GORDON "REDS" WOLMAN ’49

June 22, 1999

Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 22nd of June, 1999. I’m in Baltimore, Maryland, with “Reds” Wolman.

I am just tickled to be with you. There are so many reasons I wanted to interview you, and we might as well start at the very, very, very beginning. You grew up at Johns Hopkins, is that right?

Wolman: Well, kind of, I guess one would say. My father was formally appointed full time in, I think, 1937 or 1938, and he was at Homewood in Latrobe Hall and also at the School of Hygiene and Public Health. That would have made me about thirteen or fourteen years old. It seems to me that I was younger, but I don’t think that could be, by chronology.

My father had been teaching at the School of Hygiene and, I think, at the Homewood campus of engineering somewhere beginning in the 1920s, early, part time. But I don’t recall anything other than being very aware of the Johns Hopkins University, and since my father and two of his brothers had all three gone to the university as undergraduates. In fact, all had gone to one kind of graduate program or another. My father’s oldest brother, Sam, was a physician who
went to the Johns Hopkins Medical School after Hopkins undergrad. His next older brother, Leo, graduated, I think, in 1912 or so as undergraduate at Hopkins, then went on to get a Ph.D. in economics. And my father, I believe, was whatever the first class in engineering was, about 1913 or '14, but I think graduated undergraduate the year before, whatever those years were.

So Hopkins was very much a part of our family enterprise. I had a cousin who’s a few years older than I am, but actually went to Hopkins, I think beginning in about 1939 or 1940, something of that kind, and several other cousins on my mother’s side, all of whom went to Hopkins. So in a sense, yes, I grew up with Hopkins.

Then I myself, after the Second World War, went to Hopkins. I’d started three years before at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. I’d been in the service for about three years and decided that I’d satisfied the “away from home” criteria, and that it would be nice to go to school and live at home. At that time, living at home meant across the street, on Charles Street, from the university. So I began in the second half of the freshman year. Having gotten out of the Navy on a Friday, like many other veterans, I started Hopkins on a Monday for the second term of the freshman year.

And I graduated in 1949, so my dad was still, of course, teaching full time at the university. An old family friend many years before had said to me, when I was considering going to college and trying to decide where and why, a very close family friend, a distinguished Marylander and close friend of my folks and mine, had said to me, “It’s foolish for you to go away to college at all because, in fact, you’ll get a better college education being near your father than you will at any university,” that he could think of. But I think it was right to go away at the time.
When I returned, living at home, I saw a great deal of my father and we continued the Hopkins association. When I left to go to graduate school, I did not expect to ever return to Baltimore in a professional capacity. The field— I was in was, at the time, geology. The part of geology that I was in, which is land surface processes, origin of land forms, was not a part of the curriculum anywhere at Hopkins. I got my Ph.D., then went to work for the U.S. Geological Survey in the Interior Department, and if I did not stay with the government—and it’s a wonderful agency—I thought if I ended up in a teaching institution, university, I would more than likely be in the Rockies or west of the Rocky Mountains, given the kind of interest I have.

So it’s an accident of those common accidents of life that when a job opened up here, which was actually in geography—and this is interesting because it says something about how Hopkins operates—my father was on the committee looking for a new chairman of the Geography Department in what must have been 1957 or so, and the committee was chaired by a distinguished geologist by the name of Ernst Cloos, who apparently never informed my father, as a member of the committee, that the committee wished to consider me as a candidate for the position. My father apparently never knew that they had asked whether I might be interested and asked me to come over for an interview, and my dad knew nothing about that until it actually happened. The committee never asked his opinion, never included him in the decision-making process, and did end up asking me, and I came.

And there’s the many years after that, which are more of growing up.

Warren: Well, you are jumping so fast, I’m going to slow you down.

Wolman: Well, I just wanted to lay out the grounds of Hopkins association.
Warren: You’re doing a great job at that. I just want to clarify. You went three years to Haverford?

Wolman: No, I went half a year to Haverford.

Warren: Okay. I misunderstood.

Wolman: And then three and a half to Hopkins as an undergraduate, and that’s ’46 to ’49.

Warren: I couldn’t understand why you came back and did freshman year. So I’m glad I asked that question. So you went away for just one semester and knew you hadn’t done the right thing?

Wolman: No, I went away for what I thought would be—maybe knew better by that time—I went away to start at Haverford and finish at Haverford College, but the war intervened, and I was drafted and managed to join the Navy as part of the draft. I was away for three years in the service, and that’s what the interim was. So I had a half year away at college in the sense “away” is used.

Warren: I’m so interested in the period—well, I’m going to go back to even before that. Your father was on the faculty, so I’m interested in what the point of view of a faculty son and someone—were you really living right across the street from Hopkins? What did it look like before you entered?

Wolman: Initially I was not living across the street. When my father assumed the position of professor in engineering and at the School of Hygiene and Public Health, to develop the field then called sanitary engineering, I was living where I was born, actually, which is Eutaw Place and Whitelock Street, two blocks south of Druid Hill Park and the reservoir. My dad used to, for the
most part, I think, walk, because my father and mother never had a car. My father drove a car in
the early ’20s as an employee of the state of Maryland, but I never knew him to drive, and we
never had a car in the family. My father used to walk—it’s not too far, actually—from Eutaw Place
and Whitelock Street to the Homewood campus.

I can’t remember which year. When I say the appointment was ’37 or ’38, the
appointment may have been ’36 or so. My recollection is that the house my folks built with
Lawrence Hall Fowler as the architect, was, I guess, built about ’38, something of this kind. And
so it was three and a half years or something of this kind in which I was still in high school and my
dad was teaching across the street. My recollections of that, I don’t have much of a sense of being
a faculty child, other than the campus was close. By then I was in high school and most of the
time I was doing high school other things, and a center for Hopkins for me and many of my peers
had always been lacrosse, frankly, not anything else they did over there.

So I was already a big lacrosse fan, used to go to every game and periodically go watch
practice, things of this kind, but I didn’t associate any of it with being a faculty child that I can
recall. That only came after I came back as an undergraduate and was aware that my father was a
distinguished faculty member who I saw periodically on the campus, and about whom I heard
from my classmates and friends, a number of whom took his courses. I never took a course from
him. And conversations on a regular basis about what went on at the university and what kinds of
things were happening, and the perennial issues of curriculum and committees and quality,
interaction of School of Hygiene and medical school and Homewood, faculty responsibilities, all
of the subjects of which I later became much more familiar, but I remember vignettes of
conversation of those kind of issues with my dad when I was a student there, but very little of any of that, although I’m sure there was some, beforehand.

My recollection of the institution physically, of course, there were many fewer buildings on the Homewood campus. The building that I’m now in and that my father moved—the department moved to at some point, Ames Hall was tennis courts in those days. Wyman House, or mansion or whatever it was called, I vaguely recall from much earlier days. I think it was gone by the time I became a student, but I do remember, in the ’30, roughly where it sat, somewhere over near, my recollection is, near what is now Merryman Hall. And changes had been made in Latrobe Hall, and Shriver Hall wasn’t there, and none of the complex of biology behind Mergenthaler [Hall] was there. So there were many fewer buildings on the campus. That part I kind of remember, because I do remember playing tennis on the tennis courts occasionally, and particularly on those courts that were next to Gilman Hall in what became Ames Hall.

I think Ames Hall was built, I don’t know, somewhere maybe in the early ’50s or something of this kind, another building like, I think, both of the original engineering buildings, with support from the state government in capital funds of some kind. And there’s a marvelous story that goes with the construction of Ames Hall. It was built during the administration of Theodore “Teddy” McKeldin when he was governor, and McKeldin came to give a seminar talk in a course that my father taught, unique at the time, maybe still, called “Legal and Social Aspects of Engineering,” which was taught to senior undergraduate engineers. McKeldin agreed, at my father’s request, to come and give a talk in that class, which was interesting in itself that he did so.

My father’s office, I think, was on fifth floor, and there’s an elevator at the base near the
Gilman corner of Ames, in the basement. It’s a level entry. And Mr. McKeldin arrived, the governor arrived with his state patrolmen behind him, very breathless, on the fifth floor. Outside my father’s office is an elevator and then the stairs next to the elevator. My father said to the governor, “Governor, you seem quite breathless, can’t catch your breath. How come?”

The governor said, “Well, Abel,” he said, “I had to walk up the four flights of stairs.”

My father said, “Yes? Why did you have to do that? There’s an elevator right here.”

And the governor said, “Well, we were standing in front of the elevator, and a student came along and said the elevator is only for the faculty.” [Laughter] And he said, “So we walked upstairs.”

And that was the day when they had a lock on the elevator. You had to push a button and identify yourself. They may have had a key earlier on. And the notion was that everybody would use that particular elevator to go up to the second floor, which was the Quadrangle level in front of Gilman Hall.

So I think that happened before I came back to Hopkins to teach. May have happened when I was an undergraduate.

Warren: That’s a great story.

Wolman: It’s a marvelous story.

Warren: I remember Governor McKeldin well. I can just picture the whole thing.

Wolman: Well, a remarkable fellow in many ways. So my recollections of being a part of the university as a kid were mostly, other than lacrosse and the fact that I was a faculty child, really had very little impact. I used to, early on before we moved, I was a bit younger, I used to either
walk over or took a cab on Saturday mornings when my dad came over to the campus. I would take a soccer ball, and there was a wonderful place to kick a soccer ball against a wall at the basement of Latrobe Hall. This I remember pretty clearly, but I don’t remember much else about the operation or characteristics of the place.

**Warren:** Let’s skip on to your coming back as a student. That was a really interesting time when all the veterans were there.

**Wolman:** Yes.

**Warren:** Can you describe that for me and how that was different from the other times?

**Wolman:** I can do some of that. The comparison is particularly difficult. I can say that it was clearly different from when I began as a freshman at Haverford College. I can say that not simply because they’re two different places, but I was still a part of an era which disappeared rather quickly thereafter, that had things like hazing and some of that sort of stuff for freshmen. I don’t think we had any of that kind at Hopkins. We may never had had much of it anyhow, but the mixture of ages and backgrounds and so on that the return of veterans in big numbers represented for Hopkins and, I suspect, almost every other campus, but particularly a university kind of a campus, was so diverse, so mixed, with such different prior experience, that my own feeling is bolstered by memoirs of other folk, both at Hopkins and elsewhere, that this was a unique era in higher education in the United States, never before, and probably never since, repeated.

What was most striking about it was the enormous range of ages, interests, attitudes, characters, foci from casual indifferent to intensive and what have you, probably dominated by the fact that many of the students—I don’t know the proportion, actually, of veterans to continuing
students known as sort of “the kids” because they were much younger than many. I don’t know what the real proportion was, but the dominant feel of the place was clearly return veterans.

What this meant in every way, I think, educationally was that in many, many classes the approach to the subject matter in the humanities, for example, in history and so on, was, I suspect, student-like in many ways, but also I recall had a flavor of more experience on the part of still young, but not all of them young by those standards. I mean, there were many in their late twenties, as well as people like myself in early twenties, as freshmen, who had been someplace, had seen some things that otherwise you would not have, therefore had, I think, a different perspective than one could possibly have had coming fresh out of high school and going on to school.

It was reflected in some instances, for example, in virtual indifference to grades, which was by no means uniform at all, or even dominant, but if some of the students found that they didn’t think a course was very interesting, it mattered not that they would get a C. From their standpoint, that was not a very important affair, and one of the reasons was that they were sort of happy to be alive at all. So this couldn’t measure up to that level of intensity or importance. I had friends who were like this, who couldn’t stand certain courses. They were smart enough, they weren’t about to get a D, but they certainly weren’t going to knock themselves out to get an A, nor, in many cases, did they actually go to class very often. That didn’t mean there weren’t plenty of others who were trying to go to med school, law school, or get going in a hurry, who did work very, very hard.

But I don’t think there was anything like if you compare today the intensity of worry
about grades, which was probably a reflection of the era as well as the mix of students. The pressures now, the demands now, I think, the significance of one’s transcript is greater, probably, than it was then. I don’t think most of us thought about it, but it turned out, of course, that it was an era in which the world was opening up again, the economy was going to expand.

This was the new generation creating the baby boom and so on, and everybody was going after a job. The growth in numbers was leading to, for example, in the academic world. By the time one got out of graduate school, for example, say early ’50s, there would be many, many new, if not whole institutions, departments expanding in institutions all over the United States, the whole growth of the colleges, which I don’t remember its being discussed in those terms, but I think everybody saw the future as a place where you could get ahead and raise a family, and all the things that people later came to complain about the ’50s meant, I suspect, an attitude toward the future, which had to be more optimistic than what you’d just been through in many cases. And the flavor was clearly different from anything—and I’ve been at the university a long time—anything that I’ve ever seen since, and led, in my part, gradually to some caution about using my own personal experience as an undergraduate as a good comparative for what the undergraduates might be thinking and doing, you know, fifteen years later, twenty years later and so on. Not only one ought to learn to stop saying, “Well, you know, in my day,” although most of us never learn, but at any rate, some caution.

So, in sum, it was very lively, lots of fun, many of the same idiotic attempts to have a bonfire, to get support for the football team on a Saturday, and in those days we didn’t pay for tickets and so on. We had the same—I once gave a talk on this to a graduating class, I don’t know,
either or ten years later or something, and I went back and I read News-Letters, the college
newspaper, from way back when, 1914, 1900. Every five years I got them, read them. I picked
out, for the fun of it, all those things that we were then complaining about in 1914, we were
complaining about in 1947, we were complaining about in 1957, whenever I gave this talk. It had
to do with inadequate facilities for this, a lousy bookstore for that, how come nobody came out
for football games on Saturday morning, etc., etc. So there was plenty of that, but I think in many
ways the tone was different.

One other thing was quite different, and that was a continuation of the past in the sense
that there were still—and again the numbers would be interesting—a very large number of
Baltimore, Maryland, maybe Virginia, Pennsylvania, folk—that is, many more local students then, I
believe, percentage-wise, I believe, to be the case. I don’t even know how big my graduating class
was. I think it was 300 and something. It would be considerably bigger now, and that growth is of
the last decade or fifteen years, probably. So in those senses, quite different.

One last thing, which I can’t quite evaluate. We were taught in many instances by not only
teaching assistants, the perennial complaint about TAs and so on, some of which is warranted,
much of which is not. We were also taught by very distinguished faculty. I was taught by some
distinguished German scholar, for example. I had no idea how distinguished a German scholar this
was, even though I was a faculty child, son. I knew by that time a good deal about Hopkins and
so on, and I assumed that this full professor must be a distinguished scholar of some kind, but he
taught second-year German.

Warren: Who was he?
Wolman: He was a man by the name of Arno Schirokauer. I later learned, when I came back as a faculty member, this is one of the many very, very distinguished faculty at Hopkins in humanities, and he was as nice a professor one could conceivably have, particularly for a collection, in my case, of dolts who were by no means anything in the way of linguists or whatever. He even invited us—I realize how unusual this must have been later—we even had tea at his house. I’m making it up, but I think there must have been eight or nine or ten of us or something like that, and about two-thirds of us were dolts from the standpoint of language. But he was a gentleman’s gentleman and a scholar.

We had lots of really good professors. The introductory English course, a kind of survey of English literature, was taught by senior faculty in the English Department, who each taught a piece, and usually the piece which was their area of interest in scholarship. I don’t remember in each part, but if I were to look at a catalog again, they would come back to me. But they were, you know, sometimes a little on the dry side, but the introduction to people who were devoted to literature and to scholarship and so on, from my standpoint, was absolutely terrific. They weren’t uniformly “exciting” lectures, although many of them really were. They were senior faculty in English literature, French, not much German, I think. Icelandic because we had a distinguished Icelandic scholar who taught that, the epic poems and so on.

And the same was true in the other survey course that I put together with that in my mind, and that was the history of Western civilization, known, I think, as History A and B, you know, starting with earliest archeological background. I think that rotated faculty as well, but there may have been, but I don’t remember, an individual who was sort of a principal for maintenance of the
continuity and so on.

The lectures were tremendous. I happened to like that stuff. Some of my engineering friends, some of my friends in physics and so on didn’t like the requirements at all, and they were among the ones who never intended to get better than a C. They thought it was a waste of time to be required to take these courses. And you didn’t have, if I remember correctly—and I don’t trust my memory at all anymore, Mame—I don’t think we had a variety of courses from which to choose all the possible humanities options. My recollection is, you had to take something in this, something in that, something in something else, and that just because there were a number of possible courses didn’t exempt you from a survey course. I think you had to take History A and B, and you had to take English whatever it was.

So the classes were very big, and in many instances there was only one hall, one lecture hall that was big enough for this returning influx, veterans, students, and others, and that was Remsen One in the chemistry building. It’s an amphitheater basement from the ground floor down. That meant that you could have—one year I think I had history and English and chemistry, I may even had had a math course, but I think not, at least I had three of the major courses I would take all in the same room. And in some cases you could sit there, you know. The faculty rotated. The students didn’t go anywhere; you just sat there. That was the next thing on the bill of fare. But it was a terrific faculty.

**Warren:** Were there any particular people who stand out in your mind?

**Wolman:** Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

**Warren:** Tell me about them.
Wolman: Well, there’s a George Boas, for example, that everybody will speak about. I only took one course from Boas, which was the introduction to philosophy. He was a wonderful teacher with a puckish sense of humor, and wonderful style of lecture and so on. Good storyteller, would diverge from the subject matter to tell anecdotes about the university and things of this kind, but just fun to be with. I’m not a philosopher, but I enjoyed the course and I enjoyed the reading and so on, and he gave, I think—yes, a paper was the final exam.

In those days, the semester began sometime in September. I don’t remember when. But then it went through the Christmas holiday, and you came back and you had maybe a week or so of classes, something like that, and then you had final exams, and the second semester started at the end of January or so. So you often ended up with term papers due over the—nobody said you had to do them over the Christmas holiday, but that’s sort of how it worked out. He was one.

In history and in English—let me see if I can get it straight. In history there was C. Vann Woodward.

Warren: Tell me about him.

Wolman: I know very little about him, because most of it is a reflection of what I learned later when I came back. So my picture is only a distinguished lecturer who was interesting.

Then the man who lectured in the Middle Ages is Sidney Painter, for example, was another lively fellow who liked to talk about characteristics in the Middle Ages, part of which would be slightly off color for purposes of jokes and so on. But even with or without that, he was lively, fun to listen to.

In German history, modern European history, there was a man named Hans Gatzke that I
remembered, who was young. Can’t remember where Hans went after he left here.

In political science there was Malcolm Moos. I guess Moos I remember best because he taught the introduction—that’s another one of these big classes—introduction to political science. Not a big course. Absolutely wonderful lecturer, full of good anecdotes about the modern or current political scene, in which he was also heavily involved. He was an advisor to, and a participant with, members of the Republican party, if I remember correctly, and a writer. He was another great lecturer.

Then in the sciences, of course, one of the best teachers I ever had in my life was Kelso Morrill, that everybody will tell you about, who taught mathematics. That was the mathematics that was introductory in several levels of calculus and so on, which most of us took or had to take because it was necessary background if you were in the sciences.

I had a man who I never had a course from, who was a delightful advisor, contrary to the notion that it’s essential that you have an advisor, as an undergraduate, in your own field and so on. I had a man whose name I’m going to have to look up, to tell you the truth, who was a Shakespearean scholar, apparently. I was a geology major. Later I had an advisor in the department, in geology. He was wonderfully conversant with various courses and suggestions of things for me to take and people to think about taking courses with, and with whom to discuss something. He just assumed that if I was a geology major, somebody would tell me what I was supposed to do in geology, and he didn’t have to worry about that at all. But he was interested enough to talk to me about what would a liberal education look like. And it’s interesting I can’t remember his name, although I can remember sitting in his office.
He had invented some technique for—some technological technique for looking at and trying to evaluate Shakespearean manuscripts, things of this kind, with respect to authenticity for precise language and things of this kind. When you talk to Dick Macksey, you can say, “Who in God’s name was that, that Reds Wolman was talking about?”

Then there was in English, for example, someone like Earl Wasserman, who, in my undergraduate days, I just knew was a distinguished professor. There was a delightful lecturer in the English course, literature course. What the devil was his name? Again it slips my mind, but I can see him standing there. I’ll probably write you a note and say, “Here’s who these people were by name.”

Warren: Great. Do it, please.

Wolman: Yes. I can remember—I can’t remember whose lecture it was in Milton, for example, that got me interested enough to, of all things, go out and buy a used copy of Milton’s poetry or something of this kind. And it wasn’t that I was anti-poetry, but that was not a regular path of mine before or since. Obviously this stuff was interesting, exciting enough.

I had a couple of sensational TAs whose names I can’t remember. There was one in the History A, that was the first half of Western civilization. All I remember about him is at some point he went off to teach at American University in Beirut. Can’t remember his name or anything about him. He was sensational. We had another superb TA in political science, who became a professor elsewhere within a few years, and died at a very young age. Again I don’t remember his name, but I remember hearing about him later on.

Warren: I need to turn the tape over.
[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: Let's talk about that whole concept of teaching assistants and the relationship, how much a Hopkins student is exposed to professors as opposed to TAs.

Wolman: Yes. It's a hot topic. It's a hotter topic now, I believe, and for maybe some decades now, than the era that I'm describing, in which I was a participant. The reasons for this are mixed. One of the reasons I think is that the students have the feeling, whether accurate or not, that the distinguished professors don't teach enough of the courses that the undergraduates take. For Hopkins, I don't know that that's a fact. My impression is that it is not the case, that in the sciences, in engineering, and in the humanities, social sciences, that many of the introductory, if not most of the introductory courses, are in fact taught by full professors or very, very accomplished associate professors.

The dilemma comes in that particularly with increased numbers, many of these courses have always had, as I indicated, sections, as they're called, for which you have teaching assistants, and some of the fields are ones in which the courses are larger. The number of TAs, therefore, has to be bigger. Some of the departments do not emphasize, or at least did not—I think they're changing under the pressure of the scene, actually, in part by deans, presidents, and others—you might call it the culture of some departments did not place a high premium on the teaching of undergraduates. And if there was an attitude that one caught that denigrated, at the worst, or didn't value very highly at an in-between level, the notion of teaching undergraduates, namely one's scholarship, was far more important than teaching undergraduates. Then there were significant differences in departments, the degree to which the TAs themselves took the job
seriously. Whether, as things expanded, you had more and more sections, and one of the
dilemmas is some consistency in each of the sections among themselves and in relation to what the
lecturer is doing, and the burden of the teaching assistants also varies with the character of the
professor teaching the course and the interest of the professor in what’s going on in the so-called
sections.

What has happened in some fields, for example, where the highly specialized folk and their
graduate education brings you graduate students who have little or no—certainly no real teaching
experience before they come, in some cases, not much interest in “undergraduate” teaching as
opposed to scholarly inquiry and seminars and things of this kind, and they are asked or required
to become teaching assistants, and in many instances without much preparation and without much
supervision. They don’t always do a very good job, and some of them do a poor job.

In some fields—and the one you hear the most about is mathematics—in some fields a large
majority of graduate students are foreign, many of them are from the Far East, and their English
isn’t too good. They may be really smart, but it’s hard to understand them. They’ve had little
exposure to teaching per se. And that’s what you hear about.

My experience, because it was a different era, different mix of people and so on, I suspect
I had no idea how many of the, say, French majors or German majors had to be TAs to get a
stipend of any kind. I have no idea. I think most of them probably, and now I suspect they do
again, expect to teach. Some of the departments apparently pay a lot of attention to how the TAs
taught. All I can say is that all the ones I had were good, and in some instances better than the
lecturer. Part of the value lies in the fact that you can be much more relaxed and at ease because
they’re closer to your peer status, and so you can ask all the dumb questions that you wouldn’t want to expose yourself to asking in a big lecture if anybody asked you to ask any questions in the big picture.

What I think has been happening is two things. I think there’s been enough legitimate complaint that too little attention was being paid to teaching at the TA level, and that’s been coupled within the last, what, ten, twelve years, at least, that’s been coupled with the fact that many of the graduates with Ph.D.s, in particular, are going to go out. They don’t have as many job options. I think the students themselves, the graduate students, recognize in many instances that being a TA is something that will be valuable to them. Many of the departments, the schools themselves, engineering school, arts and sciences and so on, have instituted language programs for some of the TAs who were from abroad, and also teaching effort.

Then there are whole areas that have been taken out of the hands of graduate students. For example, there are language labs and so on, some of which are I don’t know how heavily staffed, but they’re certainly run by faculty who are not professors, don’t ever expect to be professors, but are hired because they’re interested in teaching and they do sections, and they do the coordinating work among themselves so that there’s a consistency, for example, in the language area.

I don’t know enough in detail about how this works, but the pressures are both inside, because the students are really annoyed when the teaching is poor, and opportunities on the outside may include teaching possibilities in the constricted opportunities for scholars in every field, replacing their mentors.
I believe that the universal gripe that if you’re taught by a TA it must be bad is nonsense. The fact is that the TAs I happened to have—and that was an accident, but that will be true today—many of those TAs are the people who are going to be the distinguished professors in ten years. They’re the ones writing the books. They’re the ones enthusiastic about what they’re doing. It can be really lots of fun. I never thought language training, because I was so poor at it, I never thought that was any fun, but I couldn’t blame it on the TAs that I had.

I think for some of the fields where there are lots—and this is true not only in math, but some of the other engineering fields—a lot of graduate students throughout the United States are from abroad and from the Far East or Southeast Asia, where language is a bit of a problem or a real problem. That’s a real dilemma, and it’s particularly difficult if senior faculty departments, so to speak, don’t try to take it seriously enough to see that as good a job as could be done is done at that level. And since Hopkins has an awful lot of science and engineering students, that’s why you hear so much about it. I mean, it’s for real.

I think we’re bigger. On the average, I gather we have a faculty-student ratio of ten or eleven to one, but the average is not a good measure for freshmen and sophomores, in some cases, where you have an awful lot of big classes. In those classes you have a lot of TAs to go with the lectures. I don’t know biology, but that would be a place, when you talk to some folks, that biology labs and so on, chem labs, are very, very important places. I never had lousy TAs, but I have no idea the degree to which that’s true now.

Warren: Get you back in the classroom as a student to find out. [Laughter]

Wolman: Well, the way you find out is by talking to the students in your own classes.
Warren: Sure.

Wolman: My sense is that there’s still work to be done to make the system better than it is and maybe as good as it could be. But in the languages and so on, they’ve taken a lot of steps, and some of the departments for many years have been very concerned about how teaching by TAs is done. Others, less so.

Warren: I want to go back to your own student days, because I have two particular questions. I did a little homework about you, and I know that you were on the Honor Commission. What was the Honor Commission? Does it still exist? What role does it play in the life of Hopkins?

Wolman: I believe it has had a cyclical role at least since my student days. Prior to that, I believe it was a major fixture of undergraduate life, and it was there. You, as an undergraduate, we were instructed in orientation. We didn’t have an elaborate orientation like we have now for freshmen. But you were told about the Honor Code any number of times, and every time you took an exam with a blue book, either it had on the back of it a place for a signature that you had abided by the Honor Code, or it was made very clear to you that an Honor Code was in existence.

For the most part, I don’t remember—I could be wrong—I don’t remember any of the exams—there may have been some in the big classes—that were monitored, nobody in the room. The professor left the room, and the TA or whoever handed out the exam left the room, or wrote them on the board or whatever. I could be wrong. I mean, there may have been some monitoring, but that’s not how it was supposed to be run.

All the infractions reported, as they are now, for example, you get two identical papers if you’re teaching, and you ask yourself how could this be, and you can call students in, you can
report it to—they now have a Board of Ethics, I guess it’s called, but I don’t know its composition anymore. I don’t know whether it’s all students, whether it has some faculty. I think it may be all students.

And the honor system, I gather, has had some real ups and downs, that there have been periods of time in which either it’s true or believed to be true that there were many, many, many infractions that didn’t go reported. I know that in many courses of the last decade or two decades or more, there have been monitors and so on and so forth, and I don’t know whether the Honor Commission, as a commission, went out of existence completely, which I think it did, and then was revived as something somewhat different, with maybe some faculty or administrative relationship, I can’t tell you.

Warren: I’m just coming from Washington and Lee [University], where the Honor System is the be-all and end-all of the universe.

Wolman: Yes.

Warren: So I’m trying to understand whether it’s an important part of every student’s life here or it’s just there.

Wolman: I can’t tell you today. In my view, it was an important part of student life when I was a student, for sure.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Wolman: What that meant—and this turned out to be tricky, even then—because you had a lot of the group I described, the veterans returning, and if you’ve been in the service, one of the things
everyone specialized in was how to beat the system. Therefore, the notion that you shouldn’t tell somebody the answer to a question on an exam or something of this kind, Robert E. Lee notwithstanding, was not a part of the ethos of a fair number of what I remember as some of the veteran guys who didn’t love some of these courses and so on. There was probably a fair amount of conversation, particularly since we often took exams and Remsen was packed with people and so on.

But to the extent that things got reported, when it got to the Honor Commission, that was sort of where things went. There wasn’t much intervening administrative anything. I don’t remember the machinery, but I remember that we could end up with students where it was our responsibility to decide whether the student passed the course or if they’d had an honor violation before, whether they got kicked out of the university. And in the case of seniors, for example, if you didn’t case a course, you might not graduate. So I don’t remember how many cases we had, but I do remember that it was a very serious business. And if it was contested, you were the judge, jury, and the what have you, and so on.

As fellow students argued about whether so and so really gave so and so the answers or whether this was so and so reporting so and so as having done something, whether or not they really had done it or not done it, that was your job. We didn’t have a lot of really tough cases, but we had a couple.

And not so long ago, I ran into—because we had our fiftieth anniversary of my class, one of my classmates was on the Honor Commission the same time I was, obviously. I don’t know how it came up, but he mentioned a case which was a really difficult thing, and it’s obvious it stuck in
each of our minds. I don’t remember any others that stuck in our minds.

What has happened since is something that while I’ve been there the whole time, I’ve never fully grasped. My impression was that it was believed that whatever the formal structure and system was under the Honor Commission, it wasn’t working at some point, and I think we either abandoned it or it had a very secondary role to administrative responsibility. Then it was revived again under an Ethics Board, or we may always have had the Ethics Board, renamed from the Honor Commission. But my impression was that the administrative process—deans or associate deans or something—had a larger part in the enterprise than what I remembered, at least from my day.

Today my sense is that it’s being pushed again—and by “today” I mean the last five, seven years or something of this kind—more seriously, but I believe that most exams are monitored. I’ve seen students surprised when I’ve gone into an exam room, handed out the papers, and said, “I’m not monitoring this exam,” and left. And they’ve sort of looked a little surprised. And I’ve had classes in which I have gotten either identical papers or nearly so. I’ve had complaints from students who report other students as having cheated. I have had term papers in which a teaching assistant had been able to identify the source of clear plagiarism, for example.

And my response has customarily been in any case of that kind, to call the Student Advising Office, which is run by some very, very competent folk, but there was not such a thing when I was an undergraduate. The boss there for many, many years has been Martha Roseman, and she has a staff. There was no equivalent Martha Roseman in my day. There was the dean. If something were reported to either the dean, it was then given to the Honors Commission.
My technique as a professor for many years has been to call them, to say, “Here’s what I think has happened, and here’s what I know so far. What are the options? Are there certain steps that I ought to make sure that I take?” And from there I go on to, yes, I call the students in and I ask them. If I get conflicting answers, I can go further than that. If I don’t like any of it, I can turn the whole thing over to the Ethics Committee, and they deal with the business. If I deal with the business, I can flunk somebody in a course, and they can appeal, I believe.

But I don’t know all the details, and the reason I don’t is that when I’m confronted with the issue, I always start all over again to find out what the rules are that govern this system. So I can’t answer the question for you of the role it plays, say, compared to what at W&L would be. I believe it’s weaker than that. I believe it’s weaker than “my day,” which may or may not be really true. Some of the reason I believe that is what I hear, and also the fact that lots of things are monitored and so on and so forth. When I ask students—I’ve forgotten what the rules now say—I traditionally ask students to sign on the back of the blue book when I hand out exams that it, in fact, is their own work, they haven’t received any help. I don’t know that I have to do that. I can’t remember anymore. And some students used to—a little change now—used to look at you and say, “There’s something odd about that,” which is part of why I believe the thing was unraveling for a while. It’s a good question.

Warren: Well, I need to understand it. It’s important for me in understanding that I’m at a different place and what are the rules of the game here.

Wolman: There are two kinds of people, one of whom is a person. One of the persons to speak to is Martha Roseman, who heads the advisory office, been at Hopkins a long time. Her husband,
Saul, was in the faculty of biology, is still there doing research, was chairman of biology for a long time. Between them, they really know the scene.

The other would be to speak with whoever is the student chair of what I think is called the Ethics Commission or Committee, to get a real flavor. Mine would not be too good except for this impression that I have that we’ve had some very bumpy times.

Competition may have something to do with that, the very thing I mentioned to you earlier. Competition for medical schools, for example, transcript, you know, best possible transcript and so forth, I would think drives various kinds of cheating. There are stories, some of which are clearly real. People will have cut certain things out of journals to prevent other students from getting it. People will dilute or doctor certain lab chemical constituents necessary for the lab experiments and things of this kind. I don’t know how much it happens, but it’s true it happens. People will crib notes and things of this kind.

I know it happens. I’m sure it happened in my day, too. What I don’t know is whether there’s more, whether more is reported, or whether the intensity of the competitive world for some of the grads, the undergraduates, leads—I suspect it does—to greater pressures. And there’s a lot of pressure for some of these students. They’re very, very good. Most of them are very good, but they’re in a crowd who are very, very, very good. So I think it’s a nice question that may say something about what undergraduate existence is like here. That’s a question I always ask of my own students. I don’t have big numbers of the moment. You know, how do they like it, are they enjoying themselves, are they learning things, and so forth.

And there’s a lot of talk about Hopkins pressure, indifference at Hopkins. We probably
were, in my day–what was the famous Moynihan line–benign neglect? I think some people would have said in a certain day at Hopkins it was also almost malign neglect. I mean, you came to Hopkins, you were a student and so on, the university didn’t expect to do a whole lot of things for you, a variety of services and all that kind of stuff. But virtually every university now is expected to provide many more consulting services, many more opportunities, many more planned activities and so on and so forth. There’s very little of that at Hopkins traditionally.

If I understand what some young, for me, alumni tell me, only the last ten, eleven years, twelve years, fifteen, maybe, have you begun to see a real effort to provide better facilities to respond to the needs for guidance and things of this kind. But none of that stuff existed. One of the complaints of some is that the whole university-college system has become kind of a client-centered place, not a kind of student-scholar-centered place.

There’s a nice collection of essays published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge. It’s an issue of their journal, Daedelus, about five years ago, maybe seven years ago, and there have been a couple of books of the same, what’s happening in universities-type things. That collection is quite interesting because it has a number of distinguished folk, including former university presidents, college presidents, describing what they see as the changes.

One of the major changes is catering, rather than offering, a setting to students with “an earlier day” being the assumption is, you came to go to school, and what the school provided was people who were supposed to know something, from whom you were supposed to learn, and it was your job to learn. It wasn’t their job to go out of their way necessarily to help you learn or to help you with your psychic life or social life or any other kind of thing.
Now, in the extreme, you know, it's a pretty cold sort of an enterprise, and it may have been. I think for some of the students, after I came back to teach, I think it was. I think this was not the place those particular people should have been. It was not "college-y" enough. And I think now I would say it's more "college-y." That may be, in fact, a very good thing, but it's different. The difference may be the era as much as what has actually happened on the campus, because my impression is, it's happened all over.

The complaints that students really—you know, lots of them aren't there to learn and why are they going to college at all, which you see ad nauseam in the press and various places. There's a little truth to it, probably. I think there's a lot of truth in the notion that if you want to compete for very good students, you probably have to offer things that you would not have considered that you had to offer twenty-five years ago, let alone forty years ago, something of that kind. Want to go to Hopkins? You go to Hopkins to study. We've got a basketball team, got a lacrosse team, got some other things. You know. Want to find something social, do well, there might have been a Goucher [College] dance, I don't know, I can't remember, but virtually everything you had to do for yourself. So Baltimore was here, and you did that or didn't, and you went to Washington. But we didn't have nearly as many deans, as they're called, or people to provide these services.

That was another characteristic which I think is fascinating and maybe unique for Hopkins, I don't know. As you inquire, this would be an interesting kind of a question. When I came to teach, I was a department chair. The department had three or four people in it. As I came, it was partly with the idea to rebuild some things. People had left, some people were older, were going to retire and so on. But procedures were uncodified for the most part. They had these hilarious
experiences of calling the president's secretary, I think because I knew her, or maybe the dean's secretary, and saying, "I want to hire a secretary," which I was supposed to do, and I had to ask, "What do we pay secretaries around here?" There was no special big personnel office. I'm sure there were personnel people, but there weren't what there are now, is whole books of the grades and the what have you and so on. So you called around and you found out something like that.

When I wanted to hire someone, a new assistant professor, one of the experiences was typical, wasn't universally this, I saw the dean and I asked the dean whether--we had agreed that I should proceed to maybe look for certain kinds of people, and I said, "I'd like to invite so and so to come to the campus," and so on. "Would that be all right?" Yes. I mean, I didn't have some line item. I didn't have that kind of a travel budget or anything.

When it was modestly expensive, involving recruiting or maybe appointing somebody, and I wanted to make sure I had an agreement for the appointment, before I actually wrote the formal letter requesting, you know, an appointment for so and so, I would see the dean, and the dean might say to me, "Well, it sounds all right to me. Let me talk to Mr. Macaulay." Mr. Macaulay was called, I think, the provost of the university, but it was a very different role he had. The president at that time was Isaiah Bowman, and Macaulay was Bowman's right-hand man. But a lot of what a president does now, or five other people do now, Mr. Macaulay did.

Now, the way of running a university, there is a report somewhere of what is called a Middle States--what do they call it? Middle States evaluation team. It comes under the heading of accreditation. There is a report somewhere, some decades ago--by this time I think I was already on the faculty, but learned later--in which an entry was actually made about the nature of the
governance as part of the inquiry about accreditation.

The report, I think, says—and I don’t think it’s apocryphal, but I couldn’t put my finger on it—the report says that it is difficult to understand the administration of the Johns Hopkins University School of Arts and Sciences Homewood engineering and so on, inasmuch as it is not along what might be described as traditional lines, something like this. In fact, it is sufficiently difficult to understand, that the committee spent some hours inquiring as to how it worked, and decided that while it seemed to be different, the committee concluded that it apparently works well.

This was a reflection basically, I believe, of a very high level of informality and very little paperwork. The formal things you had to document, but conversations about should we do this, should we do that, who should you see, and a very limited administrative structure, not many associate deans or anything of that kind, all but by hand, basically, like the personnel enterprise. And who reported to whom exactly, with what responsibility, wasn’t always apparently clear to some people, but “it worked.” It was probably fine for that era. It was not fine and evolved over time, I would say, probably significantly, I would guess, given the timing, Milton Eisenhower and Steve Muller probably, because that was a whole new era.

The university grew, the research budget grew enormously. The federal government grew. The number of rules and regulations you had to abide by grew, all of which required more elaborate hierarchy, much of which has been complained about by the faculty and others forever, some of it justified, probably, some of it no hope. I don’t think it’s calmed down. If you combine all the regulatory requirements with this necessity to serve the students, provide services and so
on, it’s not surprising that you have a more significant administrative structure than anything like forty years ago. And Hopkins was odd even then.

Warren: “Hopkins was odd even then.” Now, there’s a quote.

Wolman: Yes.

Warren: You mentioned the name Isaiah Bowman. You’re the first person to mention that name. Tell me about Isaiah Bowman. What was he like?

Wolman: He would, I think, be characterized by most as a rather stiff, autocratic, intelligent, somewhat taciturn externally, administrator. I knew him in a somewhat different light, and I knew him because basically he and my father were friendly because they had known each other when they were both heavily involved with the Washington scene, my father at the time, actually, a federal employee for a while, for a couple of years, but even when not, heavily involved with the National Research Council, with what was the National Resources Planning Board. My father chaired a committee of that board in the field of water resources. Isaiah Bowman was also involved with some of that structure. And because they were both interested in natural resources, they had a common area of interest.

It was through my father that I actually got to know Isaiah Bowman a little bit. What I knew of him otherwise was this picture of a quite stern, potentially, in reality, autocratic president. His style, I think, could be recognized, at that end of his style, I believe he was president at the time when Henry Wallace was running, I think, for President, and Wallace had been invited—we had a Friday—

Warren: Hold on a minute. I’m about to run out of tape, and I don’t want to miss this.
Wolman: Okay.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Warren: This is Mame Warren. This is tape two with “Reds” Wolman on the 22nd of June, 1999.

You’re telling me about Henry Wallace coming to visit.

Wolman: My recollection is that Henry Wallace had been invited as a speaker in what were then regular what I’ll call university assemblies, I believe on Fridays, Friday mornings. They were university events; they were not student-run events or something of this kind. Although my recollection is that they may well have been run by students.

When Bowman learned that Wallace was coming, I think it is Bowman—and this would have to be checked somewhere—I think it is Bowman who decided that Wallace should not be allowed to be an official speaker at Johns Hopkins University, for whatever set of reasons. I can’t remember whether part of the reason was that he was running for office, although he may not even have announced at that time, or because he was a radical of some kind in Bowman’s eyes. I never heard the reason.

But it was canceled on the campus, at which point Wallace ended up speaking at the base of what was then the bowl, and the bowl is now what is called the beach, or the grass area in front of the Eisenhower Library facing Charles Street. But there was no Eisenhower Library; there was just the arc of the road and Homewood House. That provided a nice amphitheater, and somebody got a truck with a loudspeaker, and Wallace gave his speech there. My guess is he had three times the audience he would have had up at the gymnasium, where we used to have this assembly. My
understanding is that it was Bowman who said he was not going to speak at Hopkins.

Bowman had a very tough reputation as an anti-Semite, something that I did not really know at the time, although I’d heard that it was so, but never inquired. But I believe that there is evidence that he was, at least in some instances. That evidence is related to—and there would be others, I think, still alive who might know or might have heard him speak in ways or seen things he’s written, and ways in which I think he indicated that he believed there were either too many Jews on the faculty or in a certain field he did not want to see a Jew appointed, for example. This is part of Bowman lore, and I think there’s something in it. How much is in it, I’m not at all sure.

I happen to be Jewish. My father is Jewish. So is my mother. You know, none of this was apparent in any conversations that my father and I ever had, and we had many associations with Isaiah Bowman. I had experiences with Bowman that, to my knowledge, relatively few people at Hopkins had. There may have been others. On one occasion, at Bowman’s invitation, he asked what I was interested in, and it happened to be areas related to geography, and that was his field. He invited me to have several conversations with him.

I can honestly say that one of the most interesting conversations I ever had with anyone throughout my lifetime was about two or three hours I spent with Isaiah Bowman on a Sunday morning at his house—the house no longer there—at his invitation, talking about the field of geography, talking about professional fields, approaches to professional fields.

I won’t burden you with observations that he made about his early days in precisely the area that I ended up being in, in geography, physical geography. He had written a classic text. He pulled this textbook down to show me a picture which had to do with a road cut and the structure
of the soil and the earthworms in the soil and so on. By this time this man was about to retire from Hopkins, in a year. He still recalled everything in the picture, why it was important.

And I have some marvelous letters from him about areas of inquiry in our field, having to do, for example, with why rivers meander and are crooked and things, an interest that he had as a very young man. When I was here, he wrote me several letters suggesting that these were areas of inquiry and so on, offering some comments about why the textbooks couldn’t be right, and perceptions about areas of research, possible future areas of research. I remember one of his phrases was, “If the textbook says ‘it is well known that,’ you can be sure that that is a very good place to begin a research inquiry of some kind.”

So I saw a piece of him that you didn’t see publicly much, and I later wrote a piece about him when he was retiring. I think I was a feature, sometime, reporter for the News-Letter, the school newspaper. I did a piece on Bowman and sent it to him for approval, and he grudgingly approved it, is my recollection. I didn’t think he thought it was a wonderful thing, but anyhow. So I knew his critical sense, I knew his role in the field many years ago, but he was a storm center. A liberal group, I think, felt, with some justification, that this was a pretty conservative, tough fellow.

He was, of course, very much a part of the Washington scene. He was the head of the National Research Council, which is the research—not research, but the inquiry arm of the National Academy of Sciences and, in science, a very powerful position that is a very important one on the Washington science scene. He was the chair of that for a number of years in the ’30s. In addition to that, he was a personal advisor to [E.R.] Stettinius [Jr.], secretary of state, Cordell
Hull, secretary of state, and, indirectly or directly, to Franklin Roosevelt. Very much a part of issues of negotiation, Europe, the coming peace, and things of this kind.

He was pictured on the cover of *Life* magazine, kind of the American answer to a then-famous German geographer by the name of Hausofer, and Bowman was seen as the American equivalent of a Hausofer, and Hausofer was a major advisor, I think, to Adolf Hitler. So he was a very significant figure nationally. But I think there's no doubt that he also—and I've seen some correspondence which is pretty harsh. He had very strong opinions and could be quite autocratic in the way in which he did things.

That was a very difficult financial era for Hopkins. That was the '30s. What I don't know is anything about how he was viewed by many other people who obviously supported him, Board of Trustees and so on. He was president, I think, about eleven, twelve, fourteen years. A very difficult period.

He was the one who initiated Hopkins into one of the wartime training programs, and he introduced geography as a discipline through that route.

**Warren:** Through military?

**Wolman:** Through the military. That is, through the teaching program for reserve officer training, he introduced geography, and then somehow or other geography became a discipline in the university. There were people around here who never liked that fact. They might have approved of geography, but they never approved of the way it seemed to have been established. I don't know whether this is true, but I don't know that there was ever an Academic Council vote to establish a Department of Geography, and I do remember hearing people who resented that
Bowman apparently just went ahead and did this on his own. I’m sure he did things like that.

Warren: There aren’t too many people around who remember him, so I’m really glad we’ve gotten--

Wolman: No, there won’t be. You try it out on—well, as you speak to people, for example, Tommy Turner, Bowman had some relationship with the medical institution as well. The story I heard was that, for the most part, the medical institution, the School of Medicine, ran itself, the hospital, another thing, ran itself. The president, while president, is the chief officer for the medical school, although not for the hospital. Most presidents apparently had little or nothing to do with the scene over there for decades. That’s not true of Gilman, who was really responsible for how it evolved.

Somebody told me once, I think, that Bowman went over there when he became president and announced that he was going to run their Advisory Board meeting, which is the chiefs of all the departments and services and so on, and it hadn’t been done for years. A dean had done it for years. That may be apocryphal. I’m not at all sure.

But an interesting, strong, powerful man.

Warren: What do you think the personality of Johns Hopkins is? If you had to describe it as a personality, what would it be?

Wolman: Independent, achieving, energetic, diffuse, congenial by agreement only.

Warren: Tell me what you mean by that.

Wolman: I mean that the entire enterprise from the individual to the school level is driven by
individuals and not by collective directive, and that applies to individuals, then to departments, then to schools, and then to the agglomeration which is the university, but the drive—and that’s why I said driving and achieving—the drive comes from the individual pieces that when I say congenial, are congenial because they have common interests and recognize common interests. They may be brought together in the hopes that they will have common interests, but what really gels is when they seek each other out for one reason or another and form very, very close associations over a nice period of time.

So one would then add to these adjectives I’ve used, a collective interest in the institution among those people who have found it a congenial place and a free place to operate to their taste, and for some for whom that style is either awkward or not structured enough, not always an ideal place to work. I think beyond that it can be quite demanding, and one of the reasons it’s demanding is that one is expected here, as elsewhere, to be a teacher, a scholar, a research person, as well as to make contribution to the enterprise as a whole—that is, service committees and the rest—and as well as to the region and beyond.

That’s a high order to carry, and depending on the standards that are set for it—many universities have this, but I think we epitomize this in many ways—was once characterized to me by a person who left voluntarily, who certainly would have had a future here, as an associate professor, left to become a professor at one of the Big Ten universities, a first-rate university, and when I asked him why, he said, “Reds—” This was before he got tenure. He said, “I’m expected to teach as if I was at Swarthmore. I’m expected to make research contributions as if I was at Cal Tech, Harvard, Yale, Chicago, and I’m expected to provide services as if I was at a community
college in some ways.” And he said, “I’m not sure I want to do this for the rest of my life or meet that standard.”

And that’s exaggerated, but the fact that you have to do as most universities require, produce some nice research and so on, and you are expected to teach, as we spoke about it, and these days in many fields you have to raise the money to do all these things, it’s a very intense kind of an atmosphere. I think most of the universities are intense in that way, but we’re not that big, and the notion of selectivity and so on is very much a part of that psyche, so that one has to be out there with energy, driving the system. Nothing else is going to drive it.

But it’s a very free, independent kind of place in which to work. Nobody tells you what to do. Don’t quote me. But if you do what you’re supposed to do and so on, you name it, whatever it is. You say what it’s supposed to be. You build with your colleagues and others what you think the field or the subfield or whatever ought to look like. It’s not designed from the top down. That means it’s a very free atmosphere in which to work.

Does that help?

Warren: Very much so. Very much so.

Wolman: What’ll be fun to hear from you is when you ask the question of others, and I know you’ve already talked to some, to see what kind of answers you get.

Warren: I think so, too. The other question that I’m asking everybody, and we’ll make this the last question, is, what are— and you’ve alluded to a few of these, but what are the Hopkins myths? You know, there are certain things that— there’s a mystique about this place. What do you think the Hopkins myths are?
Wolman: Small; high achieving; competitive with the very best; excellent; the best there is in this, that, or the other, and so on; and the independence and all the other words that I just used. I characterize some of this as myth in that there are times when I think the repetition of the word “excellent” and “the best there is” and so on, is too often repeated, such that one of my colleagues many years ago, who was a very astute observer from a small Kentucky town, and you would characterize as a little of the Iowa farm boy style, a very good observer. The observation that he made was that there are occasions in which too much is said about how good it is, where if it’s all that good, you don’t have to talk about it that much. And there’s a little bit of that which is kilter to the fact that in many things it is as good as you can be. But I think there’s a hype which I would call, in part, is the myth, that it shrouds or it hangs over a number of things in which you’ve got a ways to go. And to talk as if it was otherwise is a bit of a myth.

But I think part of the “myth” is the myth, is the highly individualistic “do it yourself” style and a place that is “poor” by many standards in terms of what it is we’re trying to do, which means you have to strive to make things. That’s a myth, but it’s got some reality to it.

I don’t know if I’m on the wavelength that you have in mind.

Warren: It’s a mythical wavelength. [Laughter]

Wolman: And I think some of it, just to conclude, some of it, I think, relates to the fact that it is true that the heritage of the university—that is, the graduate education model, the German model in America, and medical education with the School of Hygiene, were, in fact, unique, significant contributions different from anything that existed at the time. I think that’s not a myth, but the halo effect goes on, and there are times when it would be just as well if one forgot 125 years ago
and said, “Okay, now open your eyes. Is that where we are now? What are we going to do? In the political language, what are you doing now? What are you going to do tomorrow?” And, for the most part, we’ve lived up to it, I think.

But the unique quality was its creation. The perpetuation of some of those features has to do with style, with scale, with the similar continuing objectives, and I think the issues that face us and all universities, really, are to what extent is this rapidly changing world of communication, information, and so on, to what extent does that perforce alter not maybe the objectives, but the way in which you try to achieve these objectives and so on. I think this is a very stressful time for all universities, and that means for us as well.

Wolman: Well-

Warren: We would go on for hours.

Wolman: We could. We could. As I’ve told you, and it should be on the recording so that I can use it in the future, I have no faith anymore in the accuracy of some of the memories that I am offering up to you as if that’s the way they were, and I have enough, now, experience with comparative memory to know that what I was sure of, in company with close friends who were there at the time and in same room, in some cases, but whose recollections are not at all the same, that suggested to me that somehow or other one or the other, or all of us, are wrong in what actually happened. So I think I’ve got the aura right, but I’m not at all sure about any of the particulars.

Warren: Well, I’m looking for aura. That’s what I’m asking for.
Wolman: You’ll get it, I think.

Warren: I thank you for what I’ve gotten here today.

Wolman: And you don’t have to record for this, but I think I mentioned to you, and I had occasion after I saw you the first time, because my class was having a fiftieth anniversary and we were doing a lot of anniversary things, meetings and what have you and so on, I took the occasion not only to read my yearbook again, the readable parts of it and so on, but also to read, because I’d forgotten, the first book, I think, of several which were essentially memories of a fellow who happened to also be the editor of the yearbook. His name is Paxton Davis, now deceased.

Warren: Pax Davis is a W&L man!

Wolman: Absolutely.

Warren: Oh, my gosh.

Wolman: And if you want to read a really nice account, I think, it’s in Pax’s book, called something *Days*— *Student Days* [*A Boy No More*] or something like that, *Days*. One of the undergraduates is carrying the book around. It’s now in paperback, even. It’s a nice piece, and it’s very good on what you were asking me about my era. Pax and I were very good friends, same class. It’s reflective and better, even, than the piece he wrote in the beginning of the *Hullabaloo*. He was the editor of the yearbook. That was well done, but the later one is even better as a mature reflection. There is a piece of Russ Baker’s— one of his two, or both, books, in which he describes a little bit of his Hopkins experience, which is also, as you might guess, excellent on that era of Hopkins, an era very different, as I say, from anything before or since. But since you know
of Pax, you’ll really enjoy this. It’s a swell piece.

Warren: I will look at up.

Wolman: And it’s not just Hopkins.

Warren: I didn’t know he was a Hopkins man.

Wolman: Oh, yes.

Warren: I know his wife quite well. Saw her just the other day.

Wolman: I’ve never written to her since I learned that Pax had died a few years ago, and I really ought to, because he was a very, very good friend. I think she knows this, that he was a good friend. I don’t really know her. I’ve met her. Anyhow, when you see her, you can say that I got a tremendous kick out of rereading Pax Davis, because I’d read the whole book before, and I’d read *Hullabaloo* before.

Warren: I will.

Wolman: And if I had wanted to come to a reunion, there would have been maybe ten people that I could readily identify, and maybe five that I would have come back to a reunion for, and he would have been one of them.

[End of interview]