



1974

## Interview with Charles B. Vail and Emily Vail

Charles Brooks Vail

Emily Vail

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### Recommended Citation

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Dr. Charles & Emily Vail  
INTERVIEWEE

Grace Freeman  
Editor, Winthrop Alumni Magazine  
Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections  
Winthrop University

Interviewed in 1974  
Transcribed on October 24, 2013  
Edited by Cody Willis  
1 Audio Cassette

\*This is an edited transcript. It has been edited for readability while being kept as near verbatim as possible. The original grammar is left mostly intact to preserve the “flavor” of the speaker, but filler words such as “um” and “uh,” false starts, stumbling and stuttering have been removed. Slang and dialects have also been edited. For example, instead of “yeah” or “uh-huh,” “yes” is used. Instead of “gonna” or “goin,” “going” is used. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request.

**Interviewer(s) = Grace Freeman (GF); Unknown Male (UM)**  
Interviewee(s) = Charles Vail (CV); Emily Vail (EV)

\*This is an incomplete interview. The audio cassette begins and ends mid-sentence.

CV: A businessman and others. When he left Coker, in another year I left Coker.

UM: Who was he?

CV: Joe Roberts.

UM: He was at Duke when I was there.

CV: Yes, he was probably dean of graduate studies. So, two years intervened between the time he left Coker and the time I arrived at Hampden Sydney to work with him again; one year at Coker and one year at Agnes Scott. One thing that has to be known is the peculiar circumstances; except for the year I taught at Armstrong, there never has been a time in my career when I taught full time and did nothing else; never.

**GF: So you’ve been in administration?**

CV: No. At Coker I was doing consulting work of a sort on the side with the Sunoco Projects Company. They didn’t get their money’s worth; I didn’t have time to give it to them. At Agnes Scott I was only on a half time teaching assignment. I was doing research on the contract

program and at Hampden Sydney; though I taught a good bit at the outset, as time went on I began to teach less and less. My administrative duties were just too heavy to do it and do it well.

That ended the teaching, but there's only that one year at Armstrong when I was free of any other obligations or responsibilities to do nothing but teach. Joe Roberts must have had a mild stroke of insanity or something [others laugh]—I don't know—but he worked pretty hard to try to get us up there and I said to Emily in mid spring the best thing for me to do is go to Hampden Sydney and meet his request and then tell him to leave us alone because I didn't want to go [others laugh]. Well, it didn't work that way.

**GF: What do you think makes the administrator?**

CV: Grace, administrators are unknown quantities as a rule to those who are not a part of it. The reason it is unknown is that the major responsibility is a personnel relations job. That's a hole in the world as it is just chasing after the problems of people.

**GF: That's beautiful. Really, that to me is—I think if a person doesn't know how to get along with people, they can't—doesn't care about people and doesn't know how to deal with people and get the best from them and have them want to do their best. They just can't really be a good administrator don't you think?**

CV: Well, I think I would agree with you. There are circumstances in which an individual as a very strong willed autocrat can accomplish in the short range some important things for an institution that needs discipline. Basically, the job is one that involves some political skill of a peculiar sort. You can't be all things to all people.

**GF: Administrators nowadays really do have to know how to deal in politics don't they?**

[crosstalk, laughing]

CV: I can't guarantee that skill because I really have had only a modest experience with a politician in the true sense of the word, but the art of politics, which is the art of the possible if you will—if you take it out of the state house in Columbia or those chambers in Washington—then that's the kind of politics that I have had reference to; that and trying to keep sufficient tension in the community—constructive tension—without having internecine warfare and progress; without having too much consequence of jealousies impugning on problems. On the other side of the coin there has to be some constructive pulling together and that's what it's all about as far as I can see.

Now, the last decade has thrown a lot of additional factors into it. Primarily, the factors that are the results of bureaucracies within the state where this word accountability in its abused forms is demanding too much in the way of response from colleges and all levels of administration. It's a taxing experience just to satisfy the bureaucracies—the kinds of reporting and the kinds of feeding that those bureaucracies need. So, the old fashioned concept of bureaucracy in its worst form is beginning to encroach more and more upon the time of the present.

One thing that you all did at Winthrop that pleased me, even if you weren't conscious of the fact that you had done it—the AAUP [American Association of University Professors] in that questionnaire that it had put together to define the president that you wanted; I don't know that you all saw the findings of that. I heard them read, but one of the things that it did not emphasize that used to be a characteristic in the quest for the president, you didn't emphasize the idea of great scholarly ability because you can't have it both ways any longer. There aren't any great giants left in the world of academe who are at the same time scholars. They may have been, and they may yet have the ability, but they can't be that and with me I've watched through my career as far as the scholarship goes, I recall vividly when I had to quit trying to do anything that even suggested research or trying to have students do it. I recall with even morbid, almost garish detail, when I decided I had to quit teaching because—I had to decide this—because I thought the students were better prepared than I.

As a dean I wasn't about to go on doing what I wouldn't tolerate in anybody else. So, the demands of the job are more inhibiting, more exhausting. At any point of reference within the job of teaching—because there's no feedback from it—all the satisfaction that you get are vicarious satisfactions. If you can live off of that kind, then you're in good shape. There's no preparation for it. There's no, well there is, but through internships. You can't learn it in a classroom; it just doesn't occur.

**GF: Now you're talking about being president?**

CV: Being an administrator. A little story might interest you. There's a friend of mine [unclear] who was dean of arts and sciences at the University of Kentucky for several years and he told me as he was leaving his job—he quit.

**GF: To do what?**

CV: To move into a different kind of an administrative job—to being the dean of graduate studies which is a different world altogether. That is the only administrative job I know today which still has a little bit of the old horror of what academic administration was thought to be once upon a time. This man had been chairman of his department at Kentucky. He told me that he had hired practically every member of the faculty; that he knew what the job of the chairman was, but when he was moved into the office of dean of arts and sciences, it was like he had been carried out in the chicken yard and somebody turned on a fan. He said he simply did not know what hit him; that the scope and complexity of it was just such that it crushed him and he couldn't wait to get out of it. That may not be anything more than a slight exaggeration of the difference. I don't demean the job at all, but it just simply is a different kind of a job. The axes of responsibilities are different altogether from those involved in teaching and in research. As long as there is an acceptance of this fact and an acceptance of the fact that you can be pleased with vicarious satisfactions rather than direct ones, it's a new career, it's a different one and...

**GF: Now, are you the kind of person who likes challenges. I have a feeling that you are.**

EV: Yes, he is.

**GF: Now, is he the kind of person who wants to move onto new and different...[GF & EV laugh]**

EV: I've never seen him say no to a challenge [laughter].

**GF: Did this show back from the very beginning.**

EV: Well Grace, he was an unusual person from the very beginning and in the first place he had a very nice speaking voice and that has always impressed me [laughter]. Human being, you know—attracted immediately to his very nice speaking voice. He just had a sort of dignity and maturity in that you know...

**GF: Even in high school.**

EV: Even in high school, yes. So, that set him apart. You don't mind if I say that do you Charlie [EV and GF laugh].

**GF: I think that if you can't brag about a husband—**

UM: Something wrong with you.

**GF: Something wrong with you [GF and UM laugh]. You know I have no respect for wives who are always putting their husbands down and I can name two or three when John was at [unclear]. I still—now, when I think about them—I think about how they were just continually pulling—you know, [unclear] their husbands. I guess it's terrible to be the other way.**

[crosstalk]

EV: It can be very awkward because every now and then if I'm saying something nice about my husband I will come aware that people are looking slightly askance at my performance and then I do get a little sensitive about it.

**GF: You and I, we'll get together and talk about it [GF and EV laugh].**

EV: Even if you remind me otherwise Grace, I'm not supposed to do it because I lapse into it when I don't intend on it.

**GF: Now, I wanted to talk with you about the role of a president's wife. Does this frighten you at all? Or is it just sort of a step to being...**

EV: I'm really a maverick Grace. If I can do it without really thinking about it, that, OK I'm the first lady, oh look at me—I'll be alright. If he just won't remind me that too often I can just go along and do what I have to do, but otherwise it's going to trouble me. Just let me be one of the crowd. That's the main thing.

**GF: I wonder if it isn't a little bit of sort of a lonely kind of thing sometimes because sometimes people may hesitate to ask you to do things and all because it might look like well, you know, you're trying to apple polish and all and yet I think that's a foolish attitude for people to...**

EV: Yes, I think so too, but at this stage with me that's all right because of...well, I had experience with being a loner with my graduate work and if I'm ever going to complete the degree, which sometimes I doubt I'm going to do, I will have to be able to discipline myself to get back into studying and work. I want to do what I can, but also the others are important to me. I really would like to be able to complete that, not that I'll ever work in the field too extensively, I just don't know what the future holds. But, it's something that I started and I have the strange kind of personality that does not let light to be a task unfinished and right now there's something for me unfinished. So, unless I do it within say a couple years, it's going to start bothering me. I know that that's true.

**GF: Well, I think that you're coming at a good time because I feel that there's not as much interest as now upon little social things. I think that young people have a lot of things to do—college students have had a lot to do of getting away from the far more pretty little type of society kind of thing that I think is just great. So, you're coming at a good time if you feel this way.**

[crosstalk]

EV: I'm really very informal, but I think certain formalities and certain festivities are important.

**GF: We really had the best—that was the liveliest and your walnut chicken thing had something to do with this.**

[crosstalk]

**GF: People stayed longer at that than I think ever have.**

EV: Grace, I had the strange sort of feeling to put people at ease is tremendously important. If I assume some sort of great role that I put people at ease less than if I'm just informal and kind of just one with the group which is what I really prefer anyways.

**GF: I think that's just great. I do think it'll be easier for you to be that way now than it would have been six or seven years ago.**

EV: Oh, I'm sure.

**GF: I think we're improving—and we can talk about this. You and I'll get together and talk about this. Let's get back to—this is real interesting to me. Now, some of these things you said. Now, let's build up a little bit now what you've done before that you think sort of fits you for this—that was getting ready for this and had you thought much about being—or does everybody that gets into administrative work—the thoughts must cross that**

**someday you'd have to make a decision about whether or not you're going to accept being a president which to me nowadays is a pretty terrific job [GF laughs].**

CV: I have some friends all throughout the southland and a few other other places who are sending me, in a figurative sense, they're sending me crow regularly because I swore that I would never be a college president [CV and GF laugh].

**GF: Now tell me why. What is it about...**

CV: Two reasons, well, let's just settle for one. The thing is that I've travelled with a southern association. The point of contact about as often as not was with the president. I sat with him. I held their hands [GF laughs]. I tried to solve their problems for them. I was sometimes just a crying towel for them. Through those years I got acquainted with just about every kind of institution that exists in this part of the country from the school of chiropractic medicine to the major universities. I never saw a presidency that I would have. Had they offered it to me I wouldn't have taken it. The irony is I never visited Winthrop College [CV and GF laugh].

**GF: I do want to know why you agreed to come to Winthrop. What was it about Winthrop?**

CV: Well, let me give you the second reason. I started not to mention it because it may be a thing of the past. The role of a college president has been demeaned so badly over the past half-decade...

**GF: Sort of starting with Berkley and [unclear].**

CV: Yes...that all of what it once was, was lost and much of the legendary apocryphal notions about the presidency has vanished. Indeed it was never anything more than apocryphal. What it is in the way of—as Harry Truman spoke about the kitchen, this is about what it has become you see. This is just a place for the buck to stop and for people to harass. The students do it from one direction and the general public does it from the other. He is the one unfortunately that is the bridge between the institution and all that it represents and the rest of the world and all that represents. Well, fortunately that's an issue that is passing now. I think we're though with the Columbias and the Kent States and the Berkleys, at least for a time, perhaps for a generation we're through with that. Now why did I choose to come here? I don't think I can give you a very simple answer to that.

**GF: Were you surprised when you were approached?**

CV: Yes.

**GF: Did you know anything much about Winthrop?**

CV: Oh, Charlie Davis and I had been friends for 15 years and I knew he had resigned. One little note of interest, the attempt to organize this southern regional honors council had its—well, the first attempt to court it for the state and I have to set up this meeting. Just a simple little affair

and Bill Daniel was there and I met him—first time—and had only weeks previously learned that Charlie Davis had resigned and I asked Bill what progress was being made towards finding a president. I asked this often times because I enjoy keeping track of friends of mine who have been presidents and sometimes people I knew only by name. I read the *Chronicle*; I know who's changing, so I would have asked it to any of a dozen people if each one of them had had a vacancy. I've since asked Bill if he thought I was baiting him in any way [GF laughs] because at that point Bill Greer had not contacted me and I hadn't given a second thought about it and if Bill Daniel had asked me were interested, I would have said no.

**GF: Bill didn't say anything?**

CV: No, well he said there was a committee and they were looking at people.

**GF: Do you think Bill came back and said something to the committee?**

CV: No, I don't think so. I really don't know to tell you the truth, but I don't think he did, but it's the question I've asked more times than I can begin to count. Then, Bill Greer called and the gods were ordaining that it would go otherwise because the Monday I was to have an interview up here was the Monday following that snowstorm that had everybody tied up, so I didn't come. They rescheduled for the next week and Eastern Airlines was to pick me up in Atlanta to bring me to Charlotte and Eastern Airlines didn't fly, [GF laughs] so I got here though. I was so late that the committee and I just had time to say hello to one another and I spent a little time with Charlie and that was about it. I wish I could tell you something as dramatic and as beautiful as that the spirit moved me or...[all laugh]

**GF: I wonder, you said you didn't see a single presidency that you would have been interested in. Did anything special appeal to you about Winthrop?**

CV: Well, let me tell you one thing.

**GF: Because we think Winthrop has got a lot for it and I wondered what appealed to you.**

CV: Some of what I might say might hurt your feelings, but you'll have to take it in the spirit. I think I know what the job of the president ought to be. It's not yet certain whether I can fulfill that job.

**GF: I would like to know what you think.**

CV: Oh, now that's an evening sermon. There were a variety of factors that were at work in Florida and in Georgia to pick on two states in particular. I was beginning to tire pretty dramatically of the tensions under which institutions in these states work and hence administrators. The growth of the central offices, the chancellor's office, the board of regents' concept was just causing me to build my staff over and over again. I had more staff in that place than I've got a Winthrop. Just a good half of the staff was to feed the stuff to the chancellor's office. It was more and more putting restrictions on us as to what we could do and I had reached a kind of plateau. I had replaced about two thirds of the chairmen. I had a good crew at work, a



fine operation and so, looking in one direction I was real happy with what we've been able to accomplish. Looking in the other direction I just felt like my head was beaten against a stone wall over everything I wanted to do.

**GF: You know Galden Blackwell went down to FSU and got so fed up with Florida politics and—cause I know him personally, he was raised in Butler—and came back to Furman, so Florida and maybe Georgia may have—**

CV: They're very similar.

**GF: Yes. So, actually everything was just sort of ripe.**

CV: Yes, I suppose you could say this. If you make me write down all the reasons that—

[crosstalk]

**GF: What would hurt our feelings about Winthrop?**

CV: What I was going to say is that I really didn't know that much about Winthrop College and during the interview process I went into the downtown area and in the house we're living in right now, but I didn't even have a catalog of the institution. I really did not know that much about Winthrop except what by osmosis I had known over the years and what I could deduce some things that I looked at. However, I know what was the right of the institution. I knew what privilege it had in this state and what freedom it still possessed. I was able to get enough information based on past years and a way of looking at Winthrop that I felt that it was an institution that had real problems, real bona fide problems, but I don't want to pretend that I had that kind of intrinsic knowledge of Winthrop that I have now or that I hope I'll have in another year or two; what as to its strengths or to its people, I didn't know and it just was a board of trustees' point of view that I wouldn't know it.

There was a time when I determined, I said that I would not accept an offer if indeed they made one to me without a chance first to come and visit with the vice presidents and the deans. I was determined that this would be my position. Felt that it was fair to them and to me. Then, I changed my mind because the impressions that you get in a few hours with somebody may be 180 degrees off target and if I left the wrong impression and came to work I had some obstacles to overcome so it was a game of chance I suppose. I wasn't unaware of what the job of president ought to be and I don't think that differs markedly from one place to another, but the general political, economic and social atmosphere as Winthrop exists seemed to me to offer greater possibilities than any other that I could think of.

**GF: People stay here so long—people who can move up in their job. Two years ago or three years ago we almost left, but you know what we did we had to accept them, an offer. We found everything about Winthrop and Rock Hill—and you know when you have a chance to leave and you decide to stay at a place, I think your whole attitude and everything is because you evaluated what you had. Winthrop, if you consider, I don't think there are many colleges where people stay as long as people stay at Winthrop because John's been**

working here for so long we always see this and it's amazing how people have been here for 25 [years] and not because they couldn't go somewhere else, but that there is a lot at Winthrop. I'm going to tell you one of the things that really endeared you, was your willingness to come to the [unclear] conference and you and Emily were just right.

EV: I kept my mouth shut Grace.

[crosstalk, laughter]

GF: And we came home and got a copy of that. You just don't know how much Tom Morgan and Murray and Doug and the wives, because I met that wife and the dangerous thing, the wives, the spouses as far as [unclear] things, we're supposed to be involved just as much as them, but we really appreciate your taking the time to do that, but the chance to really for people to say what they hoped for Winthrop. It's interesting to see what all this is. Well, now let's see.

[shuffling, messing with the tape recorder, unclear from 30:10 to 30:50]

[tape cuts to non-related audio and no audio from 30:50 to 33:12]

GF: Need to be brought at, but not just catering all the time to old Winthrop, then what Winthrop's hopes are for the future so I pretty much invited into the things that deal with Furman and that comes through alumni office last Thursday. See, they supply me with the client's notes, but they also supply me with their [unclear] in other words the letters and all that and then so they write it up, type it, then I come home and read it, read what they based it all and then often add to it because I think it's important to have in there certain things like for example if they've gotten their masters somewhere. This is brag stuff see, so this is a great help to me...

[low audio, static 34:13 to 36:50]

CV: In preparation for my occasion on the platform but it had to be retyped, but I planned for that to be redone as soon as Jo Ann could get to it and you could have a copy.

GF: Yes, well fine. If you let me look at and then let me see sort of how it could be used or it may be that it isn't something that would fit this particular issue. Now do you—I would love—if you wanted to—for each issue for you to have a column or something that you want to say or we could talk about it and maybe you would rather just when you have something to say. This comes out four times a year and this is something that we can think about because we can think of—and I just think it's very important for you to have exposure to students.

CV: Well, let me offer proposal to you, and he doesn't know what I'm about to say, so he'll understand [GF laughs]. The deans have consented to a proposition that I've made to them that I will deliver the commencement address in the summer and at Christmas and there will be a visiting wheel brought in for the main commencement. There are two occasions when something

could possibly be abstracted that would have some pertinence because my intention on these occasions is not to make an address that's well calculated to attract any public attention, but if I can leave just one little thought and plant it the mind of the graduates, then I will feel it has served its purpose.

In the commencement speech that I made this summer a part of the pitch that I made was that commencement is somewhat like a wedding. Lots of pomp and ceremony, receptions before and after, but let's pronounce the man and wife and get out of there [all laugh]. The intent was to carry on this figure that I hoped that the marriage which they were about to experience would be durable, but I warned them that the marriage would face all the problems that any marriage does whether it be to degree or to another person and that I hope they had learned one thing; that is the talent of being alone for I felt that you have to be alone at one time or another to do some contemplation, to do some reading. If you haven't to learn how to stand yourself to be alone, then you're in trouble and maybe we haven't served our purpose. That was the whole idea of it.

There was more said to it than this. Fortunately—in a sense fortunately—as I prepared the speech or sat down to prepare it I came across a commencement address that Senator Margaret J. Smith had made in Michigan sometime this spring. I didn't paraphrase her, but there were a few lines that she used that were most appropriate. All this made reference to this contemporary concern of Watergate and all the deception and deceit and dishonesty that appears to be there and I reflected upon her thought that before we begin to criticize our own government we ought to give some thought to our own system of values individually; that you really don't know that system of values. You can't discover it until you have the facility to sit alone and think about it yourself.

**GF: And this was in August?**

CV: Yes.

**GF: I just do see that. Now, are you saying this then, that maybe what you'll say at Christmas?**

CV: Now, he thought he was going to deliver at Christmas.

UM: Well, I'd be glad to—

[crosstalk, laughter]

**GF: When is the inauguration going to be?**

CV: Now you're asking a question about a subject that I am trying to avoid [all laugh].

UM: Now, that's a lot of nice pomp and circumstances and ceremony.

CV: I'll tell you what the story is on inauguration if there is to be one. I have asked Roy and some of us in the administration to put their minds to work. I don't need it. If there is something

that the college could gain in a significant way by some kind of event given in lieu of inauguration or as an inauguration, it's all right with me, but to go spend all that cash just for some sort of—

**GF: Now you know Wofford decided not to have inauguration. They combined it with something.**

CV: With the 2,600 or 2,700 colleges in this country, there are so many people moved to the post of president at such a rapid pace that inaugurations have ceased to be anything; you know it's frightening to have one.

[laughter, crosstalk]

CV: I really don't need one, personally.

**GF: Well, I was wondering if you were suggesting that maybe I hold off to do the speech when it's the particular speech that you feel says the most to the public. I didn't know maybe whether it would be all right then.**

CV: Well, here's what I was thinking. I've seen alumni publications that have a column from the president and some of the columns carry a punch to them; they're worth reading. Too many of them are written because they have to be written and don't deserve the space they're given. There just isn't that much copy worthy stuff that's there. That's not said in criticism, but when you're constrained to writing something on a regular basis it gets pretty difficult to say something that isn't old happening or whatever.

**GF: That would suit me fine for you to let me know when you want to say something.**

CV: Well, what I was thinking Grace is that if I do these two commencement addresses, there may be two, and I don't know what I'm going to say. The deans have already raised questions as to whether I've got that much written [all laugh], but it's worth considering that there may be in these two occasions—they're several months apart—some copy for two issues and there ought to be at this issue something that would represent a report of the previous year. A report to the alumni roughly analogous to the report to the trustees' which simply recounts for the year the way things have gone as I saw them. Now, I don't know if that make good sense, but I would say there is a topic that might be. That gets three out of the four and what the fourth one would be I don't know. We'll let Emily write that one.

[crosstalk, laughter]

**GF: When you put your hat on this, you mean this upcoming issue?**

CV: No, the one that just came out.

**GF: This is the one that just came out. This is the one that hasn't even been delivered yet.**

CV: What I was saying is this one has come out at a time when this much of a column could deal with a kind of report on a previous year. I can write that anytime. I'm accustomed to writing an annual report three months before the year is over and with a [unclear] with a little last minute change before you put that thing to bed. It makes sense. I'm not arguing for it, I'm just fishing for possible topics.

**GF: Now, here's what I was thinking. Now, see this has nothing about you all in it because you hadn't come when this was put to bed see. So, I figured you were kind of introduced a little bit in the other is because you came to alumni day and I thought that was just great. You don't know how pleasing it was as busy as you were that you would take the time to come up there without alumni day. That was just a real good public relations campaign [GF laughs] and the alumni really feel you want to know them. That's why in here I had this little thing to say that we do not usually talk about upcoming issues, but we do hope you will watch for the next one in which we talk with and about Winthrop's sixth president, Dr. Charles B. Vail and his lovely wife Emily.**

**I didn't want them to think that I was ignoring you because they probably expected to see something about you in this issue, but people don't realize an issue is done months—see it has to go to the printers six weeks before it comes out generally, so this issue will come out—we will plan before Christmas—it will probably be Thanksgiving time. I was thinking that this could be something in which we sort of introduce you all to them as people. Then, I could use your speech. Now, I don't know what the news will be. The news may be coming out with your speech. It goes to everybody and the magazine goes to just the—so I don't know if I can get with—**

CV: The commencement speech has served its purpose. There will be no further release and to the best of my knowledge the only reason that Roy had it was that he wanted to develop some early news releases. So, I think that for all intents and purposes, it's dead as far as copy is concerned. If you could find some use in it, you're certainly welcome to it.

**GF: Well, now what do you think about the idea of this being an issue in which the alumni get to know you both as people, then we can have a section in which we talk maybe about your plans and hopes for Winthrop. I don't know, have you—are these crystallized enough yet that we can—**

CV: If you were to take a copy of the speech that I made to the faculty on Friday.

[crosstalk]

CV: Part of the perspective of what I want for Winthrop.

[crosstalk]

**GF: How about let's forget that commencement and yet I do want to read it and see because I find that my old reactions to things that interest me are a pretty good gauge to go by. In other words, if something doesn't strike me or something seems to me a little bit—I**

**got questions whether people are going to misunderstand it or something—I just don't use it, but let me reserve the right to read it over and see, but I believe your speech to the faculty—let's do that. Let me read it and let's see about that.**

CV: Roy has that too and is supposed to clean it up. That doesn't mean there are a whole lot of words there.

[laughter, crosstalk]

CV: It was done on my typewriter with a lot of inundations in hand and he promised to put it in some legible form and indeed has said he's going to do something with it either in abstract form or otherwise for anybody who wants a copy of it because I was trying to set a kind of tone for the year and some new directions.

**GF: Well, good. So, maybe the thing for us to do now then—because it could save time for me to talk to you sometime after I've read it. Then, I'll know sort of how to go on—maybe the thing to do now would be to talk to both of you as people. This can be kind of light type of thing. I'm thinking that at Christmas time people are not going to be reading too much heavy kind of stuff. Well, I don't like to write heavy kind of stuff anyway. I think that this would be a time to let them feel that they have a little visit with you.**

**Now, I'm not as prepared as I usually am because I usually do quite a bit of reading up on stuff so I don't have to ask questions that I've already got the answers to. I can get from things where you went to school and all that kind of stuff. Now, as far as family kind of stuff and about Emily, see I'll have to find out some things about her. Won't you tell me, first—now do you mind going back and how you met and all that and as I said I'm not going to use it without [unclear], but I'm just curious; how did you two meet?**

EV: Well, we went to the same high school.

**GF: And where was that?**

EV: This was in Bessemer, Alabama and I think probably we became aware of each other in freshman Latin class.

**GF: Oh, beautiful, I had 8 years of Latin.**

EV: I'm impressed. I had four.

[all laugh]

**GF: In freshman Latin class...**

EV: And he was always looking out the window.

[all laugh]

**GF: What were you doing when you were looking out the window? Were there pretty girls passing by or did you like baseball that they were playing or did Latin leave you cold?**

CV: Well, it didn't leave me cold. I don't know that I was quite tuned into it. I don't really remember looking out the window quite frankly because there was nothing but shrubbery out there anyhow [**GF laughs**]. I think my head was turned in that direction, but I doubt that I was looking out the window. I was probably asleep.

**GF: Now, this is Bessemer, Alabama?**

EV: Yes.

**GF: That was in eighth grade?**

EV: Ninth grade. We probably were in the same school in eighth grade.

CV: Yes, seventh and eighth.

EV: Not seventh because I was not there in the seventh grade.

CV: Well, I was.

EV: I was in Tennessee.

**GF: So, when did you really start?**

CV: We were seniors in high school before we ever—the summer before the senior year.

EV: The summer before senior year we began dating.

**GF: Was there anything as far as high school that predicted that you would become a college president? Anything like he was voted most likely to become college president? Most likely to succeed?**

EV: Grace, I would like to look back—do we still have that old [unclear] because as I remember they had him doing something.

CV: I think I was going to be a preacher.

EV: Something professional that way. I can't remember.

CV: I can't say that there was in my mind there was anything. Now, in my freshman year in college I began in engineering and I wasn't happy with it. It was more just a combination of circumstances that led me to engineering rather than any overriding interest in it and mid semester Emily wasn't at this institution you see. She was at another one.

**GF: What was it?**

CV: I was at the University of Alabama and she was at Birmingham Southern. I went up to Southern and talked to the man who would today be the nearest thing to Bill Murdy that the institution had and he said that I had a teaching bug. That was probably the first indication of a serious nature that is derived externally that led me to think that I might go onto teaching. I really wasn't committed to it for a long time thereafter, but I moved to Birmingham Southern and then we were at the same institution.

**GF: Did you move because she was at Birmingham Southern?**

[crosstalk, laughter]

**GF: And then did you marry while still in school or wait until you graduated?**

CV: We didn't marry for several years.

**GF: This was the first inkling now. Did he say anything about any characteristics that you had that he felt fitted you for teaching.**

CV: He didn't define any of them that I recall. He simply concluded at the end of an hour or two of conversation that I had the bug to teach and that's just about the way he put it, but he didn't elaborate. This was a long time before some of these more sophisticated tools and psychometric measurements had been invented. He was a pretty shrewd gentleman; not young by any means, he was getting along in years himself, but a person I came to respect very much. I left the university and went to Birmingham Southern to major in mathematics and that was where I was headed until the chemistry department offered me an assistantship. I wanted money—I needed money—so I said yes. Then, the sly, old chairman of the department said as long as you're working as an assistant you better be majoring in chemistry [all laugh], so I majored in chemistry.

**GF: So then you went into chemistry.**

CV: The war had broken out at this point and I was at Birmingham Southern for just about an even year.

**GF: Now this would have been 1940...**

CV: 1942/1943. Yes, and then '43 I went in the Navy in a V-12 program for another six months and then went to midshipman school and active duty. Right after midshipman school we were married which was '44.

**GF: Where were you married and was it at the...**



CV: We were married in Bessemer in a little chapel over at the church I had been going to most of my life.

**GF: What denomination?**

CV: It was Baptist. Then, I went to Norfolk to report for temporary duty.

**GF: How sudden? Did you get a honeymoon?**

CV: Yes. We went to Gatlinburg.

[crosstalk, laughter]

EV: We took a train to Chattanooga and a bus from Chattanooga to Gatlinburg.

**GF: Was there any special reason? Did Gatlinburg have any particular...?**

CV: Well, a cousin of mine and her husband had vacationed at a mountain view hotel which is practically the only thing there and she had spoken so highly of—

[crosstalk]

**GF: Could take how many people?**

UM: Oh, about 12-15 people. It was fantastic.

CV: Well, that's why we went to Gatlinburg.

**GF: So, your honeymoon was how long?**

CV: About a week I guess.

**GF: And then right after that you reported to duty?**

CV: Yes.

**GF: And did you go with him?**

EV: Not at that point, no. My family was living in [unclear] and I went back home and stayed there.

CV: I was in Norfolk for about a month and a half and then went up to Yorktown to mine warfare school and then she came. We were there for 11 weeks. Then, I shipped out on a vessel called the U.S.S. *Invade* that stayed in Chesapeake Bay for the rest of the war.

[laughter, crosstalk]

CV: Not really. For the first year I guess we towed targets out off of Cape Patters. We were in a week and out a week, but when VE Day<sup>1</sup> came, they put us in dry dock to send us to the Pacific. Before they could get us out of dry dock Japan had collapsed, so they sent us back out to the York River as a school ship to the mine warfare school where I sat out the rest of the months until I got out of the Navy. I sat there and literally put on 40 pounds.

[laughter, crosstalk]

**GF: After the war, what happened then?**

CV: Well, very quickly, I got out in February and went back to Bessemer and was given a sort of teaching job at Birmingham Southern for chemistry. I took a few courses on the side and began to search for admission to a graduate school and did get admitted to Emory and left in late summer. We left in the late summer of '46 for Emory. We were there from September of '46 until December of '47 and at that point I had a master's degree and we went to Armstrong College and were there exactly one calendar year.

**GF: Now where is Armstrong?**

CV: That's in Savannah and that was where Julie was born. We were down in Savannah long enough to get Julie born and then back to Emory to resume the work there and were there from January until August two years later, almost three years.

**GF: To get a doctorate degree?**

CV: Yes.

**GF: And what degree?**

CV: Physical chemistry. Then, we went to Birmingham and I worked for 2 years at Southern Research Institute, from there to Coker, from Coker to Agnes Scott and we hardly unpacked our bags at Agnes Scott until we went to Virginia where I was dean at Hampden Sydney.

**GF: What were you at Agnes Scott.**

CV: A member of the faculty, associate professor.

**GF: Of chemistry?**

CV: Yes.

**GF: Now, you were plucked from Agnes Scott to be dean of the college at Hampden Sydney. Now, what qualifications, what do you think—why they picked you for this—had**

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<sup>1</sup> Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945.

**you had an opportunity to show your administrative side and how did you feel about going from teaching into deanship. One dean told—I'd forgotten which dean this was. I think it was at Wake Forest or maybe it was Dean Smith because nobody loved the dean. I just wonder some people like administrative tasks and some people don't. Now, was there any tarrying or gnashing of teeth to get into it?**

CV: You ask a lot of questions; let me tell you the story in it. It puts some parts of it together, but not all. The man that was president at Coker who hired me to teach there was now president of Hampton Sydney.

[End audio at 1:04:28]