

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Gilbert Nelson '49
By Mary Stelle Donin
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NELSON: I have very lucid memories about my experiences in World War II. And fortunately maybe that is a good thing to keep the mind working and all that kind of stuff when you get older. This wartime experience was pretty fresh.

DONIN: Yes. When did you come home?

NELSON: Well, I came home in June of '45. And then—

DONIN: After you were recovered from your injuries.

NELSON: After I recovered. I was pretty well recovered from injuries. I was on crutches to a minor degree. Then I contracted polio as I indicated earlier. And that was in August of '45. That was a month or so after I got home. And then I spent some time in the hospital before discharge. And immediately upon discharge, I went to Dartmouth.

DONIN: Before you did your military service, did you know you were going to be going to Dartmouth?

NELSON: No, I did not. That's a good story. Before going in the Army in 1943, I was a good student. I was college-bound. And I was also involved with music and a few other things. But the war had started, and my brother was at West Point, and I wanted to go to West Point. My father was a World War I infantryman. He was a platoon leader, second lieutenant in the First Division, C Company, 18th Infantry. And I grew up with his stories. And he was not reticent about his experiences. And it made him a real rednecked—What today we would call an ultra conservative. But then the war came along, and I had taken all the exams. I passed them all and everything. And Fred Hartley, who was my representative, who had appointed my brother, called my father and me over and said, "This is war. Politically I cannot appoint two people from the same family." Essentially I enlisted in the Army because at that point they had a program which was called Army Specialized Training, and they might send me to college,

which they did after infantry basic and a few other things. They had a tremendous pool of young men who were at least partially trained.

DONIN: Ready, yes.

NELSON: And ready to go after D-Day. So anyway, after the war, after coming home and after hospitalization and all that kind of thing, I was across the street neighbor from Charlie Griffith. And Charlie Griffith was maybe class of '23 or something like that. He was a stalwart Dartmouth guy. He was a musician. I was something akin to being a musician, too. And he said, "Maybe you could consider going to Dartmouth? And just in case, why don't you take the aptitude test or whatever it is." To which I said, "Nothing gained, nothing lost, you know." So anyway, I did. And then he advised me that they were starting an entry class in March of '46. And that's how I came to go to Dartmouth.

DONIN: And of course you were able to go on the GI Bill.

NELSON: Definitely.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

NELSON: In addition to being wounded and a few other things, I had a much better GI Bill than most people.

DONIN: Had you gone up to see Dartmouth before you actually arrived there?

NELSON: No.

DONIN: You took the train to White River Junction?

NELSON: Yes. After discharge, I got on the train in Trenton, and it was the Montrealer and arrived in Dartmouth—at White River Junction—about 2:30 in the morning. And all I had was a barracks bag and my uniform. And nobody was there. So I sacked out on one of the benches in the station. And I don't remember when somebody said, "Well, do you need a ride? Where are you headed?" I said, "Well, I'm going to college." And so I somehow or another—I don't know whether it was a taxi man or whatever—somebody gave me a ride up to Hanover and I went

to Parkhurst and said, “When is this matriculation event occurring? I’m here.” And I think they assigned me—told me— Well, you’re going to live in Topliff Hall on the fourth floor.

DONIN: So you got to meet John Dickey right off the bat.

NELSON: Absolutely.

DONIN: He signed your card. That was his first—he came in the fall of ’45. So this must have been the first class that he was matriculating.

NELSON: It could well be. It could well have been, yes.

DONIN: Because you guys arrived in batches, didn’t you? The ‘49ers.

NELSON: Well, that’s true. There were at least three, at least three.

DONIN: A small amount in March, and then a small amount, I guess, in June.

NELSON: There might have been some in June, too. I don’t know.

DONIN: So he shook your hand and welcomed you to Dartmouth.

NELSON: I’m sure he did, yes.

DONIN: Yes. Did you feel out of place because here you’d had all this, you know, you’d had this life-changing experience in the military? You were clearly not a young civilian kid right out of high school.

NELSON: That is for sure. And in a very real sense, I lost my teenage youth.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: It just was compressed into this wartime experience.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

NELSON: And that, plus my family situation with my mother being pretty much of a straight disciplinarian. Basically getting in the Army

was a relief because all of a sudden I was just like the other guys.

DONIN: Right.

NELSON: I had been pretty much a unique individual. I probably was the last person to wear long pants in high school. I was still wearing knickers.

DONIN: Yes. You were part of a larger group, though. Did you immediately identify with all the other veterans that you discovered at Dartmouth?

NELSON: Well, basically, I think that most of us... We shared things as to whether we were in the Navy or this, that and the other thing. And there was a wide variety of people. And to my perception of those guys I was closer to, the only person I knew that was in anything resembling combat was Win Wilson who had been in the—He was a chief petty officer on a submarine in the Pacific. And as far as I could see, he was the only other one that I knew that had had combat.

DONIN: How about your roommates in Topliff? Had they been in combat?

NELSON: No. One of them had been in the Army for a brief time. He was a younger boy and had been discharged after a year or two.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

NELSON: And there were others, but I didn't really know them.

DONIN: Right.

NELSON: There were some in the Air Corps. There was a wide variety of people. And my good friend, Jim Sullivan, who's a '49er, had been in the Navy in the Aleutians for three, three and a half years which was an entirely different experience.

DONIN: Did you know when you matriculated what your major was going to be at that point?

NELSON: No, I did not have the foggiest idea. I really was, based upon all the testing that had been done, they said, "You rank very high in about 16 different things. And so you can pick any one of them."

DONIN: Did you have someone mentoring you or guiding you in terms of your choices for study?

NELSON: Not really. Not really. I was a fairly intelligent family and stuff.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: And there again I had more or less dropped the music thing. And after the wartime experience, I basically, I think my focus initially, was on medicine, being a physician, surgeon, doctor, whatever. And that seemed to fit as a possibility at Dartmouth, which really was not an objective. It was just the fact that it was there. At that point they had a premed thing. And Hitchcock was not there. Hitchcock was a nice little school.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: And I believe it was a nursing school at that point.

DONIN: It was a nursing school, right.

NELSON: Basically—and also I had a lot of extra credits coming in as a freshman. I didn't have to take Pollard's smut class. [Laughter] I mean, I had these other guys saying, "How did you avoid doing that?"

DONIN: Right, right.

NELSON: I don't remember what I said. [Laughter] I passed the screening, whatever it was.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: So then I had extra credits from Brooklyn College; there was a semester at Brooklyn College. And I'd done some correspondence courses when I was in the Army: hospitals, whatever. So basically I really had enough credits to be a junior. So I was able to take a lot of courses, liberal arts courses that

the average guy heading for engineering or medicine or anything else would not be taking.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

NELSON: So I did take physics and chemistry and math. But I had all these other courses that could stand me in good stead. So anyway, then ultimately I figured that this medicine—I didn't want to be in school for 16 years. So basically I took this shortcut to getting out of there with a fair possibility of a profession, so to speak.

DONIN: Sure, sure.

NELSON: So that's why I went to Thayer.

DONIN: Yes. You must have started at Thayer after a very short period of time.

NELSON: Well, indeed. That was when they had the senior and graduate years combined. So that it was pretty short. So I graduated—I was a '49 even though I came in in '46, the spring of '46. And then the senior year had been a joint effort. And that was also very fascinating was that those were the years when the Great Issues courses began.

DONIN: Uh huh.

NELSON: And I remember being fascinated with that, partly because of my father's penchant for world events and so forth.

DONIN: And John Dickey managed to get, I think because of his connections with the State Department where he'd come from, he had some pretty amazing speakers coming.

NELSON: Oh, absolutely.

DONIN: Statesmen and....

NELSON: That's what I'm saying. This was really fascinating, an opportunity. And also, not only that, I had attended a couple of relatively small attendance groups with Robert Frost.

DONIN: Right.

NELSON: I had a couple of real good teachers in comp lit and the modern novels, I guess. Those were all good times.

DONIN: And, as you said, you got a wonderfully sort of well-rounded education because you had so many of your credits already satisfied that you were able to branch out away from the sort of science and engineering.

NELSON: That was an opportunity, yes.

DONIN: Yes, that's great. So what was your social life, your fun life, up there? I mean you were an older veteran. You're not going to go in the basement of fraternities and drink beer with the guys. Or did you?

NELSON: I did join a fraternity, but I never lived there. Basically I was, I guess you'd say, a little bit aloof from the run-of-the-mill. And I latched on very early to the Dartmouth Outing Club.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

NELSON: But that was on an individual basis. There were...I considered a lot of the guys kind of like clubbies. And so I met a young man who had not been in the Army. He was pretty young. His name was Roger Sheldon. And he's the class of '49. He's now deceased. But anyway, he and I kind of like joined forces, and we would... We were both members of the Canoe Club. And my purpose or what was attractive to me is that this whole wartime experience was... even though I wanted to get out of even thinking about things. The best way... It turned out the best way to do that was to get off and smell the daisies.

DONIN: Be in the outdoors.

NELSON: Be in the outdoors.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: And so much of the time I was in combat involved horrendous types of weather and stuff, I wanted to experience the good part of weather. And so Roger and I would paddle up the Connecticut and decide which mountain we were going to climb. And we'd spend a night or two on top of the mountain and come on back.

And this was kind of a refreshing period of time. Also, I told you about working on the Ompompanoosuc River Dam.

DONIN: During the summer.

NELSON: During the summer. And that was kind of like outdoors.

DONIN: Did you have a part-time job?

NELSON: No, that was full-time in the summer.

DONIN: Right. But during the school year, did you do any kind of part-time work?

NELSON: Not really. As a result of working on the dam, I couldn't possibly spend the money I was earning even though comparatively to nowadays peanuts. So it turned out one of my fraternity brothers was a local person from Norwich, who'd been in Korea or just come back from Korea. I'm not sure what the deal was. Anyway, he knew a man by the name of Al Peavy, I think it was.

DONIN: Oh, that's a familiar name.

NELSON: And Al Peavy at that point was kind of like a ski bum. But he ran—in the winter he ran or had run the golf course ski tow.

DONIN: Oh, that's what it was. Yes.

NELSON: Yes. And so at that point I came back working on the dam, flush. And Cal said, "Well, how much money have you got now?" I don't know whether this was a good deal or a bad deal or whatever. And I said, "Well, I've got \$300. He says, "I'll check with Al." So I bought the golf course ski tow from Al.

DONIN: You're kidding.

NELSON: I'm not kidding.

DONIN: You bought the ski tow?

NELSON: I bought the ski tow.

DONIN: [Laughs]

NELSON: And Cal Knights and I ran the thing.

DONIN: Who was this?

NELSON: Cal Knights.

DONIN: Oh, yes, he was your fraternity—

NELSON: He was my fraternity brother.

DONIN: What fraternity is this?

NELSON: He lived in Norwich.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Chi Phi. I was a Chi Phi.

DONIN: Okay. Right.

NELSON: Tom Schwartz. I mean, the Chi Phis are extremely active if not dominant in the '49ers.

DONIN: Oh, interesting. I didn't know that.

NELSON: They are, believe me.

DONIN: So what did you do with the ski tow?

NELSON: Ran it.

DONIN: During the—

NELSON: In the winters.

DONIN: Did you make money? Did you charge for it?

NELSON: [Laughs] Yes. Of course.

DONIN: Just a little entrepreneurial spirit here.

NELSON: Oh, was I an entrepreneur. And also that's another thing: I told you that this whole outdoors stuff was like an escape.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: So...and I was going.... I think I bought the thing in '47. So I ran it '47, '48, '49.

DONIN: That's great.

NELSON: The first year that I ran it, I think I ran it a total of 12 or 13 days in the whole winter.

DONIN: Oh, dear.

NELSON: The next year it got up to 25. The first year the rope broke. And it cost me \$350 to get a new rope.

DONIN: [Laughs] Oh, no.

NELSON: And so my entrepreneurial thing was like [laughs]—it was a struggle.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

NELSON: So I remember hiring a guy up there. He was a friend of Cal Knights. I have a picture which I intended to bring but I didn't because it shows this guy running the ski tow and it shows the ski tow. And there are so many anecdotes about the ski tow. I'll tell you a couple, if you've got time.

DONIN: Yes, definitely.

NELSON: Anyway, the ski tow was priceless because even though we didn't have any snow, it was very cold. And frequently there was enough snow. The cross-country trail went up along the Connecticut River.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: And down into the Vale of Tempe and stuff like that. And I bought a pair of Army surplus skis from— I forget the name of the guy who was the overall salesman of junk.

DONIN: In Hanover?

NELSON: In Hanover. I don't know what his name was but he sold all kinds of surplus Army equipment and stuff. So I was not a great skier. But it was so beautiful to just go up to the cross-country trail. And after dark the moonlight, the shimmering snow. And sometimes it would be snowing. I did this at least two years. Every time I was in the late evening before going home to study for Thayer School and whatever. And that was really, really idyllic.

DONIN: That kept you busy during the winter months.

NELSON: Well, it was printing tickets and making signs. And I didn't spend as much time there. As I say I employed this man whose name I don't know. I've got his picture. And Cal Knights was the co-owner of this thing even though he didn't put any money in it.

DONIN: Two students running the ski tow. I love it.

NELSON: Also, my good friend Jim Sullivan, he was quite athletic and he and I undertook to... I was interested in golf. I had been a golfer in high school and so I joined the Dartmouth country club. So several of the guys on my floor in Topliff joined the country club too and none of them had played golf before. And this was really a sore in the side of some of the faculty who would be playing golf and here you see these clowns romping over the golf course. [Laughter] I don't remember the names of any of the professors but it was embarrassing really. So when the—Jim was also a Chi Phi and much more active in living there and so forth than I. But suffice to say he, nothing would do but he would skiing, even though he had never been on skis before. And he's a good athlete, and he learned very quickly. And at one point—and I didn't charge him 50 cents for running this, the ski tow—So one day it's a bright sunny afternoon. And Jim's there, and the snow's just barely enough to ski on. And the ruts in the ski tow are down close to the mud. And here these two girls are herringboning up the hill. It's just a little hill, only 100 yards, 150 yards long from the second fairway up to the third green, whatever it is, behind the third green. And so Jim came up to me and said, that brunette is really a sweet looking girl and I want to try and get a date with her. I yelled, Good luck! Way to go! So anyway, the story that both he and she said that he approached

her as she's beginning to go up the hill and said, I don't know your name but you do a wicked herringbone. [Laughter]

DONIN: What a pickup line.

NELSON: [Laughter] What a pickup line.

DONIN: Did he get the date?

NELSON: He got the date and they got married and they had a beautiful relationship. They had I guess three children, maybe four, two girls and the boy. Very unfortunate, the boy, his son was mugged and brain damaged in Delaware.

DONIN: So was this a local Hanover girl that he married?

NELSON: Well, I'm not sure. They lived in Hanover; they were both teachers at Hanover High.

DONIN: Jim was?

NELSON: No, the two girls. And I dated... I had a girlfriend but I dated her friend a little bit. But my relationship with her didn't blossom.

DONIN: That's nice. That's a great story.

NELSON: And another great story is. You mention Dickey. He had two daughters.

DONIN: Yes. Sukie and Christina.

NELSON: And I don't remember whether they frequently came out. But they did come out. And one day they're skiing, and he's observing the situation.

DONIN: Dickey is?

NELSON: John Sloan Dickey's standing by the—as I recall, he's standing by the motor, the inefficient Model A chassis motor that ran the ski tow. And for some reason or another, either the battery died or something went wrong. It could have been the battery died or something else, but suffice it to say, John came to the rescue and said, Well, you've got a toboggan here, you take the battery

out and we'll go down to my car, and I'll take the battery out of my car, and we'll get the ski tow running again.

DONIN: Amazing.

NELSON: Which is what we did. And that was my experience with John Sloan Dickey.

DONIN: That is a great story. So who was the handy guy who knew how to take batteries out? You both?

NELSON: Oh, I knew how to do this but the guy who was running the ski... My employee was. I gave him fifty percent of everything that we took in every time that he was there. Every time that he took the money in, he got fifty percent of it.

DONIN: Oh, it's a good deal, I guess. Fifty percent of what?

NELSON: [Laughter] Fifty percent of what. Whatever. And nobody ever contacted me about insurance or whether I needed to have a lease on the golf course. It just was there. And after I left, I have not the foggiest... I know that I never got... I think it was sold or something but I never...

DONIN: So you didn't try to sell it to somebody else when you were graduating?

NELSON: No, Cal Knights was still there and I lost track of him.

DONIN: So I'm envisioning the fall of 1946 when they have a real mishmash of students. They've got regular students civilian, fresh out of high school kids enrolling. They've got you veteran types that are old and have seen the horrors of war. And everything in between. They've got vets who are coming back to Dartmouth even though they didn't start at Dartmouth because they want to finish up their education because they'd started there. I mean they've got the whole mix of people as a population of undergrads. How did the college do sort of mainstreaming all this diverse community?

NELSON: Well, apparently it was in one sense, it was under-populated even with this influx. And basically it was getting back on track to some form of normalcy. And this was obviously quite a process

which I wasn't intimately involved with because I didn't know what it had been. I'd never been to college. This college experience I had in Brooklyn College was very unique. This Brooklyn College had been totally rebuilt or built anew or it was new. Every facility was new. They had no students. The Army essentially took over the faculty and the entire plant.

DONIN: Right.

NELSON: So that that was not a normal college experience by any stretch of the imagination. So going to Dartmouth was quite—just a new thing for me. And it also was, fortunately, I guess, being low-key and I'm sure that to some degree we veterans were given a little more slack as to all the—

DONIN: Discipline.

NELSON: Discipline and the freshman beanies and all this kind of stuff.

DONIN: Right. You didn't go through all that.

NELSON: I didn't go through all of that.

DONIN: Right. Well, I gather Dickey faced some issues in terms of exactly that. You know, how to discipline men who'd seen terrible things in war. I mean are you going to get on their case for drinking too much beer one night? I doubt it. And yet you've still got to keep a handle on these young kids coming in right from high school. And I gather he opened a— I gather this was in response to the older veterans who were on campus—they actually opened a pub down in the basement of the dining hall that was really aimed to be a place for the veterans and the older students to gather.

NELSON: I don't recall anything as specific as that.

DONIN: And of course by the fall of '46, the fraternities were opening up again.

NELSON: That's true.

DONIN: And they started all the old traditions, you know, Homecoming, or Dartmouth Night and Green Key and Winter Carnival.

NELSON: Right.

DONIN: All that stuff was going on.

NELSON: Yes.

DONIN: Now you started in March of '46. Were they still doing classes throughout the summer at that point? Or was that one of the summers you went off and had a job, had the job at the dam?

NELSON: I did not go on the dam that summer. I believe I went to school.

DONIN: They were still operating year round?

NELSON: Yes they were operating year round. And that basically increased my...

DONIN: Your credits.

NELSON: My credits. Yes.

DONIN: You had even more credits. Yes. So you actually started classes at Thayer, what, by '47?

NELSON: No, it would have been '48.

DONIN: Oh, it started in '48.

NELSON: As a matter of fact, I'm class of '50 at Thayer. So I was class of '49. So basically I started Thayer per se at '49.

DONIN: After you graduated.

NELSON: It was my senior year that I started Thayer.

DONIN: Yes.

NELSON: And the summer of we might have had a surveying course in the late summer of '49.

DONIN: Uh huh. Now you had a traditional graduation ceremony then in June of '49?

- NELSON: Absolutely.
- DONIN: For your undergraduate degree.
- NELSON: Right.
- DONIN: Up in the Bema?
- NELSON: Yes. It was in the Bema. It was a hot day, and believe me it was a hot day.
- DONIN: But in addition to the '49ers, you must have had a lot of other classes represented there getting their degrees because of all these staggered...
- NELSON: I have no idea. I'm not privy to what the interaction to other classes might have been.
- DONIN: You know, the fellow who had matriculated in '42, say, and then he spent two years there and then went in the war and then came back. I mean there were all kinds of different class connections.
- NELSON: I can't remember some of the... I mean like I mentioned Warren Daniell as being class of '48 and I don't know whether he got his degree with us but still was a '48. I don't know.
- DONIN: Right. I think there was a lot of mixed up class stuff going on then.
- NELSON: There was, I'm sure. The other thing was that the fraternity stuff was very, very fascinating, interesting, and so forth. And there's a total departure. As I say, I hadn't been a groupie in high school.
- DONIN: Right, right.
- NELSON: And then going in the Army, all that stuff was just totally...
- DONIN: Didn't it seem silly to you, some of it?
- NELSON: Most of it did, yes.

- DONIN: Yes. So did you spend much time there.
- NELSON: Not really. My friend Jim Sullivan and I spent a lot of time there. We both were... We played a lot of ping pong and pocket pool. He was good at both of them and I probably got better at both of them. And we spent many many hours at both. And we both went to Thayer School and they had a ping pong table at Thayer School...
- DONIN: And you continued your training.
- NELSON: Continued our training there. Yes.
- DONIN: So what was the appeal of joining the fraternity if you thought it was silly?
- NELSON: The friends that I had acquired.
- DONIN: They were joining it.
- NELSON: They were joining it, and said come on down.
- DONIN: And were all your friends— You didn't have any undergraduate friends that were just civilians? Most of them were veterans like yourself.
- NELSON: Except for this—I did, yes. The—
- DONIN: Except for the kid that you did the Outing Club stuff.
- NELSON: That was Roger Sheldon, yes.
- DONIN: Right.
- NELSON: Yes. But I was friendly with a lot of the guys. I also was in the glee club, so that was a broad cross-section. And I think that the—I remember the director, Zeller was his name, and that was a good take-in because I guess it was two years we did trips. I guess we went as far as Ohio or somewhere.
- DONIN: Wow.

- NELSON: Someplace. And stayed at homes of alumni in various towns. Yes.
- DONIN: Did you ever spend time—I gather there was quite a group of married veterans who were living in Sachem Village and Wigwam.
- NELSON: Well, that came later. At the point when we first got there in '46, I'm not aware of any married veterans other than maybe associate professors or somebody who lived.... There was one, Bob Paulson I think his name was, and he was also active in the glee club. And after he—was in electronics or electrical engineering, I guess he was. The Thayer School experience was really precious. Not that the rest of Dartmouth was not. And the close association with the professors, like—
- DONIN: You said over breakfast that there were nine students and six professors.
- NELSON: There might even have been seven.
- DONIN: Wow.
- NELSON: I mean there were nine civil engineering students. And here we had Russ Stearns and John Minich and Joe Ermenc and those are the three— And also the—I forget the name of the dean. But the dean was doing courses at that time.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- NELSON: Those are the four that I can remember.
- DONIN: Did they help you find jobs afterwards. Did Thayer help you find jobs in any way?
- NELSON: In a way they did, yes. You might say passively. Not necessarily actively.
- DONIN: Right.
- NELSON: In my case. And there again, I lucked out because I was a civil engineer. I mean I graduated with a master's degree in civil engineering. And I think—I don't know who or whatever—said,

well, you might contact, I can't remember his name, down in Baltimore. He works for the J. Greiner Company. And he's vice president or something. So anyway...

DONIN: You did.

NELSON: I did and I was employed. And so I started work within a week or two after graduation.

DONIN: So your sense wasn't that it was crowded at Dartmouth when you got there?

NELSON: Not at all. The rooms in the dorm were pretty well occupied.

[Pause to change cassette]

As far as being crowded and other experiences at Dartmouth is concerned, I don't recall how long I was at Topliff. And I believe I went to New Hampshire and had a couple of roommates. And then I went down, and I think I spent the last three years in a single room at Lord Hall down near Thayer School.

DONIN: Uh huh. That's lucky, a single.

NELSON: It was very lucky. And I had some very good friends in that era. One of them was—I never had contact with him personally—but his name was Stan Waterman. And he ultimately... He was of the Waterman Pen Family.

DONIN: Wow.

NELSON: And ultimately he had—I saw many programs—He became a producer of documentaries and things like that. And his family lived in Tahiti, for all of those...very idyllic things. And similarly, many of my classmates did outstanding things and were great achievers and whatever.

DONIN: Do you think—Did you have the sense that the community of Dartmouth, including, say, your professors and the deans, whomever, did they treat you differently than... These returning vets who were older and more mature, did they treat you

differently than the undergrads, than the young, right-out-of-high-school civilians?

NELSON: I'm not personally aware of it. I'm not really conscious of that. And I remember I had one course—this is another anecdotal thing—For whatever set of reasons, circumstances, and it probably had something to do with war; I'm not sure. But I had trouble waking up in the morning during those times and maybe because I was burning the candle at both ends with this or that or the other thing. And I remember two incidents, eight o'clock classes. One of them was in chemistry; I think his name was Professor Richardson. And they had a big like amphitheater with... There were a lot of guys in the class. And he was not exactly the most exhilarating of talkers and this was early in the morning. And one time apparently he was addressing comments about me who was sleeping, and everybody's looking at me. And I, at some subliminal level, I heard something that said, and he said, "And I used to be a pitcher when I was a younger man." And with that he threw an eraser, and it hit me in the head. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's rather undignified.

NELSON: It was. Well, and he said, "I've been watching you for a while. And I'm just trying to stimulate your attention a little bit." So then another one was, I think it was a class in government. And I was not doing well in this class. And as a matter of fact, I think it was the only D I got in my entire career at Dartmouth. I didn't hit the dean's list or anything. I did quite well. I probably had above a B average, but it wasn't Phi Beta Kappa quality. And so anyway, I can't remember his name, but this government professor said after one class, he said, "I think it would be good if we had a little talk. And you can come up to my office. And we'll see how things are going." Anyway, I went up to his office at the appointed hour. And he had a little Cocker Spaniel who was sitting under his desk and checking me out and looking at me like a dog will. And so I don't remember what the end result of this conversation was or what the content of this conversation was, other than was I having trouble studying or attending class or attention in class or all of the above? And I said, "Well, I think that probably all of the above, yes." And he said, "Well, at this point, I think that this little guy right there knows more about government than you do."

- DONIN: Oh, gosh! [Laughter]
- NELSON: So that is a pretty big putdown.
- DONIN: Yes, I'll say. [Laughs]
- NELSON: I remember in the later years, towards the end, I was there because of my impending work and all that kind of stuff. And so I was there during reunion weekends. And so I don't remember whether I had a job or whether I just worked as a volunteer or what the heck I did. But that was fascinating because I got to meet the members of the reunion class, including their sons and daughters and wives and stuff like that. And there were quite a few experiences involving that, drinking and...
- DONIN: Oh, yes. Still goes on.
- NELSON: I guess it does. That's another thing that during one period of time, going back, without mentioning any names, we frequented any number of fraternity houses.
- DONIN: Oh.
- NELSON: And this is back in the probably early '90s.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- NELSON: And this was to me appalling. I couldn't relate this to the accomplishments of the students who were accomplishing things because the contrast between an academic high-type facility and what was going on in these fraternity houses was unbelievable.
- DONIN: Yes, yes.
- NELSON: In contrast. And I still can't. And I haven't been back to any fraternity houses since this period of time when I was going up there fairly regularly and visiting the fraternity houses.

[End of Interview]