Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the third of November, 1999. I’m in New York City with Sidney Offit, who is just going to fill up this tape, I can tell. [Laughter]

Offit: And the next tape, too. [Laughter]

Warren: And the next tape. Well, I am prepared. I am prepared. I don’t have anybody but you on my schedule today.

Offit: So let’s start with—Shanghai might be a strong word, but I must have gotten Shanghaied into going to Johns Hopkins, because it was right after the war. During the war I had gone to military school at Valley Forge, and during summers worked at a summer camp where the director was David Kaufman, who was a Johns Hopkins graduate, and also one of the great lacrosse players at Hopkins and a football player.

Dave thought that I was too mature and too “intellectually sophisticated”—we’ll put that in quotes—to be going back to a military school for an extra year so I could enjoy cadet rank and privilege. Now that the war was over that didn’t seem to be an important function anyway, when he had such access to Johns Hopkins. I had known a little bit about Hopkins, because at the summer camp where I had been a camper for years, Hopkins was one of the schools that was revered.

I remember some of the names of the counselors that were Hopkins students and pretty
good Hopkins athletes. They were all hired because they were athletes. One was a chap named Leroy Swerdlof, who I think later went on to a career as a screenwriter. He was considered a great lacrosse player. One of the ironies of summer camp was that we didn’t have a lacrosse team.

[Laughter]

Another guy who looked like a movie actor, and I think he played basketball at Hopkins, was Buddy Thanhouser, whose first name happened to be Sidney, which was a confusion for me, because nobody ever called me Buddy, and I didn’t want to be called Buddy. He died young. I don’t remember the specifics. But they were two of the Hopkins people that I knew about.

So when Dave Kaufman suggested that I go to Hopkins, I had to go up to school for an interview with one of his classmates who had later gone on, I think, to work at Princeton. His name is William F. Logan. He was the admissions director. Particularly after the war, the competition for admissions was much greater than normally, because you had all the returning veterans, guys of considerable achievement and distinction, plus all the men who could now go to college on a GI Bill, who otherwise might not have been going.

So I came up to this interview with Bill Logan, and what I remember most distinctly of the university is, I was sitting with a gent who looked a little older than me, and Dave went in to sort of clear the path with Bill. I got to talking to this gent and we—oh, my goodness. [Interruption]

Warren: Okay.

Offit: The interruption was two Malteses who came descending from the muses to inspire us.

Anyway, I was sitting with this really tall, kind of athletic-looking gent and we started to talk about sports, and he told me he was interested in lacrosse, he was interested in football, he was interested in basketball, and to make him feel more comfortable about the versatility of his
sports, told me about the games that I played. I was convinced that I had met one of the members of the varsity teams. I also was greatly intimidated, because this guy, I thought, was also a candidate. I figured, gee, he’s such an all-around athlete and such a mature fellow, this school’s going to be out of my league.

Of course, the punchline of this story is when the door opens and Bill Logan and Dave Kaufman come in, they say, “Hi, Howdy.” It was Howdy Myers, who was coming to say hello to Bill Logan, because he was going to be the coach of all these varsity teams. So my introduction to Bill Logan was accompanied by my introduction to Howdy Myers, who gave me a little jab on the shoulder and said, “Now, you be sure to come out for the teams. I want to see you out there, son.” [Laughter] That was my introduction to Howdy, whom I didn’t speak to, I guess, intimately again for about ten years, when I was writing a book on lacrosse and wanted to check out all the details, I remember calling him. He had remembered me only as the editor of the school paper. But it was an introduction to Hopkins’ culture and the great bonding feeling these guys all felt. I mean, Bill Logan’s feeling for Dave Kaufman, you could almost feel it, their friendships were very, very strong.

Then when I checked into Hopkins it was—I don’t think “awesome” is too strong a word. My first memory of it is really Russ [Russell] Baker, because I immediately went out for the school paper. I remember coming to the office and some people were going to college to get a degree for credential. I was really going to college, I was sure I wasn’t going to graduate, because it didn’t seem to be any way I could possibly negotiate a course in biology or physical science. And language, while I was a good mimic, I didn’t know if I’d be able to pass that. That all seemed to me incredible, unless there was going to be some pill they gave you that—I didn’t know about
dyslexia, but cured your academic difficulties.

So I was really there because I wanted to read the poets that I loved and study literature, read literature more than study, and work on the school paper. So the school paper was my major focus. Russ Baker was—at that time, the election, I guess, had already been set up and there was a gent named Francis Kennedy who was the editor and Russ was the managing editor. It was pretty obvious in even the first session that these were not students who had a lot in common by way of political persuasion. Russ was a very impressive guy, I mean not only in manner and wit, but in stature. We described him off camera as a blond version of Gary Cooper. It wasn’t an exaggeration. I mean, he had that kind of—you figure he was going to be like the guy with the best six-shooter in the editorial room.

During the early days of working on that paper—and I spent more time there than in classes, I just went to the classes to know where they were located, because Hopkins had a system of unlimited cuts. I’ve asked other people about that and they don’t remember it, but I am positive I’m right about this, because otherwise how could I have skipped all those classes? Particularly coming from military school, I felt like there was something really reckless about not reporting for duty. But I did go to the history classes and I went to the writing classes. The biology class lost me at the end of the first session. [Laughter]

The class in introduction to Spanish, I did a wonderful imitation of the professor. He said to me [in a Spanish accent], “You have such a wonderful gift for mimicking, that I’m sure you will be a good student.” When I was not very good, [unclear], I didn’t go back. I didn’t want to disappoint him. I figured he thought I had a good accent, maybe I could be graded on my first class.
So I spent a lot of time at the school paper, and as I say, the News-Letter office was dominated by Russ, who made no effort to do this. I mean, he really was not a person who seemed to want to—power was not on his list of—I don’t think he seemed aware of power, frankly, except as a spectator. But talents of such extraordinary abundance. He used to write the paper almost by himself. He and a gent named Bill Greshan, who was his great pal, he used to travel with him. He and Bill Greshan were mocking of almost everybody. They were mocking of the administration. I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say they seemed determined to pull down the administration. They were going to get [Isaiah] Bowman and [P. Stewart] Macaulay.

[Laughter]

Warren: Tell me what you mean by that.

Offit: Well, because they came from that iconoclastic left-wing tradition, and the authority figures of the school were not people whom they were responding to with any particular respect. Bowman was already—the term “Cold War” was just beginning to come into our vocabulary, but Bowman had drawn up the boundaries, I think, at the end of the First World War, and he was considered a great geographer. I later got to know him.

I’m the opposite of this. I tend to like everybody, and so I was adopting this critical skeptical view, which I was learning from Russ, I must say, that this was the way you’d have to be a journalist. Otherwise, what were you doing? You were doing a PR release for the administration. And that sentence makes sense. So you had to take the critical view for people like Russ and Bill Greshan.

Another gent named Tom Ghost [phonetic] used to wander around. I liked these guys so much that they were vivid in my memory. They were critical of Bowman’s politic, which later as
the four years developed, I could understand. There was something about a school book scandal that they unveiled in the early editions of ’46. I just remember that vaguely. So that was a big influence.

The other people who played a role in those early years were Pax Davis. Pax Davis and I became immediate pals, too. While my relationship with Russ was that of—he was a mentor. It’s interesting, because he and Pax weren’t that different in age. I think, in fact, they were the same age, and both were veterans, but with Russ, he was the guy I was always learning from and the one who was advancing my career at the News-Letter.

If I had to isolate two incidents there that I thought were dramatic, one was watching him not only produce the school paper and write a play with Greshan, but produce Time magazine. He sat down and would do a takeoff on Time magazine and fill the bulletin boards. He could have written the entire publication. He had an almost flawless ear for any kind of pose, and that impressed me.

I wrote two pieces. I can’t imagine where I got the confidence to do this, but I had the confidence to write two humor pieces, and one of which he responded to very favorably, and the other in which he wanted me to develop. He ran one, and the other was a piece he wanted me to develop into a column. He said, “Like the New Yorker talk pieces.” He said, “You know the New Yorker talk pieces.” I didn’t know the New Yorker, and I didn’t know the talk pieces, and I said, “Yeah. Oh, sure.”

Then I thought, I remember this meant—failing Russ Baker would have meant more to me than flunking a course, and I just didn’t want to acknowledge that I didn’t know. I had no idea. I figured every city must have a publication and I’m not aware of this. And I went over to
Manheimer Pharmacy in Baltimore and spoke to Doc Manheimer and said, “Sir, do you have a”—I call everybody sir, too. It took me a long time to get cured of that, but, I said, “Do you have a publication called the New Yorker? Can I have one of those?”

There was a pause and he looked at me and he said, “We have them on order.” He said, “You want me to order a New Yorker for you?”

I said, “Yeah, sure. How much will that be?”

It wasn’t very much, I think it might have been ten cents. But I looked at the New Yorker and I read two or three issues. I just didn’t know what he meant by “talk pieces,” although there was a “Talk of the Town.” So I wrote my column for Russ, which was a humorous turn on a Horowitz symphony. I still remember that, what it was. I’d gone to the Baltimore Symphony and Vladimir Horowitz had been performing with them. The hook line that was supposed to give this humor was that there was a young lady there, younger than me, and her mother was telling her how great it was, and she was saying to her mother it was a lot noise, and finally her mother had her concede, well, at least it was beautiful noise. Because I had picked up that dialogue, I thought.

I remember Russ taking that and sitting down with me and developing this column with four or five other items in these short pieces and typing them up. He was smoking, too. I wanted to smoke because he smoked. It was supposed to be a collaboration. The column was published, and it was called “American Scene,” and I was writing it. Every week I’d bring it in and Russ would fix it up and there they were very witty and very well done, but they weren’t mine; they were Russ Baker’s work. [Laughter]

My original columns were ghostwritten by Russell Baker. The two things about it that pleased me enormously in memory was that I don’t even think Russ had any awareness that he
was doing this thing for me. I mean, I think he really—he appreciated—at some level he gave me
such a feeling of genuine appreciation and confidence, he gave me enormous confidence, that I
figured I was doing it. I mean, you know, he couldn’t have done it without me. [Laughter]

Later when he left, when he left Hopkins and went to work for the *Baltimore Sun*, my
ambition at the *News-Letter* was to impress Russ Baker. He wanted me to be the editor right
away, although I was a sophomore flunking out of school, it couldn’t have been a better ego
boost. He posted signs around the *News-Letter* office called “Ornate with Offit. I see the light, Sid
is right.” [Laughter] The first one to ever pick up with the “Ornate with Offit,” which is not a bad
campaign slogan, right?

Warren: That’s great. I love it.

Offit: It was a good play. So I’d already made a deal with John Hamilton Seth that I would be
his managing editor.

Warren: John Hamilton Seth?

Offit: John Hamilton Seth. I think it was John Hamilton Seth III, a name that Baker had great
fun with. I’m giving you the true story, of course, it was so long ago. I wouldn’t have said this
then, but Russ was not a great appreciator of Maryland aristocrats or people who were “the
third.” Russ was on the barricades right away. I mean, he was the left-wing egalitarian, a politic
that I immediately adopted without any difficulty at all, because I think most non-business majors,
English majors, would be leftik in our persuasions.

Meaning what at that point? One, is that we were willing to make concessions for world
peace. Two, that we didn’t want to get involved in any more wars, didn’t think wars were
resolutions. Three, had tremendous suspicion about capitalism and unaccepting of enormous
concentrations of wealth. I’m just giving you a sketch of it. Four, you know, really went for the little guy and the redistribution of the wealth. The fifth was moving—this was very early, but becoming highly sensitive and beginning to move towards a civil rights movement without, I think, any hesitation or any qualification. I think that was all part of this thing, whereas the more conservative persuasion of students were satisfied with the existing economic system, many were not critical of Russia and also less anxious to change the social structure and civil rights.

John Seth was not a strong conservative, by my evaluations, although he was not the radical that Russ was. During that first year that I was managing editor, I enjoyed working with John. I don’t remember a lot of the incident of that year, and I can’t be precise, but the two or three things that I got involved in, that sort of gave me the credentials, was I interviewed Henry Wallace, and Bowman would not let Wallace appear on the campus.

Warren: I want to hear about that, because Russell Baker alluded to it, but he didn’t really know the story, so I’d really like to hear about that.

Offit: Well, the story was that the word “liberal”—I’m using it as a catchall awkwardly here, but the campus—I don’t know what, “intellectuals” isn’t a fair word, but the students who were in—the liberal arts students, that includes political science majors and English majors and history majors, were really in this election coming up with Truman and Dewey, not satisfied with either candidate. Henry Wallace, who was so far left that we later learned embraced life a lot—Communists were actually involved in his campaign, I’m sure, at the end. Henry Wallace seemed like the ideal candidate. We invited Henry Wallace to speak on the campus, and Hopkins had—and this why I was afraid of talking about it. That’s when I got French’s book and read the history of Hopkins and went back over the News-Letters and discovered—I really applied myself
to trying to figure out what the Hopkins tradition was. Hopkins had a long tradition of radicalism. There was a guy named Blumberg, I think, or something, who professed not—

**Warren:** Blumberg? B-L-U-M?

**Offit:** It may be B-L-U-M. It may have been. Some of these names come back to me. They had a tradition of radicalism, of demonstrations on the campus, and so inviting Wallace was part of that tradition. I felt like we were in the tradition of Johns Hopkins. And when Bowman had blocked him, I decided, being the editor—I think I was the editor that year; it must have been ’48—but whatever my title was, I felt like I had significant credential to interview the president of the school, and so I went in to see him.

**Warren:** Isaiah Bowman.

**Offit:** Yes, and he agreed to see me. I remember the way he sat, you know, he sat with his fingers together and he had that kind of grayish hair, almost with the part down the middle, and a puckerish face of authority. I kind of—I responded to him. I saw he was an authoritative person who would answer questions directly. The reason why he’s so vivid is you don’t ever meet a person like him again. He was almost a flashback to another generation, to another era, where American university presidents and leaders were almost takeoffs on British aristocrats.

The class structure in America at the end of the war was just beginning to fade. It’s hard to realize that, but the class structure was there. I didn’t get the picture until later, because the celebrity culture so wiped it out that by the time our kids came along, they were hardly aware of it. I mean, *Life* was running *Life Goes to a Party*, meaning a debutante party. And “debutante’s” a word that’s used as an apology now.

But Bowman came from that kind of tradition. He was the president of the university and
I was seeing him, and he was very candid. The two or three things I remember him saying is that he did not think Wallace should appear on the campus because radicalizing the student body wasn’t an appropriate part of the education, unless you represented all points of view, don’t you know. If we’re going to have Truman and we were going to have Dewey, then we could have Wallace, but you don’t want to represent one point of view and identify the university with one position.

I offered my—he did not persuade me, but I wasn’t rude or confrontational. I said I did understand that and maybe we would make the effort. I left it open. As I thought back later, I was quite diplomatic about that. I mean, I didn’t realize at the time that I was, but I was. In other words, I guess I did know I was going to go interview him, and he was going to speak at the Bowl [?], which is what he eventually did. We did get him to speak.

**Warren:** Meaning Wallace?

**Offit:** Wallace. Then we got into the whole process of Hopkins’ admission policy. I don’t know why I got into that, except that there was always the subtle discussion about the number of Jewish students accepted. There was no talk about black students, because there weren’t any, but there was something about a quota system or something. I asked him if this was true, because talking to this man, who seemed to me so intelligent and embracing that I thought he would settle this and say no. I didn’t expect the answer that I got, which I didn’t—he said, “Well, of course you have to have some sort of quota system.” He said, “We need a representation and a representative student body.” He said, “When you compose a student body, you need a certain number of musicians, you need a certain number of people who are business majors, certain number of engineers. You have to have a mix, don’t you know?” He said, “Wouldn’t you agree with that?”
I said, "Yes."

He said, "You need a geographical mix. You need a mix of people from different parts of the country and you need a religious mix."

I came back—and you realize what year this was. I was twenty years old, I do remember it. I said to him—by the way, I'm not bragging to you about this, because it was all accidental and I'm not sure what, but I did say to him, "Well, isn't this—" And a lot of this was jargon to me, because it was all new language. I hadn't thought about this at all, it just had been introduced to me through that whole campus newspaper thing. I was a young guy, I was nineteen, twenty years old, and most of these guys were twenty-two or twenty-three. They'd been in the war and I'd been mimicking it at the school. So I said, "Well, sir, isn't it—" I think I used the word, I don't think meritocracy, but I said something close to it. "Isn't this supposed to be gauged by qualification, and at a university the most qualified student academically would be admitted?"

Then you can see why I didn't forget it. He said, "Not necessarily." He said, "Do we want to turn this place into CCNY?" Or SUNY. I didn't know what that was. I said, "Well, why wouldn't we?" [Laughter] But I didn't say it aggressively. It was a hedge not knowing the answer.

He said, "Well, that's a campus with Jewish students. Jewish students are very good students." He said, "If this was done on a policy of just taking people according to grades, you'd have a campus overwhelmed by Jewish students. Is that the sort of school you want to go to? You want that narrow a representation?"

Of course, I said, "Well—" He didn't realize I was Jewish. I've never run into anti-Semitism, ever in my life, and I don't even include this as anti-Semitism, I have to tell you. He had
the right guy. I said, “Gee, I am Jewish and I don’t consider myself a top student.” I said, “I think I really do like to go to a school that is broadly representative, but you understand there’s a concern among Jewish students who feel like they’re better qualified than other people who get in.”

He said, “Yes, perfectly well, but they’re going to get into other schools.” He said, “They’re going to get into fine schools.”

I’m presenting this, I would never present this publicly, you know. He said, “But we have to have representation at Hopkins. We have a large Jewish community, we have lots of very bright people, I know them well. You don’t want your whole school to be [unclear].”

Well, that was the end of that. Of course, I reflected years later when somebody told me what happened at Harvard, I often thought back to that conversation with Bowman.

Meantime—I’m moving too slowly here. Meantime, I went and interviewed Wallace. Wallace practically embraced me, he was so friendly, so—warm is a strong word, but so friendly, and so embracing, because I think for some reason he—you know how people tag on one identity? He kind of tagged on that I was the guy who was responsible for him speaking at the Bowl and all, which I wasn’t. I mean, I was one, but I wasn’t the key.

What I remembered about Wallace was he asked to take my name and address, because if he got elected, he would be needing young people like me. [Laughter] I was thinking as I walked out of there, boy, everything about him was great, but he wants somebody like me? [Laughter] He wants me working for him?

My father, who was a bookie, my dad was a Baltimore bookie and a great guy. I wrote a book about him, so you can have it. But I told my father that I was passionately for Wallace. My
father, he said, "Let me ask you a question. If you’re so passionate for this guy, are you going to vote?"

I said, "I can’t vote. I’m only twenty." [Laughter]

He said, "Well, maybe you get some other monkeys to do your voting for you." But it was funny, I had this passionate engagement in that election.

At that same time that I met Wallace—I—these names have vanished from our history. There was a guy named, I think his name was Glen Taylor. He was the vice presidential nominee. He played the guitar or something. They invited me to come as their guest to a big rally that they had at midtown in Baltimore, which I came to and was treated very well. I thought at that moment, I remember reflecting this to Russ, I thought this was the wave of the future. I mean, it just seemed marvelous. There were black people.

There were other students on that campus who influenced me, too, pulled me back a little bit, so I had written strong editorials. Among the students who had a great influence over me, there was a chap named William Franklin Romeike, who was a great classic student as an undergraduate. He was the only person in the school, the only undergraduate, I think, who took Sanskrit, I think, ever, and was capable and already translating Greek plays. He was a brilliant student and a person who was a foster child, who had been in the army and come out of it, and he was the most radical thinker that I ever encountered.

I mean, his abilities to predict—that would have made a good story. I never wrote it and it’s hard to go into, but acknowledging my history at Hopkins. He had it all. He was the one who first saw the wave of black rebellion. He saw civil rights as an absolute necessity. He said that if he was a black, he would have been—he didn’t know why that we didn’t have mayhem. His wife
was a composer and they introduced me to folk music and a new wave of music that we saw sweeping the country, so that was changing. He had long hair before long hair was fashionable. He was a great advocate of feminism and used to keep house for his wife, and prepared me to be a housekeeper and a husband. These are all parts of this man.

We could walk and talk about literature with enormous enthusiasm and could quote from the Greek and translate for you, but he was a guy who had such tremendous anger, enormous anger. He walked out of his orals, I know, from Dr. Wasserman. He died young. He died ten to fifteen years after we graduated, maybe less. But he, too, would influence me and he influenced me not to join the Young Communist League. He had seen—and he was the most radical I knew in terms of social change and despising the rich. Abbie met him. It’s one of the great things in a long marriage, that’s one of the things that broke up our friendship was that I was starting to work with Abbie.

I bring him into this narrative because he was the one who modified my radical politic, because he saw the evils in Communism. He said that it had failed already. He said the ideal of it was fine, but Stalin was a butcher and a murderer. He said that pact with Hitler was definitive, told you what he was like. The people on the left were unwilling to accept that. I’m going back to the ’50s. They were unwilling to accept it. The rage against American capitalism and the inequities and the social system here were so powerful and their identities with the idealism of Communism, which was a psychological satisfaction for him, but he slowed me up a lot. He pulled me off of that.

**Warren:** I need to adjust your microphone. [Tape recorder turned off.]

You know, you mentioned a couple of times a theme I would really like to pursue. You’ve
mentioned the idea of civil rights, and you were there at a time when things were lily white.

**Offit:** Yes.

**Warren:** Was there any talk about that? Were people aware of that issue?

**Offit:** It was just beginning to grow. There was a feeling about Richard Wright, as a writer, that he was significant. There was feeling that maybe we should be introducing—this was before [Ralph] Ellison, I’m sure, but there was a feeling that we should be introducing black writers into the curriculum. The awareness of black students on the campus was very mild.

I can’t document this, but I can tell you it’s absolutely true. Bill Romeike got me to go down and join the NAACP.

**Warren:** Who’s this?

**Offit:** Bill Romeike, William Romeike. When his son was born—so I was aware of this through him. I felt it as a sensitive—so there were students aware of it. When Bill Romeike’s son was born, he named him for me. We had a falling-out and I never saw him after that. He was angry at me because—well, that’s a whole thing about a book that we wrote. But I had gone down and given his son a present by making a contribution to NAACP. I mean, that’s an example of how strongly some people felt. There was no movement on the Hopkins campus that way specifically, but there was an awareness among this fringe of the student population and among the people in the school paper, there was some feeling about it. It hadn’t been formalized until later.

Soon after I left school in the early ’50s, other people will you that that’s when it grew. That’s when they had the swimming pool demonstrations and the Druid Hill Park demonstrations, but all that happened after ’50.

I think one of the reasons why is, coming off that war most of the students who were
there, who dominated the campus, were really trying to readjust and get back into the swing of things. This fringe politic and student activity was very—it was very fringe in their lives, very peripheral to their focus of getting on with their lives. Their lives had been interrupted and they had to figure out what they were going to do and what they were going to be. So I would say there was an awareness of civil rights, but there was no formalized—the major political focuses were McCarthy. McCarthy came up.

During my first year, Alger Hiss had visited the campus. Dr. Bowman had invited him to come as a guest, and he came down to the News-Letter office. I remember him very well, because he was wearing a three-piece suit, and he had been the editor of the News-Letter, and his brother, Donald, had been the editor of the News-Letter, and later my brother was editor of the News-Letter. So we followed each other, but I didn’t know that then.

But I just remember him being a model. The thing about Alger Hiss that impressed me when I met him—later I got to know him. We had a mutual friend, Joe Machlis, who used to have birthday parties for him and I used to go to his birthday parties so I got to know him pretty well. But there was a quirkiness about his manner and unlike Bowman, who I was impressed with. I’m not putting Bowman down. I was much more impressed with [Detlev] Bronk as a person, but I was impressed with Bowman at that time of my life. I wasn’t going to subscribe to everything he said, because he came from another era.

But Alger Hiss gave you the feeling that he was interested in what you were doing, that he thought what you were doing was important. That’s not an easy feeling to communicate when you’re working at the state department, whatever it was, putting together the U.N. and you walk into a school paper. I mean, first of all, the fact that he even came down there was kind of
intriguing to me.

I remembered him visually at that point, because I remembered the—later when I asked him about it, he remembered vaguely having gone back, and he said he was interested because he had been editor of the school paper and wanted to go back and see it. He didn’t think of it as something that he had—that was unusual.

There was a passionate group of people who were on his side and going to fight this thing through for him and going to identify with him. I remember Priscilla, his wife, was on the campus. Why I remember her being there or why she was there, I don’t remember, but she was there, because there was an organization of Hopkins people who were going to defend him against these outrageous charges. That was later. But those of us who had met him during his first visit felt like, gee, this guy is everything good in the country. That was the way this thing was polarized, that everything good and worthy and noble in America is Alger Hiss. He’s the gent, decent guy. Hopkins, Harvard, and the other guys voted for [Whitaker] Chambers, who’s a confessed alcoholic, paranoid.

So I didn’t get involved in it past the editorial writing stage, because I didn’t get into the political activism. One of my classmates, Jim Donnelly, James Donnelly, did, and you could hardly talk to Jim with—he also was a guy I liked a lot—without the tension and anger. It made him quiver, I mean his feelings about the outrage of what was happening to Alger Hiss. Those of us on the school paper were with him all the way. I wrote editorials for him.

Then in 1950, the reason I remember, you’ll have to check the facts on this. If my facts are wrong, I blew it. I was not the editor, because I’d been the editor, but I was at the school paper, at the News-Letter office when a call came in—I think it was ’50, that’s the thing I’m not positive
about—asking us what we thought about the accusation that [Senator Joseph] McCarthy made. Owen Lattimore was the—throughout our whole college four years, China was falling. This I remember. I mean, the world seemed to be moving progressively Communist. Are you aware of that? I wonder if people were aware of that? I mean, after the war, it seemed like the world was becoming progressively Communist. China didn’t happen overnight. Chiang Kai-shek, at one point I remember his picture somewhere saying “the president of China, but there’s nothing left of it,” you know. The Communists, they were moving into Peking. They were just progressing over the whole—that vast body of land, and meantime in Eastern Europe more of the governments were becoming Communist. The world seemed to be—the whole movement seemed to be Communist. So the trend was very strong.

I think that was one of the reasons that nourished the McCarthy movement. I mean, how could America, with its liberties and its championing of freedom, be losing the battles for men’s minds and souls? That obviously nourished the McCarthy movement. People were confused by it.

Some of the key people in the Asian lobby said that Owen Lattimore had been responsible for the loss of China, because the United States had not been active enough in defending Chiang Kai-shek. I wish I had known what it was, but I went up to see him, because my awareness of it was not as good as it should be. The fact that they called the school paper, I didn’t put it together that they couldn’t get in touch with him. So I went up to his office.

Warren: To Owen Lattimore’s office?

Offit: To Owen Lattimore’s office, and asked him—I thought I would do a piece about this. I asked him what he thought about this accusation. Of course, it was a stunning shock to him. He didn’t think it was a joke, which later, in reflection, you know how most people will say, “Is this a
joke?'' I often thought about that later, that he didn’t say to me, “Is this some kind of joke?” He didn’t say that. He immediately accepted it, you know. He said, “What is this all about?” He said, “I had no idea.” He was still aware of it, he didn’t run all over me, but he said he wanted to check this out.

I said, “I don’t know a lot about it, but I just know that McCarthy—I’d appreciate finding out if you want to make a statement to us.” I left it with it, with tracking it through, and that was true, that was the first he knew about it. Then we all organized for Owen Lattimore.

I talked to Reds Wolman, who’s still a major Hopkins figure, and Reds said, “You have to read Lattimore’s book.” It’s amazing to have such a vivid memory. I have great recall, that’s why this goes on too long. The name of the book was Solution in Asia. I can’t remember the books on that thing, but I can remember that book. I got Solution In Asia, because he said, “You have to read it, because it will give you a sense of what Owen Lattimore’s position is.”

Owen Lattimore had seen the growth of Communism as something that was happening. He wasn’t arguing that we should support it, but he was seeing it as inevitable movement to which we should be making sensible adjustments. It was a considerably different position than that that McCarthy was saying. McCarthy was saying that these guys were agents.

So now we had Lattimore on top of Hiss, so we had great editorial material. That would conclude my Hopkins chapter on this, except that when I had to write my chapter.

**Warren:** No, this is very, very important.

**Offit:** That reflection on Bowman is intriguing. I never talked to anybody about that.

**Warren:** So help me understand. Within the Hopkins community, there was a direct linkage. I guess within the world community there was a linkage to what was going on with Alger Hiss and
Owen Lattimore.

**Offit:** Oh, dramatic. Dramatic. The feeling was that there were people who felt that these charges were outrageous and the assault that was going on—the depths of the McCarthy influence are lost today, but they were profound. I mean, academic people were intimidated by him. The whole entertainment industry responded to him. There was no—actually, the President, Eisenhower, was very hesitant about standing up to him. Truman did—I thought Truman took some shoots at him, that I remember, that I recall, but even Truman could only go so far.

As we know about American politics, I mean, when this stuff gets going, the wave of it, it can, for a moment in history, can become very persuasive. I think that McCarthy's power—by the way, my story, which you'll read an incident in my memoir, mine was hysterical. I mean, in 1950 I graduated from Hopkins as a second lieutenant in the United States Army, because I'd taken ROTC. I had been a campus liberal. I had written editorials supporting Alger Hiss and Owen Lattimore, but I had been in the ROTC for three years and military school for three years and had been a member of—this is another Hopkins name, Helmut (Hal) Sonnenfeldt was another friend of mine there. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, who later became [Henry] Kissinger's Kissinger. I shared a lot of the history of this period with him, a very sophisticated person. Can you see why I said it was so influenced by the students? And you get Baker, Mike and Davis and Sonnenfeldt.

Sonnenfeldt had gotten me to join the military intelligence reserve, so when I graduated, I was—Hal couldn't get this, because he was older, I was given a top-secret clearance. So I was assigned to military intelligence. That's another story, but isn't that a weird one? This was the most intense period of scrutiny when nobody had this. I was assigned to the Brooklyn Army Base, and the colonel didn't have this clearance. And there I'm arguing for what a great President
Truman is and he’s telling me—

**Warren:** I need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Offit:** So that McCarthy era, as I said, had a profound effect, and Helmut had gotten me into this reserve thing. That’s another story. That was another [unclear].

Just a paragraph on Sonnenfeldt.

**Warren:** Yes, I would like to know about him.

**Offit:** Because Sonnenfeldt was fascinating. He worked for the school paper as the feature editor. Hal actually took me to Washington to meet the guy who was Henry Kissinger and his mentor. I forgot the name. I mentioned it in the piece. I wrote a piece about him in the *Hopkins* magazine years ago, but I remember meeting him.

Hal was extraordinarily sophisticated politically. I remember him talking to me. He had a way almost of talking to me in a condescending way, like I was a little American boy who didn’t know anything about the Communist parties of Eastern Europe, when every American boy knew his baseball scores and Communist parties. I mean, I would have had a hard time telling you the countries. You know, I could give you Hungry, Bulgaria and give me the capital cities, but he knew all the nuances of the politics in these areas.

Helmut, some of his political calls, which remain in my memory, I mean, one that I was outraged by was that he had predicted immediately when the state of Israel was founded, that was in ’48, and Morton Blaustein, who was also an undergraduate and worked on the school paper, and a lovely guy—I’m incoherent now, but okay. Morton was the only person we could get to write the *News-Letter* piece supporting Truman. I wrote for Wallace. We finally find a business
student who would write for Dewey, that was pulling teeth, but we couldn’t get anybody to write for Truman. Imagine how far left that was, and yet when we did the campus poll, it was overwhelmingly for Dewey. That’s a historical event in the history of Hopkins, that the campus poll was overwhelmingly for Dewey in ’48. We were shocked by it. Told us something about it. And our advisors on our campus poll were V.O. Key and Dr. Hammond.

I wrote an editorial called “Let’s Crawl Out of Our Parents’ Pocketbooks.” I remember that. You know why that was. See, we were all surrounded by the small group of people who we thought was the universe, and V.O. Key, he was one of the great political scientists of that period, Hammond was a statistician, and he told us how to set up the poll, and that you couldn’t do it in Levering Hall. I learned all about poll—I later taught a course in college on public opinion that I learned at Hopkins in three hours from these two guys. Is that okay?

Warren: Tell me about that.

Offit: I really did, I learned how to conduct a poll, because when I went to Johns Hopkins, we were going to do the poll in Levering Hall, because it seemed to us that Levering Hall was the cafeteria and you’d get the cross-section, everybody used it. Dr. Hammond said, “Well, not necessarily.” He said, “You’re not going to get Levering Hall, it’s unlikely that you’re going to get an equal percentage of the on-campus students.” He said, “The on-campus students are going to come from a different kind of social, political, economic background.” He said, “If you’re doing a poll, you have to take a look at the broad numbers.” So he said, “This is the number of the student body,” he did it. I had to go over to the registrar and get all this for him. The number of students in engineering, the number of students in business, the number of students, you know, living in campus housing, the number—he said, “Then we split it up.”
I don't remember the percentages, but there was a percentage where we did in front of the engineering building, a percentage in the business courses. It was all according to what the statistical thing was. This is the way they do polls. Then we did a certain number in Levering Hall.

So we really had a broad cross thing, and it turned out that we didn’t have it right, that the Levering Hall thing was a little bit towards Wallace, but Wallace was not a big winner. The big winner was Dewey.

What I learned from that are the two principles of polling, which Dr. Hammond told me. One, that people tell the truth, and, two, is that a small sampling can represent a broader universe, but you have to make sure when you’re representing the broader universe that the poll represents all those factions. Now we’re always startled when they do a poll of 2,000 Americans that tell us how the whole country is feeling.

Warren: They’re often right.

Offit: Right, right.

Warren: I’m glad you brought up faculty. I’d like to switch gears a little bit now and talk about that. Tell me about—you’ve told me you weren’t a brilliant student, but who were faculty members who had a real impression on you?

Offit: The students, the classes that—if you said to me, you know, what is your religion, I think my religion really came from Romantic poets, because religion is a thing that touches you spiritually and that you fall back on in times of pain and elevates you and brings you to another level. Love is what religion is generally about. Generally when they say Christ loves you, they’re trying to sell you the idea of getting into the feeling of love. Although I’ve always been a traditional Jew and maintained the traditions I’ve inherited, the spiritual feelings that I had most
intensely were at Hopkins.

I had them earlier when I was reading in Dr. Wasserman’s class in Romantic poets. Earl Wasserman was a Hopkins graduate himself who was, I think, pleased and surprised that he had been accepted to the Hopkins faculty, because the Hopkins faculty at that time was Kemp Malone and Don Cameron Allen and Charles R. Anderson and Dr. Norris. It had a kind of a—I was totally unaware of this, by the way. I mean, I was not aware that—it seemed to me English literature taught by people from English background would be fine. I had no, I have to tell you, I had no awareness of Jewish sensitivity or—I just didn’t have it, because my dad was a bookie, I think had a lot to do with it. We mixed in a much more mixing world. We weren’t isolated to begin with, so I didn’t think about it.

Wasserman considered himself an anomaly, because he was obviously Jewish, but he taught the Romantic poets, and in that Romantic poets class—this would have made a book or a story, and it haunts me I didn’t write it. The aspect of the Romantic poets that is appealing is the spiritual aspect of how they reach you in love and Wordsworth’s pantheism is one huge factor that impressed me. But the death, Wordsworth lived a long time, but Keats and Shelley and Byron, who are the writers identified generally as Romantics, all had very abbreviated lives and have almost become the symbols for the intensely lived, intensely felt, blown-out life, right? I mean, I think that’s a fair statement.

When I think about that class, I’ll name the students. I mean, there was Romeike, who died early, walked out of a hospital and promptly died before fifty. Pax Davis, who died about three years ago, who lived to be seventy, but died. Jim Donnelly, who had been involved in his thing, who’s been dead for years. I mean, I remember that he is gone. A gent named Rumsey Ellis,
who is in the 18th century class, too, I never knew what happened to him, but somebody told me
Rumsey Ellis had died early. Rumsey Ellis was in the eighteenth century class that I also took with
Dr. Wasserman. It was a follow-up to that whole feeling of literature. There was also a guy, I
think his name was Kennedy, who was a very appealing and almost seemed like he was trying to
live the Romantic poet’s life, he died young.

I may have slipped on one or two names here, but the class all disappeared. I said to Len
Scheer, who’s my friend who lives around the corner here, who is a Hopkins—J. Leonard Scheer
came to Hopkins in the same year, '46, and he had been the ETO 100- and 220-yard dash champ.
He was an athletic hero. He was a national hero, sports star when he arrived. Len and I have been
friends ever since. By the way, they ought to do a piece on him in Hopkins magazine. He came in
second to the nationals in speed walking last year.

Anyway, I said to Len, “When we go back to the 50th reunion—” I’m not big on
reunions. I said, “If Bill Dolan walks in,” I said, “that will be May, because he’s the only guy in
that Romantic poets class.” William F. Dolan, he was in the class. I’ve lost touch with him, if he’s
still around, at least we got somebody to talk to.

But if you said, who are the teachers, Dr. Wasserman was marvelous. He opened up the
whole—when he talked about—I could be specific. When he talked about Keats’ correspondence
with Fanny, he gave it a whole—a dimension of person that a young student could identify with.
You know, the feelings of unrequited love, which was such a great part of that. When he
discussed Wordsworth’s Ode on Intimations [of Immortality], “The trailing clouds of glory that
we come from God who is our hope,” there was a vividness about the experience. Again, I’m
almost ready to cry. He reflected on his daughter when he told us, who was about nine years old,
and he humanized the experience.

I was working weekends as a Sunday school, running programs and speaking and arranging programs at two different Sunday schools in Baltimore. One day on the campus I saw Dr. Wasserman walking with this exquisite dark-haired little girl, who looked vaguely familiar, but I didn’t know her. He said, “Mr. Offit, my daughter would like to say hello to you.” He says, “She says you tell wonderful stories.” I thought he meant made-up lies, you know, and I said, “What makes you think that?” He said, “She hears you at the Sunday school.” She went to the Sunday school. That was a marvelous compliment to know that this teacher I so greatly admired had a daughter who—she died two years later. Incredible. I mean, I’m not trying to make any mystic thing out of this. Wasserman died young. I have his obituary somewhere. I mean, I don’t think he made it past sixty, you know, but when his daughter died, the one that was the Wordsworthian figure, you know, the little girl who was, you know, with whom he [unclear]. So Wasserman would be a major teacher.

Dr. Anderson also had an influence.

Warren: I don’t know that name. Who’s he?

Offit: Charles R. Anderson. He was an English professor, I think the head of the department for years. He taught there for years. I mean, that was his life. Anderson was a tough teacher and he introduced a course in American literature, and he would ask us to read the book. He had that Southern elliptic way of speaking. Nodded his head [imitates Anderson’s accident], he was not trying to be your friend. He wasn’t there to be your friend, there to be your teacher, instructor. In a week you should come in with a sentence or two that define the theme of the book.

I didn’t quite get that, and I remember reading Ellen Glasgow’s book, Vein of Iron, and I
liked *Vein of Iron*, and I wrote this two sentences saying this was a brilliant book filled with the
great representation of life. It was just a sort of—he said, "Well"—he called on me in class and he
said, "Well, Mr. Offit, you’ve told us nothing." [Laughter] And having been deeply humiliated,
not humiliated, I was beyond humiliation, because I didn’t feel humiliated, I decided to have a
conference with him to discuss this. I was fully armed to speak to him.

As Pax Davis, who was his favorite student, tried to explain to me that there was a
precision of language that Dr. Anderson encouraged and respected, and without that precision of
language you were not a scholar. I said to Pax, but enthusiasm was part of literature, too.
Literature is not a science, it’s basically an enthusiasm. So I was prepared to come in and argue
with him. I got to see him. I repeated my sentence. He said, "Want to take it apart word for
word?"

I said, "Well, Dr. Anderson, you know, I don’t agree with you in the heart of the matter.
It seems to me that responding to literature is an enthusiasm."

He said, "That’s a minor part of it, Mr. Offit. Enthusiasm has no particular depth or
identifiable communication facility. Now, what was, what is the *Vein of Iron* about? You tell me."

We talked for a while and I came up, "Well, it’s about a woman’s courage in the face of
all the problems."

"Well, you’re getting closer," he said, "but not exactly. What’s another word for courage
that relates here?"

The word he wanted was not "courage"; he wanted the word "fortitude." This was the
difference. The reason why I remember that incident with such vividness is that I read the book
*Understanding Fiction*, which had been encouraged, which he encouraged me to read, and it was
written by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, both of whom I met later, and both of whom I talked to about this book, and they were both—I have a letter from Cleanth Brooks that's somewhere around—were startled that I remembered and read the book. It had long been out of print.

The reason why that was consequential in my life, when I wrote my first novel, the editor had picked up on it before it was published, and I'd written before that, but he said he liked the characters and he had it made, but he didn't know what the book was—it didn't conclude. I said, "You mean on a theme or something? It was that experience with Anderson, that [unclear] that enabled me to realize that a book had to have one structural theme that you could identify in a sentence or two to tell you what it's about. That was a great lesson. I learned that at Hopkins and I can identify where I got it. So I would say that Wasserman and Anderson.

Frederick Lane, who was a history teacher. Do you know that name?

_Warren_: Tell me about him.

_Offit_: Frederick Lane, I thought he was a wonderful teacher. I was hitchhiking to school one day from Lake Drive to campus. He was known for being a very severe teacher. His wife picked me up on the way to school and we had a wonderful conversation. As severe as he seemed—by the way, the faculty seemed severe in those days, with the exception of—we can almost remember the names. Like Malcolm Moos was a friendly teacher. Malcolm Moos was very unlike most of the faculty. Dr. Wasserman was approachable. But most of these teachers were somewhat distant. I can go on to a lot of faculty there. When you got to them alone, it was okay, but it wasn't easy to break through it.

Lane lectured to us on Machiavelli in a course on the History of Ideas, and I was bombing
out. I got a D in the biology course. I had to repeat Spanish, and I had withdrawn from some
other course, so I mean, I had very little going for me here. This History of Ideas course was
important to me. We had to do the paper on Machiavelli, and I came up with this idea that
Machiavelli wasn't a political philosopher, he was a political scientist. This was my influence from
the language thing I'd gotten from Anderson. If you could play with a word, this would give you
theme.

Am I making this clear, by the way? Because I teach this, I tell you, that when you change
the word "courage" to "fortitude," you've got to switch a theme. I thought, if I can get off of this
idea of him being a political scientist, a philosopher, and make him a scientist, then we no longer
have to pass a moral judgment. I wrote this and I got an A. It wasn't just the A; they posted it in
Gilman Hall, and for some reason it stayed there for a year and a half. [Laughter] It gave me
great confidence in my abilities to make—even as recently as two months ago when discussing a
diplomatic move and a political [unclear], a friend of mine said, "That's just like Machiavelli." I
said, I at least know—when you get a good grade, it often encourages you to read deeper into the
subject. So these were teachers.

Then there was a teacher named N. Bryllion Fagin, who was a very modest man. He was a
friend of Alfred Knopf. He was very gentle. I wrote a story, and he taught a writing course and I
wrote a story in the writing course doing a takeoff on Chekhov, and it was so close to Chekhov
that some teachers could have failed you. I just did it. He was a Chekhov scholar. He called me in
and told me—and was encouraging to me, didn’t put me down. The only thing I did was I took a
Chekhov plot and wrote a story.

By the way, in retrospect, I wasn’t wrong. I thought that was a great idea. I do it in
writing classes now. It seems to me you should imitate a writer. I could write my own stories, but it would be good to imitate to another writer’s style—not the style, but the story. It was called, it was *Lament*, and Chekhov had written about a person filled with grief, who had gotten into a horse-drawn carriage in Moscow, and the person who had the grief was the taxi driver. The other man was talking generally, and the man kept saying, “I lost my wife. I lost my child.” There was no response. The end of the story is that the guy running the horse-drawn taxi winds up in the stall at night talking to the horse, lamenting to the horse, you know, the death. So I changed it to a taxi driver. So he was a good teacher. Robert Jacobs, who was another teacher who taught a course in writing, was good. This was a good Hopkins name.

In my writing class that semester was Jack Barth. Jack was glittering. He was writing *The Floating Opera*, but I had no way of knowing that. He had these marvelous pyrotechnic descriptions and characters.

Warren: Tell me about him as a fellow student.

Offit: The thing about Jack that was interesting, Jack had a brilliancy that he seemed totally unaware of. He just did not seem to think of himself as brilliant. It’s hard to place relationships in college when you’re not aware of the hierarchies. It may be that being editor of the school paper is not something that everybody responds to, but to the editor everybody does. Bud Shulberg wrote once that there’s no position of power greater in the world than being the editor of the school paper; after that it’s all a decline. And I understood that.

So when I met Jack, I was the editor of the school paper and we were introduced by two guys who were Dundalk pals of his. One was Ben Sankey, who is a son of a major professional athlete, a great baseball player, and Ed Seeger. Ed Seeger and Ben Sankey and Jack Barth were
As I recall Jack from the class, I liked him a lot, I thought he was great. Jack seemed to be very mature because he was married at the time, and that seemed to me a heavy responsibility. And I was stunned by the fact that he was also a musician. Did you know that? He was a performing musician. My feeling for him was I thought that his writing in class was so good that I didn’t think you could ever publish stuff like that. I didn’t know where that would ever relate to literature. It seemed to me that Jack, being married and being a musician, doing gigs, should probably be a musician and should write on the side. That would be my advice to him. I always thought of him as wonderful company. There was a self-effacing charm about the guy. How else can I say it? He certainly didn’t have the political bravado of Russ, you know.

As a virtuoso, nobody else was ever going to impress me. That’s a dumb thing to say, but you understand, once I got past Baker, nobody ever impressed me again, because I was at that age and he was the first person that I ever met that could do more than I could with writing. He could do it. So Jack Barth seemed to me very gifted.

Pax Davis seemed to me wonderful, and I read all Pax’s books, and he was my friend for my life, but Baker was the one because of the school—and it wasn’t what he did later. That had nothing—sitting there writing *Time* magazine, writing the play, you know, that was a—so my impression with Jack was that that was a small, although I guess if Russ—Russ would have said, one novel he would have traded it all, because Russ wanted to be a novelist.

My feeling about him personally was that he was almost so bright, he didn’t know that other people weren’t as bright as he was. But given the range of intellect on that Hopkins campus, there was nobody who was—Bill Romeike was the brightest guy that I knew because of the
Sanskrit. He didn’t know a lot of people, but the campus was filled with guys.

I’ll throw you some other names, a guy named Tom Mead. God knows what happened to Tom Mead. I think he was Phi Beta, too. Tom Mead used to walk around in an old flight jacket. He introduced me to Hemingway, I mean, to reading Hemingway. He read it aloud in the Tutor and Stewart Club one day, sitting there in an old flight jacket. He said, “Gee, you haven’t read the beginning of *Farewell To Arms*?” He read that paragraph with such, you know—

**Warren:** You’ve just touched on something I want to go to very soon, but before you do, you’ve been dancing around the name Pax Davis. Before I came to Johns Hopkins, I did a book about Washington and Lee, which, of course, is where Pax Davis went.

**Offit:** Right.

**Warren:** Please talk to me about Pax Davis as a student.

**Offit:** Oh, gee, I can fill a whole tape with Pax, because Pax and I were really great buddies. We met, Pax and I met as a doubles team playing tennis for Johns Hopkins in my freshmen year. He was working on the *Hullabaloo*, I was working on the *News-Letter*, and we played at the Naval Academy and we won, which was incredible. I don’t know how that happened, but we did. I think we were the number-three team. Then both of us being men with very severe muses, we deserted the tennis team because we didn’t have time in our activities.

There are two or three things that Pax did. This is so much fun, Pax Davis. I’ll give you three incidents when Pax was an undergraduate. One, Pax Davis had the first enthusiasm that I remember for F. Scott Fitzgerald, and coming from—I’m not doing a great job on my literary, but you can see the books that I read and love. I mean, they’re all there. I mean, *Johnson’s Lies*, I picked that up with great, you know—I thought *Tristam Shandy* was one of the great experiences
ever. And here was Pax Davis, who was obviously such a literary person, with his great enthusiasm for *The Great Gatsby* and for Fitzgerald. I thought a lot of it was style, because Pax had a neat way of dressing and a neat way of looking. He was a little bit of a romantic himself. I remember the girls that he used to—he was intoxicated by certain women during his undergraduate life.

The fascination with *The Great Gatsby* didn’t elude me, but I didn’t get caught up in it until he explained to me what it was about *The Great Gatsby*, which also bowled over Dr. Anderson, that made it such a great book. It was the structure of *The Great Gatsby*. He said in the structure of it was that Nick, the narrator, develops along the line of the dramatic action. And I read his paper discussing Nick.

For example, Nick begins in the first paragraph—this is Pax talking to me, you know, in 1948, and I’m still telling you what he said. Nick begins by talking about coming from the west, coming east, and wanting the world to be the kind of attention forever, and not being really vulnerable to a man like Gatsby, who represented everything for which he had loathing. So in the course of this narrative he’s going to change, Gatsby is going to change his feelings about life and his feelings about the man himself.

What it was that it landed on was this gift for hope, this romantic gift for hope. Pax saw that in a structural thing as being a great American novel, because that’s an aspect of America. When he got through with me, I loved *The Great Gatsby* and I understood it. That was one aspect.

When Pax became the editor of the *Hullabaloo*, he, like Russ, was always very encouraging to me. I wrote pieces for him, too. He did something with a college yearbook that I
don't think, there must be in this country how many, a million college yearbooks published since 1920? I wonder how many editors of the yearbook ever had a theme, a literary theme that really had structure running through a yearbook. If that happened a hundred times it's a lot. He took the yearbook, I think it was—it wasn't ours, it wasn't '50, it must have been '49 or '48, and the theme of his yearbook was the paradox of Hopkins.

I'm saying this to you, I hope you're responding to this, because this is really profoundly intelligent. The concept of paradox provides tension. I've been repeating this stuff to writing classes ever since. It didn't get me right away; I had to think a lot about it. You say, why does paradox make tension? Well, because you have two opposites, and we have two opposites that's going to make it work.

For example, Hopkins was a school that de-emphasized athletics. It was a major part of a news story in '48, that Hopkins was one school in the country that didn't charge admissions for games. Without making any comment on this, you can be very proud of that, because this country went nuts about this sports stuff in college. But at the same time that we de-emphasized sports, we had the championship lacrosse team. The paradox of a school that doesn't emphasize athletes having a championship team. It was always, this is the school that doesn't have school spirit. We pride ourselves in not having school spirit. But the other side of it, you know, this is the school that shows out in numbers and cheers on, and it went on like this.

The yearbook, every section of it had this paradoxical thing running through it as a theme. He wouldn't be satisfied till he found it. That, I thought, was a really inspired idea.

Later when I came to New York, and you can see the rooms so you know what it was, what [unclear], Pax was publishing regularly and I followed his career. Pax elected not to come to
New York; he elected to stay in a smaller community. It wasn’t until he died that I fully appreciated what it was, because I went to his funeral and I visited that town, and when I went there I could see what it was. New York is filled with competitive anxiety. There isn’t any way you can say it isn’t. When you live in a place like Pax lived, all this stuff is going on is very peripheral, the rhythm of it. Russ is a lot like that, too. They really prefer that distance from this intensity.

So Pax as an undergraduate was already a person with considerable literary talent. I think his abilities to write was—he underrated his [unclear] a lot of talent, but he was already manifesting his talents that he played out in life as a journalist, as a non-fiction writer, as a fiction writer.

During one courses of my incarnations here, I was an editor of the book section of *Politics Today*. First thing you do when you get an assignment like that is you want to get your old buddies involved. I gave Pax the book to review, and I had had lots of good friends of mine who were distinguished writers reviewing it. I remember the editor saying to me, “Who is this guy Pax Davis? He’s a really excellent reviewer.” It just struck me. Pax played out his life, I think, all of the early signs were there. I’m going beyond the campus. On the campus he was the guy who was perennially in love, looking for the woman. He bought to it the mature concept of how to structure. He was a wonderful editor for the yearbook, and he was capable also of being very critical of other people.

There was a student whose name I won’t mention, who was a guy we all admired who invited us to his house to hear the beginning of his novel. He had a small group of people and this guy read to us. It was supposed to be a literary evening. I was very flattered by this and thought
this was great stuff, and I remember walking home with Pax across the bridge, walking by the market on North Avenue and across the bridge at Mt. Royal, and Pax saying to me, he said, “He’ll never finish that novel.” This was probably in 1949. It was the year he graduated. He graduated in ’49.

I said, “Why do you say that?”

He said, “That was all performance. He didn’t invite us over to critique that novel; he invited everybody so he could perform that novel.” He said, “If you’re writing a novel, you don’t perform the first chapter. You finish the novel.”

That was kind of a provocative thing he said, and he was absolutely right. I couldn’t fault—I was not listening to this friend of ours read this chapter. He was an older man, married, this was an apartment, this wasn’t in a—I tell you who it was, his name was Bill Wishmeyer, a very bright and imposing guy. I’ll say this, Bill Wishmeyer, who read that chapter, was the person who introduced me to *Don Quixote* in the Spanish.

Isn’t it incredible when you think of all these people and what they did? He read *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* wasn’t anything we were learning. I mean, we were reading English novels and thinking of [unclear] as the beginning of literature and he said, “You have to read *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* [unclear].” He had read it in the Spanish and could cite it in the Spanish, but I guess he wasn’t a novelist. I don’t know what ever happened to Wishmeyer after. I think he became a professor somewhere.

But that insight, that’s a good Pax Davis anecdote, because it’s also true. I mean, I recognize that. You don’t call your friends to listen to your first chapter if you’re writing a novel. You might send a friend a [unclear]. So that would do it. I thought that he was a wonderful friend.
all through life, and he and Russ are two people that I maintained relationships with forever.

There was nothing except warmth and encouragement that ever flowed from him.

By the way, as a sidebar, I thought Hopkins really ignored him, and there wasn’t anything I could do about it. Yes, they ignored him. When he wrote his memoir and he wrote that book about Hopkins, you know, I tried to get some attention for it.

**Warren:** But you saw that it was featured in the recent alumni magazine.

**Offit:** Yes, but that was after he was dead.

**Warren:** Yes.

**Offit:** I mean, that was three or four years after its publication. I didn’t make this up. He felt it. He told me he had made some effort. Pax talks about paradox, life is paradoxical, and we accept it after a while.

**Warren:** Alumni magazines are very quirky organizations.

**Offit:** Universities are. Rejoicing over Russ, God knows I gave Russ—is not a particular distinction to me. You’re not giving Russ the distinction; you’re bringing yourself the distinction. You’re talking about a national figure. I’m being [unclear], but true. When you say we’re going to give Russell Baker an honor at Hopkins, you’re honoring the school, you’re not honoring Russ because he’s honored all over the [unclear]. Pax Davis, on the other hand, was marginal. He’s somebody that Hopkins could have excited by doing something.

This is not your responsibility. There’s no mechanic for that. If you said to me, well, your cousin was chairman of the board, why didn’t you do it? I mean, I don’t know you do that. It’s very hard to do it, but somebody’s got to be aware of it. I’m sure that many Hopkins people that are there to do distinguished work, but he had written that memoir and he did three—and focused
on that. It’s just too bad they didn’t get it. I don’t think it’s anything vindictive; it just slipped by.

**Warren:** Well, I can tell you I was around when the editor did find it and really sat down with it.

**Offit:** I know, I told her, I spoke to her.

**Warren:** And she loved it. She was so excited about it.

**Offit:** I know. I remember talking to her about it.

**Warren:** Yes. You did, yes, you were the one.

**Offit:** I talked to her about it, yes.

**Warren:** Yes, you were the one.

**Offit:** Yes, but you can’t—

**Warren:** She’s the one that turned me on to you.

**Offit:** Is that right?

**Warren:** And then Russell Baker. “You’ve got to talk to him.”

**Offit:** Yes. But when you think about the people that you go to school with, the literary world is a dead-end, I mean, for most people. I mean, what’s going to—you know that. Your books go out of print and your work disappears. You’re a literary. You can probably give me as many examples as I can give you. So that’s not the point. It’s just the university’s relationships to the people who go there is a very subtle one and very complex. It is really complex, because you never know who’s hurt. I’m sure people would be startled to think that he was hurt and there wasn’t any way to correct it. End of story, okay.

**Warren:** Let’s talk about the Tutor and Stewart Club. You’ve alluded to that a few times.

**Offit:** Right. Well, the Tutor and Stewart, we’re back to Pax, by the way. The Tutor and Stewart had a reputation when I was an undergraduate of being very select. I’ll probably tell the story
better with an English accent. Not everyone was welcome to the Tutor and Stewart, you see. You had to bring to it a certain style, literary sensitivity, in addition to an obvious interest in the literature itself. Style was also appropriate for someone who was going to associate with the Tutor and Stewart monarchs.

Having said that, I was invited as a sophomore to join the Tutor and Stewart because of a gentleman whose name was James Paxton Davis, who was a natural heir to this. We used to have smokers on Friday nights that were as much as fun as anything that I’ve ever experienced in clubs, and I’ve been a great club man all my life. If there is such a thing, I have been one. Being a club man wasn’t anything that an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins would aspire to, because clubs weren’t considered a big part of campus life. It wasn’t Harvard and Yale, where getting into secret societies was part of the overtone of the university. Hopkins really distinguished itself as being a freelance school, independent.

But here was this Tutor and Stewart Club, the marvelous rooms that [Sir William] Osler had endowed and had been actually designed, I think, by British designer, I think, the paneling with the wall of young Revere Osler’s collection, plus the fishing equipment, because he had been a fisherman, then the marvelous safe with the priceless Spencer volumes.

I’ll tell you one great Tutor and Stewart story, because I want to do it anecdotally. I was the secretary. The secretary was the highest position that an undergraduate could hold. I was the secretary at the time. By the time of my last year I had so many credits, because to compensate for my bad academics, I had taken all these night school courses at Hopkins and gotten so much credit that my last year I was practically on sabbatical. It was just a great last year.

There was a gentleman named Mr. [Louis] Kuether. It was J. something Kuether, but I
can see him. He was perfect. Everything, I mean, every mannerism on the British. He was very tall and slim, always wore tweeds and was hunchbacked, so tall he always had to bend over. Mr. Kuether had been like the curator for Tutor and Stewart. He was the one responsible for maintaining all the books. In 1950, Detlev Bronk became the president, and when Dr. Bronk arrived, I know it was '49 or '50, I greeted him. There were two students who greeted Dr. Bronk and we had our picture taken. That picture I did give to Hopkins. So there is a picture of me with Dr. Bronk somewhere.

I greeted Dr. Bronk and talked to him and then interviewed him, because there was some fear in the humanities division that Dr. Bronk, being a biophysicist, or a physicist, that he would move the school too strongly towards the sciences. He had a marvelously deep, wonderful voice, like this, and when I spoke to him, he said, “Sidney,” he called me by my first name right away, he said, “We will definitely not [unclear]. We’re proud of our literary heritage.” He said, “I’ve heard about the Tutor and Stewart Club.”

I said, “Dr. Bronk, I’d like to invite you to visit the Tutor.”

He said, “If you will escort me there, I would be honored to come.”

So I invited Dr. Bronk. Can you see that this is probably the high point of my social achievement, right? I invited Dr. Bronk to come to a smoker on a Friday night at the Tutor and Stewart, and he showed up. There was an aspect of him that reminds me a little bit of Alec Guinness. I don’t know if anybody else saw it. I was, by the way, friendly with him later, too, because we were both in New York together. That’s a tangential story about Nobel laureates.

So Dr. Bronk showed, and I was very proud to be there in the company of the president to whom I was introducing to the English faculty. At the end of the evening, these conversations
have a certain joviality and then they die. It requires great artistry to keep the conversation going, right?

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

**Warren:** It's Mame Warren and today is November third, 1999. I'm still with Sidney Offit, and he's going to go back to when Detlev Bronk walked in to the Tutor and Stewart Club.

**Offit:** So after an evening of entertainment and meeting various members of the faculty, at the end of the evening to climax this we decided that Dr. Bronk, as a president of the university, deserved a look at the Spencer manuscripts. You're aware that Hopkins, as I recall this, this is all—but not only did we have an original Spencer folio, but I think early in its history the Tutor and Stewart Club had received a grant and began to buy other Spencer folios. So it was one of the great centers of Spencer manuscripts in, I think, the world.

I think Louis Kuether, the curator, was asked to open the safe. Here you have gathered around, in various tweeds, with smoking eminently from pipes, cigars and cigarettes, with glasses of beer all over the room, because all we drank at these was beer. This was a beer party. All the mugs of beer. Lofty, everyone filled with high spirits and great humor, the great half circle created around the safe, and Mr. Kuether, the curator, for the first time in his career at Hopkins was asked to open the safe and bring out the Spencer manuscripts for the president of the university, the physicist who loves the humanities.

Mr. Kuether gets down on bended knee, begins to tremble as he plays with the combination, and a minute passes and another minute. Shall we have another beer? Shall we light the cigar? How embarrassing for all of us. Are we sure we've got the combination? "It's never failed before," says Mr. Kuether. This goes on for five or ten minutes, very well, [unclear].
Kuether could not open the safe. He couldn’t open the safe. [Laughter] The undergraduates thought this was hilarious, and we made up marvelous stories that somebody had stolen the Spencer manuscript.

Of course, what happened is, I guess, Kuether had had a nip or two on the side, and it was a big night and he just couldn’t handle the—he couldn’t do it. We waited and we all collected and he went back and he never got it open. So that night worked with Mr. Kuether not being able to open the safe, but at a later time Dr. Bronk came back and saw the Spencer manuscripts, and I saw them. It was very, very impressive. That whole collection was impressive, too.

Warren: So there’s actually a safe in this room?

Offit: There’s a safe. The room is centered around this safe. There’s a fireplace. As you enter the room, the safe was towards the left wall and the fireplace was to the right. Over the fireplace was a portrait from Revere Osler. You know what happened with Revere Osler?

Warren: Tell me.

Offit: Revere Osler was the only son, he may have been the only child, he certainly was the only son, I think probably he was the only child of Sir William Osler and his wife, who lived a good part of the time in England. In World War I, Revere had been either inducted or volunteered and was wounded in combat, and Harvey Cushing tried to save his life. This is fragmented memory, but I remember the name. I think it was Cushing who tried to save him. He was a good friend of Osler’s. Revere died; he didn’t survive this.

Meantime, William Osler, who was one of the most distinguished names in world medicine, had lectured at Yale and had been most impressed by the Elizabethan Club, which I’ve never seen, but apparently it’s a building separate from [unclear]. That was his most impressive
experience there and he wanted to do something to replicate this at Johns Hopkins, and so he and his wife, in their son’s honor, sent a sum of money, which I remembered what it was at the time, it wasn’t a lot of money now, but it must have been enough then. The reason I remembered it vaguely is we used to spend the money for the beer parties and then what was left we bought books with, so it was enough money to conduct this thing.

But they endowed the room and they sent his fishing equipment, plus his collection of Tutor and Stewart literature. He had become involved in Tutor and Stewart literature—why does this come back to me? I’m embarrassed to remember detail like this. Because his father had given him a book by Isaac Walton. I think I got this right. Walton was Tutor and Stewart. Then Walton had given him this book that he had become infatuated with, and then became interested in books about fishing, because then we had a lot of books there about fishing.

Then the whole period of Tutor and Stewart literature had interested them and he had started to collect them. His father was a collector, and young Revere had started to collect it, so his collection was given to this club. It was called the Tutor and Stewart Club, I guess as a takeoff on the Elizabethan. Naming a club in honor of a British royalty was a strange thing, but it was the writing that fell within that period.

So we had this collection, which was all one wall of encased books. There was a little room in the back where we used to put the beer kegs. Once a month, I think, we had—we didn’t have to do it every week, I don’t think. Once a month we had a speaker and a beer party. We had a great many distinguished speakers.

This was very self-serving, but it’s true. I in my younger day was a mimic. That’s why Russ liked me. It wasn’t so much my [unclear], but I was a hot mimic. I used to mimic French
professors. Dr. H. Carrington Lancaster, one of the great names in French literary scholarship, had invited his friend Robert Frost to speak on the campus, and I was invited to escort Robert Frost with Dr. Lancaster, and so I became acquainted with Dr. Lancaster. When I told one of my friends that I had been with Robert Frost, who was less impressive to him than Lancaster, he said to me, “Did you do your mimicry of a French professor?”

I said, “I didn’t do a mimicry of my French professor in front of Lancaster. Are you crazy?”

Lancaster was a large man. He looked like a Lancaster. He looked like he had carried the mace and ridden the horse and gone to battle for the queen.

He said, “Well, you ought to do this.”

Bill Romeike, who was also a member of this club, and a [unclear] scholar, said, “We should have some fun and book a program with a visiting French professor, and you perform as the French professor.” It’s hard to believe I would be willing to do that, because that meant between the time that the invitation went out, the time I agreed and the invitation went out and the program, weeks would pass. So I’d have a lot of time to get stage fright and panic. To this day I don’t know why I did that.

But the theme of it was the anatomy of John Milton, something like that, the anatomy of John Milton as a key to the structure of *Paradise Lost*. You know, it was something to include the medical faculty and the English faculty. My name was posted as a French name as the professor, and there was a chart and slides, and I arrived in this Tutor and Stewart room and I did it. I did it with my pidgin French. [Demonstrates]. But I sustained this for the evening, and Dr. Lancaster was sitting right in the front of the room. [Laughter]
At the end of the evening, I remember him saying to me, “You have an absolutely impeccable French R. How could one have such an impeccable French R and not speak French? I want you in my class.” [Laughter] I would do the [demonstrates]. Anyway, that was my high point at the Tutor and Stewart.

Right after that, I was shipped off to New York to become an entertainer, which I immediately resisted.

But anyway, the Tutor and Stewart Club, the legacy of that club, I came back, I was grateful to be invited. That was a thing that meant a lot to me. I was invited back when my memoir came out, by the great guys in the English department, writing department. When I went back to speak there, I walked into the room and I was startled. “Decay” may be too strong a word, but the campus seemed to be flourishing. Everything around seemed to be in high care, but the Tutor and Stewart Club didn’t seem to me like it looked this—maybe it was just the passage of time, but it looked frayed and beaten up. It looked like it needed a real refurbishing. Maybe I exaggerated it.

But the other side of it was that Steve Dixon, who had invited me, there’s nobody that I have met in the last twenty years who is more of an entertaining, witty, delightful guy than Steve Dixon. Do you know him at all?

Warren: No, I haven’t met him.

Offit: You have to talk to him. I had a marvelous correspondence with him. But talk to him about it, because he’s a really very successful novelist, one of the most respected. He doesn’t sell a lot of copies, but, boy, he’s right in there. He’s in the writing department. I didn’t tell him my reaction to that club, because that would have been ungracious. I’m telling you, though, because
you brought it up.

I just think that what we used to do there in the afternoon—an interesting reflection on that is I used to go up there and I was free, because I had no anxiety about what I was going to do after I graduated, which I probably should have, because I had no idea, but we used to go up in the afternoon and read. Something my wife duplicated it here. This is really probably part of it, because I love sitting there and reading those—I loved holding an old book and reading it and feeling a part of it. I cut down the smoking. I don’t smoke at all now.

The other side of that room, which was, like Pax would say, the paradox, was that the graduate students were all in high states of anxiety. Getting a Ph.D. from Hopkins in the English literature department was an ordeal. It was a crucible. One of the students there put his head in the oven and did himself in. He flunked it twice and he couldn’t handle it anymore. I remember the guy, a lovely guy. The graduate students would come around in the afternoon, and they all felt guilty, like they should be working all the time.

I’ll tell you the names of some of them if you’re looking—Phil Griffith was one. He was a lot of fun. I wonder what happened to Phil Griffith. G-R-I-F-F-I-T-H. He was a lovely man. Philip Griffith.

Then there was Bill Nugent, N-U-G-E-N-T. He was a history—they were so much fun, those guys. Ridgeley, Joe Ridgeley.

Warren: Let’s move on to another organization you’ve alluded to. By looking at your Hullabaloo, I learned that you were very involved in activities at Levering Hall.

Offit: Right.

Warren: I’d like to know what went on at Levering Hall back in those days.
Offit: Well, Levering Hall was the coffee center for the school, because in the cafeteria, that’s where we would all adjourn between classes. I mean, think about it. Where else would you go? All the students, not all, the students—there were different kinds of relationships to the school. One was the student who came, went to the class, and went home. There were a lot of people like that. But the social activity was generated around Levering Hall.

The News-Letter office was part of Levering Hall, so we were going back and forth all the time. There were three offices which were cubbyholes. All three could fit into this room, I think. One was the News-Letter office, and across the hall was the Hullabaloo office, and then there was a little office called the S.A.C. office, it was supposed to be the office for the Student Activities Committee. I don’t remember that we had a student council. I think Student Activities Committee was like our student council. It seemed to me like it was.

Anybody who was involved in these activities, there were a lot of people who serendipitously came in and left, would go over to Levering Hall to sit around and kibitz. There is a picture in an old Hullabaloo. Gee, is it an old Hullabaloo or did I have that picture? You want to get up and look for it?

Warren: Not right now.

Offit: There was a picture of a group of us sitting in Levering Hall that really caught it. It was just characteristic. It was a social center. It was more of a fraternity than a fraternity house. It was where we would all congregate. The building itself was maintained upstairs by the Y. There was a YMCA, I think. The Reverend Detweiler was the name of a gentleman who ran the upstairs part. The upstairs part was where we would have meetings. The student council would meet there, and I remember our debating club would meet there, upstairs in Levering Hall. On the side was the
cafeteria, but this was the upstairs.

The Reverend Detweiler was an interesting man. He was a profoundly involved left-wing religious leader, but a young man, and he had a vibrant quality. He was determined to get student leaders interested in the Y. That’s how I became interested and involved in it, in maintaining the building.

So Levering Hall was a thriving part of the campus in those days. I don’t know where the money came from. Did we raise money for it? That I don’t remember. I don’t think we raised money for it, but we were part of the management of it. The sentence that summarizes it is that it was the center for the off-campus students. The aspect of Hopkins that was the—the key to understanding it was that the resident students had their own dormitory and their own social places, but the off-campus students didn’t have that. The ones who were involved in activities didn’t naturally migrate to fraternity houses. I had joined a fraternity and I hardly ever used it. I didn’t know why I really joined it. I joined it to meet girls. That’s right.

See, that was an aspect of Hopkins undergraduate life that I never discuss with anybody. I haven’t even thought about it until this moment. I mean, why did I join it? There were no girls on the campus, and meeting girls was not an easy project. There was a self-consciousness about the mixer. I wonder how many guys at Hopkins met their wives on the campus? I bet very few. We used to have mixers with Goucher occasionally, but it was almost like a raid. Have you ever discussed this with anybody?

Warren: Tell me about it.

Offit: I’m just curious as to what—it was never formalized or institutionalized. We had a freshmen mixer. Out of all my experiences at Hopkins, I can only remember one mixer. You know
what a mixer—you know, where you bring young ladies onto the campus to meet people. It just wasn’t part of the—even that one was—I remember that so well, because it was my sophomore year. I was in a car with two other guys riding through Roland Park, which is one of the great residential areas, and we picked up three young ladies who had agreed to come to this freshmen mixer. There were three guys in the car and three ladies, and one of the girls was sitting on my lap, which I didn’t mind at all. This was probably the high point of my social life for the year. And she was a knockout number.

We arrived at the mixer, and it just never really got going, you know. Some freshmen wandered in. But there seemed to be some kind of resistance to it. I don’t know what this was like at other colleges, because I never experienced it, but it was an all-male campus, and this was as close as you could get to getting a number of somebody to call in town unless you had social access.

The fraternities really picked up the social aspect of it. That’s where the guys got to meet the girls. That’s as far as I can think. I’ve never discussed this with anybody. I mean, the veterans, most of them, like Len, who had girlfriends all the time, they were meeting, they were aggressively meeting girls, but there wasn’t any social structure for it at Hopkins. I don’t remember us—I may have missed a step there. I don’t remember us having any big social mix with Goucher, which was considered our sister school. We did a couple of things, I met Goucher girls, but I met them in other structures.

Warren: It doesn’t come through very clearly in looking and talking with people. Social life does not seem to be an important part of the Hopkins experience.

Offit: Absolutely.
Warren: Which is the total opposite of Washington and Lee.

Offit: Yes. Isn’t that interesting? That’s where Pax had that paradox thing. The social life wasn’t big and school spirit was mocked. I mean, we used to mock the guys who had school spirit. That was considered—the focus of the school, which we didn’t say, and you have to say this about any discussion at Johns Hopkins in the late ’40s when I graduated, the focus was absolutely the assumption was you’d go to graduate school. The assumption was, what school were you going to go to and what were you going to study later. The influence of graduate education was so indelible on the undergraduate that the undergraduate’s expectations were that of graduate school.

One last professor who had an influence on me. We had to write a paper before we got a degree in English or humanities, and I wrote my paper on a comparison of concepts of orthodoxy between St. Paul and Coleridge. My advisor was William Foxwell Albright. Do you know that name? William Foxwell Albright.

Warren: Tell me about him.

Offit: I went in to see Dr. Albright, and he said to me, “Yes,” he said, “this is a fascinating subject.” He said he appreciated my responding to it, and he was going to help me with St. Paul and he gave me the readings on St. Paul, and I was going to be able to handle Coleridge. I worked on this paper, and I was a little bit intimidated because in the course of that year I think that was the year they found the Dead Sea scrolls and he became its commentator on the Dead Sea scrolls. He had also lectured to us, and he was considered one of the giants of the faculty. He was also very approachable and very pleasant.

I handed in my paper, which was thick and, I thought, impressive. I got it back. This is a
true story. This is like one of those great Hopkins stories. I got it back about two weeks before graduation, totally marked up with no grade. You get this? Can you feel this in your gut? There was no grade on it and it’s totally marked up, with revisions that—I mean, I cried. I actually said, “Oh, Jesus Christ, I won’t get out of school.” I mean, it’s the only course I really had to work on. How am I going to get out of this school? I can’t do this in three weeks or a month.

So I brought this manuscript back to him and told him, because I thought that we were friends. We had had nice conversations about religion, we had talked about the Dead Sea scrolls. I said to him—can you tell me the end of this story? Do you know the end of it? Guess it. You can’t guess it?

Warren: Tell me.

Offit: You can’t guess the end of it?

Warren: Tell me.

Offit: I said, “Dr. Albright, I’m going to try to do this, but I’m not going to be able to do all this.” I said, “I’m just not that good a student.”

And he said, “Well, you don’t have to do this right away. You take your time.” He said, “Your expectations for yourself are much too high. This should take a year or two.”

I said, “My parents are paying for me to graduate. My parents are paying my tuition here for me to graduate this year.”

He said, “Your parents expected you to get a Ph.D. that quickly?”

I said, “No, they want me to get a bachelor’s degree.”

He said, “A bachelor’s degree?” [Laughter] He said, “I don’t quite get why—why—why—what is this all about? Why am I advising you?”
I said, "Well, they said you could pick your advisor and I picked this and you agreed to do it."

He said, "Oh, my, my, what a misunderstanding." He said, "You were going to do St. Paul and Coleridge concepts of orthodox." He said, "You’re fine. No, you’re fine. You can get your bachelor’s degree. Are you going to do this for a Ph.D.?" He still didn’t get it.

I said, "No, sir, I don’t think I’m going to be doing my Ph.D. dissertation on this. I don’t think I’m going to be doing a Ph.D."

But anyway, he passed me. I wish I’d saved that script, but God. And I apologized to him. I wrote him a note later. I said, "Dear Dr. Albright, I’m writing to you with the sense of awe and gratitude that you invested all this energy and time in reading this manuscript and giving me such brilliant advice on it, that I know I could carry it at some later date. I hope I can pick up and carry this forward."

Warren: Oh, that’s a wonderful story.

Offit: Isn’t that a wonderful story? You can just see it. But when you think about, why would he think he’s giving me advice on an undergraduate paper? I had skipped a step. See, I had gone to him to get advice before I started the paper. That was what threw it off. As I thought back over it, the conversation did have breaks, you know, like, who was I working with, what was I doing. I had answers for everything, but didn’t gel. So anyway, that was my Albright story.

The focus was totally scholarship. That’s what we’re discussing. I mean, that’s the great example. So that everybody assumed you were doing graduate work. Dr. Wasserman, by the way, told me, he gave me the instruction that kept me from going to graduate school, which was, I thought, a brilliant insight. I had gotten a scholarship at some Midwestern school and was
thinking of going there. I couldn’t have because the Korean War started, but at that point I didn’t know that. He said to me, “Why do you want to be a scholar?”

I said, “Well, I love teaching. I think I would enjoy teaching.”

He said, “I think you’re right. I think you’d be a wonderful teacher. I think you’d be an intelligent and scholarly teacher, but that doesn’t mean you’d be a scholar.”

I said, “Well, I think I could—I’d want to qualify by being a scholar.”

He said, “Well, I’d think about that.” This was the sentence, he said, “Because when you’re a scholar you have to read things you don’t like. Do you read things you don’t like?”

I said, “Well—”

He said, “I notice like you like Wordsworth, but when we discuss Wordsworth there are things you just didn’t want to read.”

I said, “You’re absolutely right, I haven’t got any patience for the things I don’t like. You’re absolutely right.”

That did it for me. I thought it was an extraordinary statement. I thought about some of the graduate students. That really is—I mean, a good scholar has to read everything. I see the friends of mine in New York who are major biographers. I’ll give an example, like Robert Caro, who’s a good friend, won the Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Robert Moses. Robert Caro is a scholar, because he reads everything. It takes him a long time because he’s so thorough.

I have other friends whose names I won’t mention. Well, I’ll give you—Ron Chernow, who’s written bestselling books on Rockefeller. He said the other day on a TV thing that we were doing, he takes five years to write a book. When he was asked the question by the interviewer, Earl [unclear], how can he say five years, because he said, “That’s all the time I give to it.” He
gave an example of doing the Rockefeller research. He said, “But then you don’t read everything you can.”

He said, “No, I go as far as I can and somebody else can come along and contradict it.”

There’s a difference of approach, you know, and I’m thinking that I may be exaggerating Caro in comparison with Chernow, but I don’t think I’m exaggerating it.

Gene Strauss, who just did a book on Morgan. It’s a marvelous book, Carl Morgan, I think a major biography. Gene Strauss is a person who has to read everything, do it all. They have that scholarly impulse. It doesn’t mean that Chernow has it, too, but it’s more equivocal. They stop at a certain point.

I think that that tradition has certainly vanished from the university. I don’t think it’s true of any universities anymore. I teach at a couple of schools and I know it, but Hopkins was the holdover for that intense rigorous standard and making people repeat their orals and sending them back into revising their dissertations was so characteristic of the school, I learned about it sitting around the Tutor and Stewart Club, because the number of graduate students that were writing their dissertations, I mean, it was almost expected that you didn’t make it on the first.

Warren: That was in the days before word processing. How could they do it? [Tape recorder turned off.]

I just wondered whether, I know your time coincided somewhat, did you know Bob Scott, who wound up being the lacrosse coach?

Offit: Sure, I knew Bob Scott, because he was a friend of my brother’s.

Warren: Tell me about him as a student.

Offit: Well, he was a lovely guy. He was another one of those gentle, pleasant people. I mean, he
was a year younger than me, but Bob Scott was one of the guys who sort of came from that
Hopkins lacrosse tradition of being gentleman and athletes, and you didn’t put the two of those
together. I remember him as being a good student. I don’t remember his—I wasn’t in classes with
him, but my impression of him was very strong. There was a courtliness that he had that was
consistent with the kind of manners that were traditional at Hopkins. I put him in the tradition of
the guy who I—one of the reasons I don’t want to go back to my fiftieth reunion is because I
don’t want to have to face the memories of people like Freddie Smith, Jr., whose father was my
doctor, and who was a great lacrosse player. Freddie died, somebody told me. I was so
disappointed to know that.

This was an incoherent reflection on Bobby Scott, but Bobby Scott comes—these were
guys who were really first-rate athletes in a very severe sport, but there was nothing in their
manner that was arrogant or aggressive. I respected that, because I thought it was—because
Bobby was like a matinee idol hero, as I recall him.

Warren: He was?

Offit: Yes. I mean, he was always—he was the kind of guy who you wondered if he had gotten
off the track of that and gone into politics, he might have been very successful. It’s not a remote
thought, but I think—isn’t Bobby about two, three years younger than me?

Warren: Yes, he’s class of ’52.

Offit: Yes, that’s right. He was in brother’s class, yes. My brother liked him a lot. He thought he
was a great guy. I’m glad you brought up an athlete. The lacrosse team’s relationship to the
school was—it was idyllic. Maybe I’m romanticizing it, but it seemed to me that—I don’t think I
am. I mean, we knew everybody. Lloyd Bunting and Ham Bishop and George Mollinex
[phonetic], I remember. It was a small campus for a big campus. A lot of people involved in things got to know each other.

There wasn’t this [unclear] that goes on in colleges today is nuts. Nothing that we’re going to do about it, it’s set. I mean, hiring professional athletes practically to perform for you when there’s no relationship with the campus. The Hopkins—these guys were very good. I mean, they were national champions. They beat everybody the whole time we were in school. Even the baseball team was good. The big gag was that our football team played in the Tangerine Bowl. Did you know that?

Warren: I know they were invited to.

Offit: I think so.

Warren: I know they were invited to, but I think—

Offit: Maybe they didn’t play.

Warren: But Dean Shaffer wouldn’t let them go.

Offit: Is that right? [Laughter] I remember Dean Shaffer. You didn’t know him, did you?

Warren: No.

Offit: I liked Dean Shaffer. He had a very soft voice. I remember one of his stories. He was a psychiatrist, and he would say, “How we tend to personalize every response when you’re too self-focused.” He said, “For example, a gentleman gets a tie and he tries it on [unclear], a nice bow tie. It’s pretty good. He says, ‘I don’t know, do I look like a clown in his bow tie? I don’t think so. I think I’ll wear it.’ He steps out of the house and two ladies are walking up the block, talking to each other, and one tells the other jokingly, she goes, ‘Oh, my God.’ The guys says, ‘My bow tie.’” They’re laughing and he goes in and changes, you know? I love it.
I always remember that story because it’s got that nuance of transference—he said it’s a transference of somebody else’s experience to make yourself vulnerable.

We need to remember one story from that guy. I remember one thing from every one. I remember P. Stewart Macaulay, when I graduated, telling me I could work for the *Baltimore Sun* and calling up Mr. Emmart and lining up a job for me, when that wasn’t supposed to be possible, but he did it. I went to the *Baltimore Sun* and met Russ on the way down and Russ talked me out of it before I went up. Russ told me to go to New York, and I took off the next month.

I came to New York because of Russ Baker [unclear]. It wasn’t even in my mind to come to New York. I didn’t know why I was coming here. They both told me to come to New York and I came to New York.

**Warren**: Well, you got good advice, didn’t you?

**Offit**: They said, “Go to New York.”

**Warren**: A couple of questions I like to ask people as we wind up. There are some things that I call the Hopkins myths. Do you think there are Hopkins myths, and if you do, what do you think they are?

**Offit**: I’ve already given you a reflection on it, because of the term “paradox.” Once you accept paradox as a perception of a campus and you accept paradox as a perception of a nuance of relationship, then myth is understandable, because it’s when one concept begins to run away with the other that it becomes mythological. For example, it would be a Hopkins myth to say the school was not interested in athletes. You say this is a school that only played at an amateur level, which isn’t true, because the fact is that Hopkins was aware of the lacrosse team and the best players came there.
It would be a myth to say Hopkins is a school in which the emphasis has always been on scholarship and the demands have been rigorously established by the pre-meds, which is a whole other aspect of this.

By the way, one of the people I left out of my Romantic poets list was George Brenner, who was a doctor at the time. But, you see, that would be a myth, because the other side of it was that even though it did have this pre-med focus and this severe stuff, there was this other aspect of the school. You know, the Murray Kempton—just track it.

I’ll give you three names that are not even associated with the Hopkins myth. In the world of American journalism, Hopkins has produced three of the major journalists. If you listed a hundred there would be certainly. If you listed twenty, maybe even ten. I’ll tell you who they are: Murray Kempton, Philip Hamburger, and Russell Baker are three of the most distinguished journalists this country has produced. Now, Philip Hamburger’s work has all been at the New Yorker. I don’t know if you know him, but he’s brilliant, brilliant journalist from World War II on.

None of these people is a name that would be associated with Hopkins. I would say that unless you courted them, they wouldn’t come back. Hopkins did not—that aspect of the school, I think was absolutely true. I mean, Hopkins did not, in my era, encourage the concept of alumni participation and the old school tie. I don’t think you’re referring to that, but that was part of it and that was true. But the other side of it is that at the slightest invitation, you’re there. So I think every myth can be punctured, because it has its counterpoint. Is that a fair answer for you?

Warren: Sure. Sure. Do you think Johns Hopkins has a personality? Can you describe it like you’d describe a person? Can you describe this institution as having a personality?

Offit: Yes, I think it does have a personality. I don’t know, I mean, I’ve been associated with
five other schools. Well, actually six. I’ve got to set it up this way, because [unclear]. I’ve taught
at the New School for thirty-five years. I’ve taught at NYU for thirty-five years. I’ve lectured and
spoken at Barnard and Columbia. I’ve had a relationship with Marymount Manhattan, also, for
the last few years. These are schools—my son went to Princeton, my older son to Princeton and
then to Harvard. My younger son went to Brown and then to Columbia. My wife went to medical
school at NYU and Hunter. I mean, these are all schools with which I’ve had some acquaintance.

I would say that Hopkins was different from all of them in the era that I went there. The
character of Hopkins, first of all, was that it seemed to be, and has always seemed to me, because
of what it was as an undergraduate, as a school that took itself very seriously in terms of learning
and scholarship. That was part of its character, and I would see it as a person in an old tweed. I
would dress Hopkins, unfortunately, in a male role, because that was my acquaintance with it, was
all male. I would see Hopkins as pipe-smoking and stopping pipe-smoking at the age of fifty,
because the research indicated it was time for Hopkins to stop it. I would see Hopkins with
having a great balance of knowing to go out to a sporting event, but not watching it on television.
Am I giving you a characterization of it?

I would see Hopkins as never joining the Book of the Month Club and thinking it was
somewhat amusing that other people did. I would see Hopkins as going to the Baltimore
Symphony and doing it with some regularity, even if it was declining in quality, holding on as long
as it could. I would see Hopkins also as traveling, but always traveling to places that had some
historical relevance, never going to the beach resorts, out on the Caribbean. Great on visiting
Athens to see the ruins, Rome to see what’s going on there, and most comfortable all over
London and making that its vacation spot. Is that a fair characterization?
Warren: That is marvelous. [Laughter] That is my favorite answer to that question. I love it.

Oh, it’s perfect. That’s perfect.

Offit: Oh, by the way, Hopkins got married twice.

Warren: Oh, I love it. [Laughter]

Offit: Get it? I gave you the characterization. I said, “Oh, and married twice.” But the first one was not a divorce; I’m a widower.

Warren: Hopkins outlived the first one.

Offit: That’s it, he outlived his first wife.

Warren: I love it. So what haven’t we talked about that we should have?

Offit: I don’t know. I think we’ve covered almost all the things about it. I told you the things I’ve thought that if we didn’t have too long, discussing the politics and the friendships. I think I’ve included—the only thing I didn’t discuss about Hopkins with you was the interesting social mix of Baltimore people meeting each other at school, which is a personal reflection. Because I came in as an outsider, because we didn’t have a social—I didn’t have a social center of school. The range of people in Baltimore whom I met, was, I felt, really wide. I mean, knowing Woody [unclear] well and Roger and meeting Romeike, these were Baltimore people, the range of the Baltimore acquaintances.

Warren: Now, you were a local person.

Offit: I was from Baltimore, but—

Warren: Did you live at home while you were going?

Offit: Yes, I lived at home. I’m going to give you my memoir, because, see, my dad was a bookie, but he was one of the biggest bookies in Baltimore. This is the paradox of the
conversation we’re having. I’m giving you this thing, and as a consequence when you’re—as a bookie you can’t—you really—you don’t have a social center and you can’t generate—you can’t talk about your father at all. I never talked about what my father did. So military schools were not uncharacteristic for bookies’ kids to go to, because you’re in a uniform. But I happened to have terrific, wonderful parents. I love my parents and they were very supportive and great people.

So I wasn’t part of the country club set. I saw it. I saw my cousins and—I wasn’t scornful of it, but I was an outsider, which was unusual for somebody who had money. Because were not—because he was successful. You lived modestly, but it was not like—I never had that view, oh, these are rich guys, I can’t afford it. I always had the view of, we could afford it, but we have more money, which wasn’t true. I mean, my father’s [unclear] it was too late, I already thought we did. But we lived in a modest railroad flat on Lake Drive, second-floor walk-through. It seemed to me we were living luxuriously.

So the whole city of Baltimore it seemed to open up for me at Hopkins. The social activities that I had there was good enough for me. I had a great time, with the exception of the academic anxieties, because the demands were—I don’t know if you’ve talked to people about that, but it was really tough. In the biology course, there would be one A and a lot of Cs and people flunking all the time. You know, I don’t think that—I think at least twenty percent or a third of our class flunked out. Is that true? Have I got that as—

**Warren:** I don’t know.

**Offit:** I think so.

**Warren:** Well, yours was the largest class in the history of the school up to that time.

**Offit:** Yes.
Warren: Because of the veterans.

Offit: Right. But, gee, we used to go into those classes and they'd post the grades and you'd see one A, two As, C, C, C, C, C. Gentleman C was considered respectable. And then you'd see Ds and Fs, plus all the people who dropped courses and flunked out. So the academic intensity of it was—but it was good.

I know I'm swinging back and forth, but I think that the social aspect is the one thing I didn't talk about. I found that probably the reason why I was never critical of Dr. Bowman's position on admissions was that I found that meeting the people whose names I've mentioned, I'm doing it in the abstract, being friends with Bill Romeike, really friends, seeing a lot of him. Being Pax Davis's buddy and getting to know Russell Baker, although he was only around for a year or so. That was something that, to me, was the glory of the experience. I did not find the glory of the college experience to be people from your neighborhood.

Warren: Well, maybe Bowman had a little something to his thought. [Laughter]

Offit: Well, I think that's an ongoing problem. It is. I mean, that's an easy thing to say, but it's the argument—I mean, it's why I think it—I mean, I used to debate on politics here on television for years. I've fought for affirmative action. It's part of affirmative action. I mean, I know people think that's the quota system, but you don't want to go to a school with no blacks and no Hispanics. I mean, in the United States? You've got to find someway to—you know, that's the other side of this. When you say that, then you're a liberal. When you say the other, you're a reactionary. You know what I mean?

Warren: I do.

Offit: Yes. Don't you want a school where you have representation from—I mean, I would think
that if you said to me, we’ve got two students here, one’s from the Midwest who comes from a
Fundamentalist Christian family, and we have another student here from the Northeast who’s a
little better in school, but we’ve got five from Jewish or Italian or whatever, I’d say take that
Fundamentalist kid, even if he’s not quite as good. I think it’d be great for him to meet other
people and for them to meet him. That’s a part of the country’s representation. Why shouldn’t
you get somebody like that in your mix? That’s just my feeling, because I always found that
meeting people and exchanging views and learning backgrounds is the greatest education, because
I don’t think you get that from books as much as you do from people.

Warren: I need to turn the tape over. I have one more question I want to ask you because of
what we’re talking about now.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Warren: I have read allusions that there were people on campus who, and maybe in retrospect
or maybe at the time, really saw Bowman as an anti-Semite. Was that talked about on campus?

Offit: It was, but I told you my experience. I don’t—you know, for me, if somebody is an anti-
Semite, it has to be expressed through a specific policy. Now, I didn’t have any proximity to that.
If N. Brylilion Fagin, who was obviously Jewish with a wonderful Jewish name, felt discriminated
against as a member of the faculty, that may be true. If so, I can’t apologize for Dr. Bowman. I
wouldn’t know because I didn’t have the faculty—I wasn’t a member of the faculty.

Dr. Wasserman seemed to me to be treated with respect. He was very conscious that he
was Jewish. I mean, he did tell me that, and he did tell me that he was honored to be there,
because they weren’t that responsive. But I don’t know if that was part of Dr. Bowman’s
response or—you’ve got to put it in a historical context. I’m apologizing for this, which I don’t
want to, because I wouldn’t want to see my people excluded, you know, but, nonetheless, when you found universities—Buckley wrote that book that outraged everybody. I wrote a piece, but it was never published, because I was outraged. The premise of God and man at Yale was that the people who built the institutions and paid for the institutions had some idea of what was going to be perpetuated there. I mean, it was within a framework of ideas and values. And that just doesn’t work in America. You can’t buy the perpetuation of the idea. It’s just too much of a mix.

Bowman was caught in that period of history when people thought that was still true. I guess my ability to understand it is because of my talents for mimicry. I can enter into that character enough to feel it. That’s a very self-serving statement, but it’s true. I can feel what he feels, and it’s not hatred and it’s not even superiority, but it’s a sense of this is ours and a certain number of you are welcome, but you’re not going to turn it into yours. But that’s not the way America works, because the way America works is this is no longer yours, it’s ours. You’re out. So, sorry, Dr. Bowman, your son’s not acceptable here. Grades aren’t high enough. [unclear]. And you know what? Jones plays football. Do you see?

Or it can be the other way around. I mean, that’s—I mean, I think arguing this—I have a younger son who argues this, because he’s still believes in—I mean, this party is all over. This is an assimilated wild society in which the changes are—Dr. Bowman was part of that old order of things, and if that came out as anti-Semitism, I wouldn’t be shocked, but I wouldn’t give label him and disgrace him.

I gave you my impression on it. I just don’t think so. I mean, I don’t know. As an American Jew who has been part of this country’s culture in its broad sense, I have found no really strong anti-Semitism in this country. I’ve been in the army. I mean, there are pockets of it.
It’d be unrealistic to say it, and I’m sure that people do it, but gee, if anything we’ve got—the Jews in this country have done incredible. I mean, Jews—poor Jews at Johns Hopkins. We ought to take in—I mean, my God, look, we probably could get run of the school. You’ve Offit, Blumberg and—where does it—so to go back over this history and say Dr. Bronk certainly was not—I mean, Dr. Bronk was introducing me to Isadore Rabi like I was meeting the pope. So I don’t think that that’s a big subject for inquiry. Is that fair?

**Warren:** Absolutely.

**Offit:** I think he may have been caught in the past, and let the old guy rest in peace. What the hell. I mean, he came from another era anyway, he didn’t even understand—I’m not putting him down, but Bowman didn’t even understand the world dynamic of the time. I mean, he understood the history, but there had been changes that he didn’t—I don’t mean to go too far, but I’m not even sure anybody did. Who understood it all?

For years I’ve traveled moderately in the world of New York intellect and artists, everybody was saying things are great in Russia. I was, so I’m being honest and saying it. I said it in front of hundreds of thousands of people on television, so I was wrong. The guy I was arguing about, who everybody still tells me was a jackass, he kept saying Russia’s going to fall because it’s an evil empire. I think Ronald Reagan is a second-rate intellect and an embarrassment as the President, but he was closer to it than we were. [Laughter] Is that all right to say?

**Warren:** It’s all right to say, and I think it’s going to be the last word, a strange last word, but a last word.

**Offit:** I don’t want that included, but you know, I’m no fan.

**Warren:** Thank you so much.
[End of interview]