe.
- DONIN: Right. The trend seems to be that the veterans who returned were for obvious reasons more mature.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: And much better students.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: And took advantage of being there.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: Unlike the kids right out of high school who....
- BRYANT: Oh, there's one nice little anecdote about Virgil Poling's shop was that down here in the Vineyard—this again gets complicated—but I'd read somewhere when I was ten or 11 or 12, maybe older, about Ross McKinney. And I can remember walking out back here and thinking, boy, would I like to know that guy. He sounds terrific. Well, goddamn if Ross McKinney isn't at Dartmouth, which I didn't know. And he would work in the workshop quite a lot.
- DONIN: Oh.
- BRYANT: So I got to know him. As a matter of fact, he gave us two presents: He made Jean a pair of leather moccasins, and he gave me a birch-bark canoe.
- DONIN: Oh, wonderful!
- BRYANT: Oh, God! Which I brought down here. As a matter of fact, Jean and I used Ross's birch-bark canoe on the pond quite often.
- DONIN: That's great.

BRYANT: Yes. So that was nice.

DONIN: Nice story.

BRYANT: Yes, he had something to do with the Grant, too. Oh, I know what it was. If you were going to hunt on the Grant, deer hunt, or any kind of hunting, you had to go see Ross.

DONIN: Oh, and get a permit of some kind.

BRYANT: Well, you'd bring your gun with you.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: You'd walk across campus with your gun. And Ross would say—He wanted to see what you were using and what you knew about it.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Did you take advantage of any of the activities of the Outing Club?

BRYANT: No. Although I was—What were they called? Oh, God! Chuggers, Chubbers?

DONIN: Oh, yes. There is a term. What is that term?

BRYANT: There was a term back then.

DONIN: I think it was Chuggers, wasn't it?

BRYANT: It might have been Chubber. No, I didn't. I didn't because I didn't have time for any organizations. But I did manage to get up to the grant once or twice. And of course Ruth and I go up there all the time.

DONIN: Oh, do you!

BRYANT: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Oh, I didn't know. It's beautiful, isn't it?

BRYANT: Yes. Well, I don't think... These are multi-colored woodcuts. Actually that one is where the Rapid River comes into Lake Umbagog. But there's one in the bathroom in there if you use it. But it shows the Dead Diamond just above Hellgate Gorge cabin.

DONIN: Oh, nice. Yes.

BRYANT: I only got up about two times then. But it's a regular—I've gone there every year for 30 years.

DONIN: Do you stay in touch with any of your classmates?

BRYANT: No.

DONIN: Or any of the people—not necessarily classmates—but to the people that were in Wigwam with you, or...?

BRYANT: No.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

BRYANT: No, it's funny. As a matter of fact... Oh, Christ! You know what? I told you something incorrect. After I got out of Dartmouth, I didn't come home.

DONIN: You're right. Because—

BRYANT: I didn't come home.

DONIN: This article here says you were working as a carpenter and writing for the *Claremont Times*.

BRYANT: Right.

DONIN: Right here. I think somewhere—doesn't that mention you, that you were working as a carpenter?

BRYANT: Oh, right. What happened was I worked for Virgil. And then there was a young man who I think might have also worked for him. And his name has escaped me. But he had a little shop on the road south of Hanover. And I worked for him for a while. And then Phil Booth had a friend who said, "Jesus, why doesn't Nelson try and get a job with the *Daily Eagle*? So I got a job. I was working out of the Lebanon office of the *Daily Eagle*.

DONIN: Now that's the Claremont paper?

BRYANT: The *Claremont Daily Eagle*.

- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- BRYANT: And I did that for a year. Then I came down here.
- DONIN: Yes.
- BRYANT: No, no. Then—oh, God, how did it happen? Anyway, I wound up as managing editor of the *Eagle* for 15 years.
- RUTH BRYANT: Nelson, you went to another newspaper. You went to a small newspaper, and you had Jeffrey.
- BRYANT: Oh. Well, that was a one-year stint at the *Gloucester Times*.
- DONIN: So that came after Claremont.
- BRYANT: Huh?
- DONIN: That came after Claremont.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- BRYANT: What happened was—Oh, that’s the ritual. I went to work for the Lebanon office, and I was starving to death. And so then I went to work for the *Gloucester Times* for a year. And then the publisher of the *Eagle* called me up and said, “How would you like to be the managing editor?”
- DONIN: Wow!
- BRYANT: So I went back to Claremont. And I tend to be a plodder, and I plodded at that job for 15 years.
- DONIN: So where were you living then?
- BRYANT: Right in Claremont.
- DONIN: Ah-hah. For 15 years?
- BRYANT: Fifteen years.

DONIN: That's a chunk of time.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: Yes. And, you know, just south of Hanover.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Tough way to make a living, though, isn't it?

BRYANT: Oh, yes.

DONIN: I mean in those days.

BRYANT: Well, you couldn't make a living.

DONIN: No, no.

BRYANT: No, that's when I left—I finally.... I said I have to either get twice as much money or get a piece of the action because I can't support my family.

DONIN: Right. So you had two kids by now.

BRYANT: Three by then, I think.

DONIN: Wow!

MRS. BRYANT: Four, Nelson.

BRYANT: I had all four, yes. Okay. So when that occurred, that's when I left the *Eagle* and I came down here and built docks.

DONIN: Oh.

BRYANT: My wife's brother had a dock-building business. So I worked one year at dock-building.

DONIN: Probably made more money at that.

BRYANT: Oh, a lot more.

DONIN: Yes.

- BRYANT: And then I got a call from a friend of mine who'd been my state editor, Howard Schwain at the *Eagle*. And he said, "Nelson, I don't know if you know it, but Oscar Godbout at the *Times*—" He was the columnist who did the column that I did for some time. He was the "Wood, Field, and Stream" columnist for the *Times*. And he said, "Oscar's died. Why don't you apply for the job?" And I said, "Are you crazy?" [Laughter] And I did.
- DONIN: And the rest is history, as they say.
- BRYANT: Yes, yes. [Laughter] And that's it. No, it's funny. I loved Dartmouth, and I feel very close to it. But there were no—There's nobody living now. I didn't come away from there with any close friendships developed on campus or anything else. I think it was because we were too damned busy.
- DONIN: Yes.
- BRYANT: There wasn't time to socialize.
- DONIN: And did they ever ask you if you wanted to change your class affiliation because you were graduating in 1949 instead of 1946?
- BRYANT: No, no.
- DONIN: And it didn't matter to you.
- BRYANT: No.
- DONIN: No, no.
- BRYANT: If it'd made them happy, I would have done it.
- DONIN: It's just some people, I think, these alums who have gotten a little bit—gotten more emotionally tied to the school for some reason changed their class affiliations.
- BRYANT: Yes.
- DONIN: Because they had very close friends in a particular class.
- BRYANT: Yes. I think the thing is, the type of person that I was and being married and all, precluded... You were doing a job; that was it.

DONIN: Right.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: And it was not the typical undergraduate experience.

BRYANT: No, it wasn't.

DONIN: Which is the case with many of them.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: There were too many other things going on in your life.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Right, right. Okay. Any more words of wisdom before I turn off the tape?

BRYANT: I can't think of any.

DONIN: Well, let's see if there's anything in these—See if we can pull up anymore memories from these columns you wrote here. This one was in '49.

BRYANT: This was '47.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: Hmm. Well, Normandy was '44. My time in the Airborne was over after the Battle of the Bulge. That was still '44. I guess I came home in '45.

DONIN: You came home after the war over. The war was over in Europe in May of '45.

BRYANT: Oh, that's right. Now—thank you. Know what I remember? We were in occupation duty in Frankfurt am Main in Germany. And the war had ended. And I remember marching down to company headquarters saying, "I can't stand non..." How to describe it? "I can't stand non-war life in the Army." [Laughter] I said, "I want to volunteer." The war in Japan was still going on.

DONIN: Yes.

BRYANT: I said, "I want to volunteer for Japan." And the company commander, who was a good friend, he said, "Get your silly ass back to the barracks and read a book." [Laughter] So that ended that.

DONIN: Well, you'd already been shot up so many times, too. Your body must have needed some rest.

BRYANT: Only twice.

DONIN: Well, that's twice enough.

BRYANT: Yes. And the second time was very little.

DONIN: Uh huh.

BRYANT: It was just a piece of shrapnel in my leg in Normandy—and Holland.

DONIN: Right, right. Well he was wise to tell you to go back and read a book. OK, I guess I'm going to turn the tape off.

[Pause]

BRYANT: So as I was nearing graduate time, Dartmouth gave me something called the Richard Crawford Campbell, Jr. Scholarship for graduate school.

DONIN: Oh!

BRYANT: And I was accepted at Brown.

DONIN: This is grad school in English, I assume?

BRYANT: Yes. And I again, though, the money problem. Jean was staying here with our little boy with friends. And I was up at Brown staying with the parents of the guy who stammered in the English class.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

BRYANT: And I was at Brown. And what really turned me off, Mary, I suddenly realized that I had no capacity for research. I was trying to do a piece on advertising; that was what I was assigned. And I worked on it for a month at Brown. And Christ! I was living on, I

don't know, a buck and half a day for food. It was not a fun time. It was not a happy time. Fuck that fun time. And at one point the graduate students doing research and the professors got together, and we all read what we'd done so far. And one professor, bless his soul, he said, "You know," he said, "I'm really disturbed." He said, "The quality of research and what you folks have handed us is appalling." And I said, "Holy shit!" Because I kind of had a feeling it was. [Laughter] And I left Brown.

DONIN: That was it.

BRYANT: Yes.

DONIN: Well.

BRYANT: I knew—it was clear that at that time of my life—maybe I never could have—I wasn't suited for that.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

BRYANT: So that ended my—

DONIN: Your graduate school career.

BRYANT: Yes. [Laughter]

MRS. BRYANT: Nelson.

BRYANT: Yes?

MRS. BRYANT: I remember a story about the ski instructor that Dartmouth hired just because he needed the job. Dartmouth was very embracing of people who were qualified, didn't have the money. But needed their services in some circumstances, I think. And you do have friends from Dartmouth through the Outing Club. You have the Blodgetts who are beloved friends of yours.

BRYANT: Who dear?

MRS. BRYANT: Pete and Put Blodgett who both went to Dartmouth.

BRYANT: Put wasn't there.

MRS. BRYANT: I know, but later when we went up to the Grant.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

MRS. BRYANT: You made contacts with them.

BRYANT: Well, that's another thing, yes.

MRS. BRYANT: Strong bonds.

BRYANT: Yes, you're right. I slipped that.

MRS. BRYANT: That's how I found out about the ski instructor whom Dartmouth embraced. He was from Austria, I think.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Malcolm McLane talks about—

BRYANT: Al Merrill?

DONIN: No.

MRS. BRYANT: My son worked for his son. His son became a motorcycle dealer. His first name is Cari Something. I've forgotten the last name. But at one point in his life, my son's dream was to become a motorcycle repairman.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

MRS. BRYANT: So he put himself through motorcycle repair school. And his goal was to get a job at a dealership, the best BMW dealership in the world. And that was this ski instructor's son. And Nelson made the connection because Ely came home and said, "You know his father was a ski instructor at—"

DONIN: At Dartmouth.

MRS. BRYANT: At Dartmouth. And did other things as well.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

MRS. BRYANT: And Put Blodgett remembers him fondly. I've forgotten his last name. It's some Germanic last name.

DONIN: That name has come up before with members of the—

MRS. BRYANT: I can call my son and find out.

DONIN: Yes. We've got his name back in the Archives because somebody else talked about him. A guy in the class—in fact in your class, in the class of '46, I think.

BRYANT: It's not Merrill, no.

DONIN: No.

MRS. BRYANT: It's a German name.

DONIN: Yes, it is a German name.

BRYANT: It is a German name?

DONIN: Yes. And we actually have photographs of him with the ski team.

MRS. BRYANT: Mm-hmm. Well, I've learned this through the Blodgetts.

DONIN: Amazing.

MRS. BRYANT: Yes. And my son is now in California.

DONIN: So Put, is that short for Putnam?

BRYANT: Yes.

MRS. BRYANT: Putnam.

BRYANT: Yes. He lives up in Norwich, Vermont.

MRS. BRYANT: His son is alive—or his nephew.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

BRYANT: Pete, his uncle, Pete Blodgett, he used to come here to the Vineyard to duck hunt. He's about ten years—he's dead now—ten years older than I am. Put was a Dartmouth grad who he helped—he was a key figure in building the Merrill Brook cabin in the Grant.

DONIN: Oh, nice. Uh-huh.

BRYANT: So the Blodgetts were close friends of mine.

DONIN: So how did you first come to know him—Put?

BRYANT: I first came to know them by—I might have known them.... It gets complicated. My father was the head selectman down here.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

BRYANT: In that era the head selectman was everything: sheriff, constable, tax assessor. And Put Blodgett was a Boston—I mean Pete Blodgett, Put's uncle, was a Boston banker. And they bought into a place called Long Point Gunning Club down here. And my father was responsible for levying the taxes on them. So I got to know him that way. And then all of a sudden, when I was hunting from the Merrill Brook cabin, in came Pete.

DONIN: Oh.

BRYANT: And he said, "I know you." And I said, "How do you know me?" He said, "Well, I know your old man." So then he died a few years ago. But then with his nephew, I've hunted up there.

DONIN: Hmm.

BRYANT: So that's Dartmouth friendships.

DONIN: Yes, yes. They're possible anywhere and everywhere. Now we will really stop until you remember the next thing.

[End of Interview]