

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Raymond J. Rasenberger '49
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: How is it that you decided to come to Dartmouth? What made you choose Dartmouth?

RASENBERGER: Well, that's sort of an interesting story. In 1945—I turned 18 in September 30, 1945. So that summer I had graduated from high school and was a counselor in a summer camp out on the end of Long Island. And I figured I didn't want to get drafted into the Army, which is what the procedure would have been. So I would join the Navy, and I would join the Navy on my next holiday in August this was; or I guess early August it must have been. We got one day off a week, so I would go into New York and sign up for the Navy. And the bomb dropped. And suddenly there was some question as to whether the draft was going to be around. And I had no plans for college. My plans were to go to work in the US Army or the Navy. But I started thinking right then and there about college. And as luck would have it, the guy who ran the summer camp was a man named John Shaw, class of '23. And the girl counselor that I was dating that summer, which was the best part of the summer actually, [laughter] was the daughter of a classmate of John Shaw's. So they started talking about Dartmouth to me. And I had not really—I don't know whether I'd ever heard of Dartmouth before then, but I certainly hadn't thought about it before then. So to make a long story short, I applied and was accepted and went in November—I think we started in early November of that year.

DONIN: So you were the third wave of '49ers.

RASENBERGER: We were the third wave, yes. Yes. I learned today there was a fourth wave that came in March of '46. Somebody told me he was in that wave, veterans that came back. But anyway, so I was really a latecomer in a lot of ways to Dartmouth. And most of my classmates were—many of my classmates—were people who had aimed for Dartmouth all their lives.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: A lot from the Boston area, as you probably know.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: My mother didn't think Dartmouth was a good idea. She was a strong Catholic, and she had read something that Ernest Martin Hopkins had said about Catholics at Dartmouth. She thought it was, you know, not good stuff. But I had played on the basketball team in college [high school], and we had on that same team, we won the city championship in New York. And we had Bob Cousy who was later Hall of Fame basketball player.

DONIN: Wow! This was your high school team?

RASENBERGER: My high school team, yes. We grew up playing in the schoolyards in Queens together and went to high school together, a group of us. And anyway, Cousy made that team what it was. So Ozzie Cowles assumed that, you know, everybody on that team was a great basketball player. So he came down and came to our house and spoke to my mother. And I can remember, I was upstairs listening in on this conversation. He basically talked her into the idea that I should go to Dartmouth. Although I think in the long run, my mother would have done whatever I really, really wanted to do. She just needed to be persuaded a little bit. And Ozzie was a great persuader. So that was sort of a secondary reason I ended up here. [Laughs]

DONIN: Were you the first in your family to go to college?

RASENBERGER: Yes.

DONIN: Did you play basketball when you got here?

RASENBERGER: Yes. I was on the basketball team for—I was never first string, although I did start a few games. I think in my junior year I got asthma. Somewhere along the way I got asthma, which I'd had—it started at age 13 and that kept me out of practice a long time. Meanwhile I'd gotten involved with what was then the brand-new Undergraduate Council. And I was in line to be president of the Undergraduate Council. So I gave up basketball at that point and decided the rest of my extracurricular activities at Dartmouth would be that. So that's what I did.

- DONIN: So let's go back to what you found when you arrived here in November of 1945. You were the first group of students to be matriculated by John Sloan Dickey.
- RASENBERGER: That's right.
- DONIN: Do you remember that?
- RASENBERGER: Yes, very clearly.
- DONIN: Was he as sort of overwhelming as people describe? Or larger than life I guess is the right word.
- RASENBERGER: Well, he was. And when you're a freshman matriculating, any college president would have a hard time not being larger than life. But he was. He was a big man physically. And he had sort of a formal manner about him. Which you know the funny thing is that I ended up being sort of a protégé of his because he sponsored the Great Issues course, as you may know. And after I left Dartmouth, I went to graduate school for a year. And then they asked me to come back and be an instructor in Great Issues. Instructor was basically grading papers and running something called the Public Affairs Lab in Baker Library. But anyway, it was being a member of the faculty, which was a whole different role for me. And John Dickey was responsible for that.
- DONIN: Yes, that timing is about right. Because he was just getting it off the ground, wasn't he, the Great Issues course?
- RASENBERGER: Right, right.
- DONIN: So what was the graduate degree that you got? It wasn't a law degree.
- RASENBERGER: No, it was a degree in public administration.
- DONIN: Oh.
- RASENBERGER: That was another element in this because the provost at that time was Don Morrison, who had been in Washington. And he thought we should have a course in public administration or a major in it. And I signed up for it, for the wrong reasons, but I did sign up for it. And so I was the first major in public administration I think that Dartmouth had. I don't know whether I was the last one or not. But

the beauty of the major was you could take anything you wanted in the history and social sciences, and it all counted towards the major. I majored in public administration. So naturally when graduate degrees in public administration became a possibility—I really wanted to go to law school, but I didn't have any money—I got a scholarship from Dartmouth and one from Syracuse which is where I went, to the Maxwell School.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

RASENBERGER: And put those two together, and I had enough to go for a year—it was a one-year program—to Syracuse, and studied for a master's. Although I have to say I didn't get the master's at the end of that year because my paper on John Maynard Keynes was deemed inadequate. So then I moved on to Washington, and I put that out of my mind because I then went to the Bureau of the Budget in Washington which was where good public administration school graduates wanted to go. But I went to law school at night then, starting in 1953, about two weeks after we got married. I was on the Law Review, and I wrote a long article for the Law Review which had a relevance to public administration as well as law. So they published it in the Law Review, and I thought to myself, well, I'll just sent it in to Syracuse and see whether they'll take this. [Laughs] I shouldn't be disclosing these secrets, I suppose. [Laughter] But anyway, they said sure. And they mailed me a degree in the mail. So....

DONIN: Terrific!

RASENBERGER: In the same year I got a master's degree in 1957 from Syracuse, and from George Washington Law School I got a JD.

DONIN: And an article that was a two-fer.

RASENBERGER: It was a real two-fer, yes, it was. Who could have predicted that?

DONIN: So what was life like back here in '45? Let's go back to that. You arrived here as a freshman. Describe what your class was like to me. What was your impression of your classmates?

RASENBERGER: Well, part of it was because I was on the basketball team, I did not have as much social life with my classmates as maybe I might have had because a lot of my life was taken up with basketball practice.

DONIN: Yes.

RASENBERGER: Now, I did work in the Dartmouth dining hall.

DONIN: So that was your job that got you—

RASENBERGER: That was my job. Yes, that was part of the aid package. And my best friends were the guys I met in the DDA, Ray Truncellito being a perfect example. And we had a lot of fun there.

DONIN: That's what he tells me. And Vail Haak, wasn't he there?

RASENBERGER: And Vail was there, right. Yes. It was a real great group.

DONIN: And did you get free meals by working there?

RASENBERGER: Yes. Right. The package was a scholarship and a job and a loan.

DONIN: Yes.

RASENBERGER: It took me forever to pay off that \$300 loan. But anyway I did finally.

DONIN: Was it your impression that a lot of your classmates had to jobs?

RASENBERGER: No. My impression—we regarded ourselves as sort of a separate group, separate and apart from those classmates that had the money to just show up at the dining hall and buy their meals, which most of our class did. Not that there was anything negative about it in terms of our reaction to them or to the college or anything else, you know. It was just they were in a class where you didn't have to work for your meals. But we were in a group that worked for our meals and loved it.

DONIN: But what about all these returning veterans that always say they have no money and needed to work?

RASENBERGER: I don't remember many of them working in the dining hall.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: Most of the people working in the dining hall were pea-green freshmen like me. I think I was greener than most, and that's maybe why Dartmouth in a way was—the first year was a shock for me because there were a lot of veterans around, as you know. And

I was paired as a roommate with a guy named Dave Kravitzky [sp] who I think had been a marine in the war and had a whole different outlook on life than I had. You know, I came from a fairly strict religious background where you still said the Rosary and things like that. And Dave had been through hell in the Pacific. And he was not interested in anything but finding a girl and getting her into bed. I'll never forget that first fall, there was a football game I went to. And I came back early I guess. And there was my roommate Dave in bed with a girl. And it was, you know, it was a real shock to me.

DONIN: Yes, yes. It wasn't just an age difference. It was just a whole lifestyle.

RASENBERGER: It was a total lifestyle difference, right.

DONIN: Yes.

RASENBERGER: Well, you get over that after a while. I mean—and I did. I joined the Deke house, as you may know. And that was full of a raucous set of veterans if there ever was one. But we integrated rather quickly, I thought, after a while. And being on the basketball team, which was half veterans and half real freshmen like me, was also a useful form of integration.

DONIN: And I assume in the classroom as well.

RASENBERGER: Yes. I say that. I assume that, too. But I have no recollection of what went on in the classrooms [Laughs] that first year. Somehow my classroom experiences are largely—except for particular professors—are largely washed away by the blackboard effect or whatever you want to call it.

DONIN: Right. So did you know what you wanted to major in when you first got there?

RASENBERGER: No. I had no idea. I knew I was interested in political science. So I started taking courses like that. And there was a course on the Constitution that was taught by Bob—I can't remember his last name—that I wanted to take. But it was stuff in that area. Which is still my interest actually.

DONIN: Right.

RASENBERGER: But there were things we had to take like math, and there was a language requirement and science requirements.

DONIN: And freshman writing? Maybe that was later.

RASENBERGER: I don't remember that. I remember doing everything I could to evade a laboratory course in the sciences, and I succeeded. I took geography and astronomy and things like that. I was not good with languages. Still am not. So although I'd had three years of French and two years of Latin in high school, I took one year of French, which was the minimum you could get away with. And that was the end of my language training.

DONIN: So did you have professors—not necessarily freshman year—but who were the professors that, you know, made an impression on you?

RASENBERGER: The funny thing is there was a course called administration that the college had had. I don't know why such a course was in an undergraduate liberal arts curriculum, but it was. And it was taught by a guy named Cotty Larman.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

RASENBERGER: And he was good. And a professor whose last name I can't recall at the moment who taught constitutional law was good. His first name was Robert. And the professor who taught sort of the philosophy of political science, Arthur Wilson, was first rate. Those are the only names that spring out to me at the moment as memorable professors. I'm sure there were many more. Later on, of course, when I was working in Great Issues, I worked with Arthur Jensen and Bill Carter who were the two sort of co-directors of the program at that time. And they were terrific guys.

DONIN: So when you were actually a senior here, had Great Issues begun? Did you actually take the Great Issues course?

RASENBERGER: Yes, we took Great Issues.

DONIN: Uh-huh!

RASENBERGER: Yes.

DONIN: Because that was a senior-year thing, right?

RASENBERGER: Yes. And all seniors had to take it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So did you have, you know, a dean or a professor who you considered someone that you could go to as sort of a mentor or for guidance?

RASENBERGER: Well, right off the bat, I hit it off with Don Morrison, the dean of the faculty.

DONIN: Oh.

RASENBERGER: And he was very approachable. So I would say if there was any one person for me, it was Don Morrison. Although I didn't go around asking for guidance very much, partly because maybe I was too embarrassed to do it. But partly because I just figured I can figure it out for myself.

DONIN: Which was much more of a trend in those days, I think.

RASENBERGER: Yes.

DONIN: Students got along on their own.

RASENBERGER: Yes. They didn't need to be coddled. And you didn't expect it. And it was sort of a—if you did expect it, it was not a good thing in terms of the way others looked at you.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. How did the campus feel to you with such a diverse group that was here at that time? These older veterans who clearly wanted to chase women and drink beer and run around and do that kind of stuff versus you sort of traditional young civilian freshmen who didn't know as much about life as these older fellows did from their experiences in the war. And some of them even came back with wives.

RASENBERGER: Right. That's right. Lived down at Sachem Village there.

DONIN: Right. And Wigwam Circle.

RASENBERGER: Right, right.

DONIN: So how did it feel to you?

RASENBERGER: Well, you know I think at that age, you accept whatever is. You have nothing to compare it with. You have— And certainly in my case, I had no set of expectations against which to measure what I found here. What I found here was what was.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: And that's what I accepted and lived with. And I don't recall particularly feeling negative about the fact that we were a mixture of veterans and various stages of freshman-hood as others may have. I just went about my business and, you know, dealt with whatever, whoever I encountered. That's all. As I look back now, I realize— and of course now I've had five kids that have gone to college and seen their experiences—I realize how odd it was through the lens of their college experience. But to me, there was no other lens to look through. This was it. This is what Dartmouth was. And I was interested in playing basketball and studying, doing well. And so I just went about my business.

DONIN: And you had... Your group of friends was really your basketball team then.

RASENBERGER: Yes, although my closest friends were the dining hall crowd. Now later on I did have, you know, met other guys in the dorm, and I lived with different roommates. I lived in 406 New Hampshire for three years. But the other roommates were—I mean I remember Norm Laird and Ed Sawyer who were both from Montpelier, Vermont, and I. They put three of us in a room. And I remember— whether this was sophomore or junior year or what year it was—but they were Vermonters, and I liked them. And we got along really well. And I did go up to Montpelier some at their invitation to visit their homes and things like that. That was sort of a new experience for a New Yorker. And that was a good experience.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Now at this point, when you got here, the fraternities hadn't reopened yet, had they? Or were they sort of in the process of reopening?

RASENBERGER: Well, they must have been in the process because you had to be a sophomore to be tapped for a fraternity. And I was. So my sophomore year obviously—I was a Deke. And the Deke house was going strong. And I think the—I'm just guessing now—but I would think the veterans were very interested in social life, beer, and some things other than studies. I mean they were here to put in

their time in many cases. They'd put in their time in a different sense in the war and this was a time to get over the war for them. So the fraternity was a place to get over the war. That was their—most of the people who lived in the Deke house, for example, were veterans, as I recall. Although I think Truncellito moved over there in his junior year, if I'm not mistaken. But Trunce was on the football team. So he knew all those guys. And I don't know what the non-veteran ratio was on the football team. But anyway, it was a real bunch of guys, and they hung out together.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. But you said that—so the population of Deke was a lot of veterans.

RASENBERGER: A lot of veterans is my recollection. Yes. Although there were some really green freshmen like me. Marvin Durning, a classmate of mine who was a Rhodes Scholar, was a Deke. It was funny. The Deke house was a funny place. We had several Rhodes Scholars in the course of a fairly short period of time.

DONIN: Goodness!

RASENBERGER: But then we had a lot of wild and crazy guys. [Laughter]

DONIN: Well, that's sort of part of Dartmouth's—

RASENBERGER: Yes, that is. I mean that is sort of the way the college has been. And I think as long as you produce the academic excellence, you know, you take the wild and crazy guys. That's what that age produces anyway.

DONIN: Now did Dartmouth make you fall in love with the outdoors with hiking and all that kind of thing? The Outing Club? Were you active in the Outing Club?

RASENBERGER: No. No. First of all, I didn't have enough money to spend on anything...for instance skiing, which I later took up ten years after I got out of college. Or hiking or anything. The basketball season sort of interfered with all of that stuff. And then those last couple of years when I was very involved in student government, that was what I did. And my studies. And I did not do the DOC stuff. As a matter of fact, in a sense, some of the DOC was looked down upon by some undergraduates. Not particularly me. But chubbers they were called. And they were regarded as a little strange because they went off on these weekends to these cabins and, you know,

did this stuff instead of staying, as any normal person would do, staying back in the fraternity and drinking beer. [Laughs]

DONIN: Right.

RASENBERGER: I don't think that's the case anymore, and it certainly shouldn't be the case.

DONIN: You joined Casque & Gauntlet or were invited to join Casque & Gauntlet?

RASENBERGER: Right.

DONIN: And Palaeopitus?

RASENBERGER: Yes. Well, since I was president of the Undergraduate Council, I was automatically a member of Palaeopitus.

DONIN: I see.

RASENBERGER: And Casque & Gauntlet I was invited to join at the end of my junior year. And I lived in the C&G house my senior year, which was, oh, a lot of notches above living in New Hampshire Hall.

DONIN: I bet.

RASENBERGER: It was a wonderful experience, that was. Yes.

DONIN: What made it wonderful?

RASENBERGER: Well, first of all, the other guys—and of course we were all guys then—were a great collection of guys who achieved something in one way or another. Secondly, the location, which can't be beat. And third, we were seniors. And your senior year in college you can't... It's hard to beat that, too.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: You've got the hard stuff behind you. There's work, but you've risen to the top of the bottle, so to speak, and it's a great year. And I had a great year.

DONIN: Well, that was the year you were president of the Undergraduate Council, right?

RASENBERGER: Right.

DONIN: So you must have been pretty busy.

RASENBERGER: Yes, I was. But I liked it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. The campus at that point must have been pretty crowded. I mean when all the veterans were returning, say, in '45 and '46, I got the impression from talking to your classmates and others that it was sort of bursting at the seams.

RASENBERGER: I know we had three in a room in 406 New Hampshire, which was a room made at most for two. But I wasn't smart enough to draw any general conclusions about how crowded it was. That was just the way it was. And I didn't have anything to compare it to. Now as I think back, I think how fortunate the college was that the war ended when it did because the college couldn't have been doing very well financially during those war years. But for the V-12 program, I don't know how they would have survived. And I had the feeling it was sort of like walking up to the desk and registering. Anybody could get back into Dartmouth who wanted. They were very liberal about—well, they should have been—very liberal about taking veterans. It was only I think in the class of 1950 is what I think of as the closest thing to the first normal class that Dartmouth had after the war. And that was a very strong class and '51 was even stronger. That was the class that was here when I was working in Great Issues.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Right.

RASENBERGER: And I was—although I was supposed to be on the faculty, I really hung out more with the class of '51 guys like Berl Bernhard, for example, at the C&G house than I did with faculty. This is not the subject of your inquiry, but I mean, that year on the faculty shattered a lot of myths that I'd maintained about what faculty life was like. [Laughter]

DONIN: In what way?

RASENBERGER: Well, I saw a lot of pettiness, not necessarily with the people I was working with. But I saw this college from a different point of view, from the inside more. Although I was just a first-year instructor, it was like educational institutions are to this day. I mean there are

things that matter and things that really don't matter. And the smaller and more intense the organization, it seems to me, the more focus there is on things that don't matter. [...]

DONIN: Do you think your class as a unit, the class of '49, was impacted...that their sense of cohesiveness, sense of identity, was impacted by the fact that you were this sort of mixed bag of war-weary veterans and, you know, wet-behind-the-ears young freshmen like you? What did it do to your identity as a class?

RASENBERGER: Oh, I don't think it was good for our identity as a class at all for a long time.

DONIN: I mean do you all distinguish between your classmates as whether they were a real freshman or a veteran?

RASENBERGER: No. What's happened with our particular class, and I think we're lucky in this respect, is that we have a dozen or so members, many of whom—most of whom—live here in the Hanover area, who are committed to class activities.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: And are close friends themselves and close friends to many of the rest of us. And so the class, believe it or not, as the class has gotten older, it's gotten more cohesive. When it started out, it was just a loose assemblage of people who arrived at four different times. And now in these—I'm not just talking about this year or the last few years—but as we went into the reunion years, we began to get to know each other in a way, at least those who came to the reunions, in a way that we never had. Now I'm sure there's a group of members of the class who don't do reunions and still feel like it wasn't much of a class. It wasn't—if you just look at what we had when we graduated in terms of cohesiveness, it was not much of a class.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: But we made it into a class. Or others made it into a class. I didn't have much to do with it. But it's really a remarkable story. So we have, you know, over a hundred people here for our 60th reunion.

DONIN: It's amazing.

RASENBERGER: Which is a pretty good percentage. Yes.

DONIN: A reflection of a lot of hard work over many years.

RASENBERGER: It is, yes. It is. And thankfully many of our members have retired to Hanover or near Hanover anyway. They live in the vicinity here. As I said, people like Vail Haak for example, John Stearns, George Hartmann, Gordon Thomas. And they have been—Gordon Thomas particularly has been a spark plug in terms of class functions over the last 30 years or so. They have really made this into what no one would have ever thought it would be as a class.

DONIN: Hmm. But by the time you guys graduated, there was a traditional ceremony for graduation, right?

RASENBERGER: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. Yes. Right on the Bema, right?

DONIN: Uh-huh. Do you feel that your commitment is to your class or to your college? Is there a difference?

RASENBERGER: I don't think—I don't know what others think. But I'd be surprised if people put their class commitment above their commitment to Dartmouth. I certainly don't. Much as I love my class or my classmates, at least those that, you know, I see at reunions—we have a mini reunion every year, too, as you know—but unlike perhaps some other schools, class doesn't trump college, to my knowledge.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Here?

RASENBERGER: Here.

DONIN: Despite the rocky beginnings, it's—

RASENBERGER: Despite the rocky beginnings we had, yes. And they were odd years in the immediate postwar period. There's no doubt about it. Any we have some weak classes as a result of that. This is just my own opinion, but '47 and '48 never got their act together. Somehow we did. And from then on, '50, and all the fifties classes, are really strong.

DONIN: Sure.

RASENBERGER: But the '47s and '48s were, as I look at it, the residue of the war that never got healed, you might say.

DONIN: And a lot of those... Some of the V-12s and the V-5s that, you know, the young men who arrived here really for their military training, not to attend college; but then they ended up falling in love with Dartmouth and wanted to matriculate as a regular student after the war was over.

RASENBERGER: Right.

DONIN: But that makes for a very different mix in the class, doesn't it?

RASENBERGER: Yes. Although when you're in college, it does. But as alumni, it doesn't necessarily matter how you got into the class. Any more than it matters when you came into the class.

DONIN: So that distinction between being, as I say, a real freshman as opposed to a latecomer so to speak.

RASENBERGER: Yes.

DONIN: That fades after time.

RASENBERGER: Yes. In my sense, anyway, that's totally forgotten. It's who you are now, who you identify yourself with as a class. I mean we have members of our class like Ed Leede, I think he was a '48, and he switched to being a '49 for some reason.

DONIN: What is that about?

RASENBERGER: Well, I don't know. If I had to guess, I'd say it was because it seemed to him a more attractive, together bunch of guys than the '48s were.

DONIN: So you were given the choice when you were coming back at these funny times to choose a class.

RASENBERGER: That's right. And you can see this if you check the alumni fund numbers. Those classes have always been poor givers. '47 and '48. I don't know about '42 through '46 particularly. I mean, they were really devastated by the war. But when I worked on the alumni fund, it was pretty clear that some classes were never going to be pulled together and '47 and '48 were two of those. Somehow

our class, while it didn't start out strong at all, did get pulled together.

DONIN: But is giving the number one measure for togetherness?

RASENBERGER: No, no, it isn't. It isn't. But it's a measure. It's relevant. If you have any kind of sentiments about the college, favorable sentiments, you're probably going to—more likely to give than if the college was just something you had to get through like Marine Corps training or something. You don't give to that and you don't give to anything where there's nothing favorable that you remember ever happening to you.

DONIN: So the numbers you're talking about is participants, not amounts.

RASENBERGER: Right. Participation. That was always—that used to be a very, the more important measure and now I'm not sure if that's the case anymore. [...] We didn't really come together as a class, as I said, for a long time. I mean groups came together, friendships were formed, and many of them lasting friendships.

DONIN: But so many of the traditions that existed at the college that sort of would bind you together from the beginning, some of them were, you know, they were all sort of broken up. I mean whether it's the freshman trips or some of these other beanie-wearing tradition thing. I mean it was all chopped up in those days.

RASENBERGER: Well, you know, we had, our class had—In those days we had something called wet down where you had to run the gauntlet. We had fraternity Hums, which were very popular then; I think they'd probably be laughed at now. There were things that—and the college songs and the college sports and teams were going. There were things that bound us together. And we had a great president I think in those years.

DONIN: And he does play a role in class identity I would think.

RASENBERGER: Well, I think a lot of us— Yes, I mean I certainly identified closely with him. But I think everyone—he spoke to us in a way.... I just ran across, in throwing out some old papers at home, some speeches of John Dickey he gave from 1950 to '52 or something like that. The college had published them and sent them out. And he spoke to us in a very formal—he was that kind of a man—in a formal way,

which I think, for me anyway, resonated as a kind of respect for me as an individual.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

RASENBERGER: It was none of this you guys stuff or anything like that. And I don't know that any college president gets that way. But John Dickey's was an eminence in every way. And I think that got to me, and I assume it got to others in the class.

DONIN: And he certainly raised the profile of the college to the outside world as well.

RASENBERGER: Oh, he did, yes. He was sort of the handpicked guy of Nelson Rockefeller, you know. But he was a great pick, I'll have to say that. And he knew a lot of people. So when we started Great Issues, it was easy for him to get great speakers for us.

DONIN: He had some amazing speakers from the State Department and just....

RASENBERGER: Right. From everywhere.

DONIN: Everywhere. Yes.

RASENBERGER: Yes. I can remember when I was an instructor, it was really the best thing that ever happened to me because having lunch with John Dickey and Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, you know. You don't get that... There's no place to line up for that kind of thing. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's true. You probably had to pinch yourself to believe it was happening.

RASENBERGER: Yes Right. But he could talk to Reinhold Niebuhr at a level that was, you know, impressive. At least to me. And many of our speakers were in that category. As you know, Great Issues didn't survive the Vietnam War. But it was a great idea while it lasted.

DONIN: And there's always talk about brining it back.

RASENBERGER: Is there? See, he loved words. He wrote well and spoke well, but not frivolously. His words were—His voice was the voice you'd expect from the president of a college. At least it's what I came to

expect and still expect. And it was the voice of Dartmouth for those years when he was president, and it was a wonderful voice.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you were the class valedictorian, speaking of graduation.

RASENBERGER: Right.

DONIN: Well, for somebody who wasn't sure what he was doing up here in freshman year, you clearly figured it out.

RASENBERGER: Well, you know, in those days the class valedictorian was not the brightest—highest grades. The class valedictorian was chosen by some mysterious means. No one knew.

DONIN: Really?

RASENBERGER: Yes. You had to have good grades. But you didn't have to be number one in your class.

DONIN: Oh, I didn't realize that. Did you ever find out how you got chosen?

RASENBERGER: No, I never found out.

[End of Interview]