



MACALESTER COLLEGE  
Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library  
*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:** **John B. Davis**  
President, 1975-1984

**Date:** **Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 1:00p.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room  
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Edited interview run time: 1:40:17 minutes

Accession: 2007-12-21-21

Agreement: Signed, on file, no restrictions

---

Subjects:

01:14	Education and early career
06:05	Graduate school and positions at University of New Hampshire
11:49	Superintendent in Lincoln, Massachusetts
13:04	Superintendent in Worcester, Massachusetts, then Minneapolis
17:28	Coming to Macalester
22:56	Previous knowledge of Macalester, President Arthur Flemming
26:29	Difficulties at Macalester; Board of Trustees
28:63	First impressions of campus James Robinson and Arthur Flemming
32:52	Impressions of the faculty
34:01	The administration
38:19	Relationship between faculty and administration
41:56	The student body
44:59	First goals: fiscal stability
46:39	Financial crisis, EEO, Vietnam Era
50:22	EEO Program
51:30	Weaknesses and strengths of College; founding ideals of Macalester
54:16	DeWitt and Lila Wallace; meeting with DeWitt Wallace
1:00:58	Budgeting; Wallaces and DeWitt Wallace support

1:07:59	Budget and program cuts
1:09:58	Campaign for the '80s; fundraising
1:13:13	Improvement in finances
1:13:29	Relationship with faculty, staff and students
1:15:42	Town Meeting; old Student Union
1:19:17	Canceling Fall Break; student leaders
1:21:48	Relationships with students; presidential accessibility
1:23:36	Decision to leave Mac
1:25:23	State of Macalester when left in '84; progress during presidency
1:27:43	Most enjoyable aspects of being president
1:31:23	Least enjoyable aspects
1:33:10	Regrets?
1:35:02	Reaction to title "The Man Who Saved Macalester College"
1:37:35	Macalester versus other career positions

**Interview with John B. Davis**

**Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer**

**June 20, 2007  
Macalester College  
DeWitt Wallace Library  
Harmon Room**

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi and I am a new graduate of Macalester College, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and I am interviewing John B. Davis, Macalester President from 1975 to 1984, in the Harmon Room, in the DeWitt Wallace Library. To begin, if you would like to state your name, and where you were born, and what year you came to Macalester.

JD: I know all of those answers [laughter], and that may be the only time in this series that I am that confident. My name is John Davis. And for the historical record, it is John Bradford Davis, which is an old New England name. And my family lived for many years in Bradford, Massachusetts, which is a garden spot, I think, in that part of the world. I was born September 14, 1921. That I know for a fact. Now what was the other question?

LZ: What year you came to Macalester.

JD: I came to Macalester in I think August of 19—I think in the month of August—1975.

[01:14]

LZ: Well, can you talk a little bit about your educational background and then the different things you had been doing prior to coming to Macalester...maybe if you don't want to go through them all maybe just the more recent ones before Mac?

JD: Well that's a long order. Well I was a fair student in high school. And my father thought I should be fairer. And he sent me away to a small preparatory school in New Hampshire—Tilton School—from which I was graduated. And I then went on to the University of New Hampshire, which is a natural thing to do, not having any great aspirations. Great as that place is, and it's a remarkable institution now, and it was then. In parenthesis, I went to work there a few years after having been graduated. Those years at the University of New Hampshire, in Durham, New Hampshire, were spent primarily in the history field—government and history. And we, of the male class, were majority ROTC, by choice—Reserve Officer Training Corp. It was that or the draft. And we were in college. And it was an obviously easy thing to do—to sign up with ROTC—and that I did, in 1942, which was fairly early. I don't know when my draft number would have come up, but I think it would have come very soon. The period where we were allowed to stay there until 1943, when we were taken out in 1943, that's before graduation. And I had a strange and unusual and not too becoming military career. They kept sending me to school. And I never went with my gang to the Tenth Army Division. That was the skiing patrol group, which many of them went to the Battle of the Bulge. And some of the finest were lost in the Battle of the Bulge. And one of the great Macalester alums, Fred Jervis, is now at the University, was in that battle and injured seriously. But I came back to the university then, after some work here and there, and had enough credits so that getting back in I think it was January of '45, I completed and had no job prospect in mind. But everyone was looking for a school

teacher. And I had extensive experience in camping and in counseling. I don't know how professionally, but I knew campers and counselors and tents and so forth. And the superintendent's frantic famials surrounded me, and made several offers, and I chose one in Laconia, New Hampshire, which is on one of the peripheral ends of Lake Winnepesaukee, which is a great lake. And Laconia struck me as a wonderful place to go. And I did. And I had a wonderful year, in 1945, teaching history and Latin American history—which I really wasn't qualified for, although I'd had one course. But that's too often the case nowadays. But I was so "successful" that during the last quarter of the year, the superintendent and the principal both invited me to come and talk about how they'd like me to stay on. And they would see me as an Assistant Principal the next year, and after that, continued progress, and wouldn't I please stay? Well I told you already that males were in short supply, so no great surprise. On the other hand, it was flattering. I was married in 1943, I might have added, to a woman I met at the University of New Hampshire. And in that period in 1945 in Laconia we had our first child born. We also, in that year while I was teaching, we were very active in being the discussants, Barbara and I, of the United Nations and the potential that would...and that's when Governor Stassen was so involved in San Francisco. We went out night after night talking to church groups and so forth. Barbara and I were good communicators and we had planned our own futures. And so, in conversation, following the meeting with the principal and the superintendent, we came to the conclusion that if I was so good, maybe I ought to get some more education before I would venture forth from our happy time in Laconia.

[06:05]

So I applied and was immediately admitted to Harvard in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences for history. And that made a lot of sense. We moved from Laconia. And having a

wonderful family and wonderful mother and father in Haverhill, Massachusetts, they said, “Until you can get settled somewhere near Boston, come live in our big house, because all your brothers are gone.” Well, one brother was left. It was a five bedroom house. So we went with our baby, Nancy, born in 1945. But while I was engaged cleaning the bush around the neighborhood’s house, because my remaining brother had developed a land—ground-keeping business and he was employing me, the phone call rang and my mother walked to the next house and said, “There’s a call for you from Durham.” Well, that’s a surprise. So I went. And believe it or not—you’ve asked for more than you’re getting—

LZ: No, this is great.

[07:11]

JD: I went to the house and they said, ‘This is Curtis in the President’s Office at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Harold Stoke, our new President, would like to talk to you.’ Well, I swallowed just as I swallowed then. And I took the phone and he said, “Mr. Davis,” and I liked that, and he said, “I heard about you or read a little bit about you. The person who had been the Assistant to the President is not going to be in that position. And I’m looking for someone relatively young, basically intelligent, willing to listen and take some orders, and help me, as best he can.” And I said, “Well that’s very interesting.” And he said, “Will you come up to Durham?” So I went up to Durham within a few days. And we had a long conversation. And he outlined to me some mediocre, medium-sized tasks to be performed in his office. And I can tell you what they became. But in a true sense, they were a requirement of listening, taking tasks, doing some correspondence, drafting items and so forth, handling some phone call situations,

and keeping my eyes and ears open about what was happening on the campus of the University of New Hampshire. Not as a spy, but as an observant person. Frightening nobody because I was so young. At any rate I took the job. And I stayed there for two years until he was called to the presidency of the University of Louisiana. And there was no place for me. Now, academic years get all confused. But in that period of time, I was admitted—now being in administration and not teaching, I liked that world—and they had at the Graduate School of Education a program in college administration. So I was admitted to Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1947. And was there for two years and received my Masters degree in Educational Administration. I don't think it was particularly college administration. But at any rate, I went... But then, in that academic year, which has long summers, they called me back to become Acting Dean of Admissions, because the Dean of Admissions had been called back to service. You know that was, those were war years. 1945, '46. And so I went back and spent a year as Acting Director of Admissions. And by golly, at the end of that, the Dean of Men had decided that he would accept the offer of Columbia University, and study for his doctorate. So I moved across the corridor and became Acting Dean of Men. All of that ended in 1950. And what would I do? Well, my senior professor at Harvard for those years called and said, "We need someone here to direct the New England School Development Council," which was an association of public schools in the six New England states, who used Harvard as a central focus. It was independent of Harvard, but there were relationships that were established. And the six state public schools—at that time there were a hundred of these school districts—were seeking advice and counsel in the pursuit of answers to common school problems. And they ranged from teacher competence and its relation to salary, to municipal ownership of school buses, to the length of the school day, to reading as a requirement, basic to education, and so they went. The local

schools would identify the problem, find if there was a cluster of associates in that region of one of the six states, and then my task would be to find “professional” thinkers, who would be consultants. So in the course of those years, 1950 to 1959, that was my task, with an occasional lectureship at Harvard in the field of school administration. And that was thoroughly enjoyable. And during that time I also began and completed my graduate work toward the doctorate degree in administration. And that, 1959, represents the end of that era.

[11:49]

And the town of Lincoln, Massachusetts, called me to be their superintendent. And I said, “Well, I’ve never been a superintendent, and I’ve only taught school once.” “Well,” they said, “we’re ready for sort of a change, and how would you like to try it?” They’re lure was worthy of consideration, in terms of salary and the beautiful community. Lincoln, Mass. is a garden spot. Lincoln, and Concord, and Weston and Wayland. That little cluster just outside of Boston on Route 128—they’re choice locations. And so I took that assignment in 1959. At that time me and—Joy and I had six children. Our seventh child was born in Concord, Massachusetts, but we were living in Lincoln. Although by that time, my children, several of them were in college or away. So I’m surprised I could talk that long about those numbers of years, but we’re up to 1959, and I’m over in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

[13:04]

LZ: How did you then come to Minnesota, then? How did that happen?

JD: How did I what?

LZ: Come to Minnesota...

JD: Indirectly. Because I served three years as superintendent of schools in Lincoln, Massachusetts, when the second city in New England, that's Worcester, Massachusetts, sent a delegation to see me. And they said, "We want you to consider becoming the superintendent of schools in Worcester, Mass." There were more teachers in Worcester than there were students in Lincoln. That's the proportion—is that what I want to say? Yeah, ten times the size approximately. Well, that seemed like an interesting challenge. And having a good wife and being relatively fearless, we went to Worcester. But that's a story in itself because it was a time for some reformation in Worcester, so things to be done. I was the first outsider ever brought in. I may be exaggerating, but they would claim that ever brought in to a major position in the city of Worcester. And I was there until 1967. And those were tumultuous years, but years that were not without accomplishment. But they were tiring years. And I had run a very interesting course of political activity, and had made my case and had secured a school board supportive and I'd survived five-to-four votes and so forth, but I had a great constituency of citizens who were supporting me. But when things seemed to level out and my point seemed to have gained ascendancy and general acceptance, along came a knock on the door by two great citizens of Minneapolis. Stuart Rider, the attorney from the Rider, Bennett, Eagan firm, and David Preus, the Lutheran pastor who became bishop of the Lutheran Church, in Minneapolis. Well, more than Minneapolis. They were both on the School Board in Minneapolis. And, you know, information flows. And they were looking, and they thought they better come to Worcester and check me out, and they did. And we talked. They talked to Barbara, they talked to the children, and proposed. And I guess all I had to say was, "If I decide to come, you would have to do these

two things. You would have to give me a guarantee of three years,” and I guess that was it. Just a three year commitment, which could be severed, but all things being equal, I could plan on these three years. And they went back to the Board, and said, “Yeah, those are reasonable.” And so I went and interviewed and talked. Parenthetic insertion: one of my great friends at the University of New Hampshire, and one with whom I did some work afterwards in another field, both of us being independent consultants, in a sense. He applied, was requested and applied, and he became the Superintendent of Schools in Philadelphia the next year. Now I say that with pride in his success, but also I think some of it’s self serving, to say their selection was pretty good, I mean they had pretty good people to select from. So in January 1, 1967, I was committed. Also, a unanimous vote, I needed the unanimous vote, and I did. So January 1, 1967 I was the Superintendent of Schools, sitting in the superintendent’s office for the first time.

[17:28]

LZ: So then what was, you had obviously been there for a couple years. What was the process then, to come to Macalester?

JD: Unexpected. Although I had said, I mentioned Dr. Harold W. Stoke, who was the president of the University of New Hampshire and formerly had been at Johns Hopkins and the University of Washington. He counseled me in many ways. And one of the wise bits of wisdom that he espoused was, “John, you’ve been to the beach, and you’ve made a sand castle, and you’ve watched it, but slowly the sand and the wind and the waves, it begins to disintegrate. Don’t stay too long.” And he said seven to ten years should really—he wrote a book on the American college presidency. But in his book he refers to seven to ten years as a reasonable amount of

time to give the institution a break, as well as to acknowledge that you probably have run your course, you know. Well now how do I get back on track? I've told you how I went to Worcester and then to Minneapolis, and you've asked me how did I come to Minneapolis and I've given you the names of the two board members who met with their colleagues, my request of a unanimous vote, and a three year promise of employment. And that went well. But the seventh year or the eighth year I made it known that I would be looking. Because I felt the board ought to have some time. And I looked, and there were opportunities on both the West Coast and going back to New England, which were very interesting, but it didn't quite, to use the vernacular, "gel". So we just waited patiently, with absolute confidence that something would happen. My wife could go back to work [laughs], no. And Barbara was a great teacher. She didn't teach in Worcester, but she taught in a private school in Worc—she didn't teach in Minneapolis, she did teach in Worcester. She taught in the Bancroft School, which is a wonderful private secondary school and elementary school. And she had been a business writer for the University of New Hampshire. And she had also been associate editor of the Hanover, New Hampshire *Gazette* during part of the time that I was in the service so she was a worldly woman and had ability with the pen. And we felt that something would happen before the tenth year was up, not that we had to, because the board never encouraged me to leave. But I had a call. And the names of the people who called, I'm not certain who, but certainly Sandy Hill was a counselor in terms of having been involved in the search process. Jack Mason was a member of the Board, a superior person, a lawyer in town, in Minneapolis, much active in, as his wife, who later became a member of the City Park Planning Board in Minneapolis. They were great encouragers to my coming and applying. And I did. And I can't put it into sequence, but I met with a number of people, a number of the faculty. I think it's fair to state that faculty was a little

surprised to think that coming into the exalted role of president was someone who had never been a provost or a dean or a full professor, or you name it, but someone who was coming, in a sense, from quite a different perspective. But they were all charitable. Truman Schwartz, among many, was a remarkably wonderful confidante, in terms of talking to me about what I might anticipate and what I might consider doing and not doing and so forth. Truman and Beverly ever since have been very close friends. But there were many others on the campus who in wise ways said, "Look John, if you're coming, here's what it'll be. We'll certainly give you support". And certainly they did. And so Barbara and I decided. And so as I think I said, at my age sometimes I may forget dates, but I think I said in August 1975 I think I took up the mantle and then arrived.

[22:12]

LZ: Was that then a fairly easy decision for you to make?

JR: Oh, we knew that this was something worth doing. Yes, I'd had the experience at the University of New Hampshire, seeing it from many points of view and dealing with faculty, but not with authority! And I'd had the lectureship at Harvard, on occasion teaching one course, dual taught one course with a sociologist. And I'd been on some commissions. I've been on a couple of presidential commissions, both Reagan and Nixon, presidential commission assignments. So I was confident.

[22:56]

LZ: Being that you had been in Minneapolis for a couple of years...

JD: Well I was there nine years, almost nine years.

LZ: What then...did you know anything about Macalester, being that you were close by? Had you had any sort of experience with the college?

JD: No. I only knew it as a remarkable place. I hadn't really had close contact here. I had closer contact with Carleton. That's north of Northfield. I have irritation with Northfield for two reasons: I lost a granddaughter to Carleton, and a grandson, John Bradford Davis IV, to St. Olaf along the way. But Carleton's president became a good friend of mine, and he came to see me several times. And we were attempting to arrange for internships and opportunities for Carleton students to, for Carleton students to get experience in the Minneapolis schools and have a liaison relationship. That never fully developed but Howard Swearer was the President at that time, if you want to sort of document history. He went on to become president of Brown University. And after that I really lost track of Carleton except as a great institution. But I knew Macalester. Augsburg and Macalester and Hamline, I hate to leave anyone out. Well, the College of Art and Design, to which I went to work for at one time, were here and Concordia College was here at the time, but is now a university. But the two prominent ones, I think, the three, would be Augsburg in Minneapolis, and Hamline and Macalester in St. Paul. Bethel was a well-established institution. I shouldn't have gotten off onto that tract. There were some great institutions and Macalester was one of them. But it was known also because it was a place of...how many words should I use? Not disruption or discontent. It was a place of, some people thought, in disarray. There was a liveliness going on over here, sit-ins, and student concern, and a President who was a very interesting and complex person, who was well known. I'd known

him slightly, and that's Arthur Flemming, when he was Secretary of HEW, Health, Education, and Welfare. I met him but I didn't know him. But I knew who he was and everyone knew who he was. He was a tower of commitment to equity and opportunity. In those years, however, the college campus life was pretty lively and students were engaged in action. And fine. There were some, I think some excesses, but nothing in a sense out of control. Although they took over my office once and I didn't let them get away with it. They took it before I came and they did get away with it, so I don't know. But there were peaceful revolutions, peaceful encounters, and peaceful escapades. So I'd known of Macalester, and the newspapers were frequently full of Macalester.

[26:29]

LZ: So then you would have been aware that the college was kind of going through a transition...

JD: Yeah, that was perfectly clear.

LZ: And that wasn't...

JD: No, that was not a shock. No one, I think...I can speak only for myself, because there are many people who are brighter than I, to have been able to sense immediately what the situation was. But I'll go back now, having modified my position. I'll say that it's very hard to anticipate what you're going to find when you're really in the seat, in the arena, with the pencil and paper in front of you and the budget in front of you and the demands and so forth. You really don't

know until you're there what it's going to be. And it was a little different than what I had expected it to be but the complexity of it was no greater than I thought it would be because we were running out of money and we were running out of students and we were running out of public opinion, support, public opinion and so forth. That is, there were evidences of those things and they were all to be encountered. They were all to be dealt with. And it became quickly apparent to me that no president does that alone. And that's where I called on my chips, as you could say, because there were so many who came to me and said, "We want to help, we want to help, we want to help." And when you say you want to help, there's a presumption that there's a plan, and that the plan probably originates, first, it may be germinated by somebody, but it also has to emanate from a Board of Trustees. And it was a remarkable Board of Trustees. And we're in the room of Peggy Harmon, one of the great, there's a feminine for this word, benefactrix? Her contribution as a Trustee of Macalester and beyond was absolutely stunning. So I'm delighted to be having this interview in the Peggy Harmon Room of the DeWitt Wallace Library. But the Board of Trustees was very supportive, very understanding, very patient. I've mentioned several, but I could mention many. I'll mention one: Don Garretson, became Chairman in my time. And he was a bulwark of success, of assistance and confidence for me and...the Trustees were very strong and helped.

[28:53]

LZ: What was your first impression of the campus when you came to Macalester?

JD: It was a beautiful campus. Even then it was beautiful. It's much more attractive now than when I came here. But I guess one can say that the evolution of the college in the last, well

goodness, how many years is that? I left in '84, '94, 2004, 2006. That's 22 years ago, isn't it, that I left? And I was here nine years before that. The evolution of the campus and whole structure has been remarkable and constantly improved. I refer to this place as "a cultural oasis in the middle of a city". I think I coined that phrase, but you never can be sure. I thought that was one of my brilliant statements, one of the few that I would use when I talked about Macalester. And I want to tell you that I talk at the drop of a hat: to the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club, the Women's Club, the Save The Children Society, and you name it. I went anywhere. Have speech, will travel—to talk about Macalester. And I enjoyed it, because it was, in a sense, a mission. Edward Duffield Neill created a great idea, and his successors, James Wallace, they implemented it. And they went through travail and tension and trauma and...I succeeded...James...I ought to cut them...he who was president for two years before I came.

LZ: I think it was Robinson.

JD: What's that?

LZ: I think James Robinson...

JD: Robinson! James Robinson, sure. I came to know him and we corresponded and stuff like that. He was a fine person. And then an interim who had been one of his assistants was here holding things together. And they came after the exodus of the world-renowned educator who left. HEW's secretary, someone can help me with his name because this is one of those frightening times when you forget who you've always really known as the president of

Macalester in the years before I came. Flemming. Arthur Flemming. Those two men, Robinson and his associate, were “running”, quote unquote, the institution. It was they I officially followed, because Arthur Flemming had been gone for two and half years. Incidentally, George, I don’t remember which George it was—there were two—invited me, when I was superintendent of schools, to meet Arthur Flemming upon his arrival at Macalester, because George felt that there ought to be a relationship between Macalester and the City of Minneapolis and its superintendent. So we met at the Minneapolis Club. That was one of the introductions to the principal person in those years. That was a worthwhile experience, to have been able to renew acquaintance with him, although it had been slight. I felt comfortable, knowing about Macalester while I was superintendent, and I was delighted to be invited to come across the river. Very few people do that, live on both sides of the river, and so we did.

[32:52]

LZ: What then was your, kind of your first impression of the faculty, and what were your initial interactions with them when you came?

JD: Well, it was an impressive faculty. I read the catalogue and I read the catalogue, also, of Carleton and St. Olaf, to get a sense of what was happening. I made no comparison, except I saw the departments and came to understand the singularity of some departments and the coordination and combination of certain departments that were integrated in terms of the presentation of subject matter for students. And I saw the facilities, which, even then, were excellent. The quality of instruction here was at college level in many of the courses. And I felt

it was a first-rate faculty, and I had had contact with a great many who, in thoughtfulness, had come to say hello to me in my office. So I felt this was in excellent academic shape.

[34:01]

LZ: When you came in, who were in some of the other higher administration positions that you would have dealt directly with? Like, I guess it might not have been called provost then but kind of the dean of students, or the dean of faculty.

JD: Well that's a difficult question because there were a number here. I would point especially to, well Truman Schwartz was Acting Dean at the time I came. And I urged him to stay on but he said, "No, I want my test tubes!" I can hear those words, "I want my test tubes! I want the Bunsen burners!" And he went and John Linnell was called. Many interviewed him but I selected him. He came as the Academic Dean. The title has changed also, which makes it a little strange. He became the academic officer and a superior person, but he had an untimely death. And I turned immediately to Jack Rossmann. And Rossmann was a remarkable star, my star. I don't mean that in any personal way. He was a man of rigor and vigor and enthusiasm and intelligence and love of the college, and a first-rate person. He became the Dean, maybe it was Academic Vice President. I changed some titles. Earl Bowman was here. He'd been Assistant to Arthur Flemming. Earl Bowman had been a principle in a high school in Minneapolis. And I'll make a parenthetic insertion. Minneapolis, when I was there, went through the whole desegregation/integration issue. And among the schools that were in turmoil, in distress, was a junior high school where no one could settle it down. And there kids were rioting and so forth. And I, with the acquiescence of the key staff that I'd appointed in Minneapolis, called on Earl

Bowman to give up his teaching and athletic directorship of one of the high schools to come over and settle this particular junior high school. And he did. And in that process he gained the attraction, and Arthur Flemming had called him to come across as his assistant. There was no Assistant to the President when I came, and I didn't really like that title. And we needed a Dean of Students. And I asked Earl Bowman to become the Dean of Students. Earl had been a graduate, and a first-rate athlete, and, so far as I know, a stellar star. And if he wasn't, let's presume. He was a stellar person. So Earl Bowman, and Mary Lundblad was Dean. We brought Bill Shane here. He's now a Dean of Admissions at Bowdoin. And Duane Elvin was Director of Personnel, first rate. And some of the women in those offices over there were absolutely magnificent in their commitment to the college at those terrific times. In the business office, in the finance office... Who...Aase was here. He still is here and he is, isn't he the treasurer now? Dwight Ossee, O-S-S-E-E, yeah [Craig Aase?]. Well, Aase was a first rate person and he's still here. Well, there are many others and some I've...sort of slipped away. I'd have to look at the catalogs again to see. It was a great continuum of intelligent people willing to take on assignments in the five or six key areas of the college. And I was blessed with the willingness of those approached, who accepted. There were no long interregnums, there were no long vacancies. We found the people that we needed, and covered the gaps, and put an orderly structure into operation. I think. Of course there are, you're going to interview others who were around at that time, and they can say what you just heard after they have a censorship period.

[38:19]

LZ: At that time what was the relationship between the administration and the faculty? What were relations like?

JD: Well, it's always tense in the best sense of the word. You know, we sit here in our offices and we deal out the money, and we make the decisions, and the faculty have their own opinions. Of course, I play with this idea with fun because it's pretty hard to get a faculty to come to agreement. Great, independent, thoughtful, intelligent men and women have their own paths to trespass, their own paths to travel. So to put them together into a harmonious structure is not the simplest thing. But at Macalester it happened on the key issues. They came together. Now they went through real travail. Their salaries were cut, and threat of no salary increases, and so forth, and no employment, no new assignments, and so forth. All of those, no more graduate assistants, or something like that, no more student assistantships, and so forth. This was in a financial depression. And the faculty, the vast majority, stayed. They stuck with it. And in my judgment, there were ample opportunities for a significant number of our faculty to travel to the finest institutions in the country. No question about it. And these were still in a sense—well, period. I'll leave it at that. You know, absolutely wonderful. Now, you always, faculty can always tackle administration, and that's good. Dynamic tensions are essential. Student and faculty, administration and faculty, students and Board of Trustees, faculty and Board of Trustees—always seeking an approach to better resolution of what would appear to be a problem or might be a problem, better ways of managing the whole institution to the benefit of all. And what one must do is sort out those ideas which really represent steps to improving the circumstance for all versus steps that limit improvement for all in the interest of... So it's a sharing. It's the division of resource, and the appropriate allocation of that resource, to the end that in the last analysis, the students benefit. And that's why we're here. And I don't think faculty ever lost sight of that, I'm positive. And I don't think the administration did, because

those students... Well, I won't labor that point, but that's why we're here. While every student who came to Macalester, even in my day, was the beneficiary of several thousand dollars of endowed funds, which ran the college. Every student who's left this institution, quote unquote, could be determined to "owe" the college, because it cost more to educate that student than they paid in full tuition. That's a fact sometimes lost sight of. That's the endowment, and federal grants that we searched for and got. But I ought to reiterate again, anyone who went here could acknowledge that he or she could in a sense pay back something of what was paid for her or for him, making possible the one, two, three, or four years, and sometimes five years, of education here at Macalester.

[41:56]

LZ: What was the student body like when you first came here?

JD: What was it like?

LZ: In terms of size or composition...

JD: Well the composition may be a little more eclectic than it was then, but it was truly, of all the colleges in the area, the most diverse, and the most representative of cultures and religions and so forth. There's no question in my mind about that. It was...it was the world, encapsulated here, in that magnificent oasis in the heart of the city of St. Paul. That's my opinion, and I'm pretty darn sure it's correct. And the students were [chuckles], I coined the phrase because I wrote it down and I've seen it since, so I've used it, they were irritating, aggravating, agitating,

and wonderful. Those were the students, and they still are. It's easy to say that because I'm not here, but they were absolutely wonderful. And they were opinionated. And you know, college is a place you come to to get your ideas out, to quote "maybe make your mistakes" while you're in the confines of love and affection and discipline. Or the potential of discipline is here if you, as a student, want to listen to it. Here's the place to play it out. Macalester's always been able to do that, and certainly, I believe, it does it now. I know it does. But I don't have the intimacy any more. I come in, in a true sense, when I walk the campus I come to the library. I'm a stranger. I talk to some students and I get opinions, but unless you're here, with the pulse of the institution, you really can't be a commentator with any significance.

[43:40]

LZ: To move on to our next set of questions that focus very specifically on '75 and '76 and '77, I'd like to, if you want to talk to me a little bit about your inauguration celebration, because that's something that we haven't really gotten out in other interviews.

JD: I don't remember it in particular, and I can't remember who the commencement speaker was. I'd like to check that. When I went to Worcester, the President of the University of New Hampshire came and spoke. When I went to...I don't remember.

LZ: Did you have certain—

JD: But it was a wonderful ceremony. Gowns and representations from many of the colleges. It was a chance to wear my crimson gown, and so forth. And I could wear also, I wore my

honorary degree that I got later, that I got prior to my inauguration here, from the University of New Hampshire, my honorary doctorate there. So that was a... Why can't I tell you who made the inaugural address? I'm ashamed that I can't think of it, because I know it. I'd just as soon 'x' that from the video.

[44:59]

LZ: In 1975 then, did you in that year, did you develop kind of a set of goals that you were going to pursue for the college to kind of...you know, pull Macalester out of its financial crisis and, kind of, set it on a new path?

JD: Well yeah, I think that's, that is a fact. I can't give you one specific document, but in a variety of situations. With the Trustees and their interrogations, their questioning, and they were very good at this. They would get statements which would be recorded in the minutes of the Board, as to what I felt would happen, and what I felt could happen. And I hope I was able to say what the obstacles were to the achievement of those goals. But succinctly stating, the first was fiscal stability. I'm sure that was the paramount issue. And I know that they imposed upon me that burden, if I was to be successful in my term as President. You had to get fiscal stability. But the student body was important, and the maintenance of a faculty worthy of the students. And that's a different way to put it, a faculty worthy of the students. So those were the goals. And more than that, there was the development and improvement of the relationship with the alumni. Some evidence is that the alumni-college relationships had...could be improved. And again the alumni rallied. In my judgment, they rallied just wonderfully well and with enthusiasm.

[46:39]

LZ: What was your understanding of how the college had gotten to be in this financial crisis, and, kind of, this period of almost unrest and change? Were you aware of factors, before you had come, that had sort of...

JD: Well, that's very hard to document. But, I think expenses outran income, and hanging over it all was the threat of Mr. Wallace, that he would withdraw the stock that he'd given from which the college derived some interest. But it wasn't worth a great deal because the company was private. It wasn't until Reader's Digest became public that the price, the value of the stock went up. Also, alumni giving was down, by comparison with other institutions. I wonder, what was your question?

LZ: Just, were there, I guess I'm curious, did the Vietnam War protests or, kind of, the expense of the EEO program, where those both factors?

JD: Yes. Sure they were. The expense of the EEO program. It was a very expensive program, and to support those students who were brought here from Spanish Harlem, from Chicago, from Kansas City, who needed lots of opportunities...and culturing in terms of what it would be like to live on a campus with students whose backgrounds had significantly been going to college and so forth. Arthur Flemming had money... I believe he had resources that weren't to become permanent parts of the college, or sustainable. And so the cost of bringing students in to be interviewed was expensive. And the program, they built—"they", the institution—built a coterie

of qualified consultants on the campus for the minority group. One could also make the case, I think, and I'd be glad to be rebutted, that the campus wasn't really prepared for the arrival of a significant number of students whose backgrounds and orientations had not been directed toward a small liberal arts college campus on an oasis in a city which wasn't, for many of them, really a city. It didn't have the pulse, the beat, and so forth. They were in a strange environment, and they needed assistance and advice. And the Vietnam War was a factor, of course, the aftermath of it and the resistances. Mr. Johnson was the President at the time, and his great society was a commitment to improving the conditions of all people, and he did that in many many ways. He was an amazing person as a President, in terms of support for education. And that generated interest and activity in support of current legislation. And, of course, get out of the war and solve the problem of Vietnam, and related international affairs. So there was plenty of information, plenty of circumstance, to make this an intellectually lively and stimulating, active, action-oriented campus. And students took advantage of it.

[50:22]

LZ: What happened to the EEO program then after you were...

JD: Well, I was one of the factors that had to bring some reduction to it. I'm fully conscious of that. But in my judgment, we just couldn't sustain that disproportioned allocation, even though the case could be made that the disproportioned allocation was allocated and based upon the disproportionate experience that the students in that program brought to the campus. It was not an easy thing to do. But I guess practicality required it. But there were ways by which there was an accommodation to a reduction in staff. And I think the campus itself began to settle down a

bit. Sources became available of help and assistance. I think faculty began to respond over those years to the individuality of some of their students, to a degree greater than they had at the onset of the EEO program.

[51:30]

LZ: In more, kind of, general terms, what were some of the other weaknesses and strengths of the college that you highlighted in, perhaps, those first years?

JD: Some of the what?

LZ: Strengths and weaknesses that you kind of came in and acknowledged and then worked to—

JD: Well the great strength of the place was the idea. The idea that was Macalester. You can read the statements of what Macalester was intended to be. I won't attempt to—this is a great, democratic principle put into force through the efforts of Edward Duffield Neill, who had been amanuensis to President Lincoln, you know, he had been a national figure. He wanted a place like this. His pattern, incidentally, was Amherst College in New England. New England was rich with a small private college. The West and the Midwest was really primarily public institutions. The strength of the idea that the small liberal arts colleges could rend a great service, without imposing, become symbols of what the churches that founded them believed represented the best interests of humanity, broadly conceived. This was a Presbyterian church by heritage, and the Presbyterians have a universal, global respect for, and belief in, and a tolerance

of diversity. And they built a college as more of religion X, Y, Z, and P than they do in Presbyterian students. I think that's true. It was then, it is now. But here was a great composition of people under the auspices of a church funded, a church founded—because the funding wasn't that great. Some of the great contributors were church people, but the church itself, it did not have imposed on the College a formal requirement that Presbyterians be on the Board of Directors or the Board of Trustees. They usually were but it wasn't a requirement. This was to be a great Saint Paul, Minnesota, world-wide college. And that's what it was and it's become better and better and better and better. And I see no limit to its blooming, blossoming.

[54:16]

LZ: One thing I wanted to talk to you about was the relationship that you kind of cultivated with DeWitt and Lila Wallace, because we hear a lot about them and yet we, I guess, as people, we don't really know who they were, and seeing that you had a lot of contact with them...

JD: I had contact, but not a lot. I had contact more than many, although some, perhaps one or two of the Board of Trustees, had seen more of DeWitt and Lila than I did. But at any rate, when I arrived the alienation was quite pronounced. We had the Lila Wallace Fine Arts Center, you know. She was a great enthusiast for bringing Arthur Flemming here as the President. She urged that, and encouraged him to come and accept and the Board to invite him. And I think they made some special arrangements for him. He'd been at Ohio Wesleyan, where my wife taught, my current wife, Joy, taught there for five years at Ohio Wesleyan after he had gone. He went to the University of Oregon, and I think it was from Oregon that he came here directly.

That's Flemming. But she, Mrs. Wallace, had been a graduate, I think, of the University of Oregon. The story of DeWitt Wallace is a fascinating story. He went to work for the Webb Publishing Company after graduating from college here and wrote a manuscript on what the agricultural farmer ought to know that's available in terms of federal government subsidy and support. And he traveled the country in the Upper Midwest in a ramshackle car and sold 10,000 copies. That was the beginning of the idea that he could do more than just... Together, their digesting of articles, they did that night after night in the New York Public Library. And began gradually to build the concept of Reader's Digest, which, as you know, is almost next to the Bible in most New England townhouses. Everyone had the Reader's Digest. And while it was, from an intellectual point of view, sometimes criticized by the elite, it was a magnificent educator. I have a talk, which I gave somewhere, saying that DeWitt Wallace might be declared to be America's greatest public educator, in terms of what he put into publication and made available, mass distribution.

[56:53]

Well, my first meeting with him, and it was perfectly clear to me that I had to, when I came here, that I had to meet Mr. Wallace. And I made clear, I guess, that I'm glad to meet Mr. Wallace but I'll have to be elected before I see him. I didn't want me, I, to become Mr. Wallace's candidate. So I was elected, and then I went down to see him alone. And it was a very interesting meeting. He scheduled us, me to meet at the Sky Club, which is no longer there. But the Sky Club was maybe on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor of one of the great buildings. I got there early. I assure you, I was gonna be there on time. And I sat in the small lobby. It's a very private club, but a rather large club. And all of a sudden the doorway is filled with the frame of a very big man. He was not a small man. He was a big man. He, I guess, knew probably that little man over there was John Davis,

and he came right over to me. He introduced himself and they had a table for him, which I think was his usual table, against a window, and two seats, two chairs. And we chatted. And he said to me, "Would you like a drink?" That's a very difficult question, because I do like a drink, and I did like a drink. But my mind clicked for me, and I said, "Well, Mr. Wallace, it's a work day. But if you will have a drink I would be happy to join you." And he said, "Martini?" and I said, "Yes." And they served two martinis. And that, in a sense, didn't break the ice, but it was an instrument of commonality, at any rate. And we chatted about a variety of things, few of which I can remember except those that related to the campus, to the college. "What do you think of it?" and "Who have you met?" and so forth and so on. "What's it look like?" and "How are the students?" and so forth. I think it's proper to state that Mr. Wallace was politically and socially a conservative person. What he had supported was not necessarily what he had expected in terms of student behavior, student reaction. So he asked me about whether things were under control. And he had a basis for knowing what was going on in the campus, because he had an education advisor who visited several institutions of America which he gave support to. So that particular person would come and visit, maybe make himself known, usually he did. And then he'd report to Mr. Wallace what was going on. The key question, I guess, that came from that first meeting with Mr. Wallace was, I don't think he said "Davis", but he might have. It was a forced statement. He might have said, [stern] "Davis, do you know what a bottom line is?" Or he could have said [casual] "John, do you know what a bottom line is?" or, "Dr. Davis, do you know..." But it was "DO YOU KNOW WHAT A BOTTOM LINE IS?" And of course that's, you know what that word is. That means what is the blue or red at the bottom of the fiscal statement. And I was able to say, "Well, Mr. Wallace, I've dealt with budgets, not as an expert. But I've dealt with budgets all my life. And I've had to know that they were balanced or unbalanced. And I've

had to understand them. But I've always had first-class associates with total responsibility for appraising me of critical situations as they emerge in the budgeting and expenditure of budgets."

[1:00:58]

And of course I had that with Paul Aslanian. Paul was a remarkable colleague. Paul had been in the Economics Department on a short-term appointment, and was threatening to go back to the state of Washington, which wanted him. As you know, many institutions have wanted him since he left Macalester. But Paul was my great budget man and he'd gone over with me the situation. Craig Aase, is the man I'm trying to think of, who was Paul's right arm. And so I could say, "Yes, I understand what a bottom line is. And I understand," said I, "that it has to be in the black. And we will work toward that goal." It wasn't, but we will work to that goal. And not at that meeting, but at a subsequent meeting, he said to me, "When you balance the budget, I'll send you \$20,000 every time you balance the budget." Now I think it was \$20,000. I have a feeling that it may have been a little more, but it was at least \$20,000 a year sent to you, for the college of course. Well, we balanced the budget every year of my presidency here. Now that was not balanced without some privation, without some sacrifice, without some relinquishing of activities that many wise people would like to be involved in, but we balanced it. And that was convincing to Mr. Wallace. Now I saw Mrs. Wallace only twice. Once was in the farmhouse building on the site of the campus, which is the *Reader's Digest*. It's a college campus, in a sense. It's beautiful. And there's a New England farmhouse there, maybe a New York state farmhouse, but it is typical farmhouse. And she came there to one of the lunches that we had there. That's where Mr. Wallace would have his lunches. And she was gracious and lovely and beautiful. The last time I saw her was in the Wallace home in New York. And there she was frail and assisted. And Clark Drake and I were there with our attorney, Bruce Kiernat. I think

those were the three. And we were talking about some final details and so forth. And DeWitt was there. But I think this is an honest—I know it's honest—and I think it's a pleasant anecdote exhibiting love and affection. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace sat on a divan, a davenport, a settee, a two-seater. And I was at a chair next to them, and who else was there? Two or three others there. But the entire time that Mr. Wallace and Mrs. Wallace sat on that—there may have been interruptions—but his hand was this on her lap [tapping]. It was very remarkable. It was beautiful. And they conversed, they conversed, but I can see that hand now. Well, now, the sequence of this is we then went to the dining room, which was an elevated room by three steps. And as I say, Carl Drake on one and I on the other side, and we assisted her. And Mr. Wallace went to the other end of the table. And there weren't more than three-six-eight or nine people at that table. And Mr. Wallace was talking, and all of a sudden Mrs. Wallace spoke up and said, "Now, Wally! You know that's not accurate!" [laughs]. So, while they had wonderful relationships in terms of their personal affection one for the other, they were not uncritical, one of the other. They weren't afraid to interrupt one another. And, of course, they had to have been a team to write those articles, and it was a team endeavor. So my correspondence then was correspondence. And working also with a very intelligent person, as you can expect. Barnabas McHenry was Mr. Wallace's lawyer. And I've always, my life, been indebted to lawyers with whom I've had to work and happily did work. And in this situation it was Bruce Kiernat, our lawyer for the college, working with Barney McHenry on details. I would see him because Mr. Wallace had set up funds, and I'm not going to go into the nature of those funds. They were funds for Williamstown, funds for some independent secondary schools, funds for Macalester. And there was a holding company in a sense. And Chief Justice of the United States was our representative to that committee, and we met frequently in the Supreme Court Building for the

annual meetings of this group of Wallace interests. And Mr. Wallace, in my judgment, attended only one of those meetings. But Barnabus McHenry would be there representing, and the President of the *Reader's Digest* would be there representing the *Digest's* interests. So I had no more than three or four sessions with Mr. Wallace, two of which were significant. And the two were one in the farmhouse and the second was in the Pan Am building, the Sky Club on the x floor.

[1:06:40]

LZ: How—I mean I assume that it was incredibly important—but would Macalester, in your opinion, have been able to continue as an institution had that relationship with DeWitt Wallace not been mended?

JD: I don't think that's an answerable question. My prejudice says, "Yes it could," but I think it would have been extremely difficult because one of the threats was that the stock that had been given and the interest from it had not been spent in the interests of the donor. And that could have become a law case. And it didn't. Had it become I don't know what the decision would have been. But to remove that, and the final vestiges of Wallace support gone, I think it would have been extremely difficult, and a national sort of, negative national bit of news. This college was in the nation's eye, because there was general knowledge among the private colleges of America that this college had that relationship and it was tenuous. Something wasn't clicking. It was known, it was watched. We were at the end of the microscope.

[1:07:59]

LZ: Just quickly, you had mentioned that there had been some sacrifices that had to be made during this period when there was very little money. Can you recall what some of those—specifically, were there programs cut or just in general?

JD: Well, I mentioned that we cut the EEO program. And I know that there were some professorial positions that weren't filled. And I know that, if you take the catalog of today and the list of departments and personnel, and compare it to the 1975 through 1984—numbers of staff, budget, numbers of professors, and numbers of students—you will find the number of those students pretty much in, I don't think more than 100 or 150 difference in the number of students. But you have to check that. Is it 1800 now?

LZ: I think around 1800.

JD: Around 1800. But I think when I was here it was above 1600, and into 17, but you'd have to check that. So maintaining the student body and improving it was difficult. Parents think about a school and its stability. It would have been much more difficult for a student to have a parent invest x-thousand dollars with some feeling that the place might not be here, or wouldn't be quite as good as it was the year before. That was something that hung over us. So you go back to your original question, "Would it have succeeded?" My guess that it would have found a way to eventually spiral out, and there would still be a Macalester College, but I'm not positive.

[1:09:58]

LZ: To move now, sort of, into the 1980s and, sort of, the second half of your presidency, if you're going to divide it, there was a thing called the Campaign for the '80s. I don't know if it was a program or a campaign, and, kind of, what was that and how did that sort of become developed, and what its goals were?

JD: Well, it was a 30 million dollar effort and we made it. And it had to do with professorial salaries, staff salaries, school-planned—college-planned expansion. And I don't know what the details of it were because I've forgotten. But it was a 30 million dollar venture, and it was a courageous venture at that time, and we made it. And we made it because the Board of Trustees were stellar in their support of the college. And they really were just absolutely wonderful. And the campus responded well, and the faculty did, and the alumni began to respond in increasing measure. So that thirty is for me a great figure. Thirty.

[1:11:01]

LZ: Was that campaign the same as the Capital Fund Drive? Were those kind of...?

JD: Well, you know, I get mixed up on what was the Capital Fund Drive and what was merged in it and so forth. But we were after money all the time I was here. And I think we had reasonable plans for the achievement of that money, or for the use of that money. The plans for achieving were pretty good, and we were basically successful in all of the ventures. But in my time here, we never had enough in comparison to what we have now. What we had after the Wallace Agreement was settled and the monies became available. That happened the year or so after I left. That was sort of in-trust. It became available for significant improvement of the

campus. But I never felt any degree of largess. I never felt any great discretionary—you can talk to Sandy Hill about this. When we traveled, Sandy Hill and I traveled a great deal raising money. I tell you, we didn't stay in the Ritz Carletons. We had an economy budget. It didn't bother us any. We weren't used to anything other than that, anyway. We also had the opportunity to compare. We compare even now. Sandy doesn't. I compare even now the flexibilities which college presidents have by contrast to what I experienced. And in saying that I am in no way suggesting that it should have been different at that time for me. All I'm saying is it's different now than it was then. But that's the way of life, I think. In fact, I guess you could take any institution and see these great differences. Oh, Sandy and I had some wonderful times together. And we knew how to write ahead and get invited to go to family homes and so forth, that sort of thing.

LZ: Was it mainly alumni at that point, that you were kind of...

JD: Well, both alumni and friends. Friends of friends. And foundations. Yeah.

[1:13:13]

LZ: Did you start to see things within the college start to improve financially towards the end of your presidency?

JD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely. Yes. Significantly, yeah.

[1:13:29]

LZ: What kind of relationship did you, kind of, cultivate and develop with the students and the faculty, being that you were here nine years as President?

JD: Well, let's take those categories one at a time. With the faculty I think it was one of mutual respect, and agreed upon disagreement, in some situations. It had to be. And I know that the faculty were denied much of what was appropriate for them to have expected and wanted. But they were more than decent about it because they also had built a stake into this existence, into the existence of this institution. They were also ambassadors of the institution in the professional world that they traveled in, as well as the staff. Staff were excellent. And the key staff people traveled also. And they told about Macalester, created little pyramids of understanding here and there around the country and so forth. So...there were some incidents, which I won't go into, where I disagreed with the faculty and had to make some decisions. They can tell you about it, you'll be interviewing them. There were issues of tenure. There were issues of promotion and so forth. And I choose not to get into that. Those who were the elements within the structure are the ones to talk to this. I had to make some decisions. Now when you go to students, we had lots of battles. There had been a great battle on this campus when they built the chapel. I was not here then. That beautiful chapel, Weyerhaeuser Chapel. The student did not want to cut any of the trees that were there where that campus chapel went up, and that was a real tough issue. When I was here...well, period. Let's go back a little bit.

[1:15:42]

I instituted—well, there was a name for it. I can't think of what it was, but once a month the key staff and I would meet in the old student union, with coffee and cider or something, and stand there, ready to answer the questions of the students. Town Meeting, they called it Town

Meeting. That's what it was. And I instituted it and we followed through with it. And if we knew there was a particular issue on campus, I would ask somebody, you know, to be there. You were here, part of that, any part of that? No. Rognlie was the name of the man who was in charge of the campus plant. A very fine person. He left just after I left, I think. Jim Rognlie. So if there was a campus issue that had to do with the condition of a building on the site and so forth, I'd have Jim Rognlie there. If it was personnel, I'd have Duane Elvin there. But always, the Academic Vice President, the Dean of Students, the Dean of Admissions, and the Dean of—well, five or six of us would be there from the key administrative posts, answering questions. And that was a way of getting out in the open concerns that were in the minds of the students. And, to a degree, those which were legitimate we could extend out and work on, and those which seemed illegitimate we were able pretty much to say, "This is it. This is the answer". I declared that the old union building—there's a name for that building. We tore it down and built the wonderful new building. It had an entryway from a pavilion. There was argument, when I was here, that I laid bricks around and made a semi-circle around it. And my statement was, "This is the Hyde Park of Saint Paul". I'd been to Hyde Park and I'd listened to the speakers, you know—a free open forum. And it was a perfect place because steps that you used to ascend into the building had a little common place where one or two people could be and harangue the crowd from six feet up. This was a perfect place. And so I asked to have a circle built around there where they wouldn't tread the.... "Oh, that Davis is tearing up the turf!" And so forth and so forth and so on. And actually, I must say, to my disappointment, there wasn't a great use of that as a common place for, periodically, some agitator to stand and talk. It wasn't really used. But I liked the idea, and I never let go of the idea. But it never really became a Hyde Park in the sense that almost hourly you'd have someone standing there and proclaiming. We ought to have

more people who proclaim, especially in innocent situations so they can be heard. But you don't...well, period. Proclaiming is an important aspect of college life. So that was one issue. You, in your letter, you said "What about Fall Break?"

[1:19:17]

LZ: Yeah, that was mine.

JD: Well what about it? [chuckles] That was a tough one. But I felt strongly and I had some faculty support and some faculty neutrality, I might add. But to have those days of vacation come between the end of a semester and the beginning of Christmas vacation, that was the sequence, was, in my mind, an academic interruption of uselessness, the Fall Break. And we got rid of it, I think. It modified at any rate. But that was a red hot issue. And I felt so strongly about it. The place sort of stopped. Some activities took place, but the flow of instruction, the flow of intercourse, student to faculty, and so forth...the business of the college went into sort of suspended animation with the Fall Break. And students didn't like that. But it was done and apparently we didn't suffer greatly. You said you read the *Mac Weeklys*. That's an amazing document, you know. That's a history...with some objectivity and some...license. But it's there! And I might add, that it seems to me it would be wise in the history of this series to get a student from each of the great years, each of the years. When I was here, there were some wonderful student leaders, wonderful student leaders. I can name...one, her husband is a Trustee now. She became the first woman president of the Community Council. She comes to campus with some frequency, she lives around here. She can tell you something about a fellow named Tilton, who was a very active student on campus. He's servicing mankind somewhere in Africa

now. People, I think you should think seriously of getting a student, by some selection, for each of the key years that you're covering. And go through the Mac Weekly and find out who those people were. I can think of a couple that you don't want to invite, but I won't tell you [laughs]. But I think that would be a very valued...resource.

[1:21:48]

LZ: Did you find it difficult to maintain a good relationship with students when you were, kind of, placed in this position of making difficult decisions that, perhaps, were—

JD: No, I didn't because I had a... I was never personally offended. And I felt that these were reasoned. And I moved around the campus a great deal. And I went into student situations, generally invited, but not always. I was around! I think that would be proven and agreed to, that I was around. I wasn't in my office all the time. And I think the same could be said in terms of contact with faculty. Although it's never enough, especially with faculty and staff—never enough interaction or communication or...communion. But I was around.

[1:22:50]

LZ: So you had a lot of, kind of, face time with students outside of them coming to your office for very specific...

JD: Yes. I think I did. And I would stop students on the campus, and we would talk, and I'd say "Well, come on up and let's have a discussion" and that happened. It was pretty much of an open door presidency. Well, I know that. It was a fact—it was an open door presidency and I

was available. And my house was on campus. It went away from campus for a while. Now Brain Rosenberg's house is technically on campus, but my house was available also. I heard the noise from Wallace Hall [laughs]. I heard the cars screeching and so forth. So that was fine.

[1:23:36]

LZ: What were some of the factors that then led to your decision to leave Macalester in 1984?

JD: Well, there were two. One was the commitment that I'd made—seven to ten years. And second, the death of my wife in 1983, Barbara. And that was a unique situation in that we had worked so closely together over the years that I...I just couldn't quite imagine being here without her. Life changed so dramatically that I announced that I would leave in a year. She died in November of '83, and I left in the Fall of '84. Well, in the Spring of '84. I had announced my resignation, and along came another job. But I knew I wouldn't be here and I didn't know what I was going to be doing. But I knew that it wouldn't be the same, so I felt that I didn't have to attempt to adjust myself to such a dramatic change. And I had great family support. Several of my children were well-established in the area, and supportive of me, so that I knew I wouldn't starve and I could have a bed and so forth. I engaged a condominium over in a high rise in Minneapolis in July, I guess, or August the year I left.

[1:25:23]

LZ: What was the state of Macalester after almost ten years since you had come? Did you feel that you had...came in and accomplished the goals that you had kind of set out in '75?

JD: Well, let me, just to put it this way, I felt satisfied. Now I know there were shortcomings in a variety of areas that I dealt with, but on balance I think I had done the job. I had to live really with myself and I couldn't then, as I hope all of my life, I couldn't be dishonest with myself. I felt it was a reasonable time to leave and that we had made, you know, made our mark. How high the mark was on the target, I don't know, you know. I frequently use an example in discussing or talking about organization. You know what a bow and arrow is. And you know what the target is. It has three or four concentric rings, and it's great to hit the outer ring. And that's success. But it's wonderful to hit the bull's eye. And I think you would find that most of my arrows were in the ring, but they were dispersed. I haven't said that before. But I just thought of that. So I leave that to you. Others can find that out [laughs].

[1:26:49]

LZ: Was there anything you had regretted during that time that perhaps you hadn't achieved that you felt...

JD: That I?

LZ: Well maybe not personally, but something that, for the college, that you had hoped that would happen that had not, kind of, been fulfilled by the time that you left?

JD: Well I can answer that I guess only, in honesty, only this way: I did have a vision of what this place could become. And in no way had it reached my vision, nor had it reached the vision of key faculty and staff, and certainly the Board of Trustees. It hadn't yet arrived. It was well on

the way, I think, but it hadn't arrived. So in any one of the component parts of this complex institution, one could say "It could have been better." It could have been better. It could get better. Better to say "Could get better, will get better, will get better, will get better". Yeah.

[1:27:43]

LZ: Well, if you want to continue on, I just have a few more, kind of, more general reflection type questions.

JD: Sure, if you think that will wind this up.

LZ: Yeah, I think so.

JD: Good.

LZ: What do you think were some of the most enjoyable aspects for you as being president of Macalester?

JD: Oh, that's great. Well, the satisfactions that come from being the administrator at the apex of an organization come from feeling that, basically speaking, your plan—which is the evolving of the sentiments and direction of a...constituency of varied backgrounds and interests—is recognized. That the goal is recognized. And that the tangible evidence of movement toward it is being realized. Which means—like you know in the old automobiles you used to have what were called, under the hood, tappets, that went up and down, like this, on both sides of the

cylinder—there were tappets. They pushed the oil up and down. When those tappets went out of order, they would be irregular. And when the tappets were all operating the car was running smoothly. And that's so it is in an institution. The component parts: the alumni, the graduates, the—and you can name all the constituent parts. When they're all sort of oriented and focused, then you can feel good. And I felt that way. I did feel that way. Now, the acceleration of those tappets, that's another matter. But they were working. So I felt that we were achieving in the majority. And that's a great satisfaction that comes from administration. And the other is the...not occasional, but the general sense of communication, camaraderie, conversation, informal, unexpected, positive-ness that you picked up around the campus, in contrast to what I have some sense of knowing...the irritating, aggravating, unsettled, disheveled, disappointed, discouraged, aggravated opinions that float through institutions. When one is more dominant than the other, that's a problem. But when one is, when the good one is dominant then there's a sort of a happiness, a satisfaction, a feeling of contentment. And I guess I felt that. That's the reward of administration. And the third area would be when the Board of Trustees, which has the—they own the college, in this case. When they could feel that their decision, in terms of the appointment of the chief operating officer, was a good one. Not perfect, but good. When they can feel that, then—and you're told it—then you feel good as the administrator. But I use the word good and not perfect, and all that. They always will search for the perfect and they probably have in the past and will in the future, maybe now, have the perfect. But when the Board can say, in honesty, "You did it," that's the reward.

[1:31:23]

LZ: Was there anything that you just disliked about being president? Not maybe so much in serious, very negative terms, but just some aspect of the job that...

JD: Well, I think if you take into account the function of the chief executive officer, the prime administrator, the atlas of the mountain ranges, there are things you have to do. You have to tell people some things that they may not want to hear. And you have to intervene in situations that it would be, in a sense, easier to avoid. You have to discover, uncover situations that need exploitation, need excavation, need analysis, need...the....scooping up, so that exposed to light and conversation is an issue. You can't let it fester. It has to be, and that's not easy, but it's a part of the administrative task. And it being a part of the administrative task, you don't view it as anything but expected. You know, what did I think if I took on this assignment? Don't get grumpy about this, and do it! I mean, that's your job! So the ingredients of your job sometimes require what you could wish you really didn't have to do, but then you say, well, you know you're being paid and you're being rewarded, and you better get at it. And so you do.

[1:33:10]

LZ: In reflecting on your presidency, is there anything that you would have done differently if, you know, the opportunity had been to do it over?

JD: [Pause] Well, you know, that's a very awkward question. I don't really have an answer for you. Nothing seems... I don't remember. And that's why you need others to come. I don't remember any great big mistake I made. Someone will tell you what it was. There were lots of little mistakes, but they were corrected, generally speaking. I think they were. And I was

fortunate. The Board of Trustees was great. Solicitous and very comforting and very understanding. And I think they, in wise and good, unobtrusive ways would say, “Did you think of it this way?” You know. And the faculty was good, that way, and staff. People were willing to be of assistance. So I think the problems that emerged were handled fairly well in my time. And there’s nothing that I can think of now that I should have done that I didn’t do. And I can’t think of anything that I did that I should not have done. But isn’t that an interesting statement? But I’m saying it. I really can. So when you get your next respondent [laughs], you can ask and you can quote, and then you’ll get a great alliteration of “Oh! Oh, oh, oh! Sure, I’m just ready and here’s my list. What years do you want? 1977? Oh! Wow! We didn’t do this, we didn’t do that. He did...what was he thinking?” Now I can just hear that, and you better get it. You better get it recorded.

[1:35:02]

LZ: Actually, quite the opposite. What seems to come out, and it’s kind of a wide statement that is made, is that you are “The Man That Saved Macalester College”, to put it in those words. And what’s kind of your reaction when you hear that statement?

JD: Well, it’s humility. Because it isn’t true. Yet I don’t like to deny it [laughs]. I was at the apex of the organization, and we sort of came through the rough seas and our navigation was pretty good, and I was involved. I had the wheel and the rudder and the tiller, and with plenty of able hands, we sailed through without major catastrophe. What was your question?

LZ: Just in general, your reaction to, to that kind of, I guess...

JD: Oh! To my being the...save Macalester? Well, at a point I thought I was almost beginning to believe it. I think institutions and society need a figurehead. And we can lay the blame, or we can convey the praise. And in my happy circumstance, primarily, people laid the praise on the person who was head of the campus. They could also have viewed some of the leadership of the Trustees, or found some faculty members, who were central to the survival of this institution. But, actually, if you put the structure of the college in terms of individuals, the Trustees are not full time. So while they have a box on the organization chart, you don't see them. But the apex is the president. So that's where the focus was. So, I accept this. I didn't feel any halo. And I don't expect one, and I didn't then. It's fun, in a sense. But I can josh them out of that statement, that I saved Macalester. I was certainly a participant.

[1:37:35]

LZ: When you look back and reflect on all the administrative positions you've held, where does your time at Macalester kind of fit in with the other things that you've done in your life?

JD: I've been asked that question before, and I don't have a, I don't have the answer which I think the interrogator would like to get. Because each of the situations I went into was a challenge of quite significant importance for the institution that I went to. After I left Macalester it was a great challenge to go to the Children's Theater for a year and a half. That was...I went to the College of Art and Design, which was in great difficulty. I went to Mankato State University as President, where the union had driven the woman president out. And I had to fight the union there, and come to restoration. The Attorney General had to support me in the issue.

Those were very interesting. The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, to which I went for a year. Parenthetic insertion—it developed, I think, after I left Macalester and had success at the Children’s Theater. And they sort of tied me with success at Macalester, that when it was announced that John Davis was going to X or Y or Z, I have a feeling that people said, “Jingles, it must be pretty badly off. We better rally around! And I’m a Trustee of that, I’m a Regent of that place, I’m a Director. We better get started!” So they have a great coalition here of all those people, and they say, “Well, Davis is coming but he can’t do it alone.” They knew that, but “We better just rally around.” And that’s the kind of explosion of effort and energy and commitment that happened. So all of them, all that I did, including that first year of teaching—that was a real challenge. I’d never been in a classroom. I’d never been in a classroom. That’s why I’ve always been a loose constructionist as to who should be qualified to teach. Lots of college professors never taught until they taught. And I fought that battle in the public school structure. But that’s another matter. That’s another matter. Well, you’re a good interrogator and you made me feel very comfortable and I thank you.

LZ: Thank you very much.

JD: And those two great ladies that watch from behind the camera have been inspirations to see the smiles and the nods of ascent and so forth. So this had been good. And we’re in the Peggy Harmon Room, and that’s nice, too.

[End of interview 1:40:17]