

Oral History Interview—Bob Bomboy, 2020 September 25.

Participants:

Christopher N. Breiseth

Tim E. Gilmour

Jim Rodechko

Suzanna Calev

Suzanna Calev ([00:08:00](#)):

Just been busy, lots of, lots of things going on. There's no sign of us closing. So we are just full steam ahead and I'm taking advantage of it. I now have, I think, 10 or 11 students working on different projects.

Jim Rodechko ([00:08:18](#)):

What's the latest on COVID-19 among the student body?

Suzanna Calev ([00:08:24](#)):

So I think we have, I guess reported 12 or 13 that are active, 21 were cleared. Our total numbers are 34 positive, but only 13 positive right now. And then I guess 58 are in quarantine.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:08:48](#)):

Do I understand from Paul Adams that no one has been really sick?

Suzanna Calev ([00:08:54](#)):

I've heard some mixed things. I've heard that one student was very sick-- a pharmacy student, but I'm not sure if that was,

Tim Gilmour ([00:09:08](#)):

Yeah. The problem with pharmacy was that apparently there were a handful of students that were doing work at a pharmacy there in town. What is it? Rite Aid essentially became a, an infecting group. And the biggest problems would have been with pharmacy, which is ironic. Right downtown? No, no. It's in Hazelton, which is probably worse. Yeah. I don't know. I mean, most of the pharmacies I've done business with since I've been very, very cautious. So it's interesting that that's the way I've experienced that they contracted it there.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:10:01](#)):

Suzanna tell us until he comes on what you've gleaned about Mr. Bomboy.

Suzanna Calev ([00:10:10](#)):

Oh, he's a delight. Oh, he's coming on. I think. Oh, welcome.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:10:17](#)):

Oh boy. Thank you for getting us started on the right foot.

Robert Bomboy ([00:10:26](#)):

And who are you, sir?

Christopher Breiseth ([00:10:27](#)):

Sure I am. Well, I thought we'd start by letting everybody introduce him or herself. I think you know most of this, but let's, let's start with Tim Gilmour, my successor as president. Tim, tell us about who you are.

Tim Gilmour ([00:10:42](#)):

Bob, it's just great to meet you. And I I'm sure. I say for all of us we have really enjoyed reading the materials you put together and we really wanted to get a chance to meet with you this morning. But in any event, I was president of Wilkes from 2001 to 2012 and had a great time. And you know, it's a, it's a wonderful place. And prior to that, I, you know, moved up the ranks and a number of institutions around the country.

Tim Gilmour ([00:11:18](#)):

Cause I couldn't keep a job.

Robert Bomboy ([00:11:20](#)):

I had a friend a long time ago who used to say the same thing. And he was an assistant attorney general in Washington and he had done everything. He had even had the security for the Woodstock festival and he'd been a police chief in Berkeley, California, and prestigious positions everywhere. He rode a motorcycle. And he used to laugh that he couldn't keep a job.

Tim Gilmour ([00:11:46](#)):

Yeah. Well, the only thing I'm missing is riding a motorcycle, which I should, at some point. It's great to meet you.

Jim Rodechko ([00:11:57](#)):

Hi Bob. I'm Jim Rodechko. I came to Wilkes in September of 1968. I suspect right about when you left.

Robert Bomboy ([00:12:07](#)):

Yes, sir.

Jim Rodechko ([00:12:08](#)):

Right. And I've been professor of history. I was Dean of arts and sciences, and then I was vice president for academic affairs at the time I retired in 2002.

Robert Bomboy ([00:12:22](#)):

Wow! Good long tenure.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:12:26](#)):

He's also a novelist of murder mysteries in the Poconos. Oh, you need to know the full picture here. And, then Suzanna.

Suzanna Calev ([00:12:37](#)):

Hi.

Robert Bomboy:

Do you, Dr. Rodechko, know about Philip Kerr?

Jim Rodechko ([00:12:49](#)):

No, I don't think so.

Robert Bomboy ([00:12:51](#)):

He was a British novelist of German murder mysteries set during the Second World War, wonderful mysteries.

Jim Rodechko ([00:12:55](#)):

Oh, I'll look into him. Okay. I love reading mysteries.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:13:01](#)):

So, Suzanna, tell us, you've talked with Mr. Bomboy

Suzanna Calev ([00:13:06](#)):

Hi Bob. Hello. Finally.

Robert Bomboy ([00:13:11](#)):

Nice to see you in person, Suzanna.

Suzanna Calev ([00:13:14](#)):

I'm the archivist here at Wilkes. And I started here two years ago. And this summer I came across your oral history interviews and just decided to digitize them. And I'm happy that we can set this up. So I might be turning my camera off and muting myself during this cause I have some students sometimes coming in and out, but I will be listening and taking notes.

Robert Bomboy ([00:13:41](#)):

Thank you, I appreciate your interest, by the way.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:13:45](#)):

I'm Chris Breiseth. I came in 84 and left in 2001. It really was the core of my productive life, at Wilkes. The thing I'm most proud of. I'm now, in one week, will be 84 years old. So figuring out where I fit, I was born in 1936, just as Dr. Farley arrived. I've been very involved recently with, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt legacy. And, I noted that one of the key visitors from Lewisburg arrived in Wilkes-Barre on the 4th of March, 1933, the day Franklin Roosevelt became president. So I'm having a sense and reading your wonderful essay, with how much Wilkes-Barre as well as the new junior college for taking hold after hitting the very depths of the depression to start rising up. And it's a really very inspirational story and I'm sure Tim and I have referred to it frequently and talking to the public about the importance of Wilkes. But I must say, I said several times, I wish I read your essay when I was first president. It would have given a kind of reality to the decisions that were made by those key people. Arnaud Marts and, and Gene Farley and Gilbert McClintock, particularly. So let us turn to you and say something about your life, prior to doing this work at Dr. Farley's request, and then, then put this whole effort that you made into some kind of context.

Robert Bomboy ([00:15:44](#)):

Why I'm just a couple bicycle laps around the circle from you in terms of age.

Tim Gilmour ([00:15:54](#)):
Hey Bob, can you hear me?

Robert Bomboy ([00:15:55](#)):
Yes.

Tim Gilmour ([00:15:56](#)):
Uh this is Tim. I just want you to know we're recording this session. I hope that's okay with you.

Robert Bomboy ([00:16:01](#)):
That's very good. Actually. I think that's a good thing. I have a tape recorder here too, and I will depress it. Okay?

Christopher Breiseth ([00:16:11](#)):
We're put on notice as well.

Jim Rodechko ([00:16:13](#)):
Before we go on, I'm not seeing Bob.

Robert Bomboy ([00:16:17](#)):
You can't see me?

Jim Rodechko ([00:16:19](#)):
No, I'm not picking up your picture at all.

Tim Gilmour ([00:16:22](#)):

Oh, I'm seeing him. Yeah. I'm seeing you Bob. There's a, you do have light on you. Is there a light right next to you? It looks like it kind of washes you out.

Robert Bomboy ([00:16:30](#)):

Yes. Do you not want that?

Robert Bomboy ([00:16:36](#)):

Okay. My son said that not too long ago, he said I'm a washout. I have a strange sense of humor.

Tim Gilmour ([00:16:49](#)):

So you're in Danville.

Robert Bomboy ([00:17:04](#)):

But I'm a Kingston boy, And came to Wilkes as a student in 1959. I had worked from the end of my sophomore year in high school as a clerk in the ACME store, which was over on the Narrows Road in Kingston, which must have closed close to 40 years ago at this point. But by the time I got to Wilkes, I was working there in that store from after school to 9:30 or 10 o'clock at night, which meant I was putting in a lot of hours, 24 to 30 hours, I couldn't go above 30 hours because that would have tipped the part-time scale. But boy did I work, and that made it somewhat difficult for me, going to school. I worked until the day after my graduation day in 1963. When I was graduated, as it is properly said, I got a job at a three-edition afternoon daily in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Bucks County at that point was beautiful. Oscar Hammerstein lived there. James Michener had actually started his career at that same newspaper. And one of his boyhood friends was still a reporter there after all those years. Pearl Buck had a thrift shop across the square. It was a nice place to work. Anyway, I got free tickets on Saturday nights to St. John Terrell's Music Circus across the Delaware River in Lambertville, New Jersey. Do you know about that?

Tim Gilmour ([00:16:57](#)):

Oh really?

Tim Gilmour ([00:19:12](#)):

Yes. Yes. I grew up in Wilmington, but we would go up when I was a kid every so often.

Robert Bomboy ([00:19:20](#)):

To use my ticket, I had to write reviews of the jazz performances, and I had been a jazz aficionado from my teens. I had a pretty good collection of contemporary jazz records. So I met in and interviewed Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck and a host of other people -- just anybody you could name. It was wonderful. I really had a great time. While I was working in that job, I became one of the first people in America to know that President Kennedy had been shot. I don't know if you'd like to hear about that, but some newspapers have actually written about my experiences there. I was the assistant city editor on that three-edition afternoon daily. When the copy for the second edition had gone through the window, into the composing room, everybody left for lunch. And so about quarter after one I was doing something, talking to someone on the telephone when the UPI machine started a frenzy of bells: ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. I had never heard that before. It faced me and was a machine about the size of a dishwasher. Today the wire services go directly into computers. (1963 was way before the personal computer.) So I wondered what this was all about, and it was right across from me at the city desk. I stood up and looked at it and the machine had started its rapid-fire typing: UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL, then skipped a line and printed the dateline, (UPI) DALLAS - and then just a few words. And then a garble. Wire service teletype operators had nerves and fingers of steel: nothing bothered them. So I wondered what in the world was going on. I couldn't see enough of the first paragraph to know what the story was. Then it started again: there was a rumble - the machine rumbled as its keys flew and pushed up the paper on which it was printing. The narrow paper was a yellow color called goldenrod. And then the machine started again and printed UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL. Then a couple more rumbles, up paper, the paper started forward and typed (UPI) DALLAS - and then a garble of the first paragraph again. And then one more time, it did the same thing. Repeating 10 bells between each attempt to print. Then it didn't give me anything. The most bells we had ever heard before that day was five bells for a bulletin. And then it started a fourth time and it was all right. [Years later I found out that the teletypist sending the FLASH was a woman operator in UPI's Chicago hub. When she got the message from Dallas her hands shook and she had to begin again, and again, and again. Finally a supervisor stepped up behind her, put his hands under her shoulders, lifted her out of her seat, gently sat her on the floor, and took her place at the keys.]

Robert Bomboy ([00:22:50](#)):

And the first paragraph was (UPI) - Dallas, President Kennedy in a motorcade in Dallas has been shot.

It was amazing. All we got in that initial FLASH was the first paragraph because Merriman Smith, the UPI reporter in Dallas, was calling from a phone in a car behind Kennedy's in the motorcade. He would win a Pulitzer Prize for his work that day.

Robert Bomboy ([00:23:23](#)):

The next thing he dictated was that the president's car had swerved out of line, speeding to the hospital. Kennedy, by that time had said the bullet hit him. Two words, "I'M HIT!" When he got hit he slumped over on his wife's shoulder; she was wearing a pink suit, you remember? And then the story went on and on and on. My responsibility, obviously, was to get people back. And

I did. Everyone was out to lunch. The city editor and all the reporters were gone. I called the city editor, Dave Barnett, and he said, "I'm coming!" He was home in Doylestown. And then I called the switchboard operator and told her to get the reporters. They were eating lunch in a bar next to the paper. The paper was the only paper I've ever seen that had a button on the wall over the city desk.

Robert Bomboy ([00:24:30](#)):

It was a red button. No one was supposed to touch it, because if you pushed the red button, it would stop the presses. But I could catch half of the second edition and all of the third edition. And of course we were an afternoon paper: Our job was to get the paper on the streets. In short, I pushed the button. And I heard the presses three stories below, stop. By that time the managing editor, the composing room chief, and Dave Barnett were in, and there was a thunder behind me of reporters pounding their way up the steps to the second floor. And from then on, the composing room chief cut away the top part of the front page to make room for the Kennedy story. It was lead type from the hot linotype machines then, not like it is today. And so we cut away the stereotype of the front page in a shape like an upside-down right triangle, the base of the triangle at the top, making space the width of the paper for the big headline. We reset a wide headline and put the fast-growing story beneath it. And all we were waiting for was whether Kennedy was alive. Because he'd obviously been hit in the head. And I was the one who wrote the headline.

Robert Bomboy ([00:25:55](#)):

My desk had a roll of yellow teletype paper that ran right into the bail of my Underwood typewriter. And I wrote JFK SHOT DEAD IN DALLAS. Then, almost immediately, the teletype started again and Merriman Smith dictated: "*President Kennedy Is Dead.*" The city editor snatched the headline from the bail of my typewriter and sent it to the composing room. All was ready and waiting, except for the headline, and in a few minutes I began to hear the rumble and feel the slight vibration as the presses started down below.

And so the rest of the day, our reporters went through Bucks and Montgomery counties, our territory, to do follow-up sidebars, things like that, reaction stories from the public. The city editor and I worked all day and then all night. I hadn't eaten since six o'clock that morning, and at 1 a.m. we went home to his house, a couple of blocks away, and his wife made sandwiches and coffee, plenty of coffee. And we worked the rest of the night, with the Saturday paper coming up. In the morning we went through the three editions; and that was it: we didn't have a Sunday paper. That was one of the highlights of my career.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:27:25](#)):

Actually the man who married my wife and me, he said, migrational minister has put a boy. He's now deceased, but he put a book together of people's recollections, what they were doing on that November afternoon. And it's got people like Betty Ford and just an interesting cascade of characters. And I have my own two page stories in there, but I think those of us who went through that experience will remember it to our last day. I mean, it was nothing like it. Well,

that's a wonderful way to get a sense of how your career was, was taking shape. How did you get back to Wilkes?

Robert Bomboy ([00:28:18](#)):

Of course after that experience on the *Daily Intelligencer* in Doylestown I went to the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia. While I was there, I earned my bread and butter, literally, by writing feature stories and taking pictures for the New York *Herald Tribune*, which was a great paper, with great photographers.

Robert Bomboy ([00:28:44](#)):

And I liked to take pictures because the pictures paid me \$20 apiece. The story paid me \$15. So I always tried to get a picture. After Columbia, I had a good introduction. And I got a job at *Business Week* magazine, where I was a writing editor. People have always valued me for my writing.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:29:32](#)):

What you just said. The old cliché, a picture's worth a thousand words.

Robert Bomboy ([00:29:43](#)):

For me, it was worth at least \$20.

Robert Bomboy ([00:29:49](#)):

For background purposes, I should note that two weeks after I started at Columbia, my father died of a heart attack. I was the only child, and I seriously considered leaving Columbia, which had been a career dream of mine, and go back to Wilkes-Barre and run what was left of my father's business. But the Dean at Columbia had worked long and hard to fill the roster of people who had been accepted there that year. And they made a real effort to stop me from doing that. They increased my scholarship to \$1,000, half the tuition at that time, using a Clap-Polliak scholarship, which was specified for labor reporting. My adviser associated with that labor scholarship was Adolf A. Berle, the economist in the Roosevelt Brains Trust. I've had some great mentors in my life.

He sent me on assignment to write about the Federal Railway Labor Relations Act, and I went to Washington. I stayed at the Dodge Hotel, which was over by Union Station, for five days, and I interviewed a whole lot of people and then wrote my master's paper based on what I had learned.

That's what was happening before I went to *Business Week*, where I wrote stories featured on the magazine's front cover. I wrote one on air pollution, I remember, and I began by saying, "The air

over Pittsburgh is a witches' brew." And it was at that time: the steel mills were going great guns. Now there's virtually no pollution at all because the steel mills are gone.

Robert Bomboy ([00:32:30](#)):

While I was at *Business Week*, I had another interesting experience. My boss and I were coming out of the McGraw Hill building. That's where *Business Week* was located, on the 30th and 31st floors. As we came through the doors onto 42nd Street, I heard what I thought were firecrackers, but my boss was wiser. He just dove into one of the open doorways-of stores next to the McGraw Hill building. And I recall that other people did the same thing. So there was no room for me to dive into that alcove. And so I was soon flattened against the green wall of the McGraw Hill building in a fusillade of bullets going back and forth between the New York police and a man in a car facing 42nd Street.

Robert Bomboy ([00:33:40](#)):

I should say that the outdoor temperature that day and on the street was about a hundred degrees - very, very hot. And a man in the New York Port Authority building, next door on 41st Street had gone berserk. He had knocked down a Port Authority policemen, got his gun out, and had shot and killed him. And then he had run out the side door of the Port Authority into a parking lot. The Port Authority building now goes all the way to Eighth Avenue. But at that time there was a parking lot between the McGraw Hill building and the corner of Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street. He jumped into a car in the parking lot and tried to get out on 42nd Street. But there's a traffic light at 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue, and there were double lanes of cars stopped for the light and he couldn't get out. He smashed into one of the cars there in line. By that time, police from all over had caught up with him. Some came from farther east on 42nd Street and others came from up and down Eighth Avenue to try to stop him and were firing at him in the car. He was firing back with the five bullets he had left in the Port Authority cop's gun. The police coming down Eighth Avenue were firing at the car in a fusillade of bullets, and those that missed and overshot were hitting the wall of the McGraw Hill building over my head and on my right side. I want to say it was scary, but in a moment I'm going to tell you something else.

Jim Rodechko ([00:35:19](#)):

I have to interrupt you. I was there. I was on the street, real pulled out of the parking lot. I was, I was walking up from 10th Avenue. I was at the New York public libraries subsidiary, a microfilm division. It happened, it must have happened around five o'clock.

Robert Bomboy ([00:35:42](#)):

No, it was very early. It was right around noon, or early afternoon, because my boss and I were going to lunch.

Jim Rodechko ([00:35:51](#)):

Uh it was 1965. I recall that. I was looking at the guy as he pulled out and the police were behind him and we all started to run in the opposite direction because they were shooting.

Robert Bomboy ([00:36:09](#)):

Right. Which was the opposite direction for you?

Jim Rodechko ([00:36:10](#)):

It would have been down 40. I think it was on 43rd street.

Robert Bomboy ([00:36:17](#)):

That would be up when he was coming out of the parking lot.

Jim Rodechko ([00:36:24](#)):

And I would've gone back down toward 10th Avenue

Robert Bomboy ([00:36:30](#)):

He started his crazed gun battle with only about five bullets. Once the police killed him, the Port Authority policeman's gun would have been empty.

Jim Rodechko ([00:36:24](#)):

I think they said he was out of bullets.

Robert Bomboy ([00:36:52](#)):

He had fired them. Yes, he certainly was empty. And of course, by the time he died, he was part-way-out the door. He slumped about halfway out the driver's side door with his head down.

Jim Rodechko ([00:37:09](#)):

Who was he? A disgruntled stock-broker or a terrorist?

Robert Bomboy ([00:37:19](#)):

I think that night they said he was an accountant. But I might be wrong on that.

Jim Rodechko ([00:37:21](#)):

Kind of out of character for an accountant.

Robert Bomboy ([00:37:30](#)):

If it's not too grisly for you, there was a big puddle of red blood on the street, which was right against the curb because he hadn't got any farther than that. And someone had dropped into the puddle of blood an open white handkerchief. I wasn't scared when I was there. And that was a problem really. I just went on to the assignment that I was going to uptown in New York, but the whole thing didn't seem real. To me, the bullets sounded like cap pistols. And that wasn't good; if you know what I mean?

Anyway, I worked at *Business Week*, and then, in the summer of 1966, my wife and I ended a one-year marriage. We had known each other's families all our lives until we thought everything was wonderful and we were in love; but once we were married, we just couldn't get along. And so we were divorcing, and I left *Business Week* and came back to Wilkes-Barre.

Robert Bomboy ([00:39:10](#)):

And I asked Gene Farley if I could get a quick job at Wilkes. That was the measure of his greatness that he gave me a job in the English Department. I should say that I had been to Wilkes earlier in the year. I noted that at the beginning of the history, *Founding and Founders*. I had been there to Wilkes with another *Business Week* reporter to reassess the revival of the Wyoming Valley. So Dr. Farley had met me previously, and we knew each other slightly. Anyway, I got the job. I had never studied to teach, but once I started, I absolutely loved it. I loved it. I loved it all my life. And one of the things about it was that I could show students the real way to write; that is, what professional writing was like, all the tricks that people like me used to meet deadlines and create readable writing. I'm a deadline writer: I can write hard and fast against deadlines. For 30 years I told students: "Don't write in the passive voice." Outside of fiction, professional writers won't touch the passive voice. I found in my career that many teachers didn't know even what the passive voice was. All of that was how it happened that Gene Farley gave me a job, and after a while, recognized my writing skills and thought I could be useful.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:41:10](#)):

Let me pick up, you were a student at Wilkes. Yes. Who in the English department had a great impact on you as a future writer? Anyone? Or does this all just come out of you?

Robert Bomboy ([00:41:26](#)):

Well, I won a medal in eighth grade for an essay on, I don't know, America or patriotism or something like that. So I was always a pretty good writer even when I was a kid. When I was six years old, I had Scarlet Fever and I was quarantined for a month. And my parents bought a deck of cards called *Authors*. Maybe you know it or played the game of *Authors*. Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of them. And I think there were 13 authors and their works represented in the deck. During that month of quarantine we played the game by matching. I tried to get as many works of each of the 13 authors as I could. That was how a player would win. But for a six- year- old drinking nasty-tasting pink penicillin four times a day, or more, it was just play the *Authors* cards again and again and again, all the time I was in quarantine, until; I memorized the authors and their works completely and perfectly. And until maybe in my sixties I could remember all of the authors, and all of the things they had written. After that, as Hercule Poirot, would say, "*The little gray cells*," you know.

Robert Bomboy ([00:42:45](#)):

And so when I got to world literature – by the way world lit at Wilkes might as well have been *Murder Incorporated* for the science students and their ambitions. You can see that in *Founding and Founders*. There's a point where, pointing to the Board of Trustees' notes, when I talk about the fallout of enrollment numbers between the early freshmen and sophomore classes, one of the reasons for the losses among the science students was that world lit was just killing them. President Homer Price Rainey guaranteed that the curriculum at the Junior College would be the same as on the Bucknell's main campus. In world lit that meant that the teachers in Wilkes-Barre were using *World Literature*, a 1,000-page blue-covered textbook by Bucknell professors Robbins and Coleman, and in it there was no explanation from page 1 to page 1200. World lit failed the science students in droves. I started as a chem major, and I got a taste of what the science students were getting. The *Authors* card game saved me, because it gave me an early interest in literature. But Physics in the second semester did me in. Voris Hall told me and several others, "The only way I could give you a passing grade was to divide your IQ by your hat size."

Robert Bomboy ([00:44:04](#)):

At the same time, I was getting A's in the 101 and 102 English courses. So I could see that my path, or "the light at the end of the tunnel," was in that direction. During the time I was at Wilkes, I took all the courses in English that the college offered.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:44:30](#)):

So you graduate is, is there anything as we, this whole project is to capture the, the history of Wilkes and its many dimensions. And we miss an opportunity if we did not get your sense of what Wilkes was like as a student and what, what the culture was like, what Dr. Farley was like to you as President, before you knew him later in a more professional relationship.

Robert Bomboy ([00:45:05](#)):

I really didn't have any contact with Dr. Farley as a student. I would see him walking along the sidewalk or elsewhere. That was about all, at the time of my graduation. It seems to me that he was ill and did not present the diplomas. I had classes in Conyngham Hall before it burned down. *Founding and Founders* presents it as a really elegant building. All of the things from the wealthy prior owners were there when it was presented in 1937. But 22 years later, by the time I was a student at Wilkes in 1959, tens of thousands of students' roughshod feet had left behind them irretrievable tons of dirt ground into the very molecules of what had once been the Conynghams' white terrazzo floor. Pickering Hall, where I had classes, has long been torn down. One of the great things about Wilkes at that time was the Commons, where we ate on the first and second floors of the Kirby carriage house. The Commons must stand, in my mind and in the minds of students at that time, as a kind of *Fantasy Island*, though that would be an anachronism, because *Fantasy Island* hadn't yet lighted a television screen anywhere.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:46:53](#)):

Pardon me? Was it a Kirby or Chase.

Robert Bomboy ([00:46:56](#)):

Kirby.

Robert Bomboy ([00:46:59](#)):

The history, *Founding and Founders*, mentions that the reason Mr. Kirby held back on making a donation was his father's sacred promise to his chauffeur and housekeeper, that they would always have an apartment there in what had been his carriage house. But the *Commons* was wonderful.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:47:52](#)):

In 1968.

Robert Bomboy ([00:47:53](#)):

Yes. Do you agree that it was a really nice place for students?

Christopher Breiseth ([00:47:57](#)):

It was great place that's right.

Robert Bomboy ([00:47:59](#)):

A student had to be a senior to sit on the first floor – perhaps, probationarily, juniors might qualify. The first floor was luxurious dark pine tables and captains' chairs. Freshmen and sophomores got the second floor, and it was mostly Formica-topped- kitchen tables and straight, leatherette-padded dinette chairs. I and my friends wound up always using the second floor. We never graduated down to the luxurious pine tables and chairs.

Robert Bomboy ([00:48:38](#)):

Yet Wilkes was wonderful. It was lovely, particularly in the fall or the late spring. It was wonderful to walk the sidewalks and enjoy the trees. A broad lawn between Kirby and Chase Halls was wonderful. When we were graduated in 1963 we formed up on that lawn and then walked from there to the gymnasium a block farther down South Franklin Street. *Proceeded* - I should probably say *proceeded*, because we were certainly full of ourselves. (One of the characters in my 2007 anti-war novel, *Smart Boys Swimming in the River Styx*, formed up on that lawn after his young wife teased him that he “would never be a bachelor, because he had her.”) Wilkes was lovely, lovely. But in winter it was cold, facing the river. Not as cold as Columbia. Columbia University's streets in the winter were just absolutely awful, because of the concrete canyons, the wind would whistle up Broadway, just like crazy. I described that in two books.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:49:51](#)):

Who do you remember as major professors in your development? Anybody?

Robert Bomboy ([00:49:59](#)):

In the English department, particularly Dr. Edgerton, who was the new chairman the first year that I was an English major. He was my adviser. Dr. Davies had been the English Department's chairman before that. I was never quite sure whether he was British or not, but he was an old man by that time. And he was inspiring. I can't say what inspired me, but I'm not sure that professors did, because there was no real writing course, apart from Advanced Exposition, which I took from Dr. Krueger, who was also the debate coach (at his request, I joined the debate team after his course). And the English Department's focus was entirely on literature. Higher Education has changed over the past 50 years. The whole thing of writing - writing courses, writing programs, creative writing - hadn't come around at that time. Very few colleges had writing courses then.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:51:31](#)):

Bob we've just been joined by Paul Adams as interim president, and who's a student from Wilkes and he's spent virtually his entire adult career has been in administration and Wilkes. And we all felt very relieved and proud that he has the year of interim president prior for our new president, Greg Cant.

Robert Bomboy ([00:52:00](#)):

Hello, Dr. Adams.

Paul Adams ([00:52:03](#)):

Well, please call me Paul. And it's nice to meet you. And I enjoyed reading your piece on the founding and the founders. I thought that was wonderful to read.

Robert Bomboy ([00:52:13](#)):

Thank you, doctor. I appreciate it.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:52:16](#)):

He's speaking from the office in Weckesser Hall, which was Frederick Weckesser's library, which is where Dr. Micheline and I had our offices. So it's fun for me to watch that office background, Paul.

Robert Bomboy ([00:52:37](#)):

Micheline was wonderfully humane, wasn't he?

Christopher Breiseth ([00:52:42](#)):

Yes, he was. And he's the one that really got this project started really. And it was his sense of, of, of his, the history of Wilkes that was so important, his own career, that we should not lose

that history. And it was really Tim while he was still President got us together, the surviving presidents, including Bob Capin. And we decided to pull our thoughts together cause we, when we shared our notes, we realized we had such similar issues to deal with over the years, that there was a kind of Wilkes culture that we needed to come to terms with. And we decided to do a letter to whoever was going to be Tim's successor. It was our best effort to describe the culture of the college and that segwayed of after Pat Leahy came into the, starting to have these oral history interviews, I guess we've done what Joe about 20 of them? Probably about that. This is the first one on zoom. So this opens up a real opportunity for us to reach out to people all over the world, actually, who we can spend the kind of time we're spending with you to build the story. And Suzanna coming in, as she did, has brought a whole new professionalism to the project. And she's discovered both your interviews, as well as your essay, which as I said earlier, I wish I'd read early on because you capture the relationship of Bucknell Jr. And of Wilkes. I mean, it's all your whole essays about Bucknell jr. But the relationships with the community and how consciously Dr. Farley developed the institution and the curriculum in terms of the needs of the community. You're so crystal clear on that issue, which from my perspective continues to be an issue that Wilkes struggles with- the balance between the professional programs, preparing people for real jobs in the world and the liberal arts humanities tradition, which I think it's done as good a job as any institution I know of keeping together the kind of creative tension. Well, let's, let's, let's bounce to the, how, how Farley approached you to write this essay. And what's the relationship of you're doing interviews with these majestic people like Marts and Farley himself. And I guess, well, you've got about seven, seven interviews as yet. How did all that happen?

Robert Bomboy ([00:55:42](#)):

There were more than that, about 15 or so, but unfortunately, I turned them over to Al Groh and John Chwalek as representatives of Wilkes. And after I mentioned the fact, one of the previous chairs of the board became aware that I had done this.

New Speaker ([00:56:13](#)): (mentions hearing disabilities)

[Inaudible]

Robert Bomboy ([00:56:24](#)):

Yes, I have hearing problems. Next to my computer here I have a satirical cartoon picturing four Roman emperors: there's Augustus, Claudius, Aurelius, and TINITUS, a small bent figure with his hand to his ear. Tinitus means ringing and ringing. I'm sorry to throw that in.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:57:11](#)):

I'm a fellow sufferer.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:57:21](#)):

How did Farley got you onto the project?

Tim Gilmour ([00:57:25](#)):

Well, he was actually saying that he had more manuscripts then maybe we have like four, four tapes interviews.

Robert Bomboy ([00:57:35](#)):

In the mid-nineties, Al Groh and John Chwalek came down to Danville, and I gave them the tapes, but they found that I had had taped the interviews on a Webcor tape recorder, which at that time, in 1968, had two speeds: three-and-a-quarter i and two-and-a-half. It was a nice tape recorder, but they found – because of the changes in technology over time - that they couldn't play the tapes. I never heard any more about where those tapes might be. And Suzanna has been looking for those tapes, because there were interviews with Dean Ralston and several others as well.

Christopher Breiseth ([00:58:44](#)):

Did you do one with John Chwalek?

Robert Bomboy ([00:58:44](#)):

I didn't interview John Chwalek, because he wasn't a founder. I was looking at President Farley's interview, and I think it's wonderful: his vision to see far ahead, just what you were talking about: the relationship between the community and the college and the things that he would reach out to do, like enlarging the graduate programs to encourage RCA to bring 300 jobs into the Wyoming Valley at Mountain Top. And then Owens Corning.

Robert Bomboy ([01:00:07](#)):

Dr. Farley said that the people on the board, especially Gilbert McClintock, combined personal integrity with great social conscience. To me, that is the thread to bind all of the Wilkes story together. I think we all can be proud of that. I know I did feel that when I was there, both as a student and later as a faculty member: that there was, underlying in Wilkes, personal integrity and a positive and enduring social conscience.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:01:31](#)):

I think you, you also capture, and I'd like to say a little more about this. You capture the evolution of Bucknell jr. The most difficult first two years, 33, 34 35 establishing even before Farley gets there establishing a relationship with the leadership of the Wilkes-Barre community, that would be crucial to see the institution through those very, very difficult economic days of the mid thirties. And that became a real challenge for Farley when he arrives is how to secure, typically starting with the Bucknell graduates who lived in Wilkes-Barre, the alumni who came on the board, to get a sense of loyalty to this, this fledgling child of Bucknell University and interesting Tim, which I had never heard about before I read Bob's essay was that Penn State was kind of ticked off that people didn't approach them to create a campus in Wilkes-Barre rather than Bucknell. And that's a dimension of this. I've just never encountered.

Tim Gilmour ([01:02:56](#)):

Yeah. you know, Bob can speak to this as well, but Chris, even at that point Penn State was not much of a place. You know, I, they, they didn't start growing until the early sixties, maybe late fifties to be what they are now. They were really Pennsylvania State College and they were, I know they had a large extension operation, but the fact of the matter is it would have been pretty natural for people and, and Bob, you can speak to this, but I think it would be pretty natural for people there in Wilkes-Barre and for the matter of Northeastern Pennsylvania to have a much greater interest to bring Bucknell which as you know, was a sort of an unusual institution that had a pretty strong engineering programs throughout its history as well. So I, I think if I had been in Wilkes-Barre at that time, I would've thought that now was the plum. And I can imagine why Penn State was a little disappointed. Bob I don't know if you want to speak to that, but

Robert Bomboy ([01:04:02](#)):

My grandfather caught rheumatic fever in his fifties, and Dr. Samuel Davenport was his physician. It was in the 1940's, so little could be done for him; he died at 57, but I had a vague childhood memory of Dr. Davenport before I interviewed him in 1967. He was a Bucknell man, and he had a great reputation in the Wyoming Valley. So the fact that he was involved, and the fact that other Bucknell people were involved created a great foundation for Bucknell's establishing the Junior College. And then when Admiral Stark became involved he was such a well-known person, so high in the military, that he became a strong local anchor for the Junior College's board.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:05:37](#)):

If you, partly, the way you write the story and the interview by Marts, he really becomes the critical figure in getting Bucknell jr on its way up as a total outsider, but coming from a Bucknell orientation, he really was the guy. And I would just say in terms of my own relationship to the

institution I spent time with Ann Marts to have, make sure that the trust that he established, that she was in a position to guide either Bucknell or to Wilkes with come to Wilkes. And in the process, the toughest decision I ever had to make in fundraising and my 17 years was to persuade the board to name the building the Arnaud Marts Center for Arnaud Marts before we got the moneu. And the tough people on the board felt, you know, we need the money in hand before we put this name on it. I said, no, we've got to take a chance. And and Marts was very moved by the fact that we named it for him. And she came to the dedication ceremony a lengthy criteria portrait, not in the length, gave the criteria portrain that we had at the time of the dedication, which was to give it up in her own apartment on park Avenue. So I, I just was so moved by reading your interview with him. And of course your interview is the backbone of what you have to say about him, what he said himself to characterizing the issues that he was facing both at Bucknell. And he was facing in Wilkes-Barre. Say something about your time with Marts and the kind of person he was.

Robert Bomboy ([01:07:42](#)):

Yes. I drove down to New York in the winter of 1967. It was odd. He was obviously a wealthy man. He met me in his business offices, but it was like a schoolroom there with a plain wooden desk with nothing on it, as I remember, and bare, straight wooden chairs, a very bare room. They must've used it for interviews. But I was certainly impressed with him.

Robert Bomboy ([01:08:49](#)):

He had integrity. His integrity was so amazingly visible that people could see it in Dr. Marts. Everybody's said that about him; his word could always be trusted. That and his sincerity were apparently what won people over. Top to bottom, there were Admiral Stark, Dr. Marts, and Dr. Farley.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:09:27](#)):

As a Farley? No. as McClintock?

Robert Bomboy ([01:09:41](#)):

There were talks to persuade Allan Kirby to donate his late father's home at the corner of South and River streets. It was difficult, because Allan Kirby was a hard bargainer. In fact, there had been two negotiators before Dr. Marts stepped in, but it was Dr. Marts' integrity and his knowledge that got through, and he began to understand what was holding Allan Kirby back.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:10:36](#)):

By the way, Mr. Kirby's son has just died, who was named as Alan Kirby and was a long time member of the Wilkes board, and very generous with some of the same personality issues that you're describing with his father.

Robert Bomboy ([01:10:52](#)):

It was amazing what the grandfather, F. M. Kirby, had done for the Wyoming Valley: Kirby Park, all kinds of public-spirited gifts - tremendous generosity.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:11:14](#)):

He is a prime ancestor to the Valley really in terms of its institutions.

Robert Bomboy ([01:11:18](#)):

Yes, that's right. The whole group of people who had been associated with the Kirby dime store chain who had built their palatial homes in Wilkes-Barre.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:11:42](#)):

Yeah.

Robert Bomboy ([01:11:43](#)):

~~And, I'm sorry, go ahead.~~

Christopher Breiseth ([01:11:46](#)):

~~I just said yes.~~

Christopher Breiseth ([01:11:47](#)):

No, you know, one of the, one of the things that, I mean, I learned so much from your essay that I literally did not know before, but I probably should have, I'm interested whether Paul Adams knew this, but, but your wonderful characterization of Gilbert McClintock is a man who was foot in the 19th century. And one of the 20th century, I mean, my view of the coal companies and of their families was not a positive one. Right. Even though they were, they were seen as coal bearers, they were coal bearers, but that's your emphasis on his Princeton influence and the kind

of liberal civil rights ECLU background. Did you know that Paul or Jim about McClintock? I mean, that was, that was so revealing to me.. So say a little bit about McClintock from your time with him.

Robert Bomboy ([01:12:56](#)):

I never knew Gilbert McClintock. That information comes from Dr. Farley's interview. He said Mr. McClintock had one foot in the 19th century and one foot in the 20th century. They certainly admired him, and he had a very long tenure as chairman of the board.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:13:24](#)):

21 years.

Robert Bomboy ([01:13:25](#)):

That's a long time.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:13:27](#)):

Did you ever find out who the *Herald Tribune* person was?

Robert Bomboy ([01:13:31](#)):

Yes. Just yesterday.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:13:36](#)):

No kidding

Christopher Breiseth ([01:13:43](#)):

Well, I'm asking him that the man that Farley brought to, to speak his first year there and his local people thought this was too radical.

Robert Bomboy ([01:13:52](#)):

If you look in the book that Al Groh edited after Dr. Farley's death. . . .

Christopher Breiseth ([01:13:59](#)):

Essays of an Educator.

Robert Bomboy ([01:14:02](#)):

That's where you want to look. He names the man, Robert Neville, a well known foreign correspondent for the *Herald Tribune*, and says that the rowdies came from the Knights of Columbus. I thought maybe, because I had worked there myself, that I might know of that man, but apparently he had some very strong opinions and wrote them in the *Tribune*. But you'll see it on page 57 of *Essays of an Educator*.

Paul Adams ([01:15:00](#)):

I was looking for this yesterday and I finally found it. Have you guys all read this book on Dr. Marts. His biography?

Christopher Breiseth ([01:15:09](#)):

No.

New Speaker ([01:15:09](#)):

So there's a whole section in here on Bucknell university, junior college. So I'll try and I'll get that printed and sent off to everybody.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:15:18](#)):

Well to see that would be great.

Robert Bomboy ([01:15:18](#)):

Did you see what a handsome man he was?

Paul Adams ([01:15:25](#)):

I was just leafing through here. The other person who figures prominently also at Bucknell is that Daniel Roberts. Cause he was a big contributor to Bucknell also.

Robert Bomboy ([01:15:34](#)):

He's one of my favorites actually. He had died before I came along, but Daniel Roberts was of so much value to the people who knew him. And some of those inserts I put in about Marts and Roberts sitting on a porch and thinking of other people and what it means to give generously. My wife's stepfather is buried in the Oak Lawn cemetery in Hanover Township. And almost directly across from the area of his grave, on an Island in the cemetery road, there stands a beautiful white mausoleum where the remains of Daniel Roberts lay. There is still a Daniel Roberts fire company at Harvey's Lake. He must've been a wonderful man. And again, he was associated with the Kirby dime stores.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:16:57](#)):

I think in my sense at the institution he is the most important person, Wilkes has nothing to recognize. Yeah. His name appears on nothing he's virtually lost to memory. And if there's anything that came out of this project that might reinforce our sense of the past would be to do something that honors Daniel Roberts and your essay itself could be the basis of all would be well done.

Robert Bomboy ([01:17:30](#)):

Bucknell changed the name of Old Main, one of its largest and most important campus structures, to the Daniel C. Roberts Hall, because he gave the university huge amounts.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:17:43](#)):

So we have a wonderful portrait of Robert s in Weckesser Hall. So there, there is the material presence of him and his image that could be done, something could be done with, but his view with that old coot who had two and a half million dollars just like he had, who didn't know how to share it is just a wonderful, wonderful story. It's really a kind of our, I mean, I, we hired Arnaud Marts' firm when I was there for our capital campaigns. So I got to know the people that actually had been trained by Arnaud Marts who were still in the leadership at that point. And the part of the message that you got from the firm was how you really approach people of wealth to realize what they could accomplish for themselves by being generous. And that, that story on Robert is just classic from a fundraiser's point of view.

Robert Bomboy ([01:18:54](#)):

I got involved at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville with that kind of generosity. I was one of the founders and creators of the Kiwanis Children's Heart Program at Geisinger in the eighties and nineties. I helped the 250 Kiwanis clubs of Pennsylvania to build a statewide relationship that brought children from Third World countries who had been born with terrible heart problems and were dying. We brought them to Geisinger and gave them free open-heart surgery for quite a number of years. During the dozen years that I was involved, we saved the lives of 30 children who otherwise would have died. I met so many Kiwanians statewide who had that Daniel Roberts sense, who really understood what it was to give and reach out, to help other people. The program continued into the mid-nineties and, in all, we saved more than 50 children's lives.

And it changed my life too. Since then, for 15 years I've had a model train program at one of the churches here in Danville. My volunteers and I reached out to children and built a huge model train program through donations of old model trains from the 1940s and earlier, even an operating crossing gate from 1928. Because of our website and regional publicity, people from all over the country donated trains and other model-railroad equipment. The main layout is 22 feet long and 16 feet wide. We have several others, and it's always free; we've never charged anyone. And children of all ages play with it all they want; it's completely hands-on, every Saturday, all year round. We've had more than 12,000 visitors over the years, and it's sole purpose is to give children joy. I've really enjoyed that because of the very sick children I saw when I worked on the Children's Heart Program. Those children were so sick they couldn't smile. I wanted children to smile and be happy; that's why I created our model-train program. When the coronavirus came along last March, I temporarily stopped the train program, but next year when we have a vaccine I'll open it to the children again.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:21:53](#)):

Back to Dr. Farley, give us your portrait of him and your time literally working with him. What, what kind of man was he in your eyes?

Robert Bomboy ([01:22:08](#)):

He was everything that we have said and everything that the people whom I interviewed in the transcriptions said: a man of character. He was a man who combined intelligence and integrity with very strong ideals of social conscience. You can see it in all of the interviews. Once he asked me to do this, by the way, he never coached me other than to provide a list of the people that I might want to interview. He never pushed me or nudged me to do anything. Never: "Do you think you might want to add that?" Never a word; not so much as a word over the two years. That, in itself, was a sign of his integrity.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:23:13](#)):

When did you do your interview with him relative to the other interviews? Was he the first?

Robert Bomboy ([01:23:20](#)):

Probably, but after all these years, I don't know. I'd have to look at the date on his interview, but he probably was the first. Even so, in that interview, you can't see that he was pushing me to do any specific things. And that would have been very uncommon. I've done other books and been involved with other people - institutional folks - and of course their CEOs wanted this or that or whatever. But he didn't. I was totally on my own.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:23:51](#)):

Were there any negatives about Dr. Farley that you encountered, that you had to figure out how to deal with then writing your essay?

Robert Bomboy ([01:24:02](#)):

No, not one really. But remember that I wasn't close to Dr. Farley during those two years.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:24:11](#)):

No, I was, I was wondering more whether as you interviewed people, whether they uh

Robert Bomboy ([01:24:18](#)):

No, they never stepped back and said anything bad. Those things might have been, but I never once heard that from the people I interviewed - nor did I see it in all the board minutes I reviewed - maybe because their own sense of integrity was so strong, but I surmise that they just thought there was no other way to look at him, but as a great man who could see forward and really could see the greater good. Several of them said that in so many words. I really never heard bad things, and you have the tapes to verify that.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:24:51](#)):

It's not, it's not really a negative, but it's something that Dr. Michelini wrestled with in the sessions that we had together and that was that Dr. Farley was very reluctant to create an administrative structure for Wilkes that built the next layer of administration. That he, he trusted the George Ralston's and others to run their area, but he didn't create the kind of deanship level of academic administration. And Dr. Mike kind of was the first to come into that. And he then had to create created divisions. I guess those would have been around while you were I guess what Jim is, is when he's, he comes back.

Jim Rodechko ([01:25:48](#)):

That was in uh around 1971.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:25:51](#)):

Right. Cause it's just before the flood. So that one of the stories is that Admiral Stark, Dr. Mike told us several times, that Admiral Stark finally told him- Gene, you've gotta, someone is running the ship. So if something happens to him there has to be someone that takes over and steers the ship. and that's where Dr. Mike was brought in as a Dean. Uand then he had, as it turned out. He got a, he got an opportunity to go with the national science foundation for a year in Washington. So it put off for another year, where Farley was basically still the central pivot, everything administratively. And then Mike comes back and takes on the Deanship. But I think I've interpreted this as we've talked through these different sessions, it was characteristics of the presidents of universities and colleges of that era that they really, they really were the central figure around which the whole institution revolved and Farley did it for so long that, I mean, he really was the indispensable figure and overcoming that was probably enabled by the flood, which forced Wilkes to discover itself anew and created a new institution really physically as well as personal organizational terms, Tim.

Robert Bomboy ([01:27:41](#)):

At Geisinger, where I later worked, Dr. Henry Hood, the C.E.O. for many years, was the same kind of strong, single-minded-individualist leader. He obeyed the institution's rule of retirement at 70. I wrote Geisinger's award-winning annual reports for more than 15 years, but I didn't perceive that he had built a real next level of people who were going to step up and take over. I think at that time that was typical of Big Business.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:28:21](#)):

His successors had some real problems. My first trip to Danville and Henry Hood gave me a personal tour that lasted several hours. And I, it was a remarkable experience and I got to know I'm terrible on names now, but the guy who was his successor and was very close to us at Wilkes, he had a hell of a time. Because Henry stayed around and like Farley, if Farley hadn't died Mike's job would have been even more difficult. It's just that the grim realities of human institutions, these founders who are so powerful, it's the founder syndrome.

Robert Bomboy ([01:29:09](#)):

That's very perceptive of you, Dr. Breiseth. Yes , Great analysis.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:29:16](#)):

Tim, what questions do you have?

Tim Gilmour ([01:29:21](#)):

So, so Bob by the way, I think you're a relative of that assistant principal I sent you a note about. You look a lot alike, both very good looking men.

Robert Bomboy ([01:29:32](#)):

Oh, it didn't come down to me.

Tim Gilmour ([01:29:37](#)):

I'm trying to put together in my own mind and everybody else may have this well fixed, but you, you came to Wilkes in 63, I think.

Robert Bomboy ([01:29:47](#)):

I was graduated from Wilkes in 1963 I came in 1959.

Tim Gilmour ([01:29:53](#)):

Okay. So we have you from 59 to 63, then you went off to New York and then you came back in what, 68 or something like that?

Robert Bomboy ([01:30:04](#)):

I came back in 1966.

Tim Gilmour ([01:30:09](#)):

And then after that where did you go? How long did you stay at Wilkes?

Robert Bomboy ([01:30:16](#)):

Three years. I went back to-journalism at the Scranton *Tribune*-where I was the Assistant Sunday Editor. And I really didn't like it very much there after being in at *Business Week* magazine. But I edited the Pulitzer Prize winner Harold Brislin, who had won the Pulitzer in 1959, about 10 years before I was there. And that was an experience. He wrote one set of community-based stories a week. I proofread his weekly articles and made the double-truck two-page layout for the Sunday paper. One of the reasons I didn't like it at the Scranton *Tribune* was that it wasn't a well-managed newspaper. Heaps of black dirt – in Scranton at that time it was coal dirt - stood overhead on pipes that were visible under the ceiling. The soot must've been there, without having been cleaned, for 10 or 15 years. Yellowed and curled pages from long-gone news stood on the City Desk spike all the time I was at the *Tribune*. (Some years ago I wrote and published a 210-page family history covering 400 years, and I included a 1930s photo from the newsroom of the old New York *World Telegram* that looked remarkably like the Scranton *Tribune*, complete to the dirty piles of soot on their overhead pipes.) Somewhere along the line while I was there, I saw an advertisement probably in the *Columbia Journalism Review* for a mid-career fellowship at the University of Chicago's Center for Policy Study. I applied and was interviewed down at one of the New York airports. I was one of 10 journalists from around the country who were selected for that program.

Tim Gilmour ([01:32:20](#)):

What year was that, Bob?

Robert Bomboy ([01:32:25](#)):

The fellowship began during the depths of a Chicago winter on January 1, 1972, while my wife, Mary Ellen, was pregnant with our second daughter. When I was at *Business Week* I had been interested intellectually in the idea of simulation with big computers. When I had the fellowship, they didn't tell me specifically what to write or what to think about. At the University of Chicago, I worked with Brian Berry who created the SMSA concept, the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. I found his work interesting, because it neatly dovetailed with my ideas about the power of computer simulation to plan and influence public policy. In my work, I literally researched the public policy future of computer simulation, three years before the first personal computers came on the market, as *put-together kits*. I gave the University of Chicago its first bibliography of computer simulation.

After Chicago, Eddie Williams, who was a University of Chicago vice president and the head of the Center for Policy Studies, recommended me for a second Ford Foundation fellowship, this time in Washington. I took it on his recommendation, and this time I was in a rather larger orbit - one of 10 scholars from around the world who were studying public policy on drug abuse and drug use in America. As a fellow, I decided to look at, first-hand, what America's major newspapers - not just your average community newspaper, but major newspapers across the country - what they actually knew about the public policies about illicit drugs. I interviewed in-person, face-to-face, 30 leading journalists in 20 cities, in 15 states, the same way I had used a tape recorder to question the founders of Bucknell Junior College. And what I found out was that these journalists in Detroit, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston - almost everywhere - were using the propaganda of Washington, rather than going out on the street and digging in to find their answers, as these good men and women would have done covering any other news story. There were only a few exceptions nationwide: James Markham at the *New York Times* was an exception; Alan Parachini at the *Herald Examiner* in Los Angeles was an exception; and there were a few others, in that by doing the things that journalists should do: talking to sources, finding out what was really going on, they knew the difference between drug facts and fiction, between reality and federal drug policy. During President Richard Nixon's 1968 election campaign he sat at his desk in the Oval Office, took out his pen and, with a stroke of the pen, doubled the number of America's heroin addicts from one million to two million, for his political campaign's purposes. On heroin, James Markham of the *New York Times* - one of the nation's best informed reporters - wrote "HEROIN HUNGER DOES NOT A MUGGER MAKE."

One of the big things at that time was the drug bust. "The police would make a bust, and, they'd say that the drug they confiscated was worth a million dollars," noted Alan Parachini at the *Herald Examiner*. "I, as a reporter, could go to a person that I know in the city and ask him the same question and he would tell me that drug bust was probably worth \$200,000." And we're still getting that today. The whole drug issue has been inflated and distorted since as far back as the notorious Harry Anslinger a hundred years ago. Even now what federal authorities say about drugs and drug abuse is accepted as righteous fact. We're pre-conditioned: *It's an evil; it's an evil*. Therefore we will take as fact what anyone in authority says about it.

With a scholar from Brandeis, one of my co-fellows, I wrote a full-page article in the *Dow Jones National Observer*. It was titled: "Addicts Have Rights Too," an out-of-the-ordinary topic. The work I did as a foundation fellow was published and widely distributed to Congress, the media, colleges, and universities. The *Columbia Journalism Review* and the *Chicago*

Journalism Review also ran it. And then Ford gave me a \$40,000 grant to create a program at Columbia University to bring together, for an 11-day seminar there, journalists who were covering the drug problem. And the idea was that they could talk, on the record, with scholars who were looking incisively at what was going on with the drug problem. It was all on the record, and the 20 participating journalists could publish anything that came across the table.

Tim Gilmour ([01:38:47](#)):

So what I was if I can just go back to my, trying to get your timing at Wilkes you, you know, you covered this early period, but I think we'd really be interested. And I think you've given us a lot of good information, but if, if you can think from say 41 when, when your piece on founding and founders, I think stopped to the time that you left Wilkes and any other knowledge you have, do you see the same strands going through all those years? I mean, it's, it's a nice story that you tell we're not surprised, but, but it's nice to have somebody like you who obviously has been many, many places seeing kind of the unique nature of Wilkes and its leadership and great, frankly, a, an ethical strand that that's pretty important. The people we really ought to mind more.

Robert Bomboy ([01:40:21](#)):

Later on, in 1976, I worked with Victor Zorza of the *Washington Post*. He was very famous internationally as a China and Russia specialist. He accurately predicted the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and, for that, he was named journalist-of-the-year in Britain. He had a very special way of looking at the most deeply hidden information; he was a Polish survivor of the Holocaust, and he could read, analyze, and compare technical and military journals in Chinese and Russian. In a time before computers, he wrote in a tiny, very fine, script that made it possible to translate and bring together vast amounts of information like the split of Russian and Chinese communism in the 1970s. He took very fine and incisive notes. The National Endowment for the Humanities wanted to extend his methods to people in the Foreign Service who could learn to use journalistic methods. Victor got a large NEH grant at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, and he hired me to manage it. At the interview, we were about 20 people in a group he had assembled. And, somewhere along the line, I asked Victor if Hopkins was charging him 45% for indirect costs for his office space? And from that, he knew where I had been and what I had done. And he dismissed all the others and hired me because he was amazed that Hopkins was charging him so much in indirect costs.

Tim Gilmour ([01:42:44](#)):

Yeah, that was, that actually is pretty common.

Tim Gilmour ([01:42:58](#)):

Yeah. You had to pay for your space and all the administrators who had to administer your grant, all that kind of stuff.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:43:03](#)):

By the way, you, you, you and Jim were there for the shootout on 42nd street, but I just missed you by one year at the University of Chicago, where I was in a special postgraduate program in 1970 and 71 with John O'Franklin in black studies in the history department. Where do you, where did you live when you were at Chicago, were you in Hyde Park itself?

Robert Bomboy ([01:43:30](#)):

Yes. Hyde Park. We had a basement apartment that had something like five chain locks on the door. The university had found it, long-distance, for us, and it was on Harper Avenue - two blocks from the lake - the street where the novelist Saul Bellow situated his character, Herzog. It was quite a place: Someone was murdered in the vestibule of the apartment house while we were there. The place was filthy when we came in; and my wife, who was pregnant, hired a woman to spend all day scrubbing everything, floor to ceiling.

Tim Gilmour ([01:44:41](#)):

Well, are there any other things Bob, that you haven't said about Farley, that, that we should know? I mean, one of the great things that you've given us is this view of him that we really, really didn't have before. But are there any things that you'd want to add,

Robert Bomboy ([01:45:06](#)):

Remember that he and I weren't close? He did me a great favor in giving me the position. I discovered that I had a second love and that was teaching. And I was actually very, very good at it. I was a very good college teacher, because I knew exactly, from the professional side, how students could learn to write really well. There was no Mickey Mouse. People who have never written, come into college and become professors. Their background is literature, and they have never written anything professionally for publication. They teach composition courses, and, without knowing it, they teach students to write backwards. Passive writing is backwards writing. I got my understanding of that from the book, the *Art of Plain Talk*, with which you're probably familiar. But I really got the point in the 1980s at a cost of \$3,000, when an editor at *Parade Magazine* (circulation 20 million) killed a \$3,000 article of mine because it was passive.

I had another thought: I'm fairly sure that all the people in the interviews were Republicans. [ed: And the reason was that the Republican Party, in the old days of the 20th century, embraced and lived by a strict code of integrity that had been the Republican code of their class, the code of their fathers and grandfathers. Leaders such as Dr. Homer Price Rainey, Dr. Arnaud Marts, Admiral Stark and Dr. Farley in the times that I profiled in *Founding and Founders* grew up with and resolutely believed in that code. They believed in an essential duty to help people. They would have supported a federal minimum wage, a social safety net, expansions of immigration

quotas, Social Security, unemployment insurance, and universal health care. They believed in science and thoroughgoing education for Americans of every class. They dedicated their lives to higher education, as their work for the Bucknell Junior College and its expansion to Wilkes attested. Writing in the *New Yorker* last May 11th, the wonderful- reporter Owen Osnos, whose father was my classmate in the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia, aptly described this Republican philosophy. He grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, arguably the most Republican of any Republican town in America. I recommend the article as a definition and portrayal of Republicanism in the 20th and 21st centuries: its title was, “How Greenwich Republicans Learned to Love Trump.”]

Christopher Breiseth ([01:47:14](#)):

Some of the people that we mentioned along the way you would have experienced at least as a student and that Coach George Ralston.

Robert Bomboy ([01:47:26](#)):

Yes. One of the missing tape-recorded interviews was with Dean George Ralston.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:47:34](#)):

Tell us your view of George Ralston.

Robert Bomboy ([01:47:41](#)):

He was boisterous, totally enthusiastic. One of the first things I remember, coming to Wilkes, was Dean Ralston as a songleader at the assemblies, encouraging us to get up and sing with all our hearts.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:47:51](#)):

He would always say, make a joyful noise, make a joyful noise.

Robert Bomboy ([01:48:01](#)):

You know, I'm glad you remembered that.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:48:09](#)):

Um it was the Wilkes Cheer. He would run along give W I L K E S.

Robert Bomboy ([01:48:09](#)):

That must've been at the football games.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:48:20](#)):

It was the rallies too, by Chase Hall and Kirby when we had them. Anyway, I interrupted you. I'm sorry.

Robert Bomboy ([01:48:27](#)):

No, not at all. But you have to realize that the reason I wasn't so connected with Wilkes is that I was working 24 to 30 hours a week. I never saw a football game, because I worked 12 hours every Saturday all those years at the Acme store in order to pay for my college education. So that's reflected in how little I knew about campus life. And I was a day student. I wasn't living in a dorm. The only thing I remember about the dorms was that Gore Hall was the Animal House.

Paul Adams ([01:49:11](#)):

I always RA of Gore hall.

Robert Bomboy ([01:49:14](#)):

Pardon me? You were?-So you were responsible! (laughing)

Paul Adams ([01:49:17](#)):

In 1976 though.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:49:21](#)):

Was that still true when you were there Paul?

Paul Adams ([01:49:24](#)):

Oh, it wasn't the worst of places, but it wasn't the, the most studios of places either. It probably had the odor of cannabis quite a bit back then.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:49:41](#)):

We're tying into to Bob's specialty now. Yeah. On the drug field.

Paul Adams ([01:49:46](#)):

I going to ask -I wanted to try and tie several things together, let's tie the world of journalism. Chris has worked with FDR in something we talked about earlier about Dr. Farley and his is his not planting the seeds for administrative structure. And then I'm reminded of Walter Lippmann. [inaudible] In talking about Roosevelt after he died, that the final test of a leader is that he leaves behind in other men, the conviction and the will to carry on. And I'm interested to talk a little bit about, you know, what Dr. Farley inspired in everybody that came after. Because he didn't create the necessarily the infrastructure, but it would seem that he created the inspiration for people to carry on his mission. I was just curious if, if there was anything.

Robert Bomboy ([01:50:45](#)):

I agree with that a hundred percent; he created the inspiration for what I said before. And Walter Lippmann, by the way, I read every day in the *Herald Tribune*. He was such a great writer and a decent political philosopher. And I think now he's all but forgotten.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:51:12](#)):

Hmm. Oh, I think, I think, well, maybe it's just cause of my age. I think Lippmann is still someone that is highly regarded. Jim, would you say this as a historian on American popular culture?

Jim Rodechko ([01:51:28](#)):

Yes. And by the way, I read a Walter Lippmann too, from the Herald Tribune.

Robert Bomboy ([01:51:39](#)):

We have a lot in common.

Jim Rodechko ([01:51:42](#)):

Yes. I'm a model railroad fan too.

Robert Bomboy ([01:51:45](#)):

Are you really? You ought to come and visit my model-railroad for the children.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:51:49](#)):

Well, I have to add one other common point is that I worked for eight years at the FDR library in Hyde Park, New York. And one of the things that I discovered there while we were making a film was Adolf Berle did a lot of biography of, I mean, he, he facilitated of Nelson Rockefeller, which has never been published. And I tried to get Nelson's daughter one night at an event. And I told her about this. Cause we, I, I quote got the filmmaker to quote from Rockefeller's comments remembering as Roosevelt's body was being taken out of the white house, not to go to high park. Rockefeller commented on what a loss, this was to the world that there was, there was a loss of a moral center that was going to be required after the war. And what I discovered in the process that Berle was extremely close to the Rockefeller family and to Nelson and his kids and his daughter said, Oh, we called him uncle Adolph.

Robert Bomboy ([01:53:11](#)):

That's an odd thing to call somebody in that period.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:53:17](#)):

But I just think maybe Lippmann's, his name is forgotten, but Adolf Burtley's name is forgotten, too, but not to anyone that knows anything about the new deal. I'm very involved with the career Francis Perkins. Whom I knew, she lived with us at Cornell for five years. At the Telluride house at Cornell. So we, we had a lot of time together. She and I put on the seminar with Henry Wallace and Jim Farley. So I'm, as, as Tim indicated, I'm kind of invested in the new deal, but in your comments about the Republican nature, I, one little experience of mine at, at Wilkes was that we had a Congressman named Paul Kanjorski and I don't know how much you from your central Pennsylvania perspective knew about him.

Robert Bomboy ([01:54:15](#)):

I once put on a press conference for him at Geisinger Medical Center.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:54:15](#)):

He was very controversial and he was, and he was, his ideas were often very wild and he was not about above a little bit of self dealing, but he took on an addition to the levy structure, which is there now really should be called Kanjorski Point because without his indefatigable effort that would never have been accomplished, I think. But Paul wanted me to get involved with something called the earth conservancy. Which is to take on the old coal lane of 70,000 acres, at the blue coal company, which I did and became the chairman of the board and worked through the politics of getting support locally and in the porous process of, of agreeing to Kanjorski to take this on. I went to my two keyboard members, Frank Henry and Gene Roth, both of whom were Republicans. Roth, a more ardent Republican Frank Henry, who was by the way, he was very involved with Geisinger and with Henry Hood. And I said, do you guys really want me to do this? I said, this is for a college president to take this on. I mean, we thought that Hoffa's body was probably buried down a mine shaft.

Robert Bomboy ([01:55:50](#)):

That very well may be. If it's not under Giants Stadium.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:55:53](#)):

And there was coal being taken up at night illegally. There was 70,000 acres, a lot of acreage; it was all strip-mining at that point. And their answer was in terms of the tradition of Wilkes presidents. If you don't do it, it'll never happen. We will never get access to that land, which was crucial for the Southern part of Luzerne County. So I just, it's very much in the tradition that you've been talking about of the Republicans of that era. I mean, they were guys of incredible integrity, great social purpose, sense of the community, community's interests. We didn't agree on anything politically, but we shared I'm just as close to those two guys as I've been to any two people in my professional life. So I wasn't that close to Alan Kirby, young Alan Kirby, but we got the center for free enterprise and entrepreneurship as a way of honoring his father, whom you capture in your, between the interviews and your essay. He was not a popular man in Wilkes-Barre. And part of it was because cause he was having an affair with somebody, very prominent, the wife of somebody, very prominent. And this started getting up and they decided to move to Morristown to preserve his marriage and preserve his reputation. But he had a very uneasy relationship with Wilkes-Barre. Which, the fact that he gave the building to me, it was a sign of singles, singular success by Farley and others. And I just didn't know the whole history of how that building fell into our hands. By the way on dates. You've got a critical date there December 2nd 41. Yes. That's the point now on the plaque on the building, it shows that came to Wilkes on the 6th of December, the day before Pearl Harbor. And I'm interested in what the, the difference between that those few days are and.

Robert Bomboy ([01:58:10](#)):

I was referencing the Board of Trustees' minutes.

Christopher Breiseth ([01:58:16](#)):

So maybe the 6th of December was the dedication ceremony.

Robert Bomboy ([01:58:22](#)):

Yes. Something like that. I think the board accepted the building, but then the ceremony was a few days later.

Robert Bomboy ([01:58:33](#)):

I actually thought, by the way, that was a good moment to conclude the history. Because within five days, the world would turn upside down: and also the world - both of Bucknell Junior College, which would become Wilkes, and the world of the people who had founded the college and had relied on it, would be no more. Historians talk about the First World War and the changes that came from that. But the Second World War was probably even more important, at least to our time.

You mentioned Blue Coal. I have a large model railroad display in my basement. One side of it goes through two rooms, with tunnels for the trains. And on that side of the display is a model of the Blue Coal breaker that stood so prominently in Ashley, with its big Blue Coal sign. And one of the cars standing next to the breaker is a Blue Coal hopper car, heaped up with blue coal, of course.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:00:16](#)):

Of course. But one of the, one of the major blue coal stockholders this before they went bankrupt, was James Hoffa. Really? The Hoffa story is, in fact, part of the blue coal land. Uand,uI was at a cocktail party with Richard Ross who was president of first Eastern bank. And Tim Kiley had been the president's there before. Kiley was there. And as I was about to take on the earth Conservancy responsibility, share this board and put it together. I sent to Tom Kiley. Tom, tell me about Jimmy Hoffa. What's the connection? Tom, just very openly indicated that Durkin and I don't remember Durkin's first name was in the hospital. And when he, he came out of the hospital without being released, he came out on his own and they had a party, a cocktail

party, which Tom Kiley was at, which was the day that Hoffa was killed. And Durkin was of course the major blue coal guy. And he then went back in the hospital for the party. So Kiley told me this, but I said, what's the connection with Jimmy Hoffa? So I don't know if you've read the book, I heard you paint houses, which was the basis of the, of the recent movie. But there is that whole mafia connection, which includes your native town of Kingston.

Robert Bomboy ([02:02:28](#)):

Yes, certainly.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:02:29](#)):

That's where Frank Buffalino lived.

Robert Bomboy ([02:02:33](#)):

He lived two houses over from my sister-in-law.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:02:39](#)):

Okay. We are connected in many, many ways.

Robert Bomboy ([02:02:41](#)):

Yes it goes round and round

Christopher Breiseth ([02:02:50](#)):

You ended up teaching at Lycoming- tell us a little about that.

Robert Bomboy ([02:02:53](#)):

I was teaching there full-time. It was the last college or university at which I taught before I retired in 2003. And I enjoyed it very much. I gave out cookies halfway through each lecture, because I was in my sixties by then and I probably looked more grandpa than anything else. They were long three-hour evening classes, and at the break halfway through, I would bring out a heaping bowl of cookies. I brought out macaroons and all kinds of good assorted cookies. I would hand it around and, by the time I came back from the break, the cookies were all gone. I imagine that some of the girls added some pounds along the way, and they're probably kicking me right now for their weight gains. But the cookies renewed their energy late in the evening and held their attention.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:03:56](#)):

Who was president while you were there?

Robert Bomboy ([02:03:58](#)):

I'm sorry. As Hercule Poirot might have said, you know, those little gray cells are not what they once were. And yet I had a couple of private dinners with him.

Jim Rodechko ([02:04:20](#)):

Bob, Can I ask you a question? Have you been at Wilkes recently?

Robert Bomboy ([02:04:26](#)):

No.

Jim Rodechko ([02:04:27](#)):

Have you seen the school?

Robert Bomboy ([02:04:27](#)):

No, I'm 65 miles away from you.

Jim Rodechko ([02:04:34](#)):

Okay. When was your last view of Wilkes?

Robert Bomboy ([02:04:41](#)):

My granddaughter got her nursing degree there three years ago. It was in Dart Hall, the Dorothy Dickson Dart Center; that corner of the campus was all I've seen, but I have seen a wonderful brochure that pictures, graphically, all of the buildings. I might have to have a seeing-eye dog to get around the campus. *It's amazing!*

By the way, it seems to me that it was Mrs. Dart who called and asked me about the interviews I had done for Dr. Farley. I told her that I had done an oral history and it was she who arranged for Al Groh and John Chwalek to come down to Danville and get the tapes.

Jim Rodechko ([02:05:13](#)):

By the way, my grandson is currently about to graduate from Wilkes.

Robert Bomboy ([02:05:17](#)):

That's nice. You're keeping it in the family.

Jim Rodechko ([02:05:25](#)):

Yes ,yes.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:05:25](#)):

One of the things your essay does is to really indicate that potency of those early real estate transactions, if you can call them that to get those first couple of buildings. And what was involved from Marts' part as a fundraiser, but with alternate responsibilities as President of Bucknell to get a campus going and maneuvering one of these top guys with these families that had the property. That was so, I mean, you look back at what has become of Wilkes. Those were absolutely crucial. I mean, that was the, that was where the embryo was created.

Robert Bomboy ([02:06:17](#)):

And Marts knew about it almost immediately upon taking over as president of the junior college - the university and the junior college —he declared that the junior college would never go anywhere without getting out of rented buildings —that there had to be a campus, and he began to look toward permanent properties.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:06:42](#)):

Well, you, you mentioned Andrew Sordoni, the Senator. What, what is your sense of what he contributed to the whole mix in the thirties?

Robert Bomboy ([02:06:57](#)):

One, he was a state senator with political power. Two, he was the head of a big construction company and got bigger and bigger and bigger over the years. And he was a very social person. He had a beautiful home at Harvey's Lake. He was an influencer and could move things for Marts or later Gene Farley.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:07:36](#)):

I'm very interested in ethnic and racial history. And one of the things that I got onto with Bucknell Junior very early was with this advisory board. I did not realize it had 14 people on it until I read what you put. It started with a critical five that you mentioned the, the ethnic and racial, well, particularly religious mix of that group and the gender mix in your five... There are no women, but there were women in that group of 14. I think we had Evans and Dorothy Dickson Dart were part of that. For 1937, that was absolutely extraordinary. You had two Jews, you had a rabbi and you had a department store owner and you had Polish doctor, Dr. Koshin. You had the first Italian State Senator in the United States, Senator Sordoni, plus all these wasps. UI mean, it was, it's so reflected Dr. Farley's expansive view of, of our separate tribes of at a time when we were, we were antisemitic in this country, was, as was Europe with a vengeance, but that commitment to bring all those elements to the community, and to not become at all sectarian in an area that was, it was over 80%. Roman Catholic was, you know, a very critical part of the mix that Farley was played to, or, or helped to shape. We haven't talked about the Catholic church at all. what is, what is your own sense of Bucknell Junior's relationship to the existing Roman Catholic power in the diocese of Scranton?

Robert Bomboy ([02:09:40](#)):

I'm sad to say that I never really thought about it one way or the other. I don't remember there being religious services on campus, but of course you remember I was working; I wasn't living on campus.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:10:06](#)):

So I think he steered away from religious services. I'm thinking that this secular commitment with him was very serious.

Robert Bomboy ([02:10:17](#)):

Yes. And no sororities other than Theta Delta Rho for women. No fraternities. That was another serious commitment.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:10:34](#)):

well, if we got into this next decade, which is not part of your story we've, we've reviewed over and over in these interviews is that King's college really is created to save Catholic boys from what becomes Wilkes college. So the relationship with the Catholic diocese was it was very important and it's, it's been a pretty much a healthy competitive one before I came, they'd cease playing football with each other, but the football games before I got there, Jim, you would have experienced, this were really intense rivalries. And then by the very end of my time, they were reestablished. And so I don't know Tim, whether you'd say that was during the year of...

Jim Rodechko ([02:11:31](#)):

Kings didn't have a football team for many years.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:11:31](#)):

Right, that was when I came in, it stopped, but it started up before I left.

Jim Rodechko ([02:11:41](#)):

I think that you were there for the first Kings-Wilkes football game at least the first couple.

Tim Gilmour ([02:11:49](#)):

You started that... The mayor's trophy. And Gene Roth told me repeatedly that the only way I would lose my job is to lost to Kings.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:12:01](#)):

Haha, very good. Well, Bob, this has been wonderful. What, what other words do you have to share with us? And I hope we can stay in touch.

Robert Bomboy ([02:12:17](#)):

For sure.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:12:18](#)):

I mean, your life is so rich and experienced. I guess, one of things that would ask is how much given the fact that you were working at the act and didn't have much time for student life, how much has the Wilkes label been on you as you've pursued your, your career. I mean have you thought of yourself as a Wilkes product or, or not?

Robert Bomboy ([02:12:46](#)):

Yes, certainly. Although I matriculated as a Wilkes student, I might've been the poster boy for a Bucknell Junior College person. I was from the Wyoming Valley. I came from a working-class family. I was a day-student; I worked my way through college. All of those things were the characteristics that the founders originally were looking for. I had a small scholarship that enabled me to get through college. All of those things represented the kind of person that the Bucknell founders created the college to reach. And of course there were thousands like me, particularly before and after I was there. I might ask you folks, what the percentage of day-students versus dorm students is now, roughly. Do you know?

Jim Rodechko ([02:14:13](#)):

It was a little over 50% dorm student last time I heard.

Tim Gilmour ([02:14:20](#)):

It's further complicated by the fact that a good number of the non-dorm students are actually students who live in off campus housing. So I, I don't have that number exactly for you. But I think we'd be talking maybe a max of 15% of true community. Of true, true commuters. Um now the other thing though, and I think this is the important point is that Wilkes continues to serve a large number of first what we call first generation students like yourself. And we have a very high number of students or percentage of students and number who are on financial pell grant aid. And the guy who's not sitting there now, who, by the way, one, he to tell you that he, he thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and we hope we'll be able to get back with you again once some questions come because you obviously have a really, really rich knowledge, but anyway

Paul put together a remarkable program for students who basically have some academic shortcomings and has a, they, they really do help them get into college life and help them do well. So it's still much the same kind of institution that you, you remember.

Robert Bomboy ([02:15:58](#)):

It's wonderful to think of that; it's really a rather large college/university at this point. In my time Dr. Farley thought of it, or wanted to call it, a “semi-versity.”

Tim Gilmour ([02:16:06](#)):

Yeah. the th the thing that strikes me, and I think it's struck Chris is the clarity really of Gene Farley's vision. You can see it among those early people. I mean, the interview with Arnaud Marts, I mean, he, he had Farley's vision. He could tell you what it was, uh all those many years later. Well, I think we all all see that vision and really are kind of struck by the fact that that mission is, is something that's really kind of special. And, and all of us were impacted by that.

Robert Bomboy ([02:16:48](#)):

I thought of something that I'd like to add, and that is the line from Dr. Farley's interview, where he's talking about rebuilding the barn in Beaumont that they put so much effort into and loved so much. He recalled that at one point he was up on the roof putting shingles on, and he had torn the seat out of his pants. And he said there were two “old maiden ladies” who came out to see what was going on. And he called down to them, saying, “I really can't come down now because I lost my seat.” And he said, “I didn't think the virgin ladies, the maiden ladies, would want me to do that; they'd be embarrassed by that.” And, by contrast, in another of the interviews, readers can see that one of the “maiden ladies” was Mrs. Mildred Hicks, who was the editor of the *Dallas Post* and whose children had gone to dancing school and other programs with Eleanor Farley's children. They knew each other in that way and were of comparable ages. Mrs. Hicks was a fine journalist a straightforward woman, by the way, with a very good sense of humor. I interviewed her, and readers can see the contrast in her recounting of the scene, and Dr. Farley's.

Tim Gilmour ([02:18:40](#)):

Yeah.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:18:41](#)):

We didn't get it into the Dallas post tower I gathered. But one observation that one reality it's also an observation is that the board, as it took shape from the advisory committee with the exception

of marts and stark was all local people. And it was meant to be that way. It was to, to build that, even when I came in 1984, it was still overwhelmingly a local board, and it became part of what I worked on, obviously with the leadership of the board to, to bring in people outside. Both alumni, which increasingly, I think Tim did a lot to bring more key alumni people on the board, but also people who were not connected to Wilkes previously. And I, I brought a couple of those folks on that were really very, very important, but one of the observations that you make with it, it comes through your story is that this local ward was not very involved in the intellectual curricular issues early on. That those was really were Dr. Farley and, and the faculty. and I think that, and I'm sorry, Paul is not here because Paul is about to do a citation for Essy Davidowitz, who is the key recipient of the president's award this year. And she's a very bad shape physically, but she was the one exception of the local board when I first came on, except for the chair woman, Patty Davies, who I would say was really deeply into the curricular issues. Otherwise the board was much more like Arnaud Marts was. Concerned about making, getting the money to support, how do we expand the campus? how are the student discipline problems in handled by student development or all those kinds of issues. But the intellectual development of the campus and these strategic decisions that Farley made in response to community needs, like the RCA decision, was really not that influenced intellectually by the board. They were very important to support it and to give the go ahead, um, and I, I don't know Tim that the board as you know, it, as you inherited it and then reshaped it, whether that continued to be a case or not?

Tim Gilmour ([02:21:48](#)):

Uh no. They did not intellectually direct it. We really tried to keep them at a strategic level. And in fact, I think you would say that they were reluctant to get into academic matters because I really wanted them to push us on assessment harder than they did. I felt like I was always pushing the assessment, and, you know, I kept saying to them when we presented the sort of the annual report or performance of the institution that you know, come on and quietly they pushed me a little bit on this and they wouldn't do it. I mean, they ask the question obviously, but there was no real push. So they stayed away that the other thing was that there was a little bit too much in my view, localism and the board, even when I got there. So there were things that had to do with either relationships or with a community that weren't healthy that really wanted to fend off. And that's one of the reasons why we got people from out of town more and more. And then we obviously were looking for people at strong giving capability, and we went after alumni who, who had that capability and we had some of course so you know. You're always trying to build a board that will support you, ask you the tough questions and then give you money. That that would be the general routine, I think. And that board I think you know, did a pretty good job. I talked to friends who have had boards, who it was a mess and this was, I could never characterize our board situation as a mess.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:23:50](#)):

No, I think, and they, you know, they came through after the flood of 72 in an impressive way.

Tim Gilmour ([02:24:01](#)):

And then you have people like Gene Roth, you know, who just knew uh all of us Frank Henry was very good to all of us, even though he wasn't a Wilkes alum. And then for me, the Sordonis were a huge assistance all the way up and down the line.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:24:22](#)):

One other point that I think comes through startlingly clear that we've talked about before, but boy, do you give it emphasis is that 1959 was to use a word that's being used now about our politics, an inflection year. I mean, that is when Farley gets RCA to come. And that spawns the kind of corporate development for the region that you so well delineate. The Owens Corning emphasis is one. It was lost on me, the direct connection between that and RCA coming as fascinating. But the commitment to go to the master's level in engineering when we didn't even have the bachelor's level was an example of Farley as leader responding to a regional need, which is absolutely atypical for a liberal arts institution. And it's just, and at the same time in the same year, that's when the Wilkes Ottoman program begins because that's the year that the assessment is made of the, of the medical community in the Northeastern Pennsylvania. When they discovered that the median age is something like 57 or 58 of the doctors, they say, where are we going to be in 20 years? And so we then started making major commitments on healthcare curriculum. So at the same time, around 1959, this institution takes a big jump up from where it had been in the postwar consolidation period as a four year college. And it really begins the takes, the steps that make it finally a university. So I just think you, you provide in Farley's own description of what he was responding to in 59. And I don't think this comes through, and this is the educator as well, a, an inflection point commitment institution, which the board went along with it. It was a major commitment, and this is by the way, maybe some essays of educator, in the editing of the transcript, I assume those are Farley's own editings. So he puts in Walter carpenter's name. Do we know who the other two anonymous donors are of major gifts, which, which he refers to?

Robert Bomboy ([02:27:04](#)):

I don't know.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:27:06](#)):

Jim, did you pick that up?

Jim Rodechko ([02:27:08](#)):

No, I just thought it was anonymous

Christopher Breiseth ([02:27:10](#)):

I have no idea who that could have been and nor the scale of those gifts. Whether Daniel Roberts was in that category or not. But Walter Carpenter. I mean, we're kind of generally talking about that very publicly now. I think also there should be public recognition of him on campus, along with Daniel Roberts. I mean, I think his gifts and honoring Harold Stark. This is probably historian's point of view. That's a very important anchor to be nautical. An anchor for, for Wilkes that we don't make visible and conscience.

Tim Gilmour ([02:28:03](#)):

But you know, it pretty much clarifies the need for a better history than we have right now. You know, exactly how I think we're doing a pretty good job of getting some oral comments. And Bob, I just I'm going to have to go, but I don't want to go. And I think this has been just an incredible opportunity and I have a feeling that this small group will, which was, is going to continue and do some other things. I have a feeling that we will be back with you if you will bear with us because I'm sure we're going to have some questions.

Robert Bomboy ([02:28:49](#)):

Thank you for your time with me. I'd always be glad to help. I wonder if I might ask you a question and it has to do with where each of you is right now. I mean, what city or locale?

Christopher Breiseth ([02:29:04](#)):

I was going to suggest Suzanna's back with us we ask that you, that you share with Bob, all of our contact information, email, telephone numbers, our physical addresses, so that at your initiative, Bob, you can be in touch with us. We know how to be in touch with you. I'm in Ticonderoga, New York and the Adirondacks.

Jim Rodechko ([02:29:32](#)):

I don't live very far from you, Bob where 80 and 81 cross each other.

Robert Bomboy ([02:29:44](#)):

I know right where it is.

Jim Rodechko ([02:29:45](#)):

Yeah. Yup. We could have coffee sometime.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:29:50](#)):

He's at the Keystone of the Keystone State. Intersection of 80 and 81.

Robert Bomboy ([02:30:02](#)):

Right. Those are great restaurants on top of that hill of course.

Tim Gilmour ([02:30:07](#)):

We even eat together sometimes up there top of the eighties.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:30:14](#)):

And Tim tell, tell Bob where you are now.

Tim Gilmour ([02:30:17](#)):

I am the witness protection program, Bob.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:30:19](#)):

So, anywhere between Kansas city and Virginia, Virginia.

Tim Gilmour ([02:30:29](#)):

Now I'm in Richmond, Richmond.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:30:31](#)):

And Suzanna is on the campus.

Suzanna Calev ([02:30:36](#)):

I am at Wilkes.

Tim Gilmour ([02:30:36](#)):

Thank you so much.

Robert Bomboy ([02:30:44](#)):

I really appreciate it.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:30:45](#)):

Well, so do we. For discovering the gems that you gave to the college years and years and years ago. Without Suzanna's hunting, this never would have happened.

Tim Gilmour ([02:30:58](#)):

Well by the way, I should let you know that this is and Suzanna has some experience with this, but this is our first time actually recording one of these sessions. It's as Chris said, it's probably our first zoom session, but this has been recorded. And the interesting thing, if we did it right, is that zoom does a transcript of the discussion. And if you'd like a copy and we figure out how to mine, this thing, which we should would you be interested in a copy of it?

Robert Bomboy ([02:31:33](#)):

I certainly would, thank you. Yes. We can top off all of this work.

Tim Gilmour ([02:31:39](#)):

Yeah. And I, I think we should stick with you because you know, I, I would just, I would just reemphasize that I wish I had read the materials that we have from you. As I began my presidency,

Robert Bomboy ([02:31:54](#)):

It's odd that it was lost for such a long time. Maybe I could ask Suzanna where she found it. I see it's called a folder.

Suzanna Calev ([02:32:07](#)):

So Harold Cox, he's the one that really collected all of these materials but unfortunately, they haven't been accessible for a long time. I came across a random box on a shelf in the Archives this spring with a bunch of folders and binders with the tabs of these different interviews. And when I found it, I was like, wow, I should probably digitize these interviews. But I didn't really find it until going through these boxes. It's been a process since there's a huge backlog, but I'm getting through it slowly and with the help of students.

Robert Bomboy ([02:32:56](#)):

I am glad to know it had still had been preserved all these years.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:33:03](#)):

While you were not on Suzanna, he talked about the interviews that are not what you have not discovered that he recorded. And did we find those tapes and that we're not able to do it cause we don't have the equipment or are those tapes lost?

Suzanna Calev ([02:33:20](#)):

I thought Paul actually had copies of those tapes, but they were very hard to transcribe. So I can maybe reach out to Paul and see which ones he has and maybe we can get them. The technology has advanced so much that it's possible we can get that transcribed, but you actually had them transcribed already.

Robert Bomboy ([02:33:43](#)):

I have since found the tape recorder on which they were recorded, which has the — what is it? - three-and-a-half and two-and-a-half speeds, which means that if somebody can find the tapes, I could transcribe them.

Tim Gilmour ([02:35:00](#)):

Yeah. They are fast. Folks I'm going to have to go.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:35:06](#)):

Everybody, but particularly you, Bob, thank you for your time and your, your life story and we will, we will be in touch.

Robert Bomboy ([02:35:17](#)):

Thank you very much, all, I appreciate it.

Christopher Breiseth ([02:35:20](#)):

Thank you, Suzanna. Thank you.

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