

All right. So my first question for you is, could you share a little bit about your background and where you grew up? Okay. I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and came to Wake Forest in the fall of 1953.

The pastor of our church was a Wake Forest graduate, and he said to my parents, you should send this son to Wake Forest.

And my mother said, well, what about Baylor? And he said, oh, they're in Texas. They're just half civilized.

Well, what about Georgetown right here in Kentucky? Oh, he said, you've seen their students. They're all lean and hungry.

Well, how about Wake Forest? What, and have him turn out like you? So it seemed like a good idea.

I was going to room with his son, who was a good friend, but his son got married his senior year in high school and didn't want to room.

So I came to Wake Forest on my own and made some friends and had a great, great time here.

Wow, that's awesome. So were you the first in your family to go to college?

No, no.

Had you had siblings or your parents as well?

No, I'm an only child. Yeah.

Yes. Yes. Were you the one to go the farthest away from home?

Of our family who went to college?

Yeah, I went the farthest away.

Yes, for sure. And so you decided to come to Wake Forest from that, but what were your initial impressions of the campus?

Well, I thought it was lovely. I like the trees. I like the shade. I like the friendliness of the people who all spoke to you as you passed them on the sidewalk. It just seemed like a lovely setting to be in.

For sure. Now, what was that transition?

What was that transition like for you from Kentucky to North Carolina?

I had to find out about Eastern North Carolina pulled pork vinegar-based barbecue.

There were cultural things like that I was not aware of.

I could play Carolina Moon on the piano and that was a start, but it wasn't too big a difference.

Some people were curious as to what I was doing from Kentucky.

In North Carolina, since the overwhelming majority of students were Tar Heels.

Yes, for sure. And believe it or not, there's the majority of kids here are still from North Carolina.

So they keep it, they keep it in the family, I guess, as they say.

But so what were your classes like your first year on campus?

They were very stimulating.

I, I, my freshman advisor.

Z made an oversight mistake and he signed me up for one more course than I was supposed to take.

And I was taking 18 hours and I didn't know there was this was wrong.

So I worked very, very hard and made pretty good grades.

I enjoyed the English class with Mrs.

Rainer. She taught us how to do research and had a.

She taught us how to write term papers and she was delightful years later when I knew her as a colleague on the faculty, she told me that she thought the students on the old campus had more fun than the students on a new campus.

She wouldn't elaborate on that, but I was fascinated by by the insight.

I took religion took ROTC, which was required of everybody for two years.

I took history, I took English, it was just, just a basic humanities curriculum for a first year student.

Yes, for sure.

Now, what was the process like in making friends?

In the dormitory in classes, fraternity rush began and you made friends in the who were being rushed by several other fraternities with you.

Um,

It wasn't hard to make friends.

People were generally friendly.

One of the first people I introduced myself to has become a lifelong friend.

He was from Middle Tennessee where my father's family was and we were friends in college and divinity school and

still are.
And I believe you have interviewed John Wagster.
I did last Monday.
Yes, he's wonderful too.
I agree with that.
Yeah.
So you decided to to join a fraternity.
Is that correct?
I did.
Yeah.
And what was that like?
Well, it was a wonderful thing to do as an only child.
I didn't have any brothers and suddenly I had all these brothers and interactions with people at a close, friendly basis that I had not known before.
Um,
I was a bit shy.
So I had social development to work on, skills, asking girls out on dates, things like that.
I had done this, but not at the scale that was expected of me in the fraternity.
But I just mainly enjoyed the friendships and learning the ropes.
Oh, take professors so and so, stay away from professors such and such.
Things like that.
Going out to eat together.
Yes, for sure.
Now, could you tell me a little bit about the professors you had?
Is there a certain professor that stands out in your memory as being very influential?
That's a hard question because there were so many.
I would say Dr.
Hubert Petit.
I was a Latin major.
He was a Renaissance man, a polymath, an interesting, wonderful, engaging human being.
And his backup, Dr.
Kranji Arp in Greek, and a later addition to the Greek faculty, Carl Harris was good.
Dr.
Snuggs in English taught courses in Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman in modern novel, and Professor Jones in English, who taught Shakespeare and modern drama.
They were influential.
Will Sanders in German was a teacher and then became a friend when we were colleagues and is still a friend.
He's 100 years old now.
And he and Ed Wilson are the only two living faculty who taught on the old campus.
Wow.
That's incredible.
Yeah, for sure.
Now, what was the old campus like in comparison to the Rinalda campus today?
What were some of the major differences that you saw?
Well, size, modernity of buildings.
It's hard to say.
I was a senior on the new campus, and we had a lot of rain in that fall.
And we didn't feel quite as home as we expected to.
And somebody said that arriving on the old campus was like Israel moving into the promised land.
It was wonderful.
It was new.
But, oh, there were giants in the earth to be dealt with and things to learn and overcome.
The buildings didn't all have nameplates on them.
We weren't sure what building was what.

And in that heavy rain, the sides of the buildings leaked.
And there was a lot of construction.
There had been some omission of spraying some substance on the brick.
And our dormitory rooms were smaller than in the old houses in old Wake Forest.
Roommates shared a common desk.
We faced each other.
There was hardly room to put our books out.
And the explanation was, oh, you're expected to go study in the library.
Well, yeah, I did.
But it was nice to be able to study comfortably in my room.
But I was glad we were here.
One big difference was eating.
In the old campus, we all had different restaurants that were favorites all around town.
And we'd go to different ones from time to time.
But now there was one place to eat.
I don't know what the students call it now.
What do they call it?
We call it the pit today.
Yeah.
There was a cafeteria.
On the old campus.
Called Tomain Tavern.
And it was okay.
But it wasn't one of the preferred places to eat.
They were all on the main street downtown or around in the village of Wake Forest.
Yeah.
So lots of differences.
It probably wasn't quite as homey feeling.
Right?
No, it wasn't.
But we knew it was the right thing to do.
And we were glad we had done it.
And we were very excited to be part of the first class to graduate on the new campus.
Yes, for sure.
Now, what was graduation like for you?
What do you remember from that?
It was in the chapel.
I don't remember anything about it.
I don't remember who the speakers were or anything at all like that.
But it was exciting.
You know, my parents were here.
And we were saying what we thought was goodbye.
To a lot of close friends.
And it was good.
But I should look up and see who spoke.
That's okay.
No worries about that.
So how did you decide on your major?
In high school, I had taken four years of Latin and loved it.
I had a great teacher.
And to meet the language requirement, I needed two more semesters of a language.
So naturally, I took Latin.
And Dr.
Pratik, as I earlier said, was just wonderful.

So I wanted to stay and keep on taking classes with him.

And next thing you knew, I was a Latin major.

That's a good reason.

That's a good reason.

You were already taking that many classes.

Why not declare it the major, right?

Exactly.

Yeah.

Smart.

Now, going back to your involvement with your fraternity, are there any memories from that time?

Any functions that you attended or helped put on that stand out in your memory?

Oh, there were a lot.

I remember doing decorations for homecoming and staying up all night to do that.

I remember sitting together in a group at football games.

I remember giving serenades when someone pinned his girlfriend.

And we all walked over to the dorm and had to wear a coat and tie and carry a candle and sing a bunch of songs.

And we'd kneel down and light our candles and sing the Sweetheart's Sigma Chi.

It was all something out of a 1950s movie.

But it was great fun.

And then we would take the guy who got pinned to a lake between Raleigh and Old Wake Forest and toss him in the lake.

Just kind of keep him from getting too big a head.

I remember studying together with fraternity brothers and learning things that I hadn't thought about that I would need to know on the test.

I remember watching football games on television at the chapter house.

And I remember the parties and the faculty chaperones who were gracious enough to come.

And do it.

I remember our faculty advisors, primarily Claude Roebuck, a young philosophy instructor who was very influential.

He had been a Wake Forest undergraduate, but he had come from Williams College in New England where he coached track, I believe, in addition to teaching philosophy.

And he liked to go to New York on the weekends.

And he just seemed to be so sophisticated and so elegant and so friendly.

He had gone to Union Theological Seminary in New York.

He had graded for both Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, two world-class theologians.

And I remember asking him a question one day on a Friday about Reinhold Niebuhr.

And he said, I don't know the answer, but I'll ask him tomorrow at lunch.

And I thought, holy cow, this guy lives in a different world.

Yeah.

So those are some of the memories.

Yes.

Those are great memories.

At homecoming, usually there are about, oh, 15 or 20 of us who still come back with spouses and call each other by our college nicknames.

And some of our wives are horrified to hear these college nicknames.

But it's still good.

It's still good.

Well, would you care to reveal your college nickname?

If you don't, it's okay.

Thank you.

I'm glad it's okay.

That's a good answer.

That's a good answer.

Now, going...

One of the seniors, when I was a freshman, thought I looked like a television character played by Wally Cox, Mr.

Peepers.
It was the kind of glasses I wore.
So I was called Peepers.
And...
There was a really funny moment at homecoming a couple of years ago.
Somebody called me Peepers.
And the wife of one of the alums said, you're Peepers?
I said, yeah, why?
She said, you used to date a girl on my hall.
I said, yes.
Oh, my, she said.
I said, let's just drop it right there.
And we did.
That's good.
That's good.
Now, you mentioned sports.
Did you go to a lot of sporting events?
And is there one that is very memorable?
I really enjoyed going to football and basketball and also baseball.
We had a national championship team in my time.
And that was great fun.
It really was.
The football stadium on the old campus was surrounded by tall pine trees.
And it was a lovely setting.
I remember the last home game there.
And we played William and Mary.
We played William and Mary.
And we managed to beat them.
Dr. Petit, my Latin professor, was not allowed by his cardiologist to come to Wake Forest, football or basketball games.
But because it was the last one, he was there.
And as I was leaving, I went over and said, Dr. Petit, we've seen the last game here.
He said, yes.
And we won.
I said, I think it was wonderful.
We beat William and Mary.
He said, thank God they only sent Mary, not William.
That's great.
So that was his assessment of things.
That's very good.
That's very good.
Now, you've kind of already touched on this.
So it's okay if you don't want to elaborate more.
But how have you stayed connected with Wake Forest, for instance, graduation?
Well, primarily through the Sigma Chi homecoming reunions.
But when I was back, I taught on the faculty for five years.
And I would see people as they came and went to the campus.
There's several Wake Forest people in the church where I was pastor in Baltimore.
One in particular had graduated from Wake Forest in the early 1900s.
And he had known Hubert Petit when he was a little boy.
And this man had had a hard life, a scandal, a lost job, alcoholism.
But he'd overcome all of this.
Repaid everything he had embezzled from the church.
He was a treasurer.
And was restored in full fellowship.

He worked as a ticket taker at a movie.
That was how he made money to pay back what he owed.
And he gave my wife and me a pass to the movie theater for a wedding present.
And we gave him the pass and went to the movie.
He was just so proud.
But we would talk about Wake Forest in his era and my era.
And I said to him, do you know the second verse of the fight song?
He said, no, that was written after I was a student.
And I said, well, none of the students today know it either.
But it's, though fortune forsake us and fate overtake us, we'll never forget our dear old college days.
Ah, you know it.
And our memory's treasure we'll drink without measure and sing for our alma mater's praise.
He said, that's pretty good stuff.
Well, he got up one year on Thanksgiving Sunday to give what he was thankful for.
And he said, I've been looking through the Bible to see if I can find one thing to be thankful for.
And I'm thankful I'm not as bad off as whoever wrote Ecclesiastes.
And with that, he sat down and everybody went home and read Ecclesiastes.
But once we knew what a hard life he'd had, that answer made sense and was very inspirational.
Yes, absolutely.
What a great story there.
Now, what did you end up pursuing after graduation?
I went for theological education, went one year to the Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, my hometown.
But they had a faculty administrative crisis and fired 12 professors.
And I was on the professor's side.
I thought, this school's going to lose its accreditation.
And I left.
So I transferred to Yale Divinity School, where there were already three Wake Forest Sigma Chi's.
So I finished there and then went to the church in Baltimore as an associate pastor, where I eventually became pastor.
Very cool. Now, what was that transition like to becoming a professor at Wake Forest?
Well, it was stimulating and good and enriching and challenging.
I was teaching introductory Latin courses and Dr. Arp was giving me guidance to make sure I was thorough.
And I think I was. I think I was good. Good teacher.
I still hear from some of those students and I still have my grades.
I can look up their grades when I hear from them.
The challenge was relating to senior faculty members.
They had been my teachers and now I was their colleague.
And all the other faculty, my age, young faculty, call these men by their first name.
I couldn't bring myself to do that. It was awkward to know what to call them.
But they treated me well.
Sometimes at the end of the day, Dr. Reed, the chair of philosophy and Dr.
Arp, the chair of classics, would get together in Arp's office and they would invite me to join a conversation.
Well, this was heavy stuff for me and I was excited and stimulated to be to be part of that.
But it was a good time.
Chapel was required and I went to Chapel.
I thought the faculty should go to Chapel, too.
And
And not many faculty went, but Dr. Reed in philosophy went, and we were sitting side-by-side one service when Ed
Christman got up to give his first remarks as college chaplain.
Now, Old Golden Black was given out on Tuesdays then, just before chapel at 10 o'clock.
So half the student body is sitting there reading Old Golden Black.
And Ed Christman's opening sentence of his first sermon as chaplain was,
The French philosopher Albert Camus has said modern man is interested in only two things, reading the newspaper and
fornicating.
Since you are doing one and thinking about the other, let us begin.

Well, the papers went down.
He had a captive audience from there on.
And I still think that was the best attention-grabbing.
I think that was the best attention-grabbing opening sentence of any sermon I've ever heard.
That's a pretty good one.
I'm going to have to take note of that one.
I like it.
What a good one.
Now, you mentioned that the transition was a little bit difficult in that you knew a lot of the faculty members since they were your professors.
Did you know any of your students that were fellow students when you were there?
No, they were all gone.
When I came back to teach, it was five years after graduation.
Got it.
Got it.
That makes sense.
That makes sense.
So, what impact do you think your Wake Forest education had on your life as a whole?
Well, it was life-changing.
The friendships, the schools I went to, the relationships, the people I call on the phone when I say,
I've got a problem.
What do you think I ought to do about such and so?
It's just part of my identity.
I had dinner the other night.
I was in the retirement community where we lived.
And the man I was eating with was a Sigma Chi from the University of Maryland.
And I had, I think, a far richer experience than he did.
And he did have the continuing relationships.
But Wake Forest is an important part of my identity.
And I'm very grateful for that pastor back in Louisville who suggested I come.
He soon became pastor of a church in North Carolina.
And he was a trustee at Wake Forest when I was an undergraduate.
And he had me over to his home in Durham often.
And here I was.
I knew a trustee.
I was only a freshman, but I knew a trustee.
It's pretty important.
Yes, for sure.
Now, something I learned from your friend John last week was that you might have played a role.
In the infamous bra-dropping.
I'm here to elaborate on that one.
Oh, me.
Let's see.
Well, it was hatched in the philosophy library where most of us studied.
And there were five or six of us involved.
One person graded for a professor whose office was on the fourth floor of Wingate Hall.
Not many people know there's a fourth floor.
But there was one faculty office up there.
And he had gone out the window onto the roof of the chapel and discovered you could get into the roof, into the, I don't know, what you call the space above the ceiling of the chapel.
And there were catwalks so you wouldn't fall through the plaster ceiling.
And he discovered that if you lifted one of the lights set in a ceiling, out of the ceiling,
you could get out of the ceiling.
And he looked straight down at the pulpit.

You can't do that now.
There's an acoustical cloud that covers all of those lights.
But it wasn't there then.
And he thought something ought to be dropped out of the pier at just the right time.
Well, there was discussion and it was decided that a bra would be a good thing to drop.
And I want to be clear.
We were not protesting anything.
It was a prank that we had the capability of pulling off.
So we did.
So we had to rig up a system of kind of slip knots and pulleys so the bra could be dropped and the person who pulled the ripcord could make a quick escape.
We drew lots.
The person who won or lost to pull it.
I'm tempted to use names, but I don't think I will.
I'll just say he was an undergraduate.
The rest of us were seniors.
And he pulled the ripcord and ran and hid it in the men's room in Wingate Hall and just waited there for an hour.
So nobody would see him coming or going.
The rest of us were in chapel in our seats.
Immediately after class, three of us were in the same class.
And we were engaged in self-congratulatory laughter.
And a co-ed said, you all did it.
I'm sure you all did it.
I think you're responsible.
And somebody said, I won't say who.
Shut up or we'll say it was your bra.
She shut up right away.
So it was close to graduation.
Dr. Tribble was furious.
I later learned we would have been expelled if he'd known who did it.
Oh, you asked earlier about graduation.
We got our diplomas right at the spot underneath where the bra had dropped.
And all of us, as we got our diplomas, looked up at that spot and then looked back.
And I said, I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know.
It was definitely a bit of inside humor.
But there have been other pranks in chapel and in the university.
And I noticed that these have sort of gotten conflated.
There's several stories about bras and stories about unrolling a Playboy picture on the grill of the Oregon and things like that.
So students will be students.
Yes, it was just good fun.
Now, does my story.
Does my story jive with Wagsters?
It does.
It does.
He told me about the elaborate pulley system.

I said you guys needed to be engineers after all of that.
It sounded pretty intense.
Well, the night before, we had a dry run.
And some of us were down in the chapel to see how it fell through the hole.
And if it would be just out of reach, so it couldn't be taken down.
And other guys were up in the ceiling.
Doing it and the chaplain at that time was furious when it fell and he ran up the center aisle to the steeple and he took an elevator up and he got out and the students had finally settled down and stopped laughing just as he started pulling it back up and that got it swinging back and forth and that set the students off again.
I bet it did.
And I heard that people still.
Chat about it at homecoming.
Now, every now and then.
Yeah, at our 50th class reunion, people went around and said who they were and where they were from and all like that.
And one person said, all I want to know is who did the broad drop.
And Wagster was presiding.
And he said, you want to take that Roberts or you want me to.
So we told a little bit about it.
That's really cool.
Well, but I.
Go ahead.
The best thing at that reunion was said by Bill Barnes, the All-American football player.
We were going around the room and telling who we were and where we were from.
And a lot of people said, well, I'm Joe Jones and I'm here with Mary Sue, my wonderful wife of 50 years and the mother.
When it got to Bill Barnes, he said, I'm Bill Barnes and I can't introduce my wife.
Because after about five or 10 years.
She threw my sorry rear end out of the house.
Well, that just brought down the house and.
The highlight of the reunion in some ways.
Yes, you can't follow that one up.
That's for sure.
At least he's being truthful.
But I was going to tell you that when I did that dance band documentary and the lady mentioned the broad dropping, people didn't believe that that was a true story.
Students today.
So we don't do anything.
Quite as elaborate as that prank wise.
So, yeah.
Yeah.
So that's pretty funny.
Now, you've shared lots of wonderful Wake Forest memories, but I always like to ask, is there a favorite Wake Forest memory that you would like to share?
Yeah, it's from when I was teaching.
It was in November of 19.
Kennedy was shot that week.
He was shot on the 22nd, but on the 16th, we had a football game and our team only won one game all year.
And it was on November the 16th, the week, several days before Kennedy's assassination.
We beat South Carolina.
Brian Piccolo scored one of the touchdowns.
Another touchdown was scored by an and.
He turned around in the end zone and suddenly the ball hit him in the stomach and he clutched in pain and fell down and caught it.
We beat South Carolina.

Well, the students tore the goalposts down, which you can't do anymore, I don't think.

And we're just so celebratory.

Only game we won all season.

And then later in the week, Kennedy was assassinated and the student body just went through an entirely different emotional.

And then as they tried to recover and draw on the spiritual and intellectual resources that we had in the university offered, we managed to come back later.

A few days later, one of the visiting lecturers on campus was Scotty Reston, an op-ed writer for the New York Times, a really brilliant man.

And he had comforting words.

I think about the process in spite of the assassination.

But I remember someone said, well, where are you religiously in all of this?

And he said, I'm optimistic about God and pessimistic about man.

And we thought about that.

And he went on to say that as man using the sexist language of the day, he would say humans today, I hope.

Well, well, I'm going through a pursue now and seems to be helping us a lot.

And I think I just listen to what Leonard did, for sure, because it really is what he said and that United successional sense of mine begins to grow in the student body,

because now that you are at a higher level of consciousness, you're at a higher level of bits that you're even able to close to, without the levels and implications that remind you of others and not simply because you're a really quiet person, but because you're a very peaceful person at the same time.

And, you know, I think it's extremely important that, you know, every student that we're sharing with can be at the highest level of emotions, recovery is critical.

Very sending dude.

It is it is so important.

So I put my efforts and my life in the interest of good works on Freunde.

Thank you.

Twice a week.

Oh, thank you. I don't know. I spoke a couple of times in chapel, and I was honored to do that, once at homecoming and once just by invitation from Ed Christman.

And when we were living here on our first bout, we lived in Faculty Apartment Building 1, and Liz Phillips lived on the top floor, but there were two other great women in that building.

One was Jane Freeman Crossway, who'd been an undergraduate classmate and had a great career at Mount Holyoke, and the other was a young English instructor named Emily Herring, and we discovered she was dating Ed Wilson.

Ed Wilson.

Ed Wilson.

Ed Wilson.

Ed Wilson, you know, the prize catch. Well, Emily was a prize too, and a mutual friend said, okay, we all know about this, but I don't think we're supposed to talk too much about this relationship. Let's see what happens.

Well, we've seen what happens, and that was a good thing. We have one child, a son who was born at Baptist Hospital while I was teaching there, and that was an exciting sort of moment.

That was a good thing. We have one child, a son who was born at Baptist Hospital while I was teaching there, and that was an exciting sort of moment.

But, no, you've been so thorough and wonderful in your questions and follow-ups that I've enjoyed the conversation, and thank you for the chance to take part.

Well, no problem at all. I'm going to click this little...