

Richard E. Wood 1927-
Assistant Director of Development, 1959-62
Director of Admissions, 1962-91

SIDE ONE - CASSETTE ONE

FINLEY:

This is tape recording number 68 of the Colorado College Archives Oral History Project. I am Judy Finley, interviewing Richard E. Wood at Tutt Library. The date is December 11th, 1991.

Dick Wood retired in the summer of 1991 after 30 years as Colorado College's Director of Admissions. He was known as the dean of admissions directors on a national level, due to his remarkable success in his field.

Born in 1927 in East Orange, New Jersey, Wood graduated from Dickinson College in 1952, and received an M.A. from Columbia Teachers College in 1953. After jobs at Pratt Institute and Denver University, he came to Colorado College in 1959 as assistant director of development. Named admissions director in 1961, he also served stints as registrar and financial aid director.

He and his wife Lila have six children. His retirement hobbies include sailing, furniture building, and playing the recorder.

Dick Wood, I'm very delighted that you're willing to speak to us here this morning in the Lincoln Room at Tutt Library. Happy to have you participate in the Oral History Project. I thought we could start by having you tell me a little bit about your entry to Colorado College. Why did you come to CC in the first place, and when?

WOOD:

Well, I think it was destined that I come here; I didn't realize it at the time. I went to a college like CC in Pennsylvania--Dickinson College. And I was a GI and married, senior year, doubtful about what I would do with my life. I was up to that point pre-ministerial; back then, they called it pre-mins--pre-mins, like pre-med and pre-law--and in anguish went to the dean of men, who kind of looked

out after the vets. And he gave me some more tests and told me that I ought to go to graduate school at Columbia Teachers College, just like a classmate of mine had done a year or two in advance. He had taken his master's degree and ended up as an assistant dean at some little college out west.

So I did that, and went to Columbia Teachers, and then the GI Bill ran out, and I found a job in Brooklyn, and worked there for five, the first two in admissions and the last three in alumni work. And on the strength of that, got a job in Denver, at DU. We wanted to get out of the East, and that was the only deliberate move we made.

And then as soon as I got to DU I started reading about CC in the paper, and all the wonderful things going on, you know. It was back in the late fifties, with Benezet, and all the excitement. I really lusted to come down here. And then I got hired in development, and just that summer, Vickie Hahn, who was the gal that I was talking about, who was Dean Moon's assistant, had just left. And she was the one that got me out here, but she didn't know it at the time, so it wasn't until I was on hand that I realized that she had a big influence on my life!

FINLEY:

Really! Well, you came in 1959 to head up a capital campaign at CC, didn't you?

WOOD:

No.

FINLEY:

No? Some kind of fundraising campaign?

WOOD:

Yeah. I came in '59, that's right. Bob Brossman, cynic that he is, heard me give a cynical talk when I was at DU, because I was doing fundraising up there--an assistant. He heard me give a talk about how we out here tried to pretend we were Ivy League schools in the way we did things, and it just wasn't appropriate. We had a big telephone campaign up there--sort of like Dialogue here.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

And I don't think I pioneered it, but it got written up in some journal. Anyway, he heard me give a talk, and called me up one day and said, "Could I take you to dinner? Would you be interested even in talking about coming to Colorado

College?" [chuckle] I tried to--ahhhhh! I tried to act as
calm as I could! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

And I went to dinner with him, and he didn't bring his wallet, so I had to pick up the tab. He never did pay me back!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

But that led--that's how I got down here.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. So you worked raising six million dollars for a couple of years, I guess.

WOOD:

Yeah. They had a capital campaign the summer, just after I got here. The new union opened, and--I've already forgotten what it was called!

FINLEY:

Rastall!

WOOD:

Rastall Center! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

They had an outdoor ceremony, and I remember Doc Stabler sitting there on horseback, with guns on his side, in the crowd! I was really impressed by that. And they had the opening of the kickoff in Rastall one evening, with all the kinds of people that are invited to those things. Max Morath entertained, and it was his real--am I digressing too much?

FINLEY:

No! That's great!

WOOD:

His real start. I mean, he was at Cripple Creek, and made a name for himself playing the, you know, the ragtime piano, but that got him linked in with the union directors, because the director of our union was a guy named--I'll remember it--I mean, it's in the record--who went on from here to Indiana U., and then was big in the professional union directors fraternity. So Max got a whole lot of

college jobs out of that.

FINLEY:

So that kickoff was designed to also kick off the fundraising effort that you were heading up, I take it?

WOOD:

I wasn't heading it up!

FINLEY:

Well, organizing.

WOOD:

I was Bross's flunkie there!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

[laughter]

FINLEY:

And Irene Peterson worked for you, didn't she?

WOOD:

Yeah. She was there, and Lorena Berger, and we were over in Peabody House. And--I don't know, I gave a talk somewhere within this last year, remembering the Peabody experience.

FINLEY:

[chuckle]

WOOD:

That was neat! It was so typical CC that the family that gave that building to the college--there was either a friend or a sister or somebody that the idea was that as long as she lived, she would live in that building. So the development office was there, alumni development, stuff that's now in Cutler. And she lived there in the corner apartment, and she would kind of look after us, and we'd look after her.

FINLEY:

[chuckle] And nothing, of course, was computerized in those days.

WOOD:

Oh, no.

FINLEY:

You probably had to do everything by a lot of typing and envelope stuffing.

WOOD:

I remember the year that--moving up several years--that I had to act as an interim registrar, coming to work and being told that down in that building, in what, in the old buildings and grounds, we just got delivery on a used computer, or processing equipment.

FINLEY:

Now, that must have been 1965, after Ruth Scoggin retired as registrar, and before Harold Polk came in.

WOOD:

That's right.

FINLEY:

So there actually was a used computer then?

WOOD:

Right.

FINLEY:

Did you learn how to use it?

WOOD:

A data processor! It was awful! Just an awful experience! I mean, it was used; it was like getting an old Cadillac; it was good equipment, but it was very old, and needed a lot of work, and it wouldn't work, and we went through a horrendous registration. We moved from those, remember--you went here. You remember when you registered every term?

FINLEY:

Yes.

WOOD:

You had those huge cards, you had to put your name and address and schedule on about eight of them. And it was a transition period for that, and there were a lot of snags. Ah, boy!

FINLEY:

Well, when you were serving as interim registrar there, by that time, you were already also the director of admissions, correct?

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Now, my records show you became the director of admissions and also director of financial aid in October of 1961.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

You were appointed then.

WOOD:

No, July first, '61.

FINLEY:

Yeah, okay, okay, okay. Well, you essentially served as director of admissions for 30 years?

WOOD:

Yeah, 30 years.

FINLEY:

Right. The office at that time in the admissions office must have been quite different from what it is now. There were only about 1200 students in 1962 at Colorado College, and things changed a lot in the next ten years.

Can you describe the, sort of the transition between Benezet and Worner, and how it affected your office, and what happened during those ten years, the first ten years of your directorship?

WOOD:

Well, I really wanted to be director of admissions so badly. I started my first two years, and then there was this interim at Pratt and at DU, and then I came down here for two years in fundraising, knowing when I came, though, that Tommy Ross was really getting antsy.

He didn't want to do that in the first place, so I knew I would have a crack at it. And Benezet made me apply for it, but I don't think there was a search or anything. I wrote this--instead of an application, I wrote this "What I would do if I were admission director" and I still have it. Benezet made some cryptic remarks, mainly that it should have been more formal!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

[chuckle] Because he was very formal! And yeah, that summer when I got here, we didn't have our class. I guess that was the state of the art then. Well, a lot of colleges nowadays don't have their class by midsummer.

But one of the things that I did was hop on a plane. I went to Chicago, and the national organization, we had a clearing house for kids that got--just didn't get admitted anywhere, for one reason or another. Some of them were pretty good, and you could go and read their files, and then go back to the hotel and call them up at night.

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

And we got some kids that way; we got a--I don't remember any names. I remember the first person I admitted was Jeff Sauer's wife.

FINLEY:

Is that right?

WOOD:

Now, whether she was in that group or not, I don't know, but it was for the class of '61, so it was sometime in July or August. So anyway, back in those days, registration was in Cossitt Gym, and the admissions office always had a table with typewriters and blank application forms, for walkins.

FINLEY:

For walkins the day of registration!

WOOD:

Uh-hum.

FINLEY:

And you made the decision on the spot?

WOOD:

I guess we did! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

I'm bringing this up not to say that things were deplorable, because I think it was the state of the art in a lot of places. But we certainly weren't selective, the way

we are now. And there was no marketing, really, like there is now.

And I remember the first charge that Benezet gave me was that we needed to be more respected and desirable in state, and we really were not. This is a place that I think had pretty much of a reputation for taking preppies, from the East mainly, who couldn't get in anywhere else. And I guess that's true of a lot of midwestern schools, but I know we had that reputation, because it took a number of years to overcome it, in these Eastern schools.

And we were in Ticknor basement, and it was right under the living room of Ticknor, which creaked; every time somebody walked across the living room, it creaked, and in the summer, the music school people--we had a great summer music institute back then.

FINLEY:
Yes.

WOOD:
The violin players all lived in Ticknor, and practiced all day!

FINLEY:
[laughter]

WOOD:
And I had the window, the office with the window, and box elder bugs would crawl in through the window and crawl all over me, to the amusement of kids or families that I was having interviews with! [laughter]

FINLEY:
[laughter] Did you have a large staff at that point?

WOOD:
Nope! The first person I hired was a guy named Larrimore Nicholl who teaches at Pueblo, and still writes letters to the editor to Newsweek and so forth. He teaches philosophy. It was just the two of us, and Mike Trees and Mickey Wilson, Miwoko. Four people, a four-person staff.

Financial aid back then wasn't really a thing, and I really wasn't director of financial aid then; Dean Mathias did that. And one of the breakthroughs was . . . well, either kind of wresting it away from him, or . . . we didn't--financial aid was something that was not used as a tool to recruit people then, and that was one of the big challenges.

FINLEY:
Yes.

WOOD:

And we'd take folders over to him, and never see them again, for three weeks, you know, and meanwhile, kids were getting accepted at other places. That was a big turnaround.

FINLEY:

Financial aid was not in any way tied to the admissions process, though? I mean, there was no--

WOOD:

No, not then.

FINLEY:

Not then.

WOOD:

No. I don't recall exactly; your dad came into the picture when Eddie Mathias died. That was one of the many, many [chuckle] things your dad did!

FINLEY:

[chuckle] Well, everyone seemed to be a jack of all trades in those days!

WOOD:

Oh, he was! And I remember coming back the day that we were allowed to make the announcement of financial aid to the candidate . It was usually done by Ed.

FINLEY:

Would that have been in the late sixties, after Mathias died?

WOOD:

No! No, very early!

FINLEY:

Oh, very early?

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Before he died?

WOOD:

Yeah. Coming back, and sending telegrams to these kids, to just generate a little bit of excitement about it all.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Well, the student body between '62 and '73 increased about 50 percent, I think, from about 1200 to about 1800 students. What led to the growth of the student body? Were you just getting bigger applicant pools, because you were generating more interest in the college, or what happened to make the student body grow so much?

WOOD:

I guess to a certain extent there was some institutional desire to grow, but for the most part, I think it just sort of happened. In fact, I think among the faculty, that was, they thought was a problem, that it shouldn't have. It just happened like Topsy.

And I remember one of them, Don Shearn, getting up in a meeting once and recommending that we go back to 1200, you know. We were at something like 1700. Well, the place really hadn't had a professional admission officer. Of course, few places did; usually the admission director was a faculty member that was retiring, or something. Somebody took this on, just like Tom Rawles took on the treasurer's job, and stuff, and Eddie Mathias was a geology prof, and so forth. Your dad was one of the few real, just truly administrators, you know.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

And I think I had enough experience, just two years back, my first job, I got enough of it. I was in a small place, where I was on the president's council, you know. And so I had an appreciation from working at two other places, with alumni, as well as admissions, and I was kind of raring to go here, and there was a lot to do.

FINLEY:

I'm sure.

WOOD:

And the big push was to get better people from Colorado, and to get more and better men here. You know, there was a double standard back there--triple standard. And I think the Ford Foundation grant helped, the big national go-around that benefited us, and we used that to help recruit more good males from Colorado.

That was the year that we started getting people like Harris Sherman, and the Winograd kids, and Phil Lecuyer, and a whole bunch of interesting people that graduated in '64, '65, '67 and all that.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Did you go out to all the high schools personally, and talk to people?

WOOD:

Yeah, we were on the road a lot, probably that as much as anything--just outreach, getting involved in affairs in Colorado. The state has a pretty well-structured group of admissions people, and travelling around to remote little places like Creed--

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

And Eads, Colorado, and so forth.

FINLEY:

So that must have accounted for the applicant pool surging somewhat.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Was there any pressure from people like President Worner to let more people in because of any sort of need of the college for--you know, the financial aspects of--

WOOD:

Yeah, I guess you could say so. In retrospect, I could sort of see that now, and I can see more of that since Gresham came--that's Gresham Riley, the current president of the--

FINLEY:

Yes! [laughter]

WOOD:

Where Gresham was a little more decisive about keeping the lid on, and making some decisions that, of course, we in admissions, we like--our natural state is to want to have a smaller class, so that we can be more selective, and that reflects in national publications, you know, your reputation. And fewer you have to take. So if you have to squeeze in 25 more, that means 50 or more offers, and so forth.

FINLEY:

So you did some of that during the late sixties, the extra offers?

WOOD:

Yeah, although I think the college back then was just so busy being itself, and trying to be better, that very few people were looking over their shoulders at the admission operation. We were just kind of working hard and getting some results, and people kind of left us alone. "Gee, whatever you do, great! Keep bringing in those good kids!"

We started getting Boettchers back in the--that mid-sixties period, whereas we really, you know, you were--I don't know--how many were here when you were? When you were a freshman Boettcher, how many Boettchers were there?

WOOD:

Well, the Boettcher program didn't start until fifty . . . just before, a year or two before I was a Boettcher scholar, right.

WOOD:

Oh, yeah?

FINLEY:

Yeah. So it was a very early time. There were two or three--

WOOD:

You're ancient!

FINLEY:

Yes! Two or three Boettchers when I was a freshman. Now there are lots, because it's a very--obviously, the best choice for Boettcher scholars, in Colorado.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

And they admit it--they love Colorado College.

WOOD:

Lew Worner got me on the Boettcher Selection Committee back then, in the sixties. I'm sure it was back then, late sixties, anyway. I mean, it didn't have any direct bearing on how many Boettchers we got, but it was just part of that being involved in the state.

FINLEY:

Yeah. I can see how all these factors began to add up and change up. Now, my research shows that the summer start program began in 1967.

WOOD:

Yes.

FINLEY:

I didn't realize it was that soon. Whose idea was that, and why?

WOOD:

Bob Crossman's.

FINLEY:

Was it Bob Crossman's idea?

WOOD:

Bob and Lew Worner cooked it up, I'm sure. We had an association with Allegheny College back in the days of the Ford Foundation--independent study grants.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

And they found out that Allegheny had done it for women on a certain basis--I don't know what it was--came up with this idea, and I went--my reaction was kicking and screaming; I thought it was awful! And we didn't think that we could do it with men because the draft was on then. That's right.

WOOD:

And if a male dropped out of college for a semester, they might get picked up. So early summer start was for women who would come in the summer, go home in the fall, and a handful were all basket cases. Well, I shouldn't put it that way! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

I think a few of them are doctors now! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

But kids that were really risky, and they would use it to get pumped up--keep the girls company, and then they would continue on in the fall, you see.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

All part of the glorious double standard--

FINLEY:

Oh, I see. I see.

WOOD:

--at CC back in the early days.

FINLEY:

Yes.

WOOD:

And then, you know, at some point, things evened out. But that's how it started, in a meager way. But it's been going on since '67.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. But it wasn't, I take it, because there was too much pressure on the enrollment, as it sort of turned out in later years, when you had some--

WOOD:

No. It's a shrewd move. I mean, I've gotta hand it to--administratively, and just in terms of business, it's a very smart thing to do. And the other thing is that there are a certain number of faculty, who are keen faculty here, that love to teach summer starts. That's what's kept it going.

There have been many times when the admissions staff, especially when things were looking bleak, like we've going to have a tough year or two here and there, and when there was a corresponding cry on the part of faculty--"Hey, we want better quality here; when are we going to become a Swarthmore or a Carleton?"

And we always felt that you can't have summer start and that, because it means that, you know, there's going to be a segment of the class that's--that couldn't go anywhere they chose; let's put it that way. You can't go to a person that's been admitted by Carleton or someplace, and say, "Yeah, you can come here, but you have to come in the summer."

They'll say, "Thank you, but no, thanks."

FINLEY:

Right. Right. So you were tempted to discontinue it a couple of times, I take it.

WOOD:

Oh, it was a pain in the butt! These kids all came kicking and screaming--I don't blame them! And a lot of negotiating, and hurt feelings, and--it still happens.

FINLEY:

But it seems to have been accepted more in the last few years.

WOOD:

Oh, yeah, yeah!

FINLEY:

It seems to be quite accepted.

WOOD:

The summer starts are--they are a whole topic for a conversation; they really are.

FINLEY:

[chuckle] Yeah. Well, they do quite well.

WOOD:

We had some things going for us. Things turned over at CC in the sixties, academically. We, you know, we really moved and got--changed the picture, and among them were things like the early advanced placement movement, which was, you know, that was targeted at bright kids in the high schools.

And our faculty--we had a number of them--Hochman and some of the chemistry guys, and Will Wright--adopted buddies in the high schools in the Denver area, mostly, where a class--no money involved at all. The result of which that every year, a couple of days a year, Bill Hochman's group from South High would be down for the day--all these bright kids. And the admissions office lurked in the background, ready to pounce!

That helped, those kinds of things. We also had--we joined the writing sample program, which the College Board did then, where kids when they would sit for the SATs, but they also had to sit for this writing sample, which everybody hated, except us. It put us on the map. We were one of the colleges that required the writing sample; hence, we had to be pretty good.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

And so that was part of image-building; that helped. We had a summer session with a lot of NSF kids--high school juniors.

FINLEY:

Right.

WOOD:

Bright kids.

FINLEY:

And they would come back, then, wouldn't they?

WOOD:

They would come back. And all kinds of exciting things were going on that helped--things that the admissions office doesn't handle because they have other things now. But they had things that were going on, on the campus, that helped attract kids. So a whole bunch of things came together back then.

FINLEY:

Right. Well, I think I'm going to turn this tape over, because we're coming to the end of our first half-hour, but on the other side, I want to ask you--we'll continue. I will ask you about the ferment that seemed to occur in the late sixties on campuses throughout the country, and what effect that had on CC.

[Tape change]

This is side two of tape one of the Dick Wood oral history interview.

How did things change in the late sixties in terms of the admissions process and student attitudes towards coming to college?

WOOD:

Ahhhhh.

FINLEY:

That's a hard one.

WOOD:

Yeah. It's . . . I think we look back on the late sixties with a certain kind of positive feelings of nostalgia, and "the good old days." I don't think that they were especially that way at the time. I think the college being located in the hinterlands, we weren't as much at the

forefront of, say, the movement as say, coastal colleges were.

But certainly, this place was far from dead. You know, my visual memories are of grouping right outside of Armstrong for marches, and a vivid one was where I was packing for a trip, and the leaders--I mean, I was always impressed with how responsible the CC students were in their protests. And they were organizing the march on the campus, and the haranguer was telling about problems that they were concerned with, of snipers downtown.

You know, there are a lot of types here in this town! And I remember coming back, and then getting on the plane, and forgetting about it, and coming back, and reading the newspaper, of the account of that, and there was my daughter in the front row of the march! She was a high school sophomore at the time!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

There she was! [laughter] How she got there, and-- it's a good thing I didn't know it, because I was concerned about everybody's safety. [pause] Oh, it was an era that I don't think anybody's sad to see go by. There was a lot of ferment and excitement at this college.

FINLEY:

Oh, yes!

WOOD:

It was a part of that. It was a part of the attraction of coming here. It was a good place to be. We attracted kids from all over, but our best kids have always been, as a group, the Coloradans, and that's the way it should be.

And there was that excitement. I think we got pretty decent press back in those days--better. I don't know whether it was just luck or what, but we did have--we are in Christian Science Monitor, and mentions and stories and things like that.

The block plan got a lot of press, and that came in '70, 1970. And . . . those were the days when we were doing--we had the Ford Foundation grants; that was exciting.

We had the Selected Student Program, where the bright freshmen got bonded, really, with one another, in this series of courses, and had a good intellectual experience.

And we had the advisor plan, where kids could do anything they wanted, just so that their advisor would

approve of it.

FINLEY:

[laughter] Yeah. Right. Right.

WOOD:

And a number of things like that were going on, that I don't think, you know, we've considered that lightly, but I think the faculty feel that we want more--we don't want to separate the bright kids from the--it's a little bit more egalitarian here now.

FINLEY:

Well, the block plan coming in, in 1970, was certainly an outgrowth of all the sort of intellectual ferment in higher education in the late 1960s, and I guess the block plan must have had a tremendous effect on the student applications and admissions, I guess, because you got something like 3500 applications in the '71-'72--

WOOD:

No. That was later. I don't know how to answer that. The big increase that we had, we went from 1700, which is--we were kind of poking around at 15, 16, 1700 applications for awhile. And the year that the block plan was being discussed, '69-'70; it was voted in the fall of '69, you remember, in October?

FINLEY:

Right.

WOOD:

We went from 1700 to 2500 applications. Boy, that was a real jump. I don't know how to account for it. It wasn't the block plan; nobody out there knew we were going to do this.

I mean, it got voted in, but we didn't--I don't think we got a piece of literature out until January or February, a little pamphlet. And there wasn't that much news, so the public didn't know about it.

The kids that knew about the block plan in the early days--that and the next few years--were the kids who were in a pipeline that led to places like Evergreen State, New College in Florida, the one in Massachusetts--I can't think of it. The experimental one that's where U-Mass and Amherst is.

FINLEY:

Not Marlborough?

WOOD:

No. You'll have to fill this in later.

FINLEY:

Yeah.

WOOD:

But places like that, the experimental--Antioch. We were getting--we were sharing applicants with those places, and a lot of them were Eastern kids, where the word was getting around that we had this, but they were kids that were looking for alternate colleges. That's where the big jump came after the block system, where the awareness of the block system was out. But it wasn't the thing that spurred--that's a mistake we make. It wasn't that--

FINLEY:

It wasn't that.

WOOD:

In fact, there are times when I think we are doing so well despite the block system, because the block system is nifty, but it eliminates a lot of top-notch students. A characteristic of then is that they are more name-conscious, you know, the high achievers, the Boettchers. They are less prone to taking a flier at this or that.

FINLEY:

More cautious, more.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Go the standard route with the Ivy League name, and so forth.

WOOD:

Yeah. So the block system has been, you know, overall very good for the college and its reputation. It separates us, and identifies us, but it eliminates a certain number of the kinds of kids that some faculty have bitched about, or not having enough of here--high scorers, high achievers.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Well, your talking about that sort of kid leads me to ask you what was your ideal kind of student, in terms of the kind of individual you were seeking as a student at Colorado College? What kind of a student?

WOOD:

Well, it was a kind of student that did well in school, and furthermore, there was some information that came along, preferably from a teacher, about how exciting this kid is to

have in a class, and independent-minded.

And then maybe if they also had some special talent that they'd developed, like--I don't know, whatever it might be. It could be sports; it could be a piano audition competition, or something like that, where they really worked at something.

And then, you know, even more so, somebody that had the neckbrace syndrome. That's a cynical term we use in admissions. It's somebody that overcame some terrible . . .

FINLEY:

Handicap?

WOOD:

Handicap of some sort, and I'm not talking about the kids that have survived divorces and all that. That's too common; you know, you can't overlook that, but somebody that maybe . . . oh, lived on a farm in Eads, Colorado [laughter] and the father died, and this kid helped run the farm, and helped his mom, and was still number one in the class--all that kind of stuff. Or whatever. But interesting kids.

FINLEY:

Right.

WOOD:

Kids that just seemed to have minds of their own, and were sort of independent, and liked a challenge, and weren't afraid, and open to new ideas, and things like that. It's kind of hard to define the quality, but I've always felt there is something special about this place, and about the kinds of people who come here, who seek us out, who end up here.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

How much influence that the admissions office has had in getting them here, I sometimes wonder, but I think there is something special. I guess maybe over the years, this kind of project might define them.

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well . . . [laughter]

WOOD:

I can't!

FINLEY:

Obviously, you don't want a bunch of clones as students, and a certain diversity has been important, too,

which leads me to the question about diversity, which is a buzzword, certainly, now. I noticed way back in 1971, Ayuda, which was a student organization, was pressing for more women to be admitted, so that there would be an equal number of women with men.

And way back even before that, the faculty was contributing money to a minority scholarship fund, to get more minority students here. So tell me a little bit about your efforts in the realms of diversity, both in terms of your personal goals, and also in terms of the pressures you were reacting to.

WOOD:

Well, the women and minorities.

FINLEY:

Okay, the women and minorities.

WOOD:

Let's start with the women. We had a definite, it shall be, 60/40 male/female policy here.

FINLEY:

Ratio--that's the way it was when I was a student.

WOOD:

Yes. And we had more applications from women, and they were better applicants, as a whole, but yet we took more men. So there really was that double standard here. And I remember going to Lew Worner when things were appearing in Congress, and talk, and so forth, that, you know, we can't do this any longer. And boy! He got--I'll never forget! He got incensed! You know, when Lew gets mad about something, his lower jaw and lips tremble. And I said, you know, just drop it; don't bring it up again.

But he got forced into it by these committees. The admissions committee was one example of relatively few of a significantly forceful thing that the admission committee did was help ramrod this 50/50 thing through. Jim Stauss came to the college at that time, and helped the cause, because he sure saw the fallacy of that policy, not to mention the law.

But it was done. The idea was that we would try to keep it as close to 50/50 as we could, but still keep quality, keep the quality up. So if that meant taking more women one year, and more men another, and it's really worked. Some years, we have imbalances, but the student body always seems to balance out at very close to 50/50.

FINLEY:

Is your applicant pool a 50/50 split?

WOOD:

Oh, yeah! It's all very even; it's been that way for, oh, 10-15 years. I remember the great day when we realized we could actually have a waiting list for men! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

We felt that we had arrived!

FINLEY:

Yes!

WOOD:

We could say no to so many men that we could put some on a waiting list.

FINLEY:

When do you think that would have been--was that when . . .

WOOD:

'73 or '4, something around there, when we had this phenomenal jump. Yeah, it did; it went from 500 the year before the block plan to 2200, then 22 to . . .

FINLEY:

Well, my research says something like 3500.

WOOD:

3500, 3600 a couple of years running, in '72 or '3, something like that. Phenomenal! How we read them--I don't know how we read them!

FINLEY:

Well, we'll get to that in a minute, and I want to ask you about that, but tell me a little about the minority, the growth of the minority student population.

WOOD:

Well, I have to say--

FINLEY:

How you feel about that.

WOOD:

CC came into minority recruiting kicking and screaming. We had--one year we had a breakthrough where we brought in three black women from East High School, one of whom was the counselor over at Boettcher Health Center. I keep forgetting

her name. They were three pretty personable, bright women, and boy! I remember--I guess I shouldn't mention names, but there were administrators that said, "Dick, should we really be doing this?" That kind of thing, and it was like pulling teeth. The college just really wasn't very interested.

FINLEY:

Well, some of the faculty must have been interested, to contribute a portion of their salary for the scholarship fund.

WOOD:

I don't think that was before '67, was it?

FINLEY:

I think--

WOOD:

That's when all this started happening.

FINLEY:

I think it was in about '67.

WOOD:

Yeah, when Martin Luther King was assassinated.

FINLEY:

That began to change.

WOOD:

Packard came on the board, and Packard's company had been enlightened before that. He had a big influence on this.

FINLEY:

I see.

WOOD:

And the college, you know, for one reason or another, was not at the forefront back in those days in the sixties; it was tough. Ray Jones, I think, was one of very few blacks on campus. But anyway, things changed then.

But it took a long time for the admissions office to get its act together, and we had a lot of part-time recruiting going on--a student who might have senior status, or you know, we would borrow for a half a year--it was kind of a half-assed operation. It wasn't until we hired Lloyd Peterson--well, Donny Torres was the first full-time staff member in the admissions office, and Lloyd followed him, for five years. And he was a pretty shrewd administrator and

recruiter, and then with Roberto Garcia, I think the program--there is a program now, and things are in place.

Things are starting to move up slowly, but it's really been slow. My biggest disappointment; I really thought by the time I left, we would have a 20 percent minority representation here.

FINLEY:

Well, we have something like 12 to 14 percent, but that's certainly an improvement on what it was in the old days.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Yeah. Well, Dick, you mentioned something about wondering how in the world you read all those admission folders. Can you describe your work process during the admissions--

WOOD:

Cycle?

FINLEY:

--crunch! How did you do it?

WOOD:

Yeah, I remember . . .

FINLEY:

You must have good eyes! [chuckle]

WOOD:

Ohhhhh! Well, one thing: the two or the three of us on the staff at the time would take off. We would hole up at a motel in Pueblo. I remember borrowing Jane Cauvel's condo up at Breckenridge or somewhere for a week. We would just read--just take off and read all day; stop for a brief meal, and then into the night--just crank them out.

You know, I wonder--I always--it's bad for me to review a folder that we've decided on, later on, you know, looking back on a case, during the season, it's bad, you know, and say, "How could we have done this?"

But I think we made reasonably good decisions then. We had a lot of people to pick from. I remember little things like, well, the trendy things, like it seemed that all the women that applied were candy-stripers--remember that?

FINLEY:
Uh-hum.

WOOD:

There were things that people did, who applied for admission to this college, or other colleges, that you'd generally get cynical about. I remember little visual things we'd use instead of being articulate, we would just draw a picture of a straight arrow to symbolize a certain kind of kid. And other little initials like "DWP" divorced, we pay. It could be an aid applicant with pretty affluent parents, but technically, they need money.

FINLEY:

Yeah.

WOOD:

All those things. But it was just a matter, I think, just cutting ourselves off from the telephones. And it's still a problem. They're doing it right now. I just stopped in to see the admission gang, and they have 300 to get done, early decisions, before Christmas.

And you know, the crunch is on, and it's--one of the difficult things at CC in being selective, and thoughtfully selective, is that we're not unlike some of the other, the Ivy-type schools. We can't afford to cut ourselves off from the world. We're still recruiting; we're still PR-ing during the season, and how can you get Roberto to take home a bunch of folders over the weekend, when he's running a weekend thing, like he did this Sunday, for minority high school seniors, and all the work that goes into that. And so that part of the problem is, you know, we can't afford not to be recruiting at the same time.

FINLEY:

Right. Did you personally read every folder?

WOOD:

Yeah. It just sort of started off that way. Well, yeah--somebody else read them too.

FINLEY:

Of course.

WOOD:

But I didn't read every--no, I haven't read every word that they wrote, although I'd go back and find something that the staff reader had pointed out, and read it, and maybe, usually, agree with certain things.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Was there a pile of obvious rejects, and the pile of obvious admits, and sort of the in-betweens? Did it

make any difference on what you read?

WOOD:

No, well, we had a way--when you'd open a folder up, you didn't know what pile this person was in. We did that at one time; it was a mistake. So every time you open a folder, it's--you don't know what you're coming to.

FINLEY:

Yeah.

WOOD:

You're not just picking up one that the person says "Obvious reject" and just say, "Yeah, it's obvious reject."

FINLEY:

So you try to keep an open mind?

WOOD:

Try to keep an open mind with each one. We don't read by schools, which most colleges do, because that's a subgroup, so we don't take all of Dogwood Prep's eight candidates, and read them together, and when the Dogwood guy calls up to get an early reading, we resist that, because we're comparing those people with one another--it gets us in trouble every once in a while. We don't do it by region; most schools do it by region, and their admission traveler is responsible for that region; we don't do it that way, either.

I think it's a pretty good system, but it'll be interesting to see how Terry does it.

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

But I felt that the admission director should be responsible for every decision that's made, and if he delegates a certain amount of the nitty-gritty reading in the folder, he's still responsible.

FINLEY:

You're the one that gets the irate phone calls, right?

WOOD:

Yeah, that's right.

FINLEY:

Right.

WOOD:

And responsible for the big picture, too. So yeah, I read a lot of folders!

FINLEY:

[laughter] What would you say is the magic formula for admissions? I mean, there are the class rank, the personal essay, the SAT tests, the pressures you get from parents and friends, and I suppose sometimes a personal knowledge of a person. What kind of mix do you find key in making decisions?

WOOD:

Two-thirds of the rating or of a decision, really is two-thirds of it consists of a combination of the school work--everything about their school work, and tests, and writing, kind of mixed together, I mean, within that group. That accounts for about two-thirds of the decision.

And the other third is the other things, like what we learn on their application, and the writing would be part of that second thing, also, what they're passionate about, as demonstrated by what they've done, and what they say about themselves. And there are, you know, activities--although we've just never gone in for making--

FINLEY:

Laundry lists?

WOOD:

Laundry lists--it gets kind of boring, that we're more interested in why they've done things, you know.

FINLEY:

Really accomplished, uh-hum.

WOOD:

"Why have you had a job that's kept you out of extracurricular activities?"

"To buy a car."

"Well, hmmm, that's interesting." But if it's to pay tuition at the Catholic school he goes to, that's a little different.

FINLEY:

A little different, right.

WOOD:

Those things. And, you know, the alumni thing, and sports and talents, and those other considerations, but most of the people who come here have done interesting things, as comes out in that part of the application. It's not whimsical, in other words; it's that they, I think the

academic kinds of things are really the heavy parts of this.

FINLEY:

Class rank is probably more important than SAT scores?

WOOD:

Oh, yeah.

FINLEY:

Much more important, right.

WOOD:

That has always been true. They just have--it means more. Back in the old days--we've done correlation studies, and obviously, how you've done in school over the long pull has got more predictive value than how you behave some Saturday morning.

FINLEY:

In a SAT test, right. Well, what importance do you give to the personal essay? Is that big?

WOOD:

Well, there isn't just an essay; it's just their writing; they're introducing themselves in writing, so the application itself has a lot of blank space on it, even the part about extracurricular. We don't have a graph for them to fill in. So it's sort of an essay-type response to our questions. But yeah, that's the thing--the essay, that big essay on page 3 is what most of us read first.

FINLEY:

Yes.

WOOD:

And I think that's something that maybe characterizes--there have been times when there have been complaints about poor writing ability, but it's one thing that we always have paid attention to.

On the other hand, you're going to let a kid in that's been a high achiever. I mean, you're not going to turn down number 3 at Pueblo South who can't write worth a damn--I mean, you can't just--we learn that. We've turned down people like that--you just can't do it. I guess you figure, "Well, faculty, here's your challenge."

FINLEY:

He can learn.

WOOD:

Here's an achiever; can't write at all, horrid stuff. But that's not the usual case. The good writing usually

comes along with a good record and good scores. They're not exclusive.

FINLEY:

Did misspellings bug you in applications, or is it that important?

WOOD:

Yeah, there are some pet words, like "definitely" and so forth! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

Colorado, with two "lls." [laughter]

FINLEY:

I'll bet you could make a whole dictionary of words! [laughter] Not to misspell! The pressure that you sometimes got--there must have been some funny situations over the years--parents trying to get their kids into school, or--can you recall any humorous incidents, without mentioning names?

WOOD:

Oh, dear! I could if I could get jogged, like if Ellen Goulding were sitting here, she'd say, "Dick, tell them about So-and-So."

The worst thing was to have to tell somebody that they were rejected, in the office. I mean, say, they had come--the letter had already gone, so you had to confront them, and the tears--especially for a man, a young man. Ohhhhh! And I remember once getting bribed, but not realizing it, by, I think, a Mafia guy!

FINLEY:

Oh, dear!

WOOD:

Yeah. It was over in Ticknor, and he came in, and kept saying, "Isn't there anything I can do to get my boy into your college?"

And then pulling out his wallet, and I thought he was going to show me his picture or something, and then after he left, it just kind of hit me, "This guy was going to pay me something! And maybe he's going to go shoot me or something!" You know! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

Because he was Italian; he looked like maybe he could have been with the Mafia.

FINLEY:

Robert de Niro type, huh? [laughter]

WOOD:

But I think that the upsetting part of the job was the pressure cases.

FINLEY:

Oh, yes.

WOOD:

That's what I would take home.

FINLEY:

And not sleep!

WOOD:

Yeah. I didn't like that; I didn't--I was the first in my family to go to college, and I guess I just haven't been--just refused to be realistic, and CC is a private college, expensive, has an inclination to be considered as elite, and you gotta know somebody to get in, and I really just resisted that. And there were forces within the college where that made--some of the decisions that we made, I didn't like.

FINLEY:

I can understand.

WOOD:

Not too many, but some.

FINLEY:

I guess that's inevitable.

WOOD:

I don't know whether I should talk about that or not, but . . . but not as much as people presumed. Yeah, we gave--we've had affirmative action here since the college began. I mean, we give special consideration to people who can put basketballs in the hoop--

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

--et cetera. To alumni children, to this or that. And when the minority admission thing came into being here, I

mean, people just didn't realize it was sort of--I mean, it's no different. It's a special group of people that for one reason or another, the college wants to give special consideration to. I remember getting a call from an alum, whose kid we admitted--

FINLEY:

Let me turn this over before you tell this story. Otherwise, we're going to run out of tape, Dick.

[Tape change]

This is side one of tape two of the Richard E. Wood oral history interview, R68.

You were going to tell me a story about some pressure from an alum on an admissions situation.

WOOD:

Yeah, kind of a nasty, but typical thing, of an alum whose kid we admitted, but we don't admit people unless they're capable of doing the work. This person wouldn't have been admitted in the competition, and because she was admitted, as I recall, was funded, because if you're admitted, and you need funds, you get that. I hope that always stays that. But he didn't like quote, "the package"--

FINLEY:

The financial aid package.

WOOD:

And was grumbling about that, and made the crack that, "Well, I suppose all the money's going to the minority kids that get in there, that don't belong there"--that kind of thing.

And he just didn't connect the two things, that his kid was admitted, and given the typical financial aid package, because of affirmative action with alumni children, just as this other group--just didn't equate the two things. One was taking away from the other.

There were trustees who were very good, played their trustee role well. There were others--and there are others--that just butted in too much, and I don't think trustees should be dealing directly with admissions people, anyway.

FINLEY:

No.

WOOD:

They should be dealing with the president.

FINLEY:

Exactly.

WOOD:

And we try to keep it and make it that way, with both Lew and Gresham; the pressure cases I would meet with them, and we'd kind of jointly make a decision together on it.

FINLEY:

Well, I can imagine that--

WOOD:

And the most disappointing pressure was from certain faculty that--I guess I'm just too idealistic, but somebody that you always kind of worshiped in the faculty, who would come and say, after recommending somebody, and say that this kid's dad could do a lot for the college, you know. I thought, "Oh no! You too!" [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well, one would hope that the pressures weren't always that kind of pressure, just saying, "Well, the old man has money," but pressures where some people would say, "Well, this kid really can make it, you know, and you made a mistake not admitting him." I suppose you got some of those just plain cases, too.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

And I wonder if the ones you admitted in that second kind of case turned out to justify their champions.

WOOD:

I wonder, because you hear more from the person who was risky, or who came and did well, or did okay--you hear more about that, from themselves, either, "Well, see--I did it," or "You really must have known something about me then, Mr. Wood, because, you know, I finally blossomed!" That kind of thing!

I don't know what it was, but we didn't do as much of that risk-taking as people think. I mean, as I've told Jane, that's--back in those days, we took a lot of people because you had to--I mean, we had to make our class!

FINLEY:

[laughter] Yeah. Well, can you describe some of the applications forms that you got. I mean, some kids must have tried to sell themselves in peculiar ways, particularly more

recently, with the advent of, oh, video tapes, and that sort of thing.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

What kind of peculiar applications did you get in the mail?

WOOD:

I think we had more of that back during the big push in the seventies and early eighties. We were--well, there are--we have a thing in our instructions that says, "And feel free to tell us, if we haven't allowed you to let us know who you are, or what you are, and all that, through our questions, why, you know, feel free."

And yeah, there were--I think the current thing is more of an Eastern phenomenon than here, but there's the use of video. We have a very video-conscious group of young people these days; they've grown up on it. And so, you know, we'll occasionally get that.

We get a pile of things that--in the season, at the end of the reading season, we have sort of a jury; different kinds of people come in and just evaluate that aspect. This kid's piano playing, or this kid's acting, or dancing, or whatever, independent of anything else. And it'll occasionally make a difference--that gray one, the one in between, that may or may not make the cut.

Because if somebody just isn't good enough to get in--I mean, being the best violin player in the world is not going to offset that very much. Or if they are, look great on paper, and they turn in a rotten, rotten dance performance, or write a piece of music or a play that's just awful--we're not going to kick them out for that reason!

So those things aren't really that important that I--oh, there've been a few things, like this one girl--whom we took, by the way, that did a sort of a stupid, dumb thing of--that space: "Use this space as you wish" which we--with transfer students, we have a pretty big sheet of paper, almost. She made this chalk, this pastel thing, and then danced on it, to mix it up, and make it into a more interesting design, claiming that this is how she would feel if she were admitted to Colorado College!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

Just dumb! And she got in anyway, despite that. Then there was a guy that sent a mobile, it came, you know, in boxes, and it--made of boxes, and it was a lot of obscene stuff on it, which we thought was kind of weird. And as I've mentioned a couple of times, some--one applicant sent a jar of jelly that she'd made; another sent a dress that she'd designed and made. [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] Did they ever send cookies?

WOOD:

No. Foreign students, however--now, we don't accept bribes, but you know, Ellen has taught me this: that a foreign student is apt, after they've been admitted, or maybe even after they come, to present a gift to the admission officer, something little. But those aren't bribes.

FINLEY:

No, that's just a sort of a custom, especially in Asian countries, I think. [chuckle]

WOOD:

That's right. We had a letter from a girl in Hells--what is it, in Montana? One of those towns, Hellgate, Montana, who we turned down, and she wrote a vicious letter! [laughter] It was awful! Crude, you know, berating us for our decision. We had it up on the back of one of the staff doors for awhile, to chuckle over! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well, it's . . . [laughter]

WOOD:

The cute applicants--every year there are memorable people that when you're in the midst of a selection season, there are those that stand out for one reason or another. They've made a campaign, and you couldn't just not notice it, how eager they were to come, and all the things they did. And then you do this magnanimous thing and say, "Okay, we'll let you in." Then they go somewhere else! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] Are you surprised sometimes, when you actually meet the student in person, after you've known about them on paper? Do you try to follow up and get to know them?

WOOD:

Yeah. There was this one kid--yeah! One of the frustrating things about being in admissions work is you

don't get enough of this. You're . . . you know. The class arrives in September, and you go on the road, and you're out, basically--especially nowadays--well into January, and then there are spring trips. You're not around much.

And the students you get to know--then the selection season comes, and you're buried, and then they go home. The kids you get to know are those that were either quote "cases" that you sort of, for one reason or another, they stop in, or are your own interns at work, and you don't really have that contact. But it's been good.

I remember SoYong Park--wow! Was she risky! She was a local girl; she was a real risk, but she was--the tipoff on her was she was in the junior classical [can't understand] She took a lot of Latin, and her parents didn't support her coming to college. I got to know her because she became an intern in our office, I think her freshman year, and she got a Wilson! You know!

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

Wow! That kind of stuff is good! That's very gratifying. And Becky Ross, who is one of our alumni leaders in Oklahoma City.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. I know her.

WOOD:

She was really sort of a pathetic case when she came. She wasn't a very good student; she was obese, and not very attractive; and the interview was awkward. And of course, her dad was Gaylord's lawyer, and he stopped in, and yeah, I said, "You know, this is not a good decision to [can't understand] it was a logical-- And then I changed my mind, I--there was just something there, and she came in, and she really grew here--really grew!

She was, I just can't--everybody grows here, I think; that's one of the distinguishing things about this college. I think it changes more lives than other colleges do. I think too many colleges keep good kids on dry ice, you know, "Okay, here you're bright kids, just react to one another."

FINLEY:

Yeah.

WOOD:

And then they all go out and do great things where they

would have anyway. But I think here there's really more change, evidence of it. It's commented on by kids and parents, and it sure happened to her.

FINLEY:

That's great. It must be one of the most gratifying things about being an admissions officer to see the results of your efforts over four years.

WOOD:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FINLEY:

There must have been quite a bit of change in the last say, five years of your job before you retired, because the brochures and everything got much glossier--triple color brochures, and a lot more viewbooks, that kind of publication. What kind of competition were you facing, or what kind of pressures were you facing that led to all this fancy literature going out?

WOOD:

Well, CC entered the age of marketing probably five or ten years too late. I mean, not too late, but after places that have been struggling a little harder, and also places like Carleton, that did some pretty shrewd thinking about itself, and did some classical research internally--it wasn't done by firms.

And Tim Fuller was the person on campus that gave the most enlightening criticism of publications in the admissions office. I mean, it was positive stuff, but he knew his stuff. He was out there looking at other colleges, and giving talks and all that, and aware that we had pretty yucky stuff, which we knew.

And then Gresham came along, and we began getting things we asked for. I think Lew's attitude was, "Well, everything's all right." Brossman's attitude is "keep it dull." I mean, don't show any pictures of the mountains or skiing, and just--you know, that was his style, kind of low key.

And Gresham, on one of his first visits here, said, "We've got to do something about our literature." You know, we hadn't had one piece of color. The first color literature was paid for by the athletics department; they had their own brochure, with a color--

FINLEY:

Picture of a hockey player? [laughter]

WOOD:

[laughter] Yeah. And so we came into that era, fast, with a yearbook, which we resisted for many years, and it was a lot of work! That's Terry's contribution; he came here and got things really [can't understand]

We got a movie, one of the things that are state of the art things, but that's when it happened, that I think Gresham, because Gresham had worked at other places where he had a glimpse of what they did. And some big money items like this video, that's distributed nationally, and a kind of a glossy, first-class kind of magazine, and all those things.

FINLEY:

How does the video work? Is it available in high schools, for counselors to show?

WOOD:

Yeah. I don't think that they'll decide to do an updated version, just not that--kids that come to CC don't come because of something from a video or going to a college day fair, or something.

FINLEY:

That's right.

WOOD:

They seek it out in other ways. The literature we send them is very important.

FINLEY:

Did you see any particular effect in the applicant pool after that literature came out?

WOOD:

No, it kept up, and got--our best year in history, in my mind, was '88. My worst year was '84. It was a bad year; the faculty were really grumbling about the kind of kids that were coming here, and how they behaved in class, and "What the hell are you doing over there?" and all that stuff.

And then the yearbook started--the viewbook started just about then, and the '88 class was the most, you know, it peaked again. There was another peak--I mean great applicants.

FINLEY:

Yeah, I think my notes here show that CC in '88 admitted 35 percent of its applicants.

WOOD:

Yeah. Yeah.

FINLEY:

It was 13th in all liberal arts colleges in the country, and first among ACM colleges in terms of the, shall we say, the selectivity.

WOOD:

Oh, yeah. I did that study.

FINLEY:

Yeah. Yeah.

WOOD:

Yeah. About then to serve the faculty. It was, yeah, that we were in pretty good company. Tell you what--let's digress a little bit.

I think the--there is a correlation between the admission guy's relationship with other admission people and colleges with the reputation of the college. I sensed it first in the state, when I did things with other admissions people. One of the things that helped the most with our public--our image and our positioning--was linking up with a group of colleges called the Coast to Coast Colleges.

FINLEY:

Coast to Coast Colleges.

WOOD:

'81 we started, and for a week in the fall and a week in the spring, these eight colleges go on the road together, with breakfasts and lunches for counselors and great big evening programs. And they were Amherst, Vassar, Swarthmore, Davidson, Oberlin, Carleton, and Pomona.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

It was a sort of a gimmick; admissions people like to do things like that, but that was [whispers] good company. "Oh, [can't understand] I didn't know that you were in the same league with Pomona!"

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

Well, I guess we must be, huh?

FINLEY:

Right.

WOOD:

Whether we were or not, but it was . . . and that's because they knew me and the two guys that thought it up, I'm sure, part of it was because--well, where else would you go between the east and the west.

But anyway, that kind of thing helps. There's a phenomenon known as the common application that's been in being for quite awhile. I was one of the five or six admissions people that went to a meeting that the College Board finagled to get a group of people together just to talk about some ideas.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

WOOD:

So we were on the ground floor of that. That kind of thing, I think, helps the college. It's, you know, seen in company with other ones. And we're very judicious about joining up with other kinds of groups, because, you know, it's, you know, we're better than they are--we don't want to be seen with them, that kind of thing. That's all part of marketing. It's kind of crass-sounding, but it's important. Something happens way off campus that affects the campus.

FINLEY:

Exactly.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

Exactly. I was thinking maybe your bad year in '84 might have just been due to the general state of American high schools during that period [laughter] --all the drugs and so forth.

WOOD:

No, it was me. It was me, mostly--very thin-skinned. I'm very thin-skinned, and oh! I was glad that year was over. But those come and go, so it's amazing that out of 30 years, there was only one bad--I was the only one, I think, that knew it.

And other things just in that same vein, we had the summer institute for admissions counselors here every summer. We got tired of it, and didn't do it this summer, but--that helps, in terms of image, and so forth. I wanted--can I add this?

FINLEY:

Yes, you certainly can!

WOOD:

I wanted to start this off by--I remember going to Denver with Lew Worner and your dad, Juan Reid--J. Juan Reid, sitting in the back seat. Maybe I was driving. And I remember going up to this alumni meeting, or something, and they were yakking--telling [whispers] stories about CC, you know, anecdotal things.

And coming back, and just having been entertained for two hours, and then thinking as time went on--Lew leaving, your dad dying, new development types coming in, an alumni secretary who only attended CC one year, and where's the memory of the institution?

What are all these important things that I--you know, I picked up on certain things that were--Boy! They better get this out of me before I leave--[whispers] it's important. And then finding out that it just--everybody knows these things. It just gets passed on, and you know, every once in--it's--you know, an example would be when I come across something, would call up Barbara or the director of development, Dick Chamberlain, or a staff member, and say, "Do you realize [whispers--can't understand]."

Oh, yeah, we know all about that. You know, they--the memory of the college, of important anecdotal, little relationships continues.

FINLEY:

It does, and . . .

WOOD:

I mean, probably this is part of it.

FINLEY:

I guess oral history projects must help. We've tried--

WOOD:

Yeah!

FINLEY:

--to preserve the memory that way.

WOOD:

But like--

FINLEY:

But there's a certain--

WOOD:

Say, will the new director of development--would an outsider come over and listen to tapes?

FINLEY:

Probably not. It's learned through osmosis.

WOOD:

I know, yeah.

FINLEY:

[laughter] But it's still there.

WOOD:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

I hope. Sometimes I feel as though it's getting lost. The older generation always feels that, I think, with the younger generation.

WOOD:

But I--it was such a nifty thing to be around CC when, you know, Lew was linked--and your dad--to the forties, when they were students. One was a townie, like Frank Waters was--your dad sort of associated that. And Lew was kind of a preppie that came from somewhere else, transferred in, and Edith . . . who was the famous political science prof?

FINLEY:

Oh, Bramhall!

WOOD:

Bramhall! She was here when I was here. And Lew telling stories about her coming across him on campus when he was a freshman, during freshman week, and he seemed not to have anything to do, and so she said, "Young man, if you don't have anything to do, get over to the library!" And those little stories. And knowing--was it Edith Jackson--

FINLEY:

Helen Jackson.

WOOD:

Knowing her, being aware of who she was, seeing her on campus, and saying hello, and standing looking down Platte Avenue once, and seeing her ride her bicycle in her old tweeds, and riding her bicycle in front of Palmer's statue, and thinking how young this place is. Here's somebody that has a--was a part of--you know, dates right back to the beginning of the place. And it's one of the exciting things

about being here, because the place is so, really, young.

FINLEY:

But you realize, Dick, that in maybe 30 or 40 years, people will look back and say, "Oh, yeah! I remember Dick Wood!" [laughter]

WOOD:

[laughter]

FINLEY:

And you'll be one of those legends!

WOOD:

Oh, yes! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] What kind of advice would you give to the college admissions director or president, maybe, 50 years from now? [laughter]

WOOD:

[can't understand]

FINLEY:

[laughter] If he were listening--he or she were listening to this tape?

WOOD:

I wonder how--where the college will be in the firmament? I think the college has--there's been too much lately of comparing ourselves. I think it's an ego thing, institutional ego, and the ego of the people that work here, that we're number 14 in the whatchamacallit, and why don't we uuummm-uuummmm like Carleton, or why don't we get the kinds of--the whole thing, I think there's been, I think unfortunate that we've been in a period of a dozen or 15 years where we've been just looking over our shoulders too much.

There isn't the excitement that there--well, there was excitement here back in the Benezet days of--maybe it was because they had so much rebuilding to do, but I can't--I don't think CC was that bad back in the fifties and forties.

We sure produced some marvelous doctors and professors, and people in general.

But I just hope that it's always kind of--I hope it's still a special place. We have some things going for us, like our location, that I hope we still get kids that are a little bit more adventurous than other places that sort of the same league that we're in. I . . . I don't know . . . I won't be here! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well, colleges do change and go on.

WOOD:

They do. One of the great things about this place as a place to work has been that every year, lest you decide you want to look for greener pastures somewhere else, for me it's always been, "Well, next year something else is going to take effect; I think I want to be around for that," whether it's as momentous as the block system, or--I don't know--dropping ROTC--

FINLEY:

[laughter]

WOOD:

Or whatever! There's always been something in ferment here. And the other thing about CC, I think still is true, but not as much as it once was is that we don't have this institutional worship. We're still western, and we're still irreverent a bit, about ourselves, so we don't celebrate the solemn Founder's Day ceremony like I had to--I mean, I was very aware of this at Dickinson College, founded in 1793, etc. etc. And the college can still not take itself too seriously, but not as much as it once did.

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well, maybe that's the real key, not only to the college's success, but to your success over 30 years as director of admissions you've managed to maintain a sort of a perspective on your own activities, and keep a sense of humor, and it's really been great talking to you this morning, Dick, and I hope you've enjoyed this interview as much as I have.

WOOD:

Yeah, I have! Thanks for listening--and asking!

THE END