This is an interview with Tom Mullen as part of the university archive's oral history project, and would you like to describe your family background and where you grew up?

Yes. I grew up on a dairy farm. My father was the manager of the dairy farm. He was the owner of the cattle but not of the land. He rented the land, leased the land, and the people who owned it lived on the farm also so I got to know them much to my disadvantage at times because I would run away from home because the lady of the house up there would give me ice-cream when I came and even though I knew a spanking was waiting when I got back, it was worth it to go up there and get the ice-cream so I did that pretty often. Anyway, the dairy farm was my home for the first 6 years of my life.

Then we moved about 16 miles away to another dairy farm, about 16 miles outside of Memphis. The first farm was actually on the city limits. It was not in the city but it was only out by a few feet, so I learned a great deal about cows and running a dairy, about milking and all that kind of thing, both in my first 6 years and later on. My parents did not have an opportunity to finish high school. My mother finished the ninth grade. My father finished the eighth grade. After that, he went to work. He was an orphan when he was 2 years old.

I think that both his parents had died with the yellow fever which was very common at that time, in the early twentieth century and he went to work as a laborer on a team that brought logs out of the forest of Western Tennessee. They had to put them into a river and make them float down the river to wherever they wanted them to be, so how my Dad became a dairyman, I actually don't know, but it may have had something to do with my mother because her family also had a dairy, so I had dairies on both sides of the family and that was extremely important to me during the first 17 years of my life.

When I was 12 years old, my father unhappily had a brain tumor and he died at the age of 39 so I became a kind of a necessary adult at the age of 12, and from that time until I left home to go to college at the age of 18, my mother and I ran a very small dairy with only 30 cows and she and I, for some length of time, milked all of those 30 cows ourselves, 15 each, so that was what I did in the
morning before going to school. Probably the most interesting single fact about that dairy era was the fact [00:04:00] that we delivered milk all over Memphis, Tennessee. It was a retail dairy.

This was while my father was still living, and I as a boy loved to jump on the milk truck and go along with him and see what I could see. They also let me deliver milk so I could take a little carrier with six [corked 00:04:22] bottles in there and take it up to somebody's house and leave the number that was specified, also sometimes leave a bill. One of the houses in which I left milk and once left a bill was a house owned by a Doctor Moore, and Doctor Moore's house was the first one that I ever saw in my life that had its own name and the name posted out in front of the house was Graceland.

That house subsequently, I don't know how many years, maybe five, six, eight years later was sold, probably longer than that, anyway, was sold to a young man by the name of Elvis Presley, and Elvis instead of changing the name to something to suit himself perhaps better, he chose to keep the name Graceland and so I went there again about six years ago. The first time I had been back since delivering milk, so I can say with all truth that I was at Elvis's home before he was.

Tanya: Was there an expectation, given with the death of your father and the fact that you were helping your mother so much that you would go to college or was there an expectation, discussion about you staying on the farm?

Tom: Because of my family's lack of education, I was the first in the family on either side to go to college [00:06:00]. I could not say there was any expectation there that I would go to college except that over time through high school, I did well and many teachers encouraged me so that I did have a sense maybe before the tenth grade that I would eventually go to college and [inaudible 00:06:29] and certain teachers for them, it was absolutely necessary that I should go. The more I heard about it, I must have talked about that at home. I can't remember for sure, but my mother had no difficulty, happily accepting the fact that I would be going off to college. Not easy for her be-I had an older sister five years older but she had moved on and had her own family by this time, so she was not in the picture for our family, so my mother was left by herself so she had to take care of herself. She ended up after a several amount of working positions, she ended up running a small flower shop of her own and that was her last occupation.

Tanya: She stayed in the Memphis area?

Tom: She stayed in Memphis, in the Memphis area and bought a little house eventually and that was home for me then and each time I would go back until she died in early in 1963, she died at the age of 57, so both my parents lived
relatively short lives. They would [00:08:00] have been astonished had they seen their son still living at the age of 85.

Tanya: How did you choose Rollins College?

Tom: In a sense, Rollins College chose me. I was in the high school. It was known as Germantown high school in Germantown, Tennessee. That was not its official name, but that's what everybody called it. The principal of Germantown received a letter from Rollins College asking him whether he would nominate four students in the senior class ... This was some time in the fall of senior year, whether he would nominate four students to sit for an examination, [whether 00:08:50] he would monitor the exam and then send them back the results. That happened some time probably in January or February, I suppose, of what would have been 1947 and I didn't hear anything.

I didn't hear anything so I forgot about it. I had in the meantime, after I heard about it, I had gone down to Memphis to the main public library called the Cossitt Library right on the bank of the Mississippi River overlooking the Mississippi. I went down there and found a catalog for Rollins College and it had these magnificent photographs of this Mediterranean style college sitting on the edge of a huge lake with all these palm trees around. Oh my, it was completely different from anything I had ever seen or I doubt I'd even seen pictures like those [00:10:00] before.

Anyway I thought, "Boy, that's where I'd love to go" but nothing came through. Finally, just before graduation, I think some time in May, I received a letter from Rollins offering me a scholarship and so on the basis of that, I talked about it of course with my mother and decided that I would take the scholarship and go and see what it was like. I'll never forget the trip down there, 31 hours on the train from Memphis to Winter Park, Florida, and I arrived about 2:30, 3:00 in the morning. No-one in the town I think was awake except the [poor 00:10:55] man who had to look after the train station.

He was there, so he told me a few things about the town, and I had to wait then until light, daylight, so that I could get over to the college and he told me how to get there, and so as I was walking along, carrying two bags, a car stopped and a nice looking gentleman put his head out the window and he said, "Are you going to Rollins?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Would you like a ride?" He looked pretty safe, so I said, "Yes, sir, I would."

I got in and it turned out that he was a History professor and I had already been leaning in the direction of History so that in a sense moved me quite a bit farther along the road towards being interested in History, but I did have courses with him later on although he [00:12:00] did not prove to be my very top professor.
who was another member of the History department, but I could tell you more about him later on if you should wish.

Tanya: What did you like about the study of History?

Tom: I'm not sure I can answer that question. It was something that was a mystery to me, that I simply wanted to know more about what had happened in the past. I don't know why, I really don't know why, but it was fascinating. I think I became interested even in the fourth, fifth and sixth grade, I did read a lot of simple History books at that stage, mainly about the ancient Greeks and Romans and then I happened to have a particularly encouraging and supportive high school teacher who taught the course in European history.

That was in the tenth grade and in a sense, that kind of sealed my interest but I just, and then there was something ... I had a course in American History, but it seemed, it was too close to me. There was something so exotic and attractive about something in Europe for me and that's still true today. I still feel the same way even though I've been to Europe many times now. I still feel that there is something mysterious and faraway about it.

Tanya: Is that why you decided to go ahead and pursue graduate work in History?

Tom: I had several reasons for wanting to do that. I had three interests. One was academic history, the possibility of being a professor of History was one, but on the same, on a par with that interest at the time, I think, was my interest in newspapers and journalism and especially in the idea of being a correspondent abroad, especially possibly in Europe. I had that in mind, and the third possibility was to be in the US foreign service in some capacity, so working in an embassy, a consulate or whatever overseas.

I learned fairly early that you would have a leg-up in any of those careers if you had a doctorate in History, so that led me. I had at one time in high school thought about Law, but then I came across a book by a man who was a professor of Law in Yale University by the name of Fred Rodell. The title of the book was Woe Be Unto You Lawyers and I read that book and I said, "No, not under any circumstances" so I crossed it off the list.

Many years later, somebody told me that he was a real maverick who might have been entirely wrong about the field of law, but anyway that was what turned me off on the field of law, so I decided that I would apply and it so happened ... I'll just take one more step here if I may that the Professor who had given me a ride my first day in Winter Park, Florida, had given me a ride to Rollins and was one of the specialists in History, Doctor Rhea Marsh Smith was his name.
He used all three of his names always, and Doctor Smith told me about a friend of his whose name was Joseph Matthews who was in charge. He was the Chairman of the History Department at Emory University in Atlanta, so he put me in touch with him, and I learned that they had an assistantship for which I could apply, so I applied there for admission and an assistantship and received both and so that's where I went to do my first year of graduate study and ended up staying there very happily so for the rest of my graduate school career.

Tanya: How did you choose your dissertation topic?

Tom: This same Doctor Matthews offered a course called the role of the press in international affairs and then in readings, various readings from that course, we had to write a paper for the course, one extended paper. We had to look for topics and I looked in a lot of different directions, came across a fascinating little man by the name of Henri Georges Stephane Adolphe Oppen de Blowitz and everybody just referred to him as Blowitz necessarily [00:18:00].

I found out that he had been the most admired foreign correspondent probably anywhere in the world for about 25 or 30 years in the late 19th century. He came to that position only late in life. He was about 45 before he had any experience in journalism, but he had some kind of gift for it and he had an almost infallible memory so that he could go and listen to a debate in the French Parliament and come back and sit down and write out most of the arguments on both sides and send them in to the London Times.

I got so interested in him and the idea that one might be able to get a fix on the relationship between journalism and diplomacy through the eyes of one person using him as an example and that's what I decided I wanted to do. I chose to write about Blowitz in international affairs.

Tanya: Would you like to share anything about your time in the US army and at the University of London?

Tom: Yes. I was drafted into the army after having applied for a commission. I was recommended by a board in the Atlanta Navy, naval officers who recommended for a waiver because I had [eyes 00:19:54] that were not up to standard but they recommended that I'd be exempted [00:20:00] anyway. They sent the recommendation to Charleston, South California, to a big headquarters there and the people there who were wiser, I suppose, decided that they didn't really need somebody else, with a waiver or not, so that fell through.

I went then to my draft board and asked them to draft me as soon as they could so that I could go and meet my obligation at that time. They sent me from Memphis to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where I did eight weeks of basic
training. Because of all the education that I had previously had, they assigned me to a desk job, interviewing oddly enough, interviewing candidates for this, that and the other in the army, and I worked in it as one of a team of ten interviewers for, I don't know, about a couple of months.

Then an opportunity came for various people to be sent overseas, so I went to the head of the department that I was working in and asked him whether there would be any chance that I could be sent to Europe. My first opportunity to see Europe for myself, so he said he would look into it and before long, I was assigned to be sent to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey where we waited then for the next boatload of people to get collected. That gave me the chance to go into New York several times.

I saw Audrey Hepburn on the stage in New York and that was a great opportunity. On the way to New York, this time I was traveling, I believe by train if I'm not mistaken. I was able to stop in Pittsburgh and visit a friend of mine from college whose name was Fred Rogers and he showed me around Pittsburgh and especially showed me his studio. He was working in something called the Children's Corner at that time.

That was before he reached the stage of having his own program though he was the real star of the program The Children's Corner, but just a few years after I had visited him, he started Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood and sent me some material to my address overseas in Germany after I had arrived in Germany. Went to Germany in April of 1954, arrived there a few days before Easter and I expected Germany just to be devastated, the whole country.

I thought everything would have been bombed to smithereens, nothing would be left, and to ride the train through Germany from the Northern coast, the little port of Bremerhaven all the way to Stuttgart in Southwestern Germany, I saw so many beautiful trees, I just couldn't believe it that so much forest was still there. These were not young trees. These were old trees and they had clearly not been damaged in the course of all that happened in World War Two, but anyway that's ...

I was stationed in the beginning at Seventh Army Headquarters in Stuttgart, and they had assigned me to the clerical corps of the army and the personnel, well, it was big. There was just too many people in it and on my way through their orientation process, I had to be interviewed by the chaplain. Which chaplain? Protestant, so I went to the Protestant chaplain who turned out to be a Lutheran. He looked at all my papers and asked me a few questions and he said, "How would you like to be a chaplain's assistant?" "Well," I said, I was stunned by this.
I didn't know what that entailed at all so I asked him some questions. He said, "Go see my present assistant. He's going to be rotating home to the States in a couple of weeks and you can take his place then if you decide you'd like to do it." I went to see him. He said there's no better job in the army so then he told me all about it and then I became a chaplain's assistant so that's how I spent most of my time in the army, was working for a chaplain and one of the good things about it was that I could go out and use the little German that I had, I could go out and practice it which I did. In the beginning, I could just ask a question.

I prepared my question so well that the people thought I understood German and then they were speaking so rapidly I didn't have any idea of what they were saying, so I learned to slow down my question so that they would speak in a way that I could follow. I gradually began to become more fluent in German then. I had only had two years of college German so not a very solid base upon which to build, but trying helps.

Then I ate a lot of German food, had been to German restaurants, joined a German discussion group and a German choir and sang for some time in a German choir and we actually performed on the stage in Stuttgart and they ... I always dressed very carefully when I went and they thought, they didn't know that I was in the American Army ever, and they thought I was a preacher's son.

Tanya: Is there anything you want to share about your time with the University of London?

Tom: That was one of the great opportunities of my life also. My advisor, I didn't have any choice in this, she was assigned to me, was a very formidable woman by the name of Dame Lillian Penson. I hardly knew what Dame meant, but that's the female equivalent of Sir, so people referred to her as Dame Lillian. They didn't call her Professor Penson. I thought Professor Penson was probably a higher title than Dame Lillian would be, but that was wrong. She was Dame Lillian and I once referred to her as Professor Penson and [I was told, no, the 00:27:30] English Professor corrected me quickly in no uncertain terms, "You only call her Dame Lillian."

She ran a seminar. Now that was the only thing I did of a formal nature. Most of my work there was in research, but she gave me pointers and different directions and then I took part in her seminar every Monday evening at 6:00 and I would like to say a word about Dame Lillian. She was a brilliant woman, published a great deal in her own right, became the Vice-Chancellor which is really the head of the University of London.
The Chancellor is a honorary title given to some member of the Royal Family or someone like that, so she actually headed the University of London for a good number of years and had, at the time I knew her, had retired from that, but she made trips to various parts of what had once been the British Empire, and encouraged their universities that they had, that had been established in [inaudible 00:28:45], different parts of Asia, in Africa, India and so on, so she was quite a lady.

She liked her sherry and had to go to ... Because of having had the positions that she had held, she had sat on many committees and most of these committees, by two in the afternoon would start serving sherry. Some of the time, she reached her seminar at 6pm. She had had a good many, a good many doses of sherry and was feeling very comfortable. At one of these sessions, she introduced the member of the seminar who was going to give the paper that day, Miss Boyle. "Miss Boyle will read a paper for us today," so Miss Boyle started reading.

Miss Boyle had hardly started reading before Dame Lillian's large head began to fall down on to her very ample chest and [00:30:00] we all looked at each other, "She's gone now." At some point, about, oh, fifteen minutes into the paper, Miss Boyle lost her place and there was a pause and Dame Lillian looked up and looked around, and as soon as Miss Boyle resumed, Dame Lillian resumed and her head fell back on to her chest. She finished and then she said, "Who would like to ask Miss Boyle a question?" She looks around.

In this group, they were mostly English students, but there were a couple of Americans and one from Canada, and we were the ones who always took the lead for some reason. They always looked to us to be the first ones, so someone started asking a question and somebody else asked a question. [I asked a good 00:30:54] question, and I had a sense, I believe, at the time that we were hitting around the edges of the topic, asking a small thing here and a small thing there.

After we had finished and the English students had done pretty much what we, from the North America had done, Dame Lillian reared back and she said, "Well, I have a question for Miss Boyle" and I wish I had a copy of the question, but I can tell you, we all knew immediately her question went right to the heart of the whole paper. Whether she really was listening to the paper or whether she knew it so well beforehand, I will never know, but we knew we were in the presence of a good mind, no doubt about it.

Tanya: Can [00:32:00] you describe the process of joining the History faculty at Wake Forest?
Tom: Yes. I was a graduate student at Emory at the time. This was in the spring, early spring, maybe winter of 1957, and I was called to the office of the dean of the graduate school. I thought, "What have I done, what have I done to be called to the office of the dean of the graduate school?" He sat me down and he had had a letter from Doctor Henry Stroupe, Chair of the Department of History of Wake Forest College as it was at the time. He said, "Wake Forest is looking for a ..."

He said, "Do you know Wake Forest College?" "No, never heard of it," and I hadn't. He said, "Well, they are looking for someone in European History who is well on the way towards a doctorate and who is going to probably finish in the next year or two. Would you be interested in applying?" He said, "I'd be happy to recommend you if you would." I had had one or two encounters with him before. I said, "Sure," knowing that a job was a job, I said, "Sure, I would be happy to be considered for that [or 00:33:29] put in an application for it."

He told me what to do and I think I simply wrote a letter and sent a curriculum vitae to Wake Forest, and before very long, I heard from Doctor Stroupe directly inviting me to come for an interview and we agreed upon a time and I took a bus from Atlanta to Greensboro [00:34:00], Greensboro to Winston-Salem. Doctor Stroupe met me at the bus station, brought me, and I called him Doctor Stroupe for many years before I dared call him anything else, and he brought me into the campus and the process began then.

I remember being interviewed individually by several members of the department, especially Lowell Tillett who was the specialist in Russian History at the time and whose son-in-law Tom Phillips is very active at Wake Forest as you know. He looks after all kinds of scholarships for Wake Forest as well as teaching here and there at times, and Lowell Tillett's wife whom I met only later on taught Russian language and Latin and German and I think maybe Spanish and French as well. She was a wonderfully talented member of the faculty.

I might just add there something by the way, that is if a member of the faculty was married to someone who was an academician, the second one almost always the wife was not allowed to become a regular faculty member at that time, so Anne Tillett had to begin as a part-time or adjunct faculty member, just brought in from time to time to do things over the years. I'm happy to say that that changed and [00:36:00] eventually we even hired two married people at the same time.

Tanya: What else do you remember from that time period that might be considered different from today?

Tom: Let me go back to the time when Doctor Stroupe brought me to the campus because there was something that happened there. I had, apart from my
He said, "I think we can take care of that." On a Saturday morning, he called up a good friend of his who was active in the buildings and grounds department, as it was then called, they had a physical plant. He called up this man. I thought it was a woman because he called him Molly on the [phone 00:37:33]. That was his nickname, was Molly, but his real name was Melvin and he said, "Molly, could I get a truck for about an hour on Saturday morning?" Molly said, "Yes."

He got the truck and the chairman of the department to which I was being hired took me downtown to the railway [00:38:00] express office, helped me load this bed, drove me and the bed out to the faculty apartments which happened to be on the top floor of a three-story building and he helped me carry the bed up the stairs. Now I don't know that there's anything in any job description for a department head anywhere in the country that says, "You help a new faculty member get a bed," but that's the way Wake Forest was.

By the time that I heard for the first time, Doctor Tribble was the president, speak of the Wake Forest family, I understood that that was not just public, publicity language, that that was what he really felt. I think there was much of that sense and it had to do in part with the smallness, the college was small. There were fewer than 2,000 students, I believe, at that time. The tuition was very, very [inaudible 00:39:17]. People would be astonished today to know what the tuition was like.

Many poor families did not hesitate to think about sending a child to Wake Forest in those days because they knew that Wake Forest would try to find a way to provide whatever was needed. The dean who had retired, he interviewed me in the spring of '57, but he retired at the end of that academic year. Dean Bryan was his name. The story goes, and I believe this is true that he had [00:40:00] one student who could not pay the entrance fee, that [he had got 00:40:05] an entrance fee to full admission which was $50, and Dean Bryan opens his desk and took out a $50 bill, handed it to the student and said, "Go take this to the treasurer." I don't think we're able to think in terms like that today. The aura ... Maybe that isn't quite the right word.

The feeling that was generated in people at the time of the Great Depression and I as a boy lived through that, that feeling was still in evidence I think on the Wake Forest campus. I had been told that there were times when the faculty
were actually not paid in money. They were given food and the food sometimes came from students who brought it in lieu of tuition. There was still some of that feeling, that we're trying to help each other through difficult times, through really difficult times.

Tanya: I want to jump to your time as Dean of the college from 1968 to 1995, which is a long tenure. What would you say was the biggest challenge that you faced in your role as Dean?

Tom: The biggest challenge was finding faculty members who were the kind of people and I emphasize that, kind of people, but also with the kind of credentials, with the kind of abilities that Wake Forest needed to have as we all saw it at that time. We were ambitious for the college, all of us. We wanted to improve it. We knew we had weaknesses here and there, and we wanted to fill gaps here and there and we knew that Wake Forest would not be able to pay the salaries that could be paid by some much more affluent colleges and universities across the country.

We were in fact competing with some very good colleges and in a number of instances, we were able to persuade faculty members to come for a lower salary than they would have received and had been offered in fact at some other places. Part of the challenge was finding people whose values were such that they were not going to accept a job, a position in teaching in college, that they were not going to accept simply the one that gave them the most benefits, financial and otherwise.

They were looking for certain conditions of teaching, a great deal of academic freedom and that was one of the things that was difficult but also exhilarating. It truly was exhilarating too ... I'm going to jump ahead because I know you have a question coming about what in my work, in the administration, I enjoyed most.

It comes out at that point because nothing, nothing gave me more pleasure than interviewing candidates for the faculty. I truly, truly relished being able to delve into what they were all about. I had two, basically two questions. I phrased it in many different ways over the years, but they were really two questions. One was, if you were speaking to a very diverse group of people, let us say like a rotary club and you were asked to tell them what you were accomplishing, what were you trying to do with your doctoral dissertation, how would you explain it to them?

Now I put this to people in physics, in chemistry, in biology, in mathematics as well as the humanities where I was more at home, and I didn’t say this to them, but I felt if they can explain it to me, then they can explain it to anybody, and
sometimes they succeeded wonderfully. Sometimes they stumbled badly. Sometimes I think they hardly knew what I was asking them to do. I think you could tell a great deal about their ability to reach certainly a freshman student, maybe even an upper class student, to reach them and explain something to them by the way they answered that question.

The other question that I put in various ways had to do with how they perceived their own teachers in the past. I would try to find out what teacher at any level from the first grade or kindergarten on through all the way through to your doctorate, who had the greatest influence upon you and why did they ... What did they have? What was it? I can kick myself to this day that I didn't record all of that at the time because I had some marvelous answers and I've had a good many faculty members come to me since I've retired to say that that was very important to them, to be able to have that question and to talk about it.

I think they genuinely meant that, that it was valuable to them to have thought through that question and realized how much a certain teacher had been, and you'd be surprised. Here were these people who were getting doctorates or have them already and who are thinking about a teacher in the fourth grade, fourth grade teaching English that opened their eyes to the academic world. Way back. I'm still, shivers almost go down my back to think about how great an influence one teacher can have upon a life.

Tanya: Speaking of influence, I want to ask you specifically about Ed Reynolds and that's been written about extensively, but I was wondering if you would share just one thought about your role in helping him and why that was important?

Tom: The question carries an implication which is actually unjustified. The truth is he helped me more than I helped him, by far. I helped to begin the interdisciplinary honors program and then because I had had a lot of experience with that, the History department designated me to offer the first History honors seminar, so I did and in that first History honors seminar, I cannot remember specifically how the participants were chosen but they had to be accepted into the program. They couldn't just sign up for it.

One of the ... I had, I think, about 10 to 15 students in that first group with Ed Reynolds being one of them and I had to think very hard about what I was going to do. These were all gifted students, very, very able students, all of them. One was a philosophy major, but he was interested in the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history so he thought it made sense for him to have a course like the one that we were trying to begin [00:50:00]. His name was Glenn Blackburn.
His father had been the pastor of the Wake Forest Baptist Church at one time and he became a historian in the long run, not a philosopher and became a Dean of a college up in Virginia. In that seminar, I'm sorry that I can't remember most of the students in there now today. It's just been so many years back but what I distinctly remember is that Ed Reynolds, every day, I believe every day we met, had some kind of question to pose about what we had been reading, what we had been working on, and his questions were so much better than the ones that I was trying to formulate that I simply relaxed in my seminar and tried to help guide the other students to deal with the questions that Ed Reynolds raised, and it was almost a given.

I'm afraid I became kind of lazy in there. I came to depend upon Ed Reynolds to raise these very, very good questions. He was just a natural enquirer, I suppose. Not national enquirer, a natural enquirer and that was one of the reasons I came to value him so highly. We became good friends through the years. When I was briefly, several years looking after the London house in the 1990s, I found out that he was in London and he was in overall charge of the programs for the University of California, San Diego, that were overseas, so he was in London looking over that program and we tried very hard to get together but we never made it.

We were both too busy to get together but I had a good talk with him when he came back for the fiftieth anniversary of the admission of the first African-American student. He wasn't African-American of course. When he came, he was African, but I think he has made a huge contribution to Wake Forest by his coming, by his coming here and opening the doors for us.

Tanya: Would you like to share a little bit about bringing Maya Angelou to campus for her talk?

Tom: I have written about that for the Wake Forest magazine and I probably cannot add very much to that part of it, but I will just summarize very briefly to say that there have been only two lectures given by visiting people or I call it lectures or presentations by visitors to the campus. There have been only two that stand out for me above all the others. One and this was earlier than Maya Angelou's coming, one was the author of the book Roots, Alex Haley by name, and Alex, could I say a word about him?

I still am moved to think about what he did. When he came to Wake Forest and spoke, I think it was 1968 but when he spoke, he did not intend to write a novel. He was writing a history and he said, "My working title is Black Man's Story." He told how he was sitting and thinking about things that he had heard his relatives, especially older aunts and uncles and great aunts and uncles sitting on the porch in Henning, Tennessee. He remembered their talking about
ancestors and about the first ancestor. They remembered that his name was Kunta Kinte and he came from Africa somewhere but they didn't know just where and he ...

This idea kept festering and generating inside of him, and he had to do something about it, so he finally started doing research and he went to Cornell, I believe it was, and found two graduate students from a certain part of West Africa and he talked with those graduate students about the things that he had heard, including names of things. He thought they were names of places, he wasn't sure, and these two students became very excited and they said, "Yes, yes, I recognize that. I know where that is," and they [would 00:55:39] give him the name of it, and they said, "It used to be called that but not today, it’s called something else" but they knew where he was talking about.

By this tedious long, very arduous work that he put in, he found out where his first [00:56:00] ancestor in America had come from. He also did research in the London archives and found out what the name of the boat was that took these future slaves away from the coast of Africa to the North America. There had been a ... He helped to tie this down because there had been a big storm, and the people in Africa who kept the oral history in their heads, they knew about this big storm and they told certain things about it that Alex Haley was able to track down in the London archives so that he could pinpoint this particular date when that ship left and headed for America, so there he was able to fix with certainty where his first ancestor came from in Africa.

With this knowledge, he was able to get a grant to go to Africa and do all of this research. Then he said, "Think of me, an American black man, going through Ireland, looking for another one of his ancestors," which he did, and he found relatives in Ireland who gave him a lot of information. He was going to tell this story. I'm going to try to speed it up here if I can. He was going to tell this story about himself and his own family in this book called Black Man's Story. Not long before he spoke at Wake Forest, he had gone to [00:58:00] California because a friend of his, an African-American man was supposed to go and give a talk about black militancy. He said that the man got sick and he couldn't go, and he asked Alex Haley to take his place.

Alex Haley said I didn't know any more about black militancy than anybody who reads Time Magazine, but I had agreed to go. On the plane going out, I said to myself, "Why should I go there and talk about black militancy when I don't know any more than those people do? I'm going to talk about my story, what I'm working on," and so he did. He gave essentially the same lecture that he had given to us later. At the end of the lecture, they had this questions and answers. People stayed and stayed and talked and finally they were almost all gone.
He'd noticed this one white man sitting in the back of the auditorium. That man just stayed and he kept, he began to wonder, what is this man after? That man finally came up to the front where he, Alex Haley, was still standing and started asking him some questions about the first plantation where Kunta Kinte, the first ancestor had been and telling him some things. It turned out that this man was a direct descendant of the owner of the plantation and the two of them, the descendant of the slave from Africa and the descendant of the owner of the plantation got together and they spent most of the rest of that night talking, talking this through and became friends now.

He said, "Think of the odds against that [01:00:00] happening. If my friend hadn't gotten sick, I wouldn't have gone to California. If I had not changed the topic from black militancy to my story, I wouldn't have even talked about that," and the man wouldn't have heard it. That's one of the great accidents, I think. I think the audience was just mesmerized at that point. I was. Certain, well, some years after that, about, not so many years later, in the early '70s, Maya Angelou came to Wake Forest thanks to the Black Students Alliance, I believe it was called anyway, the organization for African-American students on the campus at that time.

One of the, I think the leader of the effort may have been Mutter Evans who was a well-known alumna and who at one time owned a radio station here. They knew about Maya Angelou. I did not know about her before she came, but I had read about it and I thought that's something I want to hear, so I went there barely getting there before the time for the lecture to begin. I was astonished to see that the room was full. There was not an empty seat.

People were sitting on the steps and people were standing at the back so I joined the standees at the back and then she performed and I mean, performance is the only word for it. She sang, she danced, she [01:02:00] read poetry, she quoted poetry. She made us laugh, she made us if not cry, come very close to crying by telling us some of the things that her people had been through, and she imitated male black teenagers, how they walk. She walked across the stage and it was something out of this world, that she could do that. She, this very large woman.

She made you see something that was not there. That was fine. That was wonderfully entertaining and we all enjoyed it and we learned some things, for white people, some pretty hard things from her, but that was not what won me to the cause of Maya Angelou. After it was over, we had a short session which was planned just outside the auditorium with some refreshments, but the students got in to a discussion there and before we could put an end to that or they could put [the whole running or kaput into it 01:03:27].
Some of the students asked Miss Angelou, she didn't have a doctorate at that time, "Miss Angelou, would you be willing to go to somewhere else, a more comfortable place where maybe we could sit down and we could carry this discussion on further?" She said, "Yes. Sure I could," so with no hesitation, we went to the big lobby outside the [01:04:00] magnolia room in Reynolda Hall and those who could sat down. There was not even room enough for everybody to sit down. I stood, I stood right with my back against the wall because I wanted to see what was going to happen.

We had had some great very high tension on the campus between one or two fraternities on one side and the black students who were still fairly few in number at that time, on the other side, and it had to do with the confederate flag and I don't know what, all the usual problems, and the black students had things to say. The white students had things to say. Not all the white students were on one side of the issue, I may say, but some were. About maybe 15 minutes or 20 minutes into the discussion, Maya Angelou stopped them for a moment. She said, "Now wait a minute. You aren't really saying these things to me. You are saying these things to each other, so don't direct them to me. Direct them to each other. You talk to those people, you talk to these people, and I'm going to listen, and if I need to moderate, I'll moderate."

She was just a magnificent teacher at that point in my eyes and this discussion went on. It was about 9:30 maybe, but by the time we got to the Reynolda Hall, well, at midnight, they were still going and somebody had the good sense to say, "We've got to give Miss Angelou a break," so it was stopped and that's the point at which I went up to her as [01:06:00] when I could get to her.

I went up to her and I thanked her of course and told her who I was and I said, "If you ever decide you're going to stop traveling all over the country and settle down some place, I hope you will think about settling down on a college campus, and should you reach that point, I would hope that you might even think about this as a possible place. Just throwing it out with a hope." That's how it turned out for her to come.

Tanya: What do you think is the biggest challenge facing Wake Forest today?

Tom: I think the biggest challenge is finding a way, if there is a way, of holding on to the closeness that once existed on the campus between all segments on the campus. The closeness that I believe was there in the early years on this campus in the late '50s through the '60s and into the '70s to some extent, though we began to lose something as the student body grew larger and of course the student body couldn't grow larger without the faculty growing larger. The faculty actually grew at a faster pace than the student body did. I think the problem today is to find a way to hold on to some of that at least as much of that as
possible because we have gotten a much larger, and I fear myself that Wake Forest may eventually become just like the other [01:08:00] large universities. I fear that very much because I think what has made it distinctive is having these close relationships between students and faculty, between faculty and staff, between staff and students, all across the board, instead of feeling one is just working in one's own little [inaudible 01:08:23], working at one's own pursuits without much reference to everybody else. One really ought to have a way of trying to tie everybody together and being at least in some sense a family.

Tanya: Okay, thank you very much.