

Dartmouth College Oral History Project  
The War Years at Dartmouth  
Interview with Waldo Fielding '43 DMS '43  
By Mary Stelle Donin  
July 17, 2008

DONIN: How was it that you chose to come to Dartmouth in 1939?

FIELDING: That's a good question and I have an answer for you, but it's an answer that's hard to believe. I had an aunt—whom I didn't really like—but she had some boyfriend at one point, in my very early years, who gave her a big Dartmouth banner and a Dartmouth pillow, which she gave to me, and it was on my wall all my growing up years. It became the only college I wanted to go to and the only one I applied to.

DONIN: Where were you growing up?

FIELDING: Worcester, Mass. I'm from the west.

DONIN: The west. Right. I see. Did you visit it before you applied?

FIELDING: No, I don't think so. No.

DONIN: And that was the only place you applied to?

FIELDING: That's right.

DONIN: When you finished high school, did you know whether you wanted to be a doctor?

FIELDING: Well, not really, but my father was a doctor and a damn good one. He was a family physician in Worcester—Worcester's leading doctor, as a matter of fact—but it was my mother who made sure that I was going to be a doctor, and I had no real—I had no, and still never developed one, a scientific urge or anything like that. And I just, I guess—that's how I got the nickname Doc. You didn't ask that, but when I was going through the line with some upperclassman taking my story, you know, with his freshman—the first day they go through a line—

DONIN: Matriculation?

FIELDING: Whatever that was, yeah. And this nice fellow said to me, "What's your name? Waldo? Oh God, where did you get that name?" I said, "Well, I had

an aunt that I didn't like and my mother gave me that name." And then he said, "Well, what are you going to do up here?" I said, "Well, I'm going to medical school." So, he wrote down Doc, and that became my nickname from then on.

DONIN: Perfect.

FIELDING: Suited me fine.

DONIN: Now, let's see. If it was 1943, what were you thinking about the war at that point?

FIELDING: Well, we all had to join either the Army or the Navy.

DONIN: This was after Pearl Harbor in '41, right?

FIELDING: Yeah. And I chose the Navy. We had only twenty-four guys in the class, and I don't remember the numbers that chose which: the Army or the Navy. And once we joined, the Navy took us over as far as paying our tuition and all that. And my father went in the Navy at the same time at a slightly different rank. He was a three-striper. I was a three-striper, too, eventually. I only had one and a half on each sleeve, but... [Laughter] Well, anyway, so we had to join one or the other.

DONIN: And you joined how soon after Pearl Harbor? How old were you in '41? Let's see.

FIELDING: Well, I was twenty.

DONIN: You were twenty.

FIELDING: I was born in '21.

DONIN: Yeah, all right.

FIELDING: And I think I joined in '42, so I would have been twenty-one. We had our own challenge of marching and nobody told us what to do; we just learned it. We were treated a little differently than the average of the people in the school itself. We were medical students and we didn't have to be as rigorous as the others. I wrote about the commander in one of the shows up there, a joke about him, as a matter of fact.

DONIN: You what?

FIELDING: I wrote in *Love Rides the Rails*. I had to sing a song and I sang a second chorus using his name. He was a tough guy. Then he came to address the medical school. I said something in the song about [sings]: "If you can get a weekend pass from Bullis." He said when he came to address the class: "Despite what Doc Fielding said, you can get a weekend pass from Bullis."

DONIN: So the way the system was working then, how many years of regular sort of undergrad classes did you do?

FIELDING: Well, we did the same as they always did. You had to finish the college in three years, and then start medical school in your senior year. It was at the end of your first year of medical school that you got your BA. It's interesting. Now, with me with the war, we had our degrees given to us at a dinner with President Hopkins in the Inn, and I was in a wheelchair because I was in the hospital at that time, and Dr. Gundersen was my doctor. Sven was my doctor. And when I moved to Boston, his brother became my eye doctor.

DONIN: Amazing. Small world. So, were you on campus on December 7, 1941: Pearl Harbor?

FIELDING: Yes, except that I wasn't there when the first bombs were dropped on Pearl Harbor; I was visiting a young lady at Smith with a fellow from Tuck School, and we had the two girls, and we were in the lobby of the Northampton Inn, and the radios, which were situated around somewhere behind drapes, they announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and Vick, the fellow I was with, knew that he was going. He was— So we came back to Hanover and he did go shortly thereafter.

DONIN: Right after.

FIELDING: Yeah.

DONIN: Well, I assume the campus must have been pretty diminished after Pearl Harbor happened, because so many people signed up to go.

FIELDING: Yes. I don't know the numbers, but it was replenished, of course, by the Navy sending its first and second, I think, group of a thousand men under the auspices of the Navy, and we all knew that the reason Dartmouth was that lucky was of President Hopkins's relationship with President Roosevelt. And we were lucky.

DONIN: And they had the largest contingent in the country, I think.

FIELDING: You told me that over the phone. I don't remember that. Could be. I can tell you a funny story. In the first winter we were there, the paths of the common had been plowed and the snow was piled up over your head on both sides of the path, and I happened to be walking back to North Fayerweather, where they had put me at that time, and there were two of these Naval guys in front of me. They were obviously from the South, and I actually heard one of them say to the other: "You know, it's a good thing we didn't win the Civil War; we would have had to occupy this damn country." [Laughter]

DONIN: He wasn't happy in the middle of all that snow, was he? That's cute. So, you did your first three years regular undergraduate—

FIELDING: Yep.

DONIN: And at that point—let's see, you graduated in '43—so they weren't running year-round classes then were they? You still had your summers off?

FIELDING: No. Not for me, because of the medical school. We didn't have the summer off.

DONIN: Right. You had to go year-round. And so you left—so did you have a regular graduation ceremony?

FIELDING: Well, I just told you it was in the dining room of the Hanover Inn.

DONIN: Oh, that's right.

FIELDING: Just for the medical school.

DONIN: It was just for the medical school.

FIELDING: Yes, and President Hopkins graced us with his presence and it was very nice. Really nice.

DONIN: Small class.

FIELDING: Yeah, well, twenty-four in each class, forty-eight in the whole school. That's what it was. But, there was something I wanted to say to you, but it will come. I forget. At this age, I can't always keep track of what the hell I want to say, you know?

DONIN: Oh, believe me. It'll come back, though, when you least expect it.

FIELDING: Oh, I know what it was. I told you I was sick with pneumonia in the hospital. I don't know whether you want to include this; it's not important. I did have this dichotomy of theater—or entertainment, I should say—and medicine. And I had made some advances in the field of entertainment, and I had literally been signed by Bob Hope's troupe to go overseas with him.

DONIN: Amazing.

FIELDING: You know, he had many troupes. I don't know whether it would have been with him personally; I can't answer that. But then what happened was, I weighed 120 pounds the day I got out of the hospital, and I was in the Navy now. And the Navy got word of my condition, and they had excused me to go with this Pacific tour. But then I got a letter saying, "No. It's been withdrawn. You will stay in Hanover until Michigan is ready for you, and you will work in the infirmary"—the Navy infirmary. So, that's what I did.

DONIN: What was Michigan?

FIELDING: That's where I was going to finish my medical school.

DONIN: Oh, at Michigan. Okay, that's right.

FIELDING: When I did *Love Rides the Rails*, Dean Syvertsen said to me: "You've got to make up your mind. Are you going to be an actor or are you going to be a doctor?" Anyway, when the time came to change schools—he could send you anywhere, because the school was considered to be the best first two years in the country.

DONIN: Dartmouth was?

FIELDING: Yep, because with twenty-four in the class, you had personal teaching. I lived at Dr. Lord's house.

DONIN: Oh, did you?

FIELDING: Yes. The anatomy professor. I lived in an apartment in his house. Anyway, so when the time came for me to decide where I wanted to go, I mean all he had to do was send—let's say Harvard—he said, "I'm going to send you six people." He'd have to name names. The place was so highly regarded. He looked at me and he said, "You're not going to Harvard; you're not going to Yale; and you're not going in the east. Where do you want to go?" Well, geez. I don't know. So, I said, "All right. I'll go to Michigan, Ann Arbor. Is that all right?" And he said, "Yes. You can go to

Ann Arbor.” Then a fellow in my class, George, he went with me. The two of us went together.

DONIN: Good. So, you weren’t alone.

FIELDING: Yeah. Ann Arbor. I didn’t like Ann Arbor. It was terrible. I became the class entertainer out there, too. That Hill Auditorium sat five thousand people, you know. In Ann Arbor.

DONIN: That’s fantastic. So, did you get into the theater thing in high school?

FIELDING: Did I what?

DONIN: Did you get into the theater thing, entertainment thing in high school?

FIELDING: Oh, it was always—it started long before high school.

DONIN: Oh, really?

FIELDING: Started when I was a little kid at summer camp. Each camp—I went to two camps—each one seemed to have a real feel for the theater. My high school was terrific as far as theater was concerned. Dartmouth, of course, under Warner Bentley was—

DONIN: Warner Bentley.

FIELDING: So I was, you know—All my life I was sort of in this thing, and I went back to it again.

DONIN: And did you have—your social group at Dartmouth: was it mostly med students, or was it more your entertaining friends, the people in—you must have been in the drama club, or the Dartmouth Players, or whatever they—

FIELDING: Oh, I was in the Dartmouth Players, of course. But no, I socialized mainly with the guys in the dorm. No, I didn’t—I wouldn’t say that the Players kept my attention. No. Although I loved working with them. The women from town, oh, they were wonderful.

DONIN: Yeah, you had to import women, didn’t you, to play the female parts.

FIELDING: Oh yeah, but they were from Hanover.

DONIN: Yeah, sure.

FIELDING: They were professors' wives... Oh, yeah. And some of them were out of this world. They were so good.

DONIN: So, what were your memories of Hoppy? Do you remember ever meeting him or shaking his hand?

FIELDING: Oh, yes. Meeting him, sitting in his living room with him. I remember sitting there in a chair. You don't remember him of course, but he used to stammer when he became excited about what he was talking about. And he said to me: "The ch-chair you're sitting in was sat in by Woodrow Wilson during World War One." There I was.

DONIN: Wow. And that was because he was—I mean, he invited med students in?

FIELDING: No, just me.

DONIN: Just you?

FIELDING: He used to come and see the shows that I did.

DONIN: Oh, I see. That's right.

FIELDING: As much as I was prominent for doing the Dartmouth Players, when this summer thing began for the Navy—so-called jam sessions—it just, you know, it flew.

DONIN: And did you do that out on the Green as well?

FIELDING: Yep. The first one was in front of—I'll tell you; it's a funny story.

DONIN: In front of Robinson.

FIELDING: Yeah, and we must have had forty people there. They had big loudspeakers, which went all around the campus. But, there was nobody there. And all of a sudden, a little girl—not a little girl—a girl in her very early twenties, came up to me and said, "I would like to sing." This was the idea of these things. I got people out of the audience and what they wouldn't do, I'd do. She said, "I would like to sing." I said, "Fine." And I had the little wonderful group that you just saw the picture of in back of me and I said, "Well, what do you want to sing?" She said, "I want to sing 'You Are My Sunshine.'" I said, "Ladies and gentlemen"—and I got her name—"Mary Smith is now going to sing for us 'You Are My Sunshine.'"

She was so bad. Let me tell you something: people were walking all over the campus, just walking, and they heard this noise and before she—and she never stopped and I was afraid to stop her, because I didn't know. She might have a brother sitting there who was going to bounce me around if I pulled her off. There must have been eight or nine hundred people by the time she finished, and from then on we flew. It's true. And who was she? She was the housekeeper for the secretary of the college.

DONIN: Well, let's see. Was it Neidlinger?

FIELDING: No, Neidlinger was dean.

DONIN: The dean. The secretary of the college...

FIELDING: Hayward.

DONIN: Yes, Sid Hayward.

FIELDING: Sid Hayward. Yes, that's right. She was his housekeeper. I didn't know who she was, and then Sid came to me one day and he said, "Do you know who that girl was?" I said, "No." He said, "She's my..." I liked Sid Hayward. He was a good guy.

DONIN: But it got you guys launched.

FIELDING: Wow, did it ever. Yeah.

DONIN: So how often did you entertain?

FIELDING: Every week.

DONIN: Wow. Like on a Saturday night or a Sunday?

FIELDING: I think it was Friday.

DONIN: Friday night.

FIELDING: Yeah. You see, they had no leave when they went up there. They had to take off—if they were a three-striper, they had no stripes and they were just sailors, really, but dressed like officers, but without rank. They couldn't go into town; they couldn't do anything. So, they needed the Hanover Society or whatever it was.



DONIN: Improvement Society.

FIELDING: Whatever it was decided they needed entertainment. Who should they get? Turned out to be me.

DONIN: Did the campus change a lot after Pearl Harbor? I mean, do you feel like—

FIELDING: When you use the word campus, what do you mean?

DONIN: Did the college campus, the atmosphere on campus and the mood of everybody—I mean, it must have been palpably different after Pearl Harbor. Do you remember anything like that?

FIELDING: No, I don't.

DONIN: Because when you got there in '39, I assume it was a pretty traditional undergraduate experience.

FIELDING: It was.

DONIN: You weren't focused on war or signing up.

FIELDING: No. Well, you know the newspapers were full of what was good and all of that, but it never touched us. It never hit us like, hell, like hell, like Iraq has never hit the people either. It's just: give them money and die. So, it never touched us. We were protected, somehow or other, by being up there. I was the first disk jockey for—it was DBS: the Dartmouth Broadcasting System. That's when I started with—oh, I had a lot of fun with that.

DONIN: How did they broadcast in those days? Do you remember?

FIELDING: What do you mean, how? I sat in a room with a microphone and played records for them.

DONIN: And so they had loudspeakers in the rooms or people had their radios?

FIELDING: Oh, no. It was a radio station. Yeah. WDBS, I guess it was. And Art Amidon. Do you remember that name?

DONIN: No.

FIELDING: Well, he had a record store down on the little street off of Main Street.

DONIN: Oh, there's still an Amidon on Main Street.

FIELDING: Yes, there is.

DONIN: He's a jeweler now.

FIELDING: Yes. And I got a bowl sent from Amidon to a bunch of us for some reason. I don't remember now. Art became my engineer. He traveled with me when I did my act in all of the little towns around.

DONIN: You took your act on the road?

FIELDING: Well, not very far.

DONIN: So to speak.

FIELDING: Yeah, so to speak. Oh yeah. And being in the Navy, you're not supposed to get outside income, so this Bullis fellow, I went to him and I said, "Look, I have to entertain Enfield and they want to pay me. I said, I can't take it." He said, "Well, nobody says you can't say to them: 'I bet you I can jump from this line over there.'" So, I was allowed to get paid. Not great sums, but, you know. But it was a little fun.

But Art went with me all the time. And when I worked in Webster, Art was my engineer. He loved—I hope. He said he loved it. I'll never forget: one day he said to me, "Doc, you know, if any night you feel you can't go on, don't you worry about it. I can do your whole damn act." [Laughter]

DONIN: He'd heard it so many times. That's great. So, you had these two years of sort of blissful undergraduate life, and then Pearl Harbor happened, and things must have gotten pretty serious then.

FIELDING: Yeah. You see, but I really—I'm trying to remember whether—it didn't change our lives a great deal, because the college continued in full force, financially able because of this group of Naval officers who were sent up there for training. For me, I became their entertainment. And I loved it. I loved that and I made friends with so many of them. I still sing some of the songs to myself that they wrote. There were some very talented people among them.

DONIN: And you became—That's when you joined the Navy as well, right?

FIELDING: Yeah.

DONIN: Yeah. The Navy people all lived together in the dorms?

FIELDING: My first place was Wheeler. That's right in the back of Webster, and I lived there for two years. Then the Navy took me over and I was living then in Dr. Lord's house, and eventually, the Navy said, "No. We're going to take all of you and put you in North Fayerweather." So, that's where I ended up living until I moved, as I told you, when they said I couldn't go overseas for that stay. I moved in Ripley, where the old Nugget used to be. Across the street from the old Nugget. The Nugget blew up one night and I slept right through the whole thing.

DONIN: You never knew it. Amazing. And then, I guess, they had to show the movies in Webster Hall.

FIELDING: Then they picked up the place further down the street.

DONIN: Yeah. So, you were like the major source of entertainment on campus.

FIELDING: You want to know the truth? I was the only source.

DONIN: Yeah.

FIELDING: And I loved it. It got so that nothing could go on unless Doc Fielding was the master of ceremonies. I mean, Smith College would come up with its bond drive. Doc Fielding was in the act. We had these professional vaudeville troupes that would come up. You know, second grade, second—not the best, of course—and Doc Fielding had to introduce them. One of the guys obviously didn't like me, because during what I was—he was on and he was saying, "Well, Waldo said this and Waldo said that." And some guy from the other side yelled: "His name is Doc!"

DONIN: Now, you must have been called upon to entertain at the, you know, Winter Carnival and Green Key weekend and all that. Homecoming.

FIELDING: Oh, yeah. But remember, Winter Carnival—

DONIN: That stopped after the war started, right?

FIELDING: Yeah. That's right.

DONIN: So, for the first couple of years you were able to...

FIELDING: Yeah. We had three years of house parties when I was there. Nine house parties: pouring rain, every single one. Yeah.

DONIN: Now, did you join a fraternity?

FIELDING: I did. Pi Lam, but I was not a fraternity guy. I didn't care much for that. I never did.

DONIN: But you must have been in demand. You would have been a great fraternity brother, because you were such great entertainment.

FIELDING: But I'm not.

DONIN: It wasn't your thing?

FIELDING: No.

DONIN: Why?

FIELDING: I already belonged to the AMA. I'm really not a joiner.

DONIN: Right. You like to do your own thing.

FIELDING: Yeah. Those things don't interest me.

DONIN: Right. But, were the fraternities still—I mean, before they shut down during the war, were they really the center of the social life for you guys?

FIELDING: No, not anymore. And you know Dartmouth was one of the few places where you could eat in the fraternity house but you couldn't live there.

DONIN: Oh, I didn't know that.

FIELDING: Yeah. They were very—I thought that was terrific, myself. So, they never became what fraternities in other colleges became, in my thinking. As I say, I was never interested in them. I'd get invited to them. They normally invited me maybe I would do something. Maybe I did or maybe I didn't. I don't remember.

DONIN: Right. Now, you said you did a road trip down to Smith on December 7. Was that a regular thing to go off?

FIELDING: I had a girlfriend down there.

DONIN: And it must have been hard to get around in those days, though.

FIELDING: Well, we would thumb. Vic Schneider and I, we would thumb down. Once, I borrowed a fellow's car. Jimmy Crowdy, from Worcester, lived just down the street from me, and I borrowed his car. The first time I went to meet this girl, Nina, it was winter, freezing cold. And I left at, I don't know, seven o'clock in the morning. There was nothing open on the roads, and I had to go to the john very badly. I stopped, finally, a gasoline station with lights on. And he said, "Well, the men's room is occupied. Just go in the ladies' room. It's all right." So, I did. While I was in there, the door opened and a woman came in.

DONIN: Oh, no.

FIELDING: That's the only time I had a car to go down there, though. It's just as well.

DONIN: Yeah. It is just as well.

FIELDING: We never had any trouble. One night, I can remember being down there and we didn't have to come back until the next morning. Say, Sunday morning. And the night desk clerk at the Northampton Inn gave us a key and we went up to one of the rooms. He gave us a room and an alarm clock. He said, "Just set this in time to get out before the maids come around and look."

DONIN: Oh, what a riot. That's terrific.

FIELDING: Then we thumbed from there, which was on the main road. Route 10, I guess, up to Hanover.

DONIN: Yeah. Route 5. Was it Route 5 up that side? No, that's the Vermont side. Yeah, Route 10.

FIELDING: Yeah.

DONIN: Because in those days, I assume not many kids had cars on campus.

FIELDING: Well, first of all, at Dartmouth, unlike a lot of places, freshmen were not allowed to have a car. It was a rule. I never had a car while I was in Hanover, of my own.

DONIN: I guess you didn't have to get a part-time job because you were earning money entertaining. A lot of kids, I guess, had part-time jobs there in the dining hall or...

FIELDING: Yeah, I didn't. I was fortunate in that my father, you know.

DONIN: Was able to pay the full freight.

FIELDING: And then, of course, the Navy took over, so I belonged to a private eating club: Rood. Carl Rood's place. A lot of us ate lunch there together, the medical students. Then there was a barbershop with a pool table, and Billy Wierman used to play all day. We met up again in the far reaches of the South Pacific and Billy died, eventually. Good fellow. He was fullback on the football team, too.

DONIN: Yeah, they kept sports going even during the war, didn't they?

FIELDING: Yes, they did.

DONIN: And I gather some of those teams were pretty good, because they had these older Navy guys on some of the teams who really—

FIELDING: Oh, no. They couldn't be on—They weren't regular students at Dartmouth. They couldn't be on the athletic teams.

DONIN: Oh, I thought some of them were on some of the teams. No?

FIELDING: I don't think so. What we used to do is we used to play them in baseball, for instance. The Navy would put together its team and, like, I pitched for the medical school. So, the medical school is going to play the Navy. Now, in this first group of Navy people, there were big shots from every area in the country, including athletics, and so that many of the people that we played against were professional ballplayers. I mean, we didn't stand a chance with them, and I wasn't a pitcher, really, I was a first baseman. But, for the medical school, who didn't have anybody to pitch, and this Billy Wierman was the catcher. And so I'm pitching it, and I guess I came off the mound in an unprofessional manner, and one of the guys at bat yelled, "Doc, you're going to get hurt that way. Don't do that. They'll hit it right at you." I said, "Shut up and hit." And he hit the next ball through my legs. You know, he had complete control and I don't know how I avoided being killed.

DONIN: Really seriously injured. That's great. Well, 1942, I gather, the hockey team won the national championship.

FIELDING: Yeah, they did. Yeah.

DONIN: And I thought it was because they had some of these older V-12 students on the team.

FIELDING: No, I knew all the guys on the team. They were all from Providence, from Marblehead, Lynn, that area. And the basketball team.

DONIN: Oh yes, George Munroe.

FIELDING: George was in our class. Well, five of them... Three of them were in our class and they won the NIT in Madison Square Garden undefeated.

DONIN: Yes. Pretty exciting.

FIELDING: Yes. George is still... I love George. He's a great guy.

DONIN: Yes.

FIELDING: I hope you're going to interview George.

DONIN: I did already.

FIELDING: Oh, did you?

DONIN: He's a wonderful man.

FIELDING: He's something. Yes.

DONIN: And the story of how he put himself through law school playing for the Celtics, or the Celtics farm team...

FIELDING: No he did actually play for the Celtics. He didn't play much but George was a hell of a basketball player.

DONIN: It's a great story.

FIELDING: And his wife Ellie is a sweetheart. She's a love too. I'm hoping we will get together as we usually do at reunion.

DONIN: Well, he's hopefully coming back for the 65<sup>th</sup>, right?

FIELDING: Yes, I hope.

DONIN: Now, do you think having the war interrupt the education of some of your classmates – I assume some of them signed right up and off they went and didn't actually graduate on time.

FIELDING: I think so, yes. I'm sure. They came back, most of them.

DONIN: They came back and... Do you think that had an impact on the class unity and sense of identity with class of '43?

FIELDING: Oh, I'm sure it did. Yes. Not with me and not with our group at the medical school because we stayed and we stayed together as a unit. So our other friends, they just went and lots of them didn't come back at all.

DONIN: No.

FIELDING: But many did but that was long after we were gone, long after I was gone, I know that.

DONIN: Sure. And some of them, not just in the class of '43, but in some instances they came back and sort of bonded with a younger class that they were maybe going to graduate with.

FIELDING: Yes.

DONIN: And actually changed their class affiliation. They were given the choice.

FIELDING: Oh really, I didn't know that you see because that didn't hit me.

DONIN: Yes, it wasn't even... It wasn't an option for you because you went straight through.

FIELDING: Yes.

DONIN: So it's a question of how do you identify with a class that's been so sort of splintered with different experiences?

FIELDING: Well, as I say, I can't really answer that because it didn't happen to me but I know that, as you say, it did happen to the classes after us.

DONIN: Do you distinguish between...? Did people distinguish between those that went straight through and those that went off to war and then came back again? That didn't make any difference?

FIELDING: No, I don't think so.

[Phone rings. Pause]



DONIN: OK. Any particularly memorable teachers? Classes that you really loved or teachers that you bonded with? Or deans? There weren't so many deans there then as there are now.

FIELDING: I know. Now, it's—and the hospital was this big and it was beautiful. It was a great place to be treated. And I've never been treated, of course, in the new place, but it's all different than it was. And we had a small group of doctors, and because of our medical school we got to know them all intimately. I played golf with a half a dozen of them. Yeah.

DONIN: As a student?

FIELDING: Yeah. I couldn't make—I tried to make the golf team. I played on the high school golf team, but I wasn't good enough to make the college team.

DONIN: So that golf course was there even then?

FIELDING: Oh, twenty-seven holes.

DONIN: Twenty-seven holes?

FIELDING: Yeah. It was an eighteen and a nine.

DONIN: Wow.

FIELDING: Yeah. Not an easy golf course.

DONIN: No.

FIELDING: No, not by any means. My dad came up one weekend and he and I were going to play golf, and he had to hit it over—the hole, he had to hit it over water.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Right.

FIELDING: He hit about five balls right into the water and I said, "Dad, why don't you use an old ball?" He said, "I don't have any!" [Laughter]

DONIN: Yeah, I gather that's a challenging golf course.

FIELDING: Yeah, very. But that whole area out there, there was nothing beyond the golf course. There was nothing. Now, of course, it's—

DONIN: All developed.

FIELDING: Yeah.

DONIN: All developed and more coming. More coming.

FIELDING: Really? I'll bet.

DONIN: So, no teachers that particularly come to mind that really made an impact on you?

FIELDING: Well, yeah.

DONIN: Either medical, or freshman year, or whatever? Any of your four years.

FIELDING: You know, right now, I remember your name, Mary, [Laughter] but I can think of several with whom I was very friendly, close socially, and I can't come up with names at the moment.

DONIN: Yeah. That's all right. That's okay.

FIELDING: Roy, the biology teacher, was a close friend of mine and when it came time for me to study for the boards that you talked about, he gave me the key to his classroom and I'd go in at night. He had three walls of blackboard and one wall of windows and I'd write out my whole chemistry notebook on those three walls, night after night after night. And I ended up number three in the country on the chemistry score, and I promise you, Mary dear heart, I couldn't put H, 2, and O together and even get damp. I just memorized the whole damn thing. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's great. Well, it worked, writing on those blackboards. So, were the professors very young?

FIELDING: Yeah, and some I used to be in—we'd drink beer together at their home at night. And some of them were really nice. I had a good time with the professors. I used to see them when I was entertaining. I'd see them.

DONIN: Well, that's the other thing. You were sort of a big man on campus because of your entertainment skills and, see, you—

FIELDING: I'd like to be modest about this, but I can't and I'll tell you why. The first year—freshman year—band night?

DONIN: Yeah.

FIELDING: Was exceeded by a young type of professor: the nephew of a Supreme Court justice. I can't think of his name. Jewish fellow. Brandeis. It wasn't Brandeis. Anyway, whatever it was. And he was terrible. He was awful. Now, I had never done anything like this, but I went to—I can't think of his name either—the professor who was the head of the band, afterwards and I said to him, “Professor, next year I want to do that show. I want you to let me master of ceremonies it and help put it together.” And from then on, that was my show.

DONIN: You were the king.

FIELDING: That was my show. And that was the same professor that we had playing the music for *Love Rides the Rails*. You know? And when I would come out, of course it would be: [sings piano part] because I was the villain. One night he fell asleep at the piano. [Laughter]

DONIN: At the piano? Oh my goodness.

FIELDING: While the show was going on, and I had to tap on the... “Professor!”

DONIN: Wake him up. Oh my goodness.

FIELDING: It was really—he was a wonderful old guy, but I'll never forget he fell asleep.

DONIN: Just sound asleep, right at the keys.

FIELDING: And at one point, I worked it out with him. I said, “I'll come in backwards, and you go [sings piano part].” You do that.

DONIN: That's great. Oh, funny.

FIELDING: I remember when a kid—oh, this was after I left. I was at—where was I? I was at Bellevue as a resident. So, I was out of the Navy, too, and a kid—an Italian boy—his father was the owner, and editor, and publisher of the largest Italian newspaper in the world in New York. I can't remember the name. The boy had on a varsity sweater. He was not entitled to it, and a bunch of guys came in his room and started to push him around and hit him. He fell, hit his head on the cot, and died.

DONIN: Cirrotta. Ray Cirrotta.

FIELDING: And what was the newspaper?

DONIN: I don't know the name.

FIELDING: Journale—I forget. Anyway, I was scheduled to come back to Hanover to do a band night a few days—maybe this happened on a Wednesday and my show was going to be Friday. It was the night before they went away on—

DONIN: Break?

FIELDING: Yes. Easter vacation. And I called—I was in Boston coming here to go to Hanover and met an old girlfriend while I was here. But I called Mr.—the president.

DONIN: It was Dickey at that point.

FIELDING: Dickey. Yeah, John Dickey, and I said, “Do you think I should come up and try to make people laugh?” He said, “I think they need it very badly. Please come.” Sure enough, the minute I got into the Inn, they said to me—they came out for me—the Inn used to be the college switchboard, too. They came around and they said, “Doc, he wants you in his house as soon as you get here.”

DONIN: Dickey?

FIELDING: Yeah. So, I went over to his house. We sat down and we talked and he said, “Please.” I said, “I think you should do this.” He said, “No. I want you somewhere in the evening to interrupt the show and speak to the students.”

DONIN: Oh. That's a big responsibility.

FIELDING: I know. I really didn't—it worked out okay, but I didn't think I could do that well after, you know, telling jokes and blah, blah, blah, blah. Imitations of Jimmy Durante or something foolish like that. When I did it, I asked for a chair and they brought it out on the stage for me and I sat down and they had put the house lights up and, Jesus, there was Mr. Dickey standing right by the exit door. And I talked to the student body.

DONIN: My goodness. What a responsibility.

FIELDING: That, I think, was one of the—it didn't turn out so difficult, but in thinking about doing it, I was really overtaken a little bit. I have no idea what I said, now, except I remember saying, “When you get there, you're going to get questioned. Every one of you is going to get questioned about this

unfortunate incident.” I said, “Just tell them and just remember that you go to the best goddamn school in the country,” or something like that. You know.

DONIN: Good advice.

FIELDING: It was—

DONIN: That really shook everybody up, that’s for sure.

FIELDING: Oh, yeah.

DONIN: Terrible.

FIELDING: It was the first time—when I lived in Ripley—I lived there for a year and a little fellow who lived across the hall from me got drunk and crashed a car and died.

DONIN: But this was such a violent way for this kid to die.

FIELDING: I know. I know. And he didn’t die because they hit him.

DONIN: No, he fell.

FIELDING: He died because he—you know, the metal cot—

DONIN: Those big metal radiators, right?

FIELDING: No. The cot leg, I think. I think.

DONIN: Oh, I thought it was a radiator.

FIELDING: Maybe. You may be right. I don’t know. That was a tough thing.

DONIN: So, let’s talk about those incidents in the newspapers that I clipped out for you. What were some of those—What was going on when they were serenading you at the...? I think that was wonderful.

FIELDING: What?

DONIN: What was going on when they were serenading you in the—

FIELDING: In the hospital?

DONIN: In the hospital. Cones and needles. So, this was in July of 1946. You were back up there, huh? “Last Saturday night in Webster Hall, all eyes were focused on the villain.”

FIELDING: Oh no, that’s *Loves Rides the Rails*. I came back to do it.

DONIN: Oh, that was—This is the review of *Love Rides the Rails*.

FIELDING: Yeah.

DONIN: Right. Where’s the article, though, about how they serenaded you when you were in Dick’s House? That’s it, isn’t it?

FIELDING: I guess. I don’t know.

DONIN: So this one is July 31, 1942: “Dedicate jam session to ill Doc Fielding. Tomorrow night’s jam session will be dedicated to Doc Fielding, who is sick in Dick’s House.” This is when you had the pneumonia?

FIELDING: No, I hesitate to tell you what it was.

DONIN: All right. Don’t then. “The show will start at seven with Neil MacNeil, class of ’45, substitution for Fielding as emcee. Part of the program will be picked up by DBS and sent to Fielding at Dick’s House during the bedpan alley show.” The bedpan alley show. But I think it’s wonderful. It says, “Lieutenant Hoy, United States Navy, will sing a group of songs chosen from—”

FIELDING: Yes.

DONIN: “—Stephen Foster, Victor Herbert, and Franz Schubert. The second feature will be Professor Longhurst, who will—”

FIELDING: That was Professor Longhurst. That was the head of the band.

DONIN: Oh. “He will be accompanying with the bells of Baker.” That’s great.

FIELDING: Oh, I remember. It was very nice. I mean, I had a baseball game to play one day and I didn’t have a pair of pants. We were going to play over in Vermont somewhere. I don’t know where. I borrowed a teammate’s pants and I got a wild infection.

DONIN: Oh, no.

FIELDING: Scrotal in nature.

DONIN: Oh, no. [Laughter]

FIELDING: So, you can imagine what happened when I got out. The yelling across the campus: “Hey, Doc!” But that was awfully nice of them to do that.

DONIN: That’s great. Well, it’s a measure of what a celebrity you were, truly. Okay, let’s see here now. I think we’re going to wrap this up. I think—

FIELDING: I’m having too much fun. Don’t go away.

DONIN: All right. Well, let’s see. What else can I get you to talk about, then? Where did you take your meals?

FIELDING: When?

DONIN: When you first got there.

FIELDING: Well, the first year was in the dining hall.

DONIN: In the Freshman Commons?

FIELDING: Oh, god, it was awful.

DONIN: Bad?

FIELDING: Terrible. So, I used to eat, you know—I’m not a large eater, never was in my life—in one of the restaurants in town. And then eventually a whole bunch of us ended up at Carl Rood’s eating place. Not the first year, though. That was in medical school.

DONIN: And you could also eat in the fraternities, you said, right? You could?

FIELDING: Yes. I never did. As I said, that never interested me.

DONIN: Yeah. Well, you know, during—it’s not what college is about—good cooking—that’s for sure.

FIELDING: No. But the Commons really was just awful.

DONIN: Pretty bad. What did you think of the—Did you have any impression about the quality of the teaching when you were there?

FIELDING: That's a good question. I like that question. Well, let's put it this way: my curriculum was not my own choice. Once it was known—or I made known—that I was headed towards, hopefully, the Dartmouth Medical School, my curriculum was—

DONIN: Preset, isn't it?

FIELDING: Yeah. Now, for instance, at the end of the first year I was scheduled to have physics, special kind of physics the following year, but I didn't want to take all that time—afternoon labs and everything—because I was now interested in the Players. So what I did was I went to Harvard summer school and took the whole—

DONIN: You had more free time to do the entertaining.

FIELDING: Yes. And all I needed was the credit. Not a grade. I needed the credit and then I didn't have to take it at Dartmouth. But this class at Dartmouth was just for pre-med students, and it was not tough. So, stupid me, I went to Harvard—listen to this—and I had to take Summer Course One and Summer Course Two Physics from the same book. The first was the first half of the book; the other course was the second half of the book and we took them together. And I didn't know anything about it. It was awful.  
[Laughter]

DONIN: How did you get through it?

FIELDING: I'll tell you how I got through it. First of all, I sat with a kid who was obviously a genius in this stuff, and when we would build things—radios and whatever the hell they were—then he would say to me, "Okay, Doc." And then I would press a button and the result was there, so we both got credit for it. I didn't know what the hell he was doing. And then I had to take a—what do you call it? A course I've got to get through—in Harvard Square. Tutoring. I was tutored three times and I passed and I got my C grade.

DONIN: Well done. All you needed.

FIELDING: So, come the next summer, oh, now I know what to do. There was a physical chemistry class that the pre-med students had to take the following year. I didn't want that either. So, I went to Harvard and I found the physical chemistry class. This was not for medical students; the one up there was. And I sat in class and I paid my fee—it was fifty dollars or something like that—and I sat in class and I didn't understand, literally, one word the professor was saying. So, I waited until the class left—this



was the first day—and I went up to him and I introduced myself. I said, “I’m a visiting student from Dartmouth pre-med and, honestly, I didn’t...” He said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you three problems. You sit over there and you work on them, and if you can solve them you can stay—you should stay. If you can’t solve them you should get the hell out and get your money back.” I couldn’t even read the problems, so that course I did not get to take at Harvard.

DONIN: So you had to go back and take it at Dartmouth?

FIELDING: Yeah, but then it was designed for us. See, it was different.

DONIN: Right. So, you satisfied all your requirements?

FIELDING: Yeah. Well, I was never the leader in class. I was okay, I got by. Three-point-something, whatever it was. And, you know, there were some awfully smart guys. I had all these other things that I was doing that I just loved: the Players, and then when I got into the entertaining and the entertaining.

DONIN: I’m surprised you had time to do any schoolwork.

FIELDING: Well, I don’t remember now how I did any, if you want to know the truth. But, Syvertsen was tough. He didn’t like me. The feeling was mutual, because I didn’t like him either.

DONIN: Right. He was a pretty tough customer.

FIELDING: Well, he was, but how he was alive we never knew, because the way he drove his car, we said he’s going to get killed. He lived on a mountain somewhere and he’d come down it, the whole damn thing with his pedal to the metal, metal to the pedal. But, he survived.

DONIN: He was there for a very long time.

FIELDING: Yeah. Sven was a great guy. Oh, Trygve was the brother. You know there were five...

DONIN: Gundersen.

FIELDING: Gundersen brothers. The Gundersen Clinic in Minnesota: very similar to the Mayo Clinic. I don’t know whether there were four brothers and a father. I’m trying to remember. There were five Gundersens that ran the clinic, but Sven stayed at Dartmouth and Trygve ended up here in Boston.

DONIN: Doing eyes, you said?

FIELDING: Trygve did eyes and Sven was general medicine. Oh, he was good. And in the days of rationing—we had subclasses in the class—and there were, like, four of us in each one of those, and Sven and his wife spent all of their meat things one time—

DONIN: Oh, their rations, you mean?

FIELDING: Yeah, and had the four of us over for dinner. I'll never forget it.

DONIN: Didn't he die a very sad death in a car accident or something or am I thinking of somebody else?

FIELDING: Not Sven. I don't think so. I think Sven just died. He was old. And Trygve the same year, in Boston.

DONIN: I'm thinking of somebody else in the med school. Anyway. Okay, well, we can keep talking. I'll turn this off, though. Have we exhausted your Dartmouth memories?

FIELDING: I don't know. You'll have to tell me that.

DONIN: Well, I think we've pretty well covered it, I think. Yeah. I think we've pretty well covered it.

FIELDING: It did become grabby when it was my roommate and I who were both trying to get into the Dartmouth medical school. I got it and he didn't. He was captain of the tennis team, Arthur Cohen, and that didn't create good feelings.

DONIN: No. How did they assign roommates in those days?

FIELDING: I don't think they did.

DONIN: Did you choose one another?

FIELDING: I was in my own room in Wheeler the first year. The second year, Arthur and I chose each other to be roommates. Not very pleasant; it was not the greatest. And the third year, I moved into Ripley and chose my—Eddie Linder and I became roommates there. And I'll never forget: we had a professor in chemistry—Bolser. The first day of class he said, "If you are ever going to be late for my class, do not come in. Turn and leave. You are not allowed in late." Okay. Now, I'm asleep and I woke up with a start

one morning. It was ten minutes of eight and I said, "Eddie, oh my god. I'm going to be late. I don't know what I can do!" He said, "Doc, it's Sunday." I fell back... And he used to write all these things down. I had won a big golf cup here in Worcester, I guess, and he used to put all of these *errata* that I made—he would put a slip in the cup. Oh, god, he died, too, but he lost his mind before he died.

DONIN: Oh, isn't that sad.

FIELDING: Yeah, I was walking the street in Newton one day and there was Eddie and his wife on the street. I remember at one of our reunions—I don't remember which one it was—she was at a table. They were at a different table than I was and she brought me over, and she said, "Eddie, here's Doc. Doc Fielding, Eddie. Doc." And I didn't know at that time that he was... Oh boy, what an experience that is.

DONIN: Shock.

FIELDING: Yeah. And then when I bumped into him on the street in Newton in the middle of the day one day, he threw his arms around me, kissed me on the cheek, and started to cry. Oh, Jesus. And he died and his wife died later, too. They lived up in that—eighteen miles from Hanover, south.

DONIN: Eastman?

FIELDING: Yeah, Eastman.

DONIN: Oh, yeah.

FIELDING: They moved from—He was a theater owner; he was in the theater business.

DONIN: Yeah, it's amazing the Dartmouth people who come back to live up there.

FIELDING: Yes, I know. One of the great guys in that class, I wish you—well, he's dead. You can't interview him. But, Eddie O'Brien. I'm sure people have talked about Eddie O'Brien.

DONIN: No.

FIELDING: No? Oh my lord.

DONIN: I'll look him up. Eddie O'Brien.

FIELDING: Eddie became almost like my personal public relations man. Every time I did a play here in town, I can show you class notes after class notes of: “Doc is now in such and such. Nobody can touch him and I know he’s going to...” And then my wife and I wrote this really good show called *Déjà Vu All Over Again*, which was a Yogi Berra expression. And Susie was, as I said, a musical genius. What this show was was a story of every ten years, starting with the forties, fifties, right up to the nineties. Susie died in ’91. But what we did with each of these ten years, we took everything in sports, theater, music, education, everything, and re-wrote it all and the songs were done with our words, but to popular—the top hit from a Broadway theater. We would then say our own words, you know, and it was a good show. We had our own piano player, and we insisted he get paid. We did that twice up in Hanover.

DONIN: For the class?

FIELDING: Yeah. And for me to work in—Oh my god, the Warner Bentley Theater was just...

DONIN: That must have been fantastic.

FIELDING: Warner and I kept up a long correspondence before he died. He also went.

DONIN: Oh, did he?

FIELDING: Yeah. His daughter wrote me and said that he no longer was able to do these things. When you worked for Warner, if he didn’t say anything to you, you did a crackerjack job.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

FIELDING: And if he let you have it, he let you have it. The first play I ever did for him was a terrible play: Ibsen’s *Wild Duck*. I’ll give you the *Daily Dartmouth* review before I tell you anything else. The morning after the play opened, the review was: “Wild Duck lays an egg.”

DONIN: Oh, no.

FIELDING: It was terrible.

DONIN: It’s a great line.

FIELDING: I know. And I didn't come on 'til the third act, and my name was Werner Gregas, and I had, like, a five-button suit and a tie, you know, and I was supposed to light my pipe. Well, of course, this was my first appearance for the Dartmouth Players, and I was stuffing the pipe backstage, and I guess I overstuffed it a little bit, because I got out onstage, struck a match, and went... I couldn't get any air through.

Then, I came—this is so funny—I stood up and as I did, the audience started to laugh a little. Now, there was nothing I did that should have caused the laugh. And as I made a little cross on the stage, there was more laughter. The first thing you do is check your fly. That was okay. I get over to one side and on the way back, pandemonium broke loose. Well, here's what happened: I had a tie on, but it was not a tie that went around, it was one of those butterfly things.

DONIN: Clip on.

FIELDING: Well, it fit under the collar.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Okay.

FIELDING: And evidently, as I stood up it went pop. It popped out, see. With each movement of my body, it began to disappear inside of this five-button suit, and then began to appear. And I didn't know anything until it dropped on the floor. And so the next night when I came to get made up, Warner came at me with a staple gun, and he said, "You will do anything for a laugh," and he's going click, click, click, click, click.

DONIN: Great.

**[End of interview]**