Macon Memories Oral History Project

Pat Denti and Elsa Falls

April 10, 2008

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LW: I’m Lynda Wright. Today is April 10, 2008, and this is Macon Memories Oral History Project at Randolph-Macon College. Today I’m here with Professor Pat Denti and Professor Elsa Falls.

PD: I’m Pat Denti. I came to Randolph-Macon in 1975, to the biology department, and I was here until I retired in 2004.

EF: I’m Elsa Falls. I also was in the biology department, and actually still am, at least part-time. I came to Randolph-Macon in 1978 and retired same time Pat did, 2004. I stayed out one year, and have been back on a part-time basis since then, teaching some of my favorite courses. So Pat and I actually have a lot in common, and we’ll try to bring that out, our commonality, if that’s a good word, as we go through the interview.

But Pat, I wanted to start by, since you were here earlier than I, to ask you how you came to be at Randolph-Macon.

PD: It was just sort of a bolt out of the blue. My husband was in graduate school, I had kept children for two years and decided, we really need a little bit more money than this, and so I sort of put the word out that I was looking, and Wallace Martin from the biology department called and said, “We’re looking for someone to teach anatomy, would you be interested?” I said, “Sure!” So I came up and interviewed and met Howard Davis, who was the dean at the time, and they offered me the job and 28 years later I was still here.

EF: Well, actually, the person who first called me was actually Pat. I had gotten, finished my master’s degree at the University of Richmond in biology in 1972, and had been teaching as an adjunct either at the University of Richmond or J. Sargeant Reynolds since 1972. And trying to combine raising a family with teaching is essentially what I was doing. So I got this call from Pat Dimenti that indicated that they were looking for somebody to teach invertebrate zoology. So I thought, “Well, why not?” And the funny thing was, when I came up to Randolph-Macon to meet Wallace Martin, who was chair of the biology department at that point in time, I couldn’t find the college. And so I stopped on Route 54 and asked somebody, “Where’s Randolph-
Macon College?” and they looked at me like I had lost my mind, and so I was able to find it. And I remember that first day I met Wallace, and then he introduced me to the other person I met that day, who was Bruce King, who was at Randolph-Macon.

PD: Bruce came the same year that I did.

EF: Okay. And let’s see, who else was here?

PD: McClurkin, Mac McClurkin was here. That may be all.

EF: Yeah, because Art Conway and Barry Knisley came a couple years after I came, I believe. Those were the next two that were added to the department.

PD: And then Russ Shea. And there were some short-term people in between. I’ll say one thing, though. I remember before I came up here, I had my husband drive me up so that I would know where the college was. So I didn’t have the problem that you did.

EF: Right. Well, I don’t know, did you start part-time, or did you start as a full-time?

PD: No, I started full time. Actually, they said, “You can go part-time or full-time,” and I said, “Well, it’s not to my advantage unless I go full-time,” so they said, “Okay.” Very informal, not at all like it has gotten to be, with national searches and so forth. And I think for a long time, even after I came, people were added in the same way, just call up and say “Would you be interested? Come on up.”

EF: Yeah. Well actually when I started it was part-time, and once I was here, they needed someone in the general biology labs, and I started coordinating those, and teaching some of the labs, and then, at some point in time, I don’t know how long after I came, the issue came up of should we be tenure track, should they be tenure track positions since we don’t have, neither of us has a terminal degree? I always liked that terminology, terminal degree. So as I recall, and maybe, Pat, I’m a little confused, the Board of Trustees had to vote.

PD: They did, but it was awhile after we were here, I don’t remember how long.

EF: I was going to say maybe 1980 or 1982 when we . . .?

PD: Whatever year we got tenure, I think it was right before then.

EF: Right, right. So that was interesting.

PD: Well, somewhat contentious, I think. I know that it was after one of the accreditations, the issue was raised during that, and that’s when they addressed it. I don’t remember the year, but that’s what prompted it.
EF: So Pat and I were probably the last people, certainly in certain academic areas, that were able to become tenure track without that terminal degree.

PD: Right.

EF: I think it’s still possible, for example, well, our librarians are faculty, which we’re very proud of, I having been on the committee on the faculty when we had that long discussion with Robert Hoyler as dean, whether librarians should be faculty members or not, but librarians of course have other degrees besides just PhDs, and then maybe in the arts it might be possible, and maybe in music.

PD: Or if you’re just a visiting instructor, maybe on your way to getting your degree.

EF: Right, so that has certainly changed. Let’s see, do you want to talk about who your role models and mentors were in your early years of teaching?

PD: I’m not certain I had role models, but there were certainly some people, when I came, who were venerated as excellent professors, and Schuyler Miller was the prototype. Everybody talked about Schuyler Miller. I never got a chance to hear him give a lecture. I wish I had. George Oliver was another one, and I think George sort of took Elsa and I both under his wing, and sort of pushed us along, nurtured us, so he was in essence a mentor, I guess. Howard Davis, who as I said was dean when I came, but he was just interim, acting dean. He was another one that I know the students really were very, very fond of. He won the Thomas Branch Award many times. Never heard him talk either, which I wish I had. But those were the big names when I came. How about you? Any others?

EF: Well, I would say, first of all, being in the sciences always, I never had the feeling of being the first woman in a particular position, because I was used to working with all males. I mean, when you go back to, both Pat and I graduated from, well, when we graduated we called it Westhampton College at the University of Richmond. Now they claim there’s as Westhampton College, but I don’t know whether there is or not. I think it’s kind of gone by the boards. But all the professors that both of us had were males at University of Richmond, and actually, if I were to point to mentors, I would have to go back to Nolan Rice, who was my thesis advisor at University of Richmond. He used to let me bring my children over with me because they were little at that time when I was working on my master’s and they could come.

PD: Well you know, I had Tom Harris at the University of Richmond, and I think he probably was responsible for my being at Randolph-Macon, because I think he was the one that passed my name onto Wallace.

EF: And Tom was at MCV at that time.
PD: He was at MCV when I went there too.

EF: Yeah, so I would say Nolan Rice, I agree with George Oliver 100%, he always would say, “Now, you and Pat are kind of like my daughters, I’m going to stick up for you and see that you’re treated right.” And then I can’t say enough good things about Wallace Martin as chair of the department who kind of kept a loose reign, I would say, in the department. And he would always say, “Now Elsa, if that’s what you think you ought to do, then you just go ahead and do it.” So he was fantastic.

PD: And I think he was highly respected on campus too, as a sort of a mediator and a leader, not just in our department.

EF: And then I would point to, in my case, Jim Martin, who was the chair of the biology department at J. Sargeant Reynolds, who was actually a graduate of University of Richmond.

PD: Oh, is he?

EF: Yes, he is. And he’s still at J. Sargeant Reynolds.

PD: He’s a member of our church. I didn’t know he went to the University of Richmond.

EF: Oh, oh okay. I know his wife Lisa, well they’re both very active in the Virginia Academy of Science, and I know she’s . . . you’re the ones who had your gutters stolen, then.

PD: Yes. The church, they stole the gutters from the church.

EF: Yes, absolutely. Let’s see, do you want to talk about what was easy and fun about teaching at Randolph-Macon, or particular challenges?

PD: Well, I think the fun part was the students themselves. We’ve had some great students go through the department. I think there was a time, like in the mid to late ‘80s, when the department really gelled well, and we had some excellent students go from there who have gone on to do college teaching, of course a lot went to be doctors.

EF: Neil Norton.

PD: Neil Norton, yes.

EF: Let’s mention Neil.

PD: He was probably the best all-around student that I ever taught. Was a natural-born teacher, is a teacher now, is a college teacher. And just would go out of his way. He would come in evenings to help the students in comparative anatomy; he’d had it the year before, he would
come in and help them get ready for their practicals. He would spend hours teaching the other
students, and helping them. He was just a great guy.

EF: And isn’t he in Oklahoma, is that right? At a dental school.

PD: He’s at a dental school.

EF: And he’s a professor of anatomy, isn’t he?

PD: Yes, and he has been selected as Teacher of the Year, too, so he fulfilled his promise.

EF: So he comes to mind. The other one I can think of right off is Paul Nyantoki, who was a
student from Ghana, who came and was such an excellent student, and just loved to learn for the
sake of learning. Did you get – you should have gotten an email from Barclay just in the last
couple of weeks.

PD: No.

EF: From Paul. Well, she sent his email, because he was interested in hearing from you and
from me and some of the other people that he had in contact with when he was here on campus.
He’s back in Ghana, actually.

PD: Yeah, he really is a fine person. He was an older student. He struggled with anatomy only
because of the language barrier. He said he would have to think of things in his own language
and then translate them, and that was difficulty with all of the terminology in anatomy. But he
did make Phi Beta Kappa, and I remember he did not, he had no appreciation for what it was,
and I think he was just going to let it slide, and Art Conway pulled him aside and said, “Look.
You want to be a part of this,” and he actually convinced him to be initiated, which I thought was
a wonderful thing on Art’s part.

EF: Yeah. I remember Paul drove a cab in Washington D.C. on weekends because of he
obviously needed some money.

PD: He went on to Johns Hopkins, and he tried to drive a cab when he was there, but I think it
got to a point where his time commitments to his education were such that he couldn’t do it
anymore, but he did finish.

EF: That brings up Art Conway, who we both had the pleasure of teaching with over the years,
and who we all, he’s just a fantastic human being, he really is. And if there were problems with
technology, or couldn’t find something in the department, Art was always the one we went to,
and he was always willing to go the second and third mile.

PD: Oh yes. And he could jerry-rig anything.
EF: Yeah. He is fantastic, so I’m glad that I had the opportunity to meet Art and to work with him.

PD: And the students, he took a real personal interest in all the students, I guess.

EF: Yeah, I know there was a rumor that maybe he lived in Copley somewhere, because he was always here, day and night.

PD: What about challenges in your teaching?

EF: Well, what I would say is, when you’re at a small liberal arts college like Randolph-Macon, my experience is you ended up teaching a lot of courses that you probably didn’t have a great background in, so there was lots of learning going on. And I’m thinking about marine biology, which I ended up teaching, because I had started in invertebrate. I had the honor to take classes to Jamaica for the field component of the course. The other one was, I remember one time we needed somebody to teach genetics, since we changed the requirements, and all biology majors had to take genetics, and so I volunteered to teach genetics, which was really kind of not very . . . I didn’t think that one through. Because genetics has changed, so it’s all molecular. And so I spent a lot of time at workshops trying to come up to date in genetics. So I would say things like genetics and marine biology. And then I taught a, at one time at Randolph-Macon we had a course which was called “The Social and Ethical Impact of Computers on Society.”

PD: I remember that.

EF: And I ended up teaching in that program too.

PD: This was when we had a computer literacy requirement. All students had to go through, was it about a year, two semesters of computer literacy. Now they’re so computer literate you don’t even think of it.

EF: Yeah, I turn to them for help now.

PD: I remember when I first came, and probably when you were here, they had a January term, and it was supposed to be something entirely different from what you usually taught. I came here to teach comparative anatomy and human anatomy, and they asked me what did I want to teach, and I’m thinking, “Gee, I don’t know, how about nutrition? I probably know something about nutrition, since I teach human anatomy and physiology.” Little did I know how little I knew about nutrition. That first year was frantic. Of course, it was a four-week course, and every night I was cramming in, you know 50, 60, 100 pages and trying to get ready to talk about it the next day. It just about did me in. That was a challenge, it was a real challenge. But I think the students really appreciated that course, and I know I had some of them say, “Oh, we have changed our way of eating since we took that course,” which I felt good about. But then they
went to non-majors lab requirements, and they asked me to teach my nutrition with a lab attached. And that was difficult and it also changed the complexion of the course so that I don’t think students enjoyed it any more at all. It was a shame, really, and finally I got to the point where I said, “I can’t teach this this way anymore,” so I just gave it up.

EF: That brings to mind, your talking about the nutrition course, people have always confused Pat and I because of, you know, we’re both women, we both came from Westhampton College, we’re both involved in Phi Beta Kappa, all these issues.

PD: Our offices are right next door to each other.

EF: Right, and so people would ask me, “Now, you know about nutrition, what about Vitamin B?” or whatever and I would say, “No, I don’t know anything about nutrition, that’s Pat. You’ll have to ask her.” So that was kind of interesting.

Um, let’s see. How about your favorite courses to teach? What would you say about that?

PD: Strangely enough, it was comparative anatomy. That’s considered one of the most difficult courses that you can take. When I first came, I was sort of like Elsa. They asked me to teach it and I had had it I don’t know how many years before, I don’t want to say, maybe . . .

EF: Dr. West or Wolcut, did you have?

PD: I had Dr. West.

EF: Okay, I did too.

PD: And so I said, “Yeah, I can do that.” Well, that was another up till two, three o’clock every night thing trying to stay one step ahead of the students. But after a couple of years I felt like I was, I had an approach that I liked, and I enjoyed teaching it that way. And most of the time the students were excellent, because they were the sort of cream of the crop who were going to medical school, and so it was for me a fun course to teach, even though it was very tedious. I know the students, since there was so much material to be covered, they petitioned me – at the time every science class with a lab was four-hour credit – and they said, “We deserve five hours credit for this course because it’s so much.” So I think I finally talked the curriculum committee into making it a five-hour course and I think we actually ended up with two labs a week and then six hours of lecture, so in fact it was a very time-consuming course. Then they decided there would be no more five-hour courses anymore, we met four hours, and then it became more difficult because I really didn’t have time to cover everything properly.

EF: Yeah. And unfortunately, I think it’s sad but true that there is no comparative anatomy taught here anymore. I guess this is just an old faculty member liking things the way they used
to be, but I think the biology major, if you look at it today as it is structured compared to what it used to be, I think it has been weakened in many ways, I really do.

PD: Well, the emphasis is so much more on molecular, that they felt there was no room for the gross anatomy types of courses.

EF: Right, but our majors no longer have to take, for example, genetics. Organic chemistry, of course, is not necessarily required. I really don’t know how you do a modern-day major in biology without organic chemistry, I really don’t.

PD: Neither do I, particularly since it’s more molecular in orientation.

EF: Yeah, it doesn’t make any sense to me at all. I think they’ve done a great job with the freshman level course, it has a lot more research in it, and I think it’s an improvement, but I think some of the decreases in requirements for the major bother me, they really do. No genetics particularly, no organic chemistry. But, you know, the kind of student at Randolph-Macon has changed, I think.

PD: I do too. I’ll have to say this: my first introduction to the students at Randolph-Macon was a young man that came to my office to ask me about comparative anatomy. He had no shoes and no shirt. And I thought, “Is this the way they all are?”

EF: Oh my goodness!

PD: Well, it wasn’t. But I do think that things have become much more casual in the classroom than they used to be. Now, I had sort of come from a tradition at medical school at MCV where, you know, they wore coats and ties, and it was Mr. So-and-So and Mr. So-and-So, which really dates me, I’m sure, because they don’t do that anymore. But this was just so, such a big change. But I do think, you know, students will come to class with hats on, baseball hats and things like this. I don’t think they would have ever done that when I first came here.

EF: Well, that’s true. I know some of the professors right now have in their syllabus it says you may not wear a hat to class, and you may not eat in class, and you may not bring a drink to class. And I know there are certain individuals, and I’ve heard James Scanlon is one of them, who will actually lock the classroom after the class starts, so if you’re late, you can’t get in.

PD: I have felt like doing that.

EF: Yeah, I know!

PD: Particularly in general biology, where, you know, a third of the way through someone will just get up and walk out.
EF: Oh yeah, that’s right, they do that, right. And the casual dress now extends to faculty.

PD: Yes, it does.

EF: You know, faculty teach in jeans and flip-flops and t-shirts. I guess I’m kind of an old-school person that, you know, I just don’t think it’s appropriate.

PD: Well, I know our whole society’s become much more casual, and I think that’s part of it, but yeah I have a hard time with this too, even now.

EF: Um, let’s see. We’ve kind of talked about the changes in the student body. Do you want to talk about interactions with students outside the classroom, Pat?

PD: Sure. I guess it was in my younger days, maybe I was more on the same level as the students, or certainly when my children were the same age as they, I could relate to them better. I can remember a period of time when I would have students in my office every afternoon, talking about everything from classwork to their love life. And I enjoyed it, although I couldn’t get anything done, obviously. As I got older, that stopped. Now I don’t know whether it’s because I got older, or whether the students changed. But they were encouraging interactions with students, and I know I tried several attempts, for example, to have students come over to my house for dinner. I did have my nutrition class come several times to sort of model, you know, the kind of meal that they were supposed to be eating. That was fun. I invited my advisees one year, and one came, and I said, “I’m not going to do this anymore.”

EF: I had kind of the same expectations, and the same results. I remember one year I invited members of a class, I even came here and picked them up, which is, well, it takes me about 35 minutes to get to Randolph-Macon from where I live, and there were two or three students who came. In the early years we used to have, do you remember, Beta Beta Beta meetings, or the cookouts that normally took place at some faculty member’s house, and the students really came out for those.

PD: They would support that, and Kai Beta Phi, which was the honorary science fraternity founded here at Randolph-Macon, they used to auction, to raise money, they would auction off dinners at faculty homes. And that was well-supported. I had them come to my house a couple of times for that. But I don’t think there’s that much interaction of that nature, I don’t know, certainly from my perspective there isn’t.

EF: I think you’re right. Most of my interactions these days are taking students on field trips, that kind of thing. The first year experience course I’m involved in, we just took our students to Washington, D.C. to the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian, and those kinds of things, and then I guess my most memorable experiences, those kinds of
events, would be the trips to Jamaica, where I always felt fortunate if I got everybody back in one piece. And those were exciting times for sure. It was a lot of fun.

PD: A couple of years in my comparative anatomy class, and usually those classes, well, they got to be small. When I first came I had 17, which was a large number. My understanding was everybody had put off taking it because they didn’t like the teacher that was teaching it, and so they were waiting for the new teacher, hoping that I would be easier. And one of my first students told me, he said, “No, you have definite McClurkin tendencies.”

EF: No, you were never considered to be easy, that’s for sure.

PD: No, I know that.

EF: I don’t think I was, either, so we have that in common, I guess, essentially.

PD: But when my classes were small, I did take several of them up to the Museum of Natural History, and they took us behind the scenes and showed us, you know, their own collections and things like that. That was very interesting. One year I had a comparative anatomy class that had only two students.

EF: Oh, wow.

PD: And you need a critical mass for something like that, and that one didn’t really gel. But if you could have 8-10 you could do well. And I remember one year, one class, and I will never forget it – I think Neil Norton was in it – it just came together incredibly well, and everybody helped each other. I rarely had to go around and show them any kind of thing when they were dissecting, because they did it themselves, and Neil probably had something to do with that, I suspect, but they helped each other. And in later years it got to the point where I had to do everything. I mean, they didn’t seem to care, they didn’t care about technique, they performed poorly on practicals. It just [had an] entirely different character.

EF: Yeah, I would agree with that. I had an invertebrate class, I think the last time I taught it, that had three students in it. So, it’s just not enough, and then if one person’s absent . . . and then if two people are absent you wonder, “Well, do I do this? And suppose nobody shows up? Do I just go ahead and do whatever, then they have to catch up?” So yeah, you do need, you’re right, a critical mass. And two or three . . .

PD: No. Another of my comparative anatomy classes, I don’t think it was the same one I’ve been talking about, had a very goodly number of excellent students in it. I walked in one day, and they had taken a cat – we dissected cats – they had taken a cat and put a cape on it and hung it from the ceiling, and they said this was Supercat. (laughing) I mean, you know . . . actually,
later, they gave me flowers because they said they’d gone a little too far. But I don’t think any of the students who are here now would do something like that.

EF: No . . . I remember some of my invertebrate zoology classes would save the parts from some of the things they dissected, and several years they made me earrings out of, you know, crab claws, or a crab claw necklace, or that kind of thing. So that was always a treat, when you go in and suddenly there’s this little gift for you. Actually, I think I still have one of my crab claw necklaces in my jewelry case at home. I think I need to clean it out, probably.

PD: I think it was the same class that floated the cat who wrote a song about the cats and they sang it, somebody brought a guitar and they sang it one day when I came in to class. And I know I saved the words, I think they had written the words up on the board, and I saved those for years because I thought it was a sort of cute thing.

EF: Aww. Well that’s great. Well, should we talk about changes in technology? Let’s talk about that.

PD: Boy, things are ever different. I think I was telling Lynda when we first started discussing this, I can remember when I first came. First of all, there were no Xerox machines, and now we can’t live without Xerox machines. We had mimeograph machines.

EF: And stencils.

PD: And stencils. Those nasty, awful, messy stencils. And you’d be in there trying to run off your test before class, and it would jam off, oh it was just awful.

EF: It was horrible.

PD: And of course we didn’t have secretarial help. We had to either handwrite or type all of our tests, and I was a terrible typist so I handwrote a lot of those. And then of course the advent of Xerox machines, I don’t know how we lived without them.

EF: Or computers.

PD: Computers, yeah. Well another big change, though, which seems minor, I guess, was the telephone system. I don’t know about when you came, but when I came, we had a switchboard, which closed at 5:00 and you could not make a call out or get a call in after that. And we had faculty meetings at night, I had small children at home, I would have liked to have called and touched base, or since I was driving by myself from Richmond to here I would call my husband and say, “I’m leaving now, expect me in 20 minutes, or 30 minutes.” And he used to say, “If you don’t get home in that time, I’m going to come up Route 1 and find you.” It made me feel
better, but I couldn’t call. So, and now, the telephone system is so sophisticated. Phone mail, et cetera, et cetera.

EF: And almost nobody these days uses the phone, I’ve found. I very seldom get a call on my phone here. It’s all email, or obviously, all the students and us to some degree all have our little cell phones, and I use those, but the decline in the use of the telephone and also the decline in mail has been interesting. I only go to Peele Hall these days one a week, because everything comes as an email attachment, so that has really changed. And oh, the LCD projectors and the PowerPoint in the classrooms.

PD: Oh, yeah. Of course, I was in the days of the overhead opaque projectors.

EF: Oh yeah! Yes.

PD: And it’s extremely different. I remember, too, when they first started talking about email. I didn’t know what email was, and they said, “We’re going to have a class and teach you how to use email!” and I thought, “Electronic mail? I don’t care about that.” I didn’t go. And now, you know, what do you do without it?

EF: Well, do you remember when the college subsidized the professors’ purchasing computers for their houses, and we had a choice between purchasing an IBM and a K-Pro?

PD: What did you get?

EF: And I chose K-Pro because it was cheaper.

PD: I did too. We had to pay half. The college paid half, we had to pay half.

EF: That very quickly became a dinosaur.

PD: Extremely quickly. My worst memory of the K-Pro is, you typed everything in, and then you formatted it. And so it was not till you finished putting everything in that you knew how many pages you had, or where everything was going to fall on a page. And at that particular time I was working up a lab manual that had pictures and so forth that went with it, or diagrams, and I would type in, and I’d try to leave places for the diagrams, and inevitably, it would format it, it would come out with the diagram split between two pages. And then I’d have to go back in and try to re-space and reformat, and oh I thought I was going to lose my mind. I did this on a summer grant.

EF: Was that when you did the thing, was that on organic molecules?

PD: Uh-huh.
EF: I remember, actually, that manual that you all put together with organic molecules. I think, did we use it in intro biology?

PD: We used it several years in intro biology.

EF: That’s what I thought, yeah. I remember that.

PD: Until the students complained bitterly because it got too tedious. I still think it had value, anyway, but that’s a personal prejudice.

EF: Yeah, well, I would agree with that.

PD: But I cannot, I will remember when Wallace Martin said, “Oh, well, you should have an IBM because it formats every page independently.” I thought, “Why have I been working with this K-Pro? Oh!”

EF: And now I had Dean Heinemann arrived at this office this morning to tell me they were coming by to put Vista on my computer, and so here we go. Steep learning curve once again. It’s ever-changing, and ever changing very quickly. The technology is just unbelievable in all areas.

PD: Well, of course the classrooms too that are so computerized now. I mean, this is good, these are really nice, state-of-the-art things.

EF: When they work, which they don’t always work. (laughs)

PD: Oh yeah I can remember when we showed projection films . . .

EF: Oh, you had to thread the projector!

PD: Thread those things, and they would not work.

EF: I had forgotten about that. Oh, what a nightmare! Oh my goodness.

All right, Pat, anything else you’re just dying to say?

PD: Well, they did ask about changes in administration.

EF: Yeah.

PD: I think probably one of the big things that started since, I don’t know how long after I came, was evaluations. Which has been a bone of contention probably ever since.

EF: Absolutely. And relying so heavily on student evaluations.
PD: Right.

EF: That’s still a big bone of contention, that’s for sure.

PD: But I think it’s probably with us forever, do you think?

EF: Yeah, I think so. And it’s remarkable how things change when you get a new dean in, and they all do things differently. Jerry Garris, I think was, I always thought he was probably . . . well, let’s see. Hendricks was an excellent dean also, and then I would say Jerry Garris. But somebody new comes on campus and all the rules change, so you have to be adjusting constantly. Somehow the presidents never affected us to any great extent, I don’t think. Now, was Earl Moreland – he was still around on campus.

PD: He was on campus, yes.

EF: But he had retired before either of us came. And then I guess Ladell Payne.

PD: Well Luther White was the president when I came. He was not popular with the faculty at all. And I think yes, Ladell Payne was well received.

I think another issue that has bounced around a lot is teaching load. I don’t know where they stand on that now, but, I know when I came, the science faculty were always complaining because they had to teach more hours because they would only count labs half.

EF: Right.

PD: And we always felt like labs took as much time, even in prep, as the lecture part, particularly after you got your lectures a little bit under your belt. You know the first year or two those lectures are pretty difficult. I know that they changed the teaching load, and that went with abolishing the May term, did it not?

EF: Right. The teaching load, it seems to me, has continued to be lessened all through the years that I’ve been here. But also the responsibilities, expectations for what you’re supposed to do other than teach have increased, the emphasis on research has definitely increased, I would say. And of course then the committee work, which has I guess always been with us, and the expectations are there too for the committee work. But up on the research expectations and down on the teaching loads I think have been the two main trends.

PD: And I think down on the emphasis on effective teaching, with that.

EF: Yes. And after all this is primarily a teaching college, isn’t it?
PD: And this is what they always told me when I came – the most important thing is the classroom experience. And I feel like that’s important now, but there’s all these other things that are sort of detracting from that.

EF: Absolutely, yeah. Which is kind of why I am enjoying what I do now, because all I do is teach, and working with a full-time colleague who is in the math department for the first year experience I’m doing now, Bruce Torrence, I have so much more time to devote to the class than he does, because he’s got all these other things that he has to do, as chair of the department, for example, and he’s teaching three or four classes, I’m teaching one. So I tell you, the pressure on full-time folks out here is really high, I think.

PD: It had reached a point before I retired where it felt like all I did was extracurricular stuff. I mean, I barely had time to think about what I was going to do before I went into the classroom.

EF: That’s right, yeah.

LW: Did you want to talk about your involvement with Phi Beta Kappa?

PD: Sure.

EF: Absolutely, okay.

PD: Well, of course now we’re both also Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Richmond, which meant that we were eligible to be in the Phi Beta Kappa chapter here. I do know that when I first came, I didn’t realize that they had a Phi Beta Kappa chapter here. It’s my understanding that they used to try to identify faculty members who came here as Phi Beta Kappa so that they could ask them to participate, but somehow they missed me, so I had been here for several years before an announcement was made at a faculty meeting that we’re going to have a meeting of the Phi Beta Kappa meeting after this to talk about so-and-so, and I remember going up to George Oliver and asking, “Would I be included in that,” and he said, “Oh yes!” So that’s when I started becoming active, and dear George made sure that I was asked to be an officer. I was the vice-president and the president, and then when he retired, he conned me into being the secretary-treasurer of the chapter, which is an ongoing position. He said, “Oh, it doesn’t take much time.”

EF: (starts laughing)

PD: He . . . in short, he was not truthful. It turned out to be very time-consuming. But I enjoyed it, I enjoyed tracking the students and so forth.

EF: And you’re still involved with Phi Beta Kappa in the Richmond area, right?

PD: The Richmond area association, right. But I think two things that happened while I was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, I think one was instituting the sophomore awards to identify, or to
recognize the students who were on track to be Phi Beta Kappa, I think that’s a good thing. The other thing was our fortunate endowment by John Werner, who was an alum, and a Phi Beta Kappa member, money that we can use either to pay for students who cannot afford to join, their using the money to pay for their dinners for initiation, which I think is a nice gesture, and I think now they have started paying for the sophomore award winners’ dinners at the fall meeting. Our chapter is extremely fortunate because in all of the conventions that I’ve been to, this is one of the big problems, is funding things that are going on in the chapters, and we have this very nice endowment, and I think we are very, very, very fortunate.

EF: Yeah actually now they pay for faculty members to come to the dinners, when they’re a dinner associated with the meetings, I think they actually pay.

PD: And yet I don’t think there’s good attendance.

EF: No, there really isn’t.

PD: I don’t know what it is. Again, in the earlier years . . . maybe it’s because of all these other demands on your time, that people feel like they can’t do this extra thing. But I think there used to be much better support from the faculty for things that Phi Beta Kappa did than there is now.

EF: But I do think, looking at our chapter versus chapters at other colleges and universities nationally, that Phi Beta Kappa is still well-respected here, and as far as I know there has never been a student who has been invited to become a member – one student, Pat says, who turned . . .

PD: This was a foreign student, and I think they don’t appreciate Phi Beta Kappa as much as people from this country.

EF: But I do know that other institutions have a big problem with people have never heard of Phi Beta Kappa and they’re not going to pay the initiation fee and they’re not going to take the time to come to the initiation service.

PD: I think that’s one good thing about the sophomore award winners, is that they are, at an earlier time, are made aware of Phi Beta Kappa.

EF: Well Pat, how long were you secretary-treasurer?

PD: I think it was 13 years. I think George was 15. And I told him, when I took over, I said “I’m not going to be able to stay as long as you.”

EF: But that position, which as Pat said, is an ongoing position, that’s who really runs the chapter.

PD: Yes it is.
EF: Okay! I think we’re through.

LW: Well thank you very much, Elsa Falls and Pat Dementi, for making memories here with us today. Thank you.