

Riley, William M., 1935-
Colorado College Class of 1957

CASSETTE ONE - SIDE ONE

FINLEY:

This is tape recording number 18 of the Colorado College Archives Oral History Collection. I am Judy Finley, interviewing Mr. William Monroe Riley at Tutt Library. The date is October 21st, 1977. Mr. Riley graduated from Colorado College in 1957 as a psychology major. As a student here, he was a member of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity, editor of the student newspaper, The Tiger, and a member of the football team. He received an M.A. in journalism from the University of Oregon in 1959. At the present time, he is in the home builders' business in Tacoma, Washington, as president of United Homes Division of the New West Pacific, Inc.

I'm here this morning with Bill Riley, who is a graduate of the class of 1957, and who has come back to Colorado College for homecoming festivities this weekend. Nice to have you here, Bill.

RILEY:

Thank you.

FINLEY:

In attempting to reconstruct some of the life of Colorado College during the 1950's, I thought I might ask you if you recall why it was that you came to Colorado College in the first place, and what some of your first impressions of the campus were when you came to CC?

RILEY:

I came here for, I guess, a variety of reasons. One of them was that it was the proper distance from my home--which was about 630 miles, and the other was that it was non-sectarian in its affiliation, which I found at the time appealing. I also had aspirations to make the football team.

FINLEY:

Were you recruited in advance to be on the football team?

RILEY:

No, I wrote and applied--they had never heard of me!
[laughter]

FINLEY:

Well, now, you came out here from Kansas City, is that right?

RILEY:

From Kansas City, Missouri.

FINLEY:

Did you, in fact, become a member of the football team?

RILEY:

I did.

FINLEY:

Who was the coach at that time?

RILEY:

My first year, it was Bill Heiss, and that was also his last year, and the next year, Roy Robertson replaced him for three years.

FINLEY:

Was there a winning team at that point in time; was football still a big sport?

RILEY:

Well, we thought it was a big sport, but I believe that I was here for the worst four years in the history of the school in terms of win/loss record. Lot of close games--very few wins.

FINLEY:

Yes. As I recall, we were still playing Denver University at that time.

RILEY:

Played them four times. Scared them once!

FINLEY:

But never beat them! [laughter] Right! Well, now, what do you recall thinking about college life when you first arrived? What were your impressions of the atmosphere at CC?

RILEY:

Well, I arrived in the summer for early practice, several weeks before school started, and it was a very quiet place. I got acquainted with it, really, on that basis.

Once the rest of the students arrived, it was--I found it to be very relaxed and very friendly, and other than the freshman hazing that went on in those days, totally acceptable.

FINLEY:

What did the freshman hazing consist of?

RILEY:

We--all freshman men had to wear yellow corduroy slacks and black sweaters, and yellow beanies. And as I recall, we had to wear those until we won our first football game, or until homecoming, whichever came first. And I believe we wore them a long time that year. And there was some regulation against washing them, as I recall. And the girls wore green hair ribbons and paddles on their necks, on a little chain, I think.

FINLEY:

Was there some sort of a freshman-sophomore fight that went on as part of this hazing?

RILEY:

Yes. Well, that was homecoming, I believe.

FINLEY:

What did that consist of, do you remember?

RILEY:

It was a tall greased pole with a flag on top, and as I recall, the sophomores defended the flag, and the freshmen were to get the flag from the top of the pole and cart it off somewhere. And that was the victory or defeat, whenever anyone had given up, or when the flag had been retrieved. It was a mess! And thanks to being on the football team, I didn't have to get in on that! [laughter]

FINLEY:

You avoided that! Did that kind of hazing, and the tradition of freshmen wearing cords continue all through your college years?

RILEY:

I believe it did, but it was losing popularity. The traditions were enforced by what I'd like to call a group of vigilantes, the biggest senior men who were well acquainted--perhaps some of them were juniors--called themselves "The Red Lanterns." It was an honor society that you were to aspire to, and for which I actually had a lot of regard, other than the fact that they would awaken us in the middle of the night and have us sing the school songs, and if we didn't cooperate

fully, they would then shave our heads.

And that became less and less popular over the years, I suppose, and I think it went out at about the time--I guess while I was still on campus. The Red Lantern was disbanded and replaced by the Blue Key, which was more of a service fraternity, and for a year or two they--at that point, we, I guess, enforced the regulations that I initially objected to, and cut a fair share of hair ourselves. But it was going down in popularity, and I believe a few years later, the cords and the sweaters and eventually even the beanies were dropped.

And perhaps something lost in the process. It was something that I thought put all freshmen--certainly all freshman men, anyway, together very fast, they being in a defensive posture. But in any event, they got very well acquainted, whether they were in one fraternity or another, or not.

FINLEY:

Certainly unified the campus in terms of school spirit.

RILEY:

Perhaps not admirable, the wrong term.

FINLEY:

Right. Now, fraternities were also quite important as I recall in student life, and you must have joined one right away, as most freshmen did. Is that correct?

RILEY:

I did, and I was surprised, because when I came here, I had absolutely no intention of joining a fraternity, and I did. I joined Kappa Sigma Fraternity and enjoyed it immensely--something I had had a very negative outlook on when I arrived, and only two months later, I was pledging one of them.

FINLEY:

Why did your attitude change?

RILEY:

Probably because of--well, unquestionably because of a number of the people that I met, either in the dormitory I was in, which was venerable old Hagerman Hall, or on the football team, a good many of the players were members of that fraternity.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Now did the fraternities also indulge in hazing of their pledges?

RILEY:

Yes. A good deal worse than the freshman orientation.

FINLEY:

Do you recall any of the incidents that occurred with respect to fraternity hazing? Was this right before initiation usually?

RILEY:

Well, it went on to a degree for all semester, and then we had what was called Hell Week the first week of, I believe it was the first week of the second semester. And that was a week without sleep, and with lots of grubby activities, and you could find yourself with an egg in your hair, or running a foot race around a city block with next to nothing on. I remember two fellows wearing ladies' undergarments to Jay's restaurant to pick up some food. [laughter] There were some other traditions downtown that I'm not sure I ought to remember! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Censor them out of the tape! Okay. Now you mentioned that you had resided in Hagerman Hall. Hagerman Hall is no longer on the campus, and I wondered if you would describe its location and what it was, and what its atmosphere was.

RILEY:

Well, it would have been what I suppose is now the west section of Rastall Center, and it was built, I believe in 1888.

FINLEY:

Right.

RILEY:

In any event, it was an old, old building, and I liked it very much. I liked the exterior of it particularly--limestone, I believe, with some native stone, and lots of ivy and lots of history. The inside left a lot to be desired. It needed total renovation, and obviously at some point, the school decided not to try that, but to rip it down instead.

FINLEY:

It was used as a men's dorm all the way along, right?

RILEY:

Yes. And it was torn down shortly after I left, and in fact, I believe it was a year or two after I graduated. And it was a men's dorm all the time I was here, and my guess that they just never would have considered the facilities there for ladies. It was a little basic--two or three central baths and showers, and a great deal of lack of privacy, noise through corridors and such as that.

It seemed to be largely an athletic dormitory when I arrived, although there were many fellows in there that were not on any of the teams, as I recall. But it was a great fun-loving group of people. I remember that very fondly.

FINLEY:

At that time, did any drinking of alcoholic beverages take place in the dormitories--do you remember?

RILEY:

Oh, I'm sure there was some. It wasn't sanctioned. Usually someone would be bringing beer back to the dormitory after a party, or while he studied. There were dormitory proctors, I think they were called at that time, or head residents, and I remember that my first year in Hagerman, there was a particularly small and rather quiet fellow there, and of course, he had charge of 240-pound tackles, and very aggressive hockey players that had arrived from the Canadian prairies. And he really wasn't very strict about enforcing regulations. He also, as I recall, didn't allow any blatant actions to go on.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

RILEY:

All in all, a pretty enjoyable place, and I don't remember any great abuse of drinking, but there was a good deal of it.

FINLEY:

Right. The fraternities certainly did their share of it. What was the favorite weekend pastime in the fraternity house during that period?

RILEY:

Well, all the parties seemed to center around a keg of beer, and the most enjoyable ones that I recall would be up in the canyons behind the Broadmoor and west of the city, where you could put the keg in the middle of the cold stream, and build a fire, and then you effectively ended up sitting around the fire drinking beer and singing songs. And that went on--probably somebody was doing that every weekend, from the campus.

FINLEY:

Right. And song singing was quite a big part of these beer busts, as I recall.

RILEY:

Well, once you got there, if you didn't move around the

fire and do something, you would get mighty cold. And it led to a good deal of fellowship, and we would all--all the people had learned their own fraternity and sorority songs, and each other's fraternity and sorority songs. Although I never--I remember that in part of my freshman pledging, I had to go down to the girls' dormitories and sing The Indian Love Call as a solo. I heard a lot of windows slam! I never could sing, but when they had more of a choral group, especially with beer to help, it was a lot of fun.

FINLEY:

Yeah, everybody could sing, right! We haven't touched yet at all upon the academic side of CC life, which I presume was the main reason most people were here. Do you have any strong memories of classes that you felt exerted a strong influence on you, your personal development, your personal growth? Professors and classes?

RILEY:

Well, I came here with no particular major in mind, and in fact, when I selected my major, I was walking across campus to sign up for a major in English, and a friend of mine talked me into stopping and listening to the psychology presentation, and that afternoon I ended up, strangely enough, vice-president of the Psychology Club, and with a declared major in psychology. And I found that very interesting.

Most of the classes were taught by Dr. [William A.] Blakely and H. Richard Van Saun was still here then. And a year or two later, he left, and Dr. [Doug] Freed came in. So those three were in my major--that's where I had most of the courses.

FINLEY:

Yes. Can you describe Dr. Blakely's personal manner in the classroom and appearance? He was here for quite a long time, wasn't he?

RILEY:

You must have had some classes from him? [laughter] Dr. Blakely was a psychologist with a Ph.D. as I recall, who had dropped out of medical school for health reasons, but was very oriented to the M.D. approach, perhaps, is the right word. As a result, I found his courses to be extremely difficult, and much more oriented to the physical aspects of the being than I had anticipated that they would be.

I recall him as a very unusual man. He would give you total freedom in his classes, most of which were quite small, but if you--by total freedom, you move around, you talk, you

could bring in extraneous matter, you also still had to pay attention what he was doing, and obviously had to learn it. I thought he was, in that way, was a difficult taskmaster. But if you abused the privilege of moving around and talking in his class, he had quite a temper! He was a very, very interesting man.

I think probably the man that would have caused me to major in English was Tom Ross, from whom I had freshman English. Probably if I had to pick a professor that had a really strong impact on me here, it would be Tom Ross. Although I did not major in his field, I did, I think, get a very, very strong introduction to the academic life, and to English, through him.

FINLEY:

In what way?

RILEY:

Well, I found the man dedicated, exceptionally bright, and I consider that today in terms of people I've met in the 20 years since then. I doubt if I ever met anybody that I consider any brighter than Tom Ross. But he had an awfully good way with students, and I was just very, very impressed with the fellow, and have maintained some contact with him since leaving. I did take a direction later, and very nearly ended up with journalism as a career, and that was largely, I think, due to Tom Ross' initial impact on me, and some time in the one journalism course that was taught here at the time by Kay Freyschlag.

FINLEY:

Oh, there was a journalism course?

RILEY:

Just one course. He taught--I believe he was the school public relations director at that time. I don't remember his exact title, and was the coach of the ski team, of which I was not a member, but advised the school paper, and taught the one journalism course.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. And you joined The Tiger, the school newspaper as a reporter, and went on to become its editor.

RILEY:

Yes.

FINLEY:

Can you give us some fairly extensive recollections of what it was like to publish a newspaper at CC in those days?

What the problems were, what the influences were from the administration, if any, and also the kind of feedback you got from various articles?

RILEY:

Well, running a newspaper is a lot of fun, and I would suppose that it's fun for anyone who runs one, whether it's a campus or otherwise, these days. I had always liked the concept of journalism, and I mentioned Tom Ross and Kay Freyschlag having an impact on me. I started out writing sports, I think, and I'm trying to remember who I followed. For two years, Tom Pankau was the editor, and really left a pretty difficult act to follow, I thought. And then I think it was Jim Jacobs that was the editor after Tom, and then I was the editor after Jim.

I might say that was a--I didn't breeze into that. There was very stiff competition for that job in those days, and the lady who was editor of The Nugget, Betty Troutman, a very talented lady, and she very nearly was editor of The Tiger. I felt very pleased and honored to get that selection. In addition to the fact that it was a great deal of fun, and put you in the middle of campus to have that job, it paid \$525 a year, which happened to coincide with the total cost of tuition in those days. So it was a plum in a lot of ways. I tried to have a lot of fun with it, and I had a good staff, a fun staff. As I recall, your brother followed me as editor.

FINLEY:

Yes, he did.

RILEY:

And was very instrumental in helping me through the organized portions of this the year that I had it. He was a very bright, organized guy. And I think I took a little more of a fun approach to it than Robin or Tom or Jim might have. I started writing a column, and I remember it was called "Riley's Roving Eye" and I started interviewing exotic young ladies who had come to the campus, and featuring their pictures.

FINLEY:

Marit Opsahl was one of them, wasn't she? She was a Norwegian foreign student.

RILEY:

That's right. She was a very pretty, very bright lady, and I remember that I went through--oh, maybe a two-hour interview with her, and got all this great information, and wrote it down, and I misspelled her name every time in the article. [laughter] She didn't take offense at that, and it got her introduced to the campus, which she didn't need any great big introduction, but I think it probably made her feel a little more at home.

Then there was another--Pam Battey, who had come here from Bennington, I think, or somewhere in the East, who was an active skier, and really a vivacious, charming lady, and when I got past that, as I look back on some of these articles, I don't think I continued that particular series. I continued the columns, but generally got into student life after that.

FINLEY:

Maybe people were accusing you of using interviews to get to know these girls! [laughter]

RILEY:

Yes! I had a little--yes, I had a little bit of that!

FINLEY:

Ulterior motives!

RILEY:

They were both very pretty girls!

FINLEY:

Yes. But you went on then with various approaches to campus problems. What do you recall--anything that had to do with political life that occurred while you were the editor?

RILEY:

Well, in terms of political in a major sense. We were--the paper was constantly being called upon to take a position on national affairs.

FINLEY:

Who called upon the paper to do this?

RILEY:

Well, we would get--I've forgotten what the name we used to use for it--fill material, we called it.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

RILEY:

We didn't have enough of our own headlines, we'd use these canned articles that would come out of some news bureau. And I do remember--this was right after, or right about the time that there was a revolt in Hungary that was put down rather effectively, and I was called upon by some of the supporters of the folks who had got put under, so to speak, over there, to take an editorial position. Most of the others came to us in the mail. We, or I opted to be very cautious in terms of taking a position on those situations,

although we did run some material on them.

And there was a time when I ran one of those canned articles that had lots of references to Eleanor Roosevelt, who was then, of course, very active in national affairs, and very popular, and of course, she was very liberal. I didn't pay enough attention to the article when I put it in, and it turned out that it had been written by what was considered a Communist-front organization in California.

And one of the budding political scientists on the campus at the time took enough offense at it that he reported me to Senator Joseph McCarthy, and to the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. I never heard from them directly, but when I went into the Army later on, I expected that to show up as I went for various clearances, but it did not.

FINLEY:

It did not?

RILEY:

So I'm presuming that they disregarded it. At the time, it was a rather sore point with me that somebody would do that. But there was a good deal of activity on the campus, and of course, the newspaper was the best way to get that expressed.

I remember that I tackled the Honor Council one time, and the then-dean, now-president Lew Worner took great exception to that. I'd never heard him use a really bad word, but he came close to it that day that I did that. I presume the Honor Council is still in existence?

FINLEY:

Oh, yes indeed! And still under attack periodically! [chuckles] But the honor system remains strong. What were your criticisms at the time, do you remember?

RILEY:

Oh, I think that we had--there were some--theoretically, the activities of the Honor Council were secret, but of course, if your friend got booted out, or put on probation, you knew about it, or if your roommate mysteriously left campus, you were pretty sure what the reason was.

And I think it was more--I don't think it was in reaction to any one of those particular instances, because in favor of the Honor Council, I don't think that they ever put anybody out of the school that didn't deserve to go, according to the rules at the time. I think I was asking them to do things, or to work in a manner in which they weren't working at the time, maybe a little more open.

And I had--you elect people to the Honor Council, and I had promoted some people that I considered to be very outstanding, totally honest, and all the requirements that I thought they should have to be a very serious, active member of the Honor Council. And, of course, as elections are, several very popular people, not necessarily qualified to be on the Honor Council, I thought, got elected over some of the more serious types. And I suppose there was a little bit of that in my editorial. But I do remember that I did not make a hit with our current president, then-dean. And then, my advisor--

FINLEY:

Your advisor! [chuckles]

RILEY:

Faculty advisor!

FINLEY:

Editors are always subject to criticism.

RILEY:

They certainly are!

FINLEY:

There were other editorials on various college subjects. I have been looking through this old Tiger before interviewing you, and I noticed one rather humorous article, I thought, on the fact that there were too many queens at Colorado College. It did not have a by-line on it, but I suspected you might have written it.

RILEY:

I wrote it, and I think it was titled, "Here a Queen, There a Queen, Everywhere a Queen, Queen," and of course the reference was to Old McDonald's farm, and it made me very unpopular, but it was a time when electing queens was a very, very big thing. And in my opinion, this campus did not have enough pretty girls to have as many queens as they were electing! They weren't all elected on beauty, obviously, but if they weren't going to be elected for their beauty, I didn't think they ought to really be calling them queens.

So one particularly bright and nice lady, who just was not queen material in my opinion, got elected, and that really stimulated the article, and I would have to say that I should not have timed it so close behind the election, because--

FINLEY:

She knew you were referring to her?

RILEY:

I'm sure she knew I was referring to her. But it wasn't her alone.

There was another parody on--it doesn't take the form of an editorial. It was on the front page of one of the Tigers. The Zetas organized, and this was really a put-on for fraternities. A group of independent men, mostly fellows on the hockey and football teams, as I recall, formed a group called the Zetas, and you could get initiated into the Zetas for no money, but with a firm grip, and a triple shaking of the hands, and saying, "Zeta, Zeta, Zeta," and then these fellows would put a great big safety pin on you, and you were a brother forever! [chuckles] And they had a great deal of fun with it.

And when the queen situation was getting out of hand--I really wasn't the only one that noticed it--but I don't remember which one followed which. These fellows arranged to elect a Zeta Homecoming Queen, which would have been their homecoming for their intramural program. And they went to the House of Oscar, and got this--whoever the stripper was there at that time, and brought her on campus, and paraded her around in an open convertible, and took her down to Bemis Hall, where we interviewed her for the paper, and took some pictures, and ran her photograph.

One or two of the Zetas were active in the kitchen operation at Oscar's, and somehow convinced Sallie Payne Morgan and Mrs.--oh, the lady's name that ran the dormitories--. In any event, these were very serious ladies, and they really would not have put up with the idea of the stripper coming to their--to the nicest dining hall on campus. So nobody told them how the Zeta queen was chosen, and I remember when she made--the Zeta queen made her entry, that--Mrs. [Evaline] McNary was the other lady--and doors were slamming all over the building, and they were slamming behind Sallie Payne Morgan and Mrs. McNary as they left the scene!

But the luncheon, the feast was held, and then the Zeta queen was put in the back of a convertible again, and driven around campus. Those two things, I think, probably were as indicative of some of the changes that came to the campus several years as--like the drop in freshman hazing, and that sort of thing.

FINLEY:

Yes. Sort of a way of making fun--poking fun at traditions that had become a little too--

RILEY:

Yes! Get a little carried away! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Well, there weren't any terrible negative repercussions from the administration, were there, on the Zeta queen?

RILEY:

Oh, no! No. In fact, I would say that officially, the administration probably viewed it as one of the most humorous things that had happened here in a good while. They liked it a lot better than the brawl with Colorado School of Mines, and the painting of the Cossitt Hall roof, which I shouldn't say who did that, but they caught him, because he painted a bad saying about Colorado School of Mines on the back of Cossitt Hall, and he painted the "N" upside down. Well, there was probably only one fellow on campus who would misspell that word, [laughter] and who would have that sort of strong feeling about the School of Mines. And they approached him the next morning, and he was dumbfounded that anybody would know that he had done that! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Or guess that he had done it! [laughter]

RILEY:

But I'll leave his name out of this.

FINLEY:

Okay. Well, this brawl with Mines was another tradition that seemed to go on for years, this kind of strong rivalry between the two schools.

RILEY:

They were very, very competitive, and there was--that's the worst I saw it. At the end of one game--there was a tradition at the schools of if you win, you tear down each other's goalposts, or you do some terrible thing, and sometimes blow up buildings, as I recall was done.

That particular year, someone called down here, and told someone on our campus they were going to tear down our goalposts, win, lose or draw. And several hundred of them got off of a train behind the field carrying gallon jugs of beer, which I presume was Coors from Golden. Sort of wrought havoc on the campus. Then we went into the game, and I think the game ended in a tie. In any event, it was closely contested, and at the end of the game, all these Mines fellows moved out the stands, and an equal number of CC fellows moved out from the other side, and they had the biggest fist fight I've ever seen. Our team was in on it, which was probably unfortunate.

FINLEY:

The suited-up football players?

RILEY:

Yes.

FINLEY:

In the brawl?

RILEY:

It was interesting. The Mines coach herded his off, but our coach was emotional. It got to the point that he wouldn't try, and most all of our fellows were in it. I was observing from a distance. I had had my jaw broken. In fact, we used to play those people twice a year, and that's what happened. I had had my jaw broken in the earlier Mines game that year, so I was observing the brawl from up on top of the hill.

But that sort of thing was, of course, not--they did not get the goalposts that day, as I recall, by the way, but the next night, about 6:00--the goalposts were made of steel, and the fight--our defenders kept them from the goalposts, but the next night as we were walking around campus about 6:00, there were four blasts that you could hear. And these fellows had come down with primer cord and had blown the goalposts down about six inches above the ground!

FINLEY:

Boy! [chuckles]

RILEY:

So they did get our goalposts.

FINLEY:

You may be interested to know that Colorado College played Mines for the first time in many years in football this year, about three weeks ago.

RILEY:

Who won?

FINLEY:

It was a very close game--Mines won by two points.

RILEY:

Oh, oh.

FINLEY:

But there was very little understanding of CC students of the old rivalry; that had pretty much been forgotten.

RILEY:

Oh, oh, I see.

FINLEY:

But the Miners hadn't forgotten--they brought their beery fans, and sang their engineers' song, and raised a lot of--

RILEY:

They were a better team, with less practice time and fewer scholarships, and a smaller student body, I think--with the exception of CC, they had fewer students than anybody in the league, and they were a very formidable team in those days.

FINLEY:

There were so many activities surrounding football games. There were still, in those days, extensive celebrations of homecoming by the fraternities--

RILEY:

Yes!

FINLEY:

Wasn't there a parade downtown?

RILEY:

There was a parade, and that same year, because of my broken jaw, I got to take part on the homecoming celebration for the first time. Otherwise, we were always locked up out at the Broadmoor or somewhere, so that we wouldn't get in trouble the night before!

But yes, it was extensive. The fraternities and sororities would do house decorations, and they would make floats, and there would be a parade, and people would march through Colorado Springs downtown, and there were parties in conjunction with it, and a big dance. And the dance was, I would guess, the most popular dance of the year.

And the work on the floats was enormous! I never realized how much work went into that until that one year when I was a part of it. It was--perhaps it didn't rival the Rose Festival in Portland in quality, but it was a great deal of fun! And there were other activities with homecoming and other sporting events.

FINLEY:

I think perhaps that parade was phased out while I was in college. The house decorations continued.

RILEY:

It was difficult to get a really large parade. At that time, we had 900 students, co-ed, and we could get a few floats, and then each group--they had all been working on the

floats, and then they would have to try and get a marching group out of that, and of course, the CC band would march, and the queen would ride in her open car, with a couple of princesses, and that was the extent of the parade. And it did not turn out large crowds when I was here, but it may have--townspeople, I mean--but it may have--I'm sure it did years before when the school was an even bigger factor in the life of Colorado Springs. I would suppose it drew a big crowd.

FINLEY:

Yes, yes. You had an interesting perspective as a student, because you were here for two years when President [William H.] Gill was still the president of the college, and then in the fall of '55, [Louis T.] Benezet arrived on the scene. It seems to me that the whole atmosphere of the campus changed quite a bit during that period of time. Can you assess the differences, the atmosphere, and the changes that Benezet brought--whether that had anything to do with the changes in some of these traditions?

RILEY:

Well, I'd like to be careful, first, as I say that. Yes, I do have strong opinions on what he did, and I want to say it in a way that--in no way would I want to be critical of President Gill.

FINLEY:

No.

RILEY:

Because as I look back on it, and I don't claim to be an academician, but I presume that President Gill was here because of his--not only because he was a bright man, but because he was a retired Army general, and the school was having great difficulty, as others were, keeping their male student body. And at the time when Mr. Gill came here, we got an R.O.T.C. program, which was in full swing when I got here, and of which I was a member, and because of which we all were able to complete our educations before we went into the Army.

Now, I don't think that was his total contribution. I don't have the advantage of having seen the school just prior to his arrival, but I think that it was run more or less like a--more like a military organization, probably, than most schools, but with a pretty loose hand. Nobody really sitting on the students. I think there was a great deal of freedom here--a great deal more than I expected, in any event.

But when President Gill stepped down, and Dr. Benezet

arrived, there was an immediate change on the campus, and I viewed it as a very positive change. I didn't care for it all, because he took away some things that I thought were good for the school.

FINLEY:

What?

RILEY:

Well, I was here largely because of the athletic program, and then he basically de-emphasized it, and in the intervening time, totally de-emphasized it. He had such an academic approach, that I think it helped bring on the unkempt student of the sixties.

When I visited campus one time, there was a point when I didn't care, really, if I ever came back. I saw all these grubby people around here, and whatever--not that they weren't bright, but whatever tradition had been here, they seemed to just delight in defiling. That was a very--I had words with some of the staff over it at that time, when they wanted some of my efforts on behalf of some school promotions, and for the only time since I had been here, I refused.

I don't know how much that had to do with Dr. Benezet. It obviously happened all over the country. Also, the year I left here, we were the National Collegiate Hockey Association champions, and a few years later, I think we lost every game. Basically, a difference in the athletic outlook, I thought, and the football program, although we didn't win many, it made a great difficulty afterwards, and of course, a step down in the caliber of competition. But overall, I think those are minor, though.

What he did do, and I very much admire the way he did this--he got to know everybody on the campus. He knew the student leaders by name. By student leaders, I mean the presidents of the fraternities and sororities, and the AWS, and the ASCC, and whatever organizations were around, and that included the editor of The Tiger, and he went out of his way to get to know me.

I recall one time--it must have been his second year here, that we were invited to his home. "We" being about twenty people holding various offices around the campus. For the first time, we met Dr. Benezet's wife, although we had seen her, and she met us at the door, and had never met any of us before, to my knowledge, and called each of us by name, from having studying our yearbook pictures! And knew enough about us to talk to each of us, and of course he was the same. And then that night--there was a new drama professor--was the name McMillan?

FINLEY:

[William E.] McMillan.

RILEY:

Who Dr. Benezet had brought in to run the dormitories and also to operate the drama program. And he gave us excerpts from "Pygmalion" in Dr. Benezet's living room that night. It was a very, I thought a very high level approach to getting acquainted on campus, and more or less telling us what he was going to expect of people in the future.

And I think the school can be very proud of what he did over the years in upgrading us academically. I heard it expressed once. There were so many good students coming here in the next few years, I asked Dr. Drea one time if there really were that many good--better--students, and he said--and I'm paraphrasing, but in my opinion, he said, "There are no more really good students, but there are a lot more good students."

You had the--well, suddenly, you could not get in here with the sort of grade point average that most of us had gotten in, and Dr. Benezet put my particular class through three days of what were called "Area Studies" when we graduated. And it had nothing to do with our grade standings, but it ranked us in knowledge or expertise in three different areas, humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences.

FINLEY:

Was that part of a comprehensive exam, or some national--GRE?

RILEY:

No. We had Graduate Record Exams, and Comprehensive Exams in addition to these. It was a three-day special event. And I'm sure what he wanted was to see what these people that had come in before he got here, what we went away with.

And I think it was largely based upon the results of those exams, that they restructured the curriculum--not to this block program, but to where you suddenly had--an incoming freshman had to take some humanities, had to take some natural science, and all these things that I and others had been able to avoid showed up on that exam. We were weak in areas that a liberal arts graduate shouldn't be. At that point, Dr. Benezet knew that--I would guess the rest of us did not! But he then, I think, brought great honor to the college, and placed it where it appears to be today, which is a very high rank among small liberal arts colleges in the country.

FINLEY:

Certainly! The other members of the administration certainly carried on the traditional rules and regulations of the college at that time. Do you--now, this may put you on the spot, but I know--[laughter] The girls' dorms--of course, they had to be in at certain hours, and there was no such thing as co-ed dorms. Do you--how did you assess the changes in the social standards, and the changes in the rules and regulations on college campuses over the years? Do you think that the strictness--whether it was strict or not--that our generation lived under contributed to any--

RILEY:

Oh . . .

FINLEY:

--problems?

RILEY:

Looking back, I would say it was appropriate to the times. You could feel change coming. I was here in the days of panty raids, although I don't really recall them on this campus. I went to two universities after I left here, and they were very big on both of those campuses, and it was, I think, an evidence of sophistication of society. A lot more freedom for young people pre-college age, and college age. And I think that had to be reflected in dropping some of these restrictions. Unfortunately, there are always some people that can't handle that sort of a dropping of standards--of restrictions, I mean. And those are the ones you read about.

But I have an idea that--although I didn't believe it at first--that the co-ed dormitory is one of the better things that has happened, at least to this degree. When I left, after I left CC, I ended up taking another degree in journalism from the University of Oregon, and Oregon was one of the leaders in co-ed dormitories, and I was earning my keep out there running one of the dormitories. And the fellow who preceded me in that particular dormitory then became the U.C.L.A. director of dormitories, which I thought--at age about 23 or something.

And they obviously were very good at their program. And in those days, they still would have fainted at the thought of co-ed dorms. But they had common dining rooms. They would have dormitories linked up to a central kitchen, and then the girls and boys ate together at the various meals. And they got to see each other at 7:00 in the morning, and at noon, and at night. And they were more or less thrown together, where, when I was in school, we were sort of forcibly kept apart. The girls' dormitories and

sorority lodges were one part of the campus, and the fraternity houses and so forth were the other part.

FINLEY:

And none of the meals were together, were they?

RILEY:

No, no. You were very much kept apart. And what we found at Oregon was that--there was only one panty raid, the second year they had this program--and if you talked to the young fellows--I had freshman hall--they didn't like, really--the mystique was off of these ladies when they saw them with their curlers and their lack of makeup, and their grouchy early-morning dispositions, and there was very little problem. And I think--of course, now they have co-ed dorms, and I guess CC has co-ed dorms--

FINLEY:

Yes.

RILEY:

And lots of other things have happened in the world since then, like the invention of a pill that was not available in the old days, which must have instilled fear in all sorts of people, I think--particularly the deans! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

I don't think you ever see now what others call a mad scene at Colorado College, and that is on Friday and Saturday nights, at the witching hour, when the girls had to be in--there would be all these passionate embraces going on in front of the dormitories, and cars pulling up, and great love scenes! [laughter]

RILEY:

That's right! You were only going to see them right then, and everybody had to in and if the girls were in late, they were campused, I think was the term.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

RILEY:

I recall keeping a young lady out until two hours after the witching hour one night, and nothing happened to me, of course, but she got campused for six weeks! She lost her privileges for six weeks! Those were severe times! [laughter]

But I will also say that when the mothers sent their daughters away to a college in those days, they expected the administration of that college to look after them as the mother would. And I would imagine there was--when that girl got campused, I would imagine the dean of women heard about it, and probably took my name in vain several times! But that was the time, and looking back on it, I feel that it was

appropriate for the time.

FINLEY:

Yes.

RILEY:

I didn't feel put upon, and I really doubt that anybody else did.

FINLEY:

No, no. Well, there are so many things we could continue on here. There is one little detail that I wonder if you recall, because you were the editor of the student newspaper. You were talking about the beginning of the period of change, and change was in the air, and as I recall, there was a sort of underground newspaper that sprang up at the time, and which called itself The Gadfly. Can you recall some of the details of this situation?

RILEY:

Oh, yes. It was not as much of a problem to me as it was to your brother the next year, and I think that's only because--well, I'm not really sure of all the reasons.

I knew the fellows who were putting out The Gadfly--it was pretty easy to spot them. They were hyper-intelligent people, not really within the social structure of the school at that time. One of them, for example, was in a fraternity, and one of the things he wanted to do was print the entire secret ritual of his fraternity in The Gadfly. His compatriots wouldn't let him do that.

Another exceedingly bright student--and this one was not in any fraternity that I can recall, and not really socially oriented at all--wrote a story which I read that did not get printed in The Gadfly, and if you can imagine the worst word you ever heard in your life, that was the name of the main character. And it was intended to shock--the whole thing was intended to shock and poke fun at the systems.

I thought they went too far, and from what I could--the following year, I'm told that they actually would steal the newspapers--they'd steal The Tigers, which the students had paid to have published--and replace it with The Gadfly as a free distribution. There, frankly, were lots of good, funny articles in it, and it didn't really hurt anybody the year I was here. I think I would have been very distressed if I had come under the sort of pressure that they exerted on Robin the year after. Because they were grossly unfair, and I find that that's true in business today, where we run into people that are taking an extremely liberal or extremely conservative point of view. They are unfair, and most times they don't realize it.

FINLEY:

Right. There was a backlash. I noticed in re-reading some of the letters to the editor in The Tiger the students were objecting to the approach that The Gadfly took, but I think secretly kind of enjoyed the controversy.

RILEY:

Oh, yes, yes. It was really, in my year it was kind of a fun thing. And I also think that had it--I don't think the campus mood was ready for them to go as far as they did the next year.

FINLEY:

No.

RILEY:

There was still enough of this hazing, and corporal punishment if you will that I would have the feeling that if they had been caught that year and thrashed by whomever--and I'm not saying by me, but by whomever--I don't think the administration would have lifted a finger, unless somebody had been seriously injured.

FINLEY:

No, I think you're right.

RILEY:

And so there was a little bit of intimidation then that you couldn't do today and probably couldn't do shortly after.

FINLEY:

But ten years later, such approach would have been commonplace.

RILEY:

Oh, yes, yes!

FINLEY:

The four-letter word story would have been printed.

RILEY:

Yes, that's right, yes.

FINLEY:

So it was kind of a beginning of the mood that was growing in the country.

RILEY:

Yes, it was very sad. I was moving around the country at that time a good bit, in the Army and in the various schools, and I was on a lot of different campuses, and I was

very saddened by what I saw, because--some good change was wrought, but lots of good people and lots of good institutions suffered.

During that period of time--I keep track of the University of Oregon--one of their presidents died, and it's thought that he committed suicide, basically as a result of pressure. What he did is he drove head-on into a logging truck on a mountain road, and he had been under great pressure from student activist organizations. I have lived up in that area long enough now to know that you don't accidentally run into a logging truck head-on. And it was a very, very sad time. That's the worst thing I can remember that came out of it, but I think campuses suffered all over. And it was at that time that I visited the campus, became totally disenchanted, and when somebody wrote to me to promote it, I just--

FINLEY:

Right.

RILEY:

There's a letter in the file here somewhere I could probably retrieve and burn. I really was unhappy.

FINLEY:

Well, the pendulum is certainly back the other direction.

RILEY:

It appears that way.

FINLEY:

Oh, yes, very much so, and I think you'll enjoy the comparison while you're here this weekend. The students are quite different from the students of the sixties.

I think maybe we should sum up this very pleasant interview, Bill, to ask you--it's sort of a difficult question to answer, but I hope you can try to answer it. What influence do you think your student years at Colorado College had on your later life, and what you think the value of having attended Colorado College was?

RILEY:

Well, in my particular case it was--CC had a very strong influence on me. It still does, I think. I came from a family that I probably thought at the time was unique. But there were very few people in our family who had gone into any college, at least for several generations. And looking back, that was more the norm than I realized at the time.

For example, we did field good representative athletic teams here, and I counted up not long ago, and the ones I can remember, there were more than a hundred men here on scholarships to play some sport. Most of them came from the same sort of a background that I did, and we got away from--we got into some academic work; we met some very bright people. We met people from all over the country. In fact, as I recall, there were people here from 47 state and six or seven foreign countries when I was here. And having never been out of my own neighborhood in Kansas City until then, that had a great impact on me.

There's a certain sophistication that existed in this school, and I presume does again exist in this school, that you just don't run into in a state university, or any really large school, I would guess.

And then there's a matter of what can you do? Well, I was--we could do whatever we wanted--if we wanted to work hard enough t it, we could be head of the fraternity, or editor of a paper, or something like that. They're very big learning experiences, and I think have helped me in everything that I've done.

FINLEY:

Certainly did me, I know. Your later life, we might just put a little bit in here to find out what you are doing today and--

RILEY:

Let's call it my middle years! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Your middle years! I meant your later life, following college! [laughter] You're not old, Bill!

RILEY:

I hope not! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Can you tell us what you are doing, and what some of your hobbies, as well as your business interests, might be.

RILEY:

Well, my wife and--my two boys are seven years old now--live in Tacoma, Washington, which is about 30 miles south of Seattle. I was very briefly in the advertising business, after getting my journalism degree, and one of our clients was a builder, and I went to work for the builder, and I ended up being president of a building company in the Tacoma

area.

We also are involved in, I guess you could call it an affiliate, there--real estate sales and insurance. And it gives me a pretty broad look at several different counties in the state of Washington, and we've been out of Washington a little bit. It's a busy, interesting, sort of wild business, and not anything I ever thought I'd get into.

And something that makes me wish that Dr. Benezet had changed the curriculum a little bit before I started, because I successfully navigated out of here with no business courses, no accounting courses. And several other things that I could use today.

But also with this journalism experience, which is very helpful, and for a long time I was in sales work in the psychology study, I--[both talking at once, can't understand] very, very [can't understand] so that I don't feel that I suffered, but I think that probably I could have had a little better business preparation if I had taken it on myself, or if maybe the academic orientation had required it 20 years ago.

My wife is from California, so we're both transplants to the northwest. I've been there 16 years now, she almost that long, and we've sort of gone native. We play golf, and some tennis, and we've taken up a sport called curling, which I think has become--they do it here now--

FINLEY:

Yes, they do.

RILEY:

--which they did not before, and that takes us into Canada, and we've had some nice experiences through that. We've not gone back to skiing yet. I nearly got killed up here at Aspen one time, and I have yet to take that sport up again.

FINLEY:

But you always enjoy coming back to Colorado College, I know.

RILEY:

Oh, I do, yes, very much.

FINLEY:

It's been delightful to have you here for this interview today. Thank you very much for coming, and I know that your recollections of life in the 1950's will help

reconstruct a very interesting period in Colorado College history.

RILEY:

I hope so.

FINLEY:
Thank you, Bill.

END