

Joe Nathan Wright '68  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
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Transcribed by Kate Packard '22

PACKARD: Okay, this is Kate Packard and today is Thursday, May 4, 2023. And I'm conducting this oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. I'm recording this interview by Zoom video call with Mr. Joe Nathan Wright. I am on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. And Mr. Wright is speaking to me from Richardson, Texas. Mr. Wright, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

WRIGHT: Glad to do it. My pleasure.

PACKARD: Thank you again.

WRIGHT: Thank you for asking me.

PACKARD: Of course. So just to get started, if you could just tell me where and when you were born?

WRIGHT: Okay. I was born in 1946. In Charleston, South Carolina. Lowcountry of, lowcountry of South Carolina was about population then about 35,000.

PACKARD: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

WRIGHT: My parents were Peter Wright Jr. No middle name.. He died about 1992. He was born in 1917. My mother, uh, her name.. Marie Wright. No middle name. M-A-R-I-E Wright. Last Name W-R-I-G-H-T. She was born in 1918. She died. She died in 2012 at 94.

PACKARD: Oh, wow.

WRIGHT: My father died at 75 of uh, of lung cancer. He got asbestosis.

PACKARD: Oh, okay. Interesting. What did your parents do?

WRIGHT: My father was an electrician. My mother was a domestic. My parents split up when I was in first or second grade. And remained split for about 30 years before my father came back.

PACKARD: Really?

WRIGHT: Yeah, it's my mother really, how should I say it? My mother was one of the angels of the world. We, she was a domestic. She didn't go far in school. My dad was an electrician. My [mother], she worked as a domestic during the day, making \$18 a week. And at night she would serve parties and receptions to bring home some more money. And we looked forward to that because she also brought home leftovers. That's where I formed my passion for pastrami and rye sandwiches.

PACKARD: Okay, from the leftovers.

WRIGHT: The leftovers. Yes.

PACKARD: That's great.

WRIGHT: So, when I moved to New York, anyway, I, the New York delis. I used to hang out there. A little more about my family. I'm the sixth of eight kids.

PACKARD: Okay, wow.

WRIGHT: There, there's six of us surviving. My oldest brother was his name was William [Wright]. His nickname was Sap. S-A-P. He was born in 1938. Then, Annabelle [Wright] came along in 1940. Her nickname was Dollie. D-O-L-L-I-E. Pronounced the same as Dolley Madison if not spelled the same way I forget how Dolley Madison spelled her name. Then there was Marie [Wright], who came along in 1941. Her nickname was Sister. Everyone's got a nickname except me. And she was born in 41. Evelyn came along in 1943. Lillian [Wright], Lillie, came along in 1945. She spells her name L-I-L-L-I-E. But then I was born in '46. I think '46 is the start of the baby boom. And anyway, my family calls me—well I do, I do have a nickname. They call me Josie. They still do, but nobody else does except my brothers and sisters.

My younger brother, Peter Wright III—Petey we call him still—came along '51. And my—the last of us, Catherine [Celia Wright], we call her Catie. C-A-T-I-E. Came along in 1953. Marie has died. William died freshman year. And I think it was January of '65. And I went back home for his funeral. He died young. Let me see, Marie, who died a couple of years ago, and Evelyn were retired registered nurses. Lillie is a retired Special Ed teacher. Pete III is a retired OB/GYN doctor. Catie is a retired lawyer. I'm a retired lawyer. Annabelle or Dollie retired from being the head of housekeeping at a New Jersey hospital. I forget which one now. And I was married

to a retired CRNA, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist. So somehow or another we got to be a medical, legal family.

PACKARD: Yeah, it sounds like it.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Growing up. Well, I'm not the only one who had it tough. Since my—since we were raised by a single mother, my dad was sending home \$35 dollars a month. Though he was working as an electrician at a shipyard in New Jersey, he probably could have afforded to send a lot more. But that that was in the 50s. About 30 years later, after they split up in the early 50s, he got very sick. And there was nobody to take care of him where he lived or nobody wanted to do it. So, he asked my mom to take care of him. And she did it. She took care of him for about 10 years before he died.

PACKARD: Wow. So, he just asked her to do it and she said yes?

WRIGHT: Yes. Over the years, you know, we knew where he was. And we'd seen him from time to time. He'd send gifts from time to time. And he, he would come back from the Philly area for big events like high school graduation. Hardly saw him other than that, but he was there at my high school graduation. so he and my mother maintain this rather strange relationship. But we didn't—we the kids, we stayed out of that.

PACKARD: Yeah. What do you, what do you mean by rather strange?

WRIGHT: Oh, well—They— [laughter] He was gone. He didn't do his fair share to help us. But as far as I know, she never really held that against him. Just went on about her business of raising eight kids. And when he got sick, late in life, I don't know how many—I don't know many people would have volunteered to take him in as an old man sick with lung cancer and care for him for the remainder of his life. To me, that's strange.

PACKARD: I agree. I would, I would say that it's definitely unique. [laughter]

WRIGHT: Yeah. Okay.

PACKARD: But impressive and very admirable that your mom is the type of person who would do that.

WRIGHT: Yes, she was she was always the kind of person that everybody would lean on. We were all born at home.

PACKARD: Oh really?

WRIGHT: No hospital. Born at home. And my mother was the neighborhood midwife.

PACKARD: That's cool.

WRIGHT: She—you know, black folk in those days. The hospital was segregated. Black women had no place to have their babies except at home in, in Charleston. So, Black families learned how to have babies on their own.

PACKARD: Yeah. Wow. That's cool. Were—had either of your parents been involved in World War Two at all?

WRIGHT: World War Two, you said?

PACKARD: Mmhmm. Sorry. Are you having trouble hearing me? I can definitely like turn my, my sound up on my end if that would be helpful.

WRIGHT: No, no. I just wanted to make sure I heard. Yeah. My dad was a veteran. Yeah. My mother was never in the service. My dad was in the Navy. I think he was trained to be a Mess Steward. I don't think he got deployed. I think he was drafted late in the war, when he already had four kids.

PACKARD: Right.

WRIGHT: And so he went through training. And, and got discharged at the end of the war.

PACKARD: Okay. Gotcha. So, you, you grew up, your whole life, up until Dartmouth, in Charleston, right?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Interesting. I never, never left the state until like, came to Dartmouth.

PACKARD: Really?

WRIGHT: Really.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: I think I was I think the farthest I'd gotten away from home was physically, like 100 miles to go to a beach.

PACKARD: Wow, okay.

WRIGHT: Near Savannah, Georgia. And so grew up in Charleston. Spent time. My mother, my mother was a country girl. Her folk still got a lot of relatives there on Edisto Island, one of the Sea Islands. Edisto is about 35 miles from Charleston. So, from time to time, we'd go out there and spend time on the farm. Slopping hogs, running around, wandering through swamps and bogs and creeks. And she grew up near the inner, inner coastal waterway. It weaves its way through the Sea Islands. You got James Island, Sea Island, Charles-uh, finally Edisto Island. On and on and on. And these are islands. We got to Edisto over a little wooden bridge. But anyway. But didn't leave South Carolina, really had no interest in it. There was so much to do, and so much to see around Charleston. And I had, and I had books to keep me company.

PACKARD: Yeah. Were you a big reader as a kid?

WRIGHT: Yep. In fact, the barbers would tease me, but it didn't bother me. They called me "The Professor."

PACKARD: [laughter] Oh, that's funny.

WRIGHT: I'd come in, finally they—I'd come through the door and I'd always have a book. They'd say, "there's, there's, there's, there's, there's 'fess." I love, I loved history. And it just seems like like books that—you can't make this stuff up.

PACKARD: Yeah. No, I know, I love reading.

WRIGHT: It is so fascinating.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: This, the true stories of, of how people lived and what they did decisions they made, so anyway. Yeah, I was huge reader. Still a huge reader. I still prefer hard copies of books.

PACKARD: I get that. I get that. There's something about holding a book in your hand for sure.

WRIGHT: Yep.

PACKARD: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about what your childhood was like growing up in Charleston? You've told me a little but like—

WRIGHT: Oh, I can tell you. Yeah. Charleston was an interesting place. Totally segregated. By law. But practically—the population was probably 60% White, maybe 40% Black. Might've even been closer than that. But, but Blacks and Whites lived all over the place. So, there was a—I had a neighbor across the street, who was White. And they're, they're, they're Whites and Blacks living next door to one another. But since it was segregated by law, no one worried about de facto segregation in real estate. Now, it's, just, it was just the opposite I found when I was in Boston. Blacks lived a certain place, Roxbury, part of Dorchester. On the other side of Dorchester Avenue and Southie, there were the Whites. But anyway, all the public officials in those days, Mayor, the Senators, the US Rep., the Governor—all Democrats. Southern Democrats.

PACKARD: In South Carolina, okay. Okay.

WRIGHT: Until the '60s when LBJ was President and the Civil Rights Act of '64 got passed, the Voting Rights Act of '65 got passed, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 got passed. And all those people became Republicans, Strom Thurmond and Fritz Hollings, and all the rest of them became Republicans in order to preserve to fight all those issues and to maintain segregation. And nowadays, Charleston County's probably about 250,000 people—and it's purple. The Congress person there is a Republican, her name was Nancy Mace. But she is straddling the abortion issue. She's, she's not wanting to go as far as Roe, but she doesn't want to go to the six-week ban. So, so, so, before her there was a, there was a Democratic Representative.

PACKARD: Alright.

WRIGHT: At some point, but anyway—but back, but going back to the the old days. Southern Democrats in a totally segregated town. I went to—Brown v Board was in '54. But from '52 to '56. I went to something called Simonton Elementary--all Black. From '57 to '58. I went to something called the Columbus Street School, where sixth grade and seventh grade, all Black. 1959 through '60, I went to a junior high, eighth grade Simonton, all Black. From '60 to '64, I went to high school at Burke, all Black. The schools never integrated while I was there. And interestingly enough in '57 when I went to sixth grade, they—the powers that be, were White—built a school almost overnight during the summer of 19, of 1957. It became obvious that, that, that the Black, the Black population had grown so much that the two segregated public schools elementary schools I think one was called Buist. I think it was B-U-I-S-T. The other one was Rhett, R-H-E-T-T. These are old southern names, all slave owners.

PACKARD: I bet. Right.

WRIGHT: And anyway, wouldn't hold us all so they built the school overnight—a third segregated elementary school for, for, for, Black kids. Lucky me. That's where I met Mrs. Hare. Genevieve? No, Mamie G. Hare. She, she, we all wanted to know what the “G” stood for, but it wasn't until I got to be grown up that she confessed that it was Genevieve. For some reason. Anyway, it was—She didn't want anybody to know that. Anyway, lucky me. I was an indifferent student until I met her. And she got me interested in learning. And so that turned me around and I became a good student. And that sort of got me on the road to coming, to getting into Dartmouth. If I hadn't met her, I would have probably just been another C-student. Auto mechanic somewhere, if I was lucky.

PACKARD: What year would that have been? When, when you met her?

WRIGHT: '57.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: I'll never forget it because it was the beginning of junior year—uh, sixth grade. [laughter] I was really different.

PACKARD: Okay. That's a tough time.

WRIGHT: Yeah, that's true. Did I tell the story about the first day of sixth grade?

PACKARD: No, no.

WRIGHT: When I met her, she said, we're all sitting there in class, there were probably about 40 kids, you know, all Black, maybe 20 women, 20 Girls, 20 boys. She said, “I'd like to know what you guys know. Let's start with math.” Or arithmetic, you know? And she said, “I'd like to know if you can do fractions.” And she started calling off fractions 6, 5/6, 7/8, 4/16. All, all, and so forth and so on. Believe it or not until that point, I don't think—I didn't even know what a fraction was. I mean I'm in the sixth grade. I've never seen one. And so finally, I just wrote down numbers randomly across the page. When she looked down, and she saw—she couldn't believe it. And she didn't say anything. But next day, she announced we're going to learn fractions this year.

PACKARD: [laughter] That's great.

WRIGHT: [laughter] Yeah, she didn't embarrass me or anything. She just said we're gonna learn fractions this year. And I really appreciated that. And she, she had a way of teaching that would make me want to learn things. And so, that's, that's where I met a guy named George Glasgow. He's another lawyer, Black guy lives out in California. He and I call one another twins. George is a, is a lawyer, a member of the New York Bar and the California Bar. It just, he's an Army veteran. He was an attack helicopter pilot in Vietnam. It just seems that whatever one did the other did without really communicating. And so anyway, he is a lifelong friend from the sixth grade that I talk with regularly. And anyway, that was a magical time.

PACKARD: Yeah. So, what was sort of like high school or middle school like for you socially?

WRIGHT: In a minute. Let me tell you something else about the schools back then. I don't want to let anybody off the hook.

PACKARD: Okay!

WRIGHT: I walked to school from the from first grade through senior high. The county schools, they didn't give Black kids school buses.

PACKARD: Oh.

WRIGHT: We had no lockers in school, we had to carry our stuff around everywhere. We had no gym. We had—in high school we had basketball, but it was just an old Quonset-type hut with stands and a basketball court. That's where we did P.E., physical education, no showers! When we finished P.E. we just had to get dressed, sweaty, whatever, put our clothes back on. Since we didn't have any lockers when we, the girls would get dressed, , while the guys were outside, and the guys would get dressed while the girls were outside. Then we just leave our stuff just on the on the stands of the of the basketball court. The teachers watched the stuff, but it was ridiculous. And so, I walked to school back and forth 3.3 miles from home in high school each way each day. Never missed a day.

PACKARD: Three and a half, almost three and a half miles you walked to and from school every day.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

PACKARD: That's not a short walk.



WRIGHT: I like walking, I liked the walk.

PACKARD: That's good.

WRIGHT: [laughter] Still do. Kept me skinny, kept me in shape.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: Rain, rain or rain or rarely snow. Heat, usually heat. And didn't miss! My mom did not allow us, you can see were you well educated. My brother went to Williams, I told you that. He graduated from Williams in '73 and then went to Howard Medical School after that and graduated in the, in the, in the 70's. But anyway, we learned to overcome adversity early. When I got to Dartmouth thought I had died and gone to heaven.

PACKARD: [laughter] Yeah, fair. People do a lot more for you here, huh?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And you know, it's a walking campus.

PACKARD: Right. Yeah, that's true. Still is.

WRIGHT: I really am fond of it being a walking campus. And I walked everywhere. The farthest I had to walk was from Brown Hall to Phi Psi [Phi Kappa Psi/Phi Sigma Psi] School Street. That's not that far. So, when I was a senior, junior and senior, I was in Fayer, Middle Fayer [Mid-Fayerweather]. And you know, all the history classes were at Dartmouth Hall, or what? Reed [Reed Hall], some other. You know, I can roll out of bed for an eight o'clock class at 7:45.

PACKARD: Yeah, I know! That part's nice, definitely spoils you a little bit, the walking.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway. And it's so beautiful. Anyway, lifelong love of the place. That's why I'm still active with the Dartmouth College Fund. I was the Head Agent for nine years.

PACKARD: Oh, wow.

WRIGHT: I still solicit more guys than anybody in the class.

PACKARD: Good for you. That's very commendable.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I appreciate—you know, like to pass it forward. Saved my life going to Dartmouth.

PACKARD: I love it here. I can't believe that I have to leave soon. I'm not ready. I'm never going to be ready. [laughter]

WRIGHT: [laughter] If I had to do all over again. I would've, I would've, I would have done the three-two program where you could, where you could get an MBA from Tuck [Tuck School of Business] and then graduate.

PACKARD: Oh, yes.

WRIGHT: And then in my lifelong regret is that Dartmouth didn't have a law school.

PACKARD: Couldn't go back.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: I come back once or twice a year.

PACKARD: Yeah, that's great. That's, I—It's so beautiful. Today's not really a day where it's very beautiful out, but it typically is.

WRIGHT: I know. You asked me to do something and I—

PACKARD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'd asked about like your social experience in like middle and high school growing up.

WRIGHT: Oh! Socially, um, how should I put it? My sister Lil is probably--I don't tell anybody--but she is my best friend. She was born in '45 We hung out together, we did everything together. She was very, very popular. She was in the social clubs. Everybody loved her, still do. We were, we were opposites until I was about 13. I kept my head in the books. And was, when I wasn't playing ball, I played a lot of sports. When I, when I wasn't doing that, I was I was a loner until I was about 13. Because I couldn't dance.

And, you know, and one, one day I got tired of it and, and Lil taught me how to dance. You know what they call the Florida Bop. It's a swing. You know, you can do everything. And I really enjoyed it. I said, "Hey, this is great!" It was a song called "Party Lights" by a woman named Claudine Clark, I think it was. Anyway, that's why, when I learned. Anyway, I couldn't get enough of it. You know, all of a sudden, hey, this is cool! And so, I started hanging out with people socially, as well as academically, and social life picked up.

And I was—how should I put it? I had a very active social life. And it's, and the kids around me really appreciated intellectual achievement. So, I got elected to a lot of class offices, you know, not the—I wasn't the Captain of the track team or wasn't the Captain of the basketball team or wasn't the head cheerleader, wasn't Captain of the football team, wasn't Captain of the baseball team, though I knew all those guys.

And they all supported me and I just got elected to everything. I think I was a Junior Class—I know I was a Junior, I was a Junior Class President. Then I was the Senior Class President. I was valedictorian, but that was academics. But the other things were elective offices. And so I get along with people. I—I kind of allow them to be. So I think they appreciate that. I had a very active social life, dating as much as I could. Never had a lot of money. But I, I worked odd jobs. And on Saturdays, I delivered groceries for a grocery store for five bucks. After Social Security deduction, it was \$4.82. So, my first Social Security deduction was 1963. So I'm real pleased about that. Put money in there for 50 years, and nobody's gonna take it from me.

PACKARD: That's great.

WRIGHT: So anyway, I hope I answered your question.

PACKARD: Yeah, no, you definitely did. And you mentioned a little bit earlier, some about like, growing up with your mom as a single mother, did you and also just how different your schools were. Did you talk much about politics and like, the civil rights movement and things at home while you were growing up?

WRIGHT: Yeah, we—the local papers. There are two, News and Courier. And it was a morning paper and the Evening Post was an evening paper. We took the Evening Post. Now they've combined, I think it is Post and Courier. But they didn't cover the civil rights movement at all. You wouldn't have known that Martin Luther King [Jr.] was a person. And the radio stations didn't, the television stations didn't either. In fact, when there was a black person in the movie, in a movie that did not have what they called an “appropriate role.” The John Wayne kind of deal if, if a black person was alright in a movie if it was if they was a maid, a butler, or you know Stepin Fetchit or Willie Best or some other character. Sidney Poitier? Uh-uh. You couldn't see Sidney Poitier, because that was somebody in an “inappropriate role,” they would just say that. Harry Belafonte, no. We found, we got our news through *Ebony* [Magazine] and *Jet*

[Magazine] and in other in other publications. That's how we found out about what was happening in Black America.

PACKARD: Were those newspapers, or—?

WRIGHT: *Jet* is—I don't know if they still publish it or not. *Jet* was—this was all about the Johnson publications out of Chicago. John Johnson, you know, the prominent Black family. *Jet* was a weekly, small publication where they just gave news with relevance in the Black community. And *Ebony* was their monthly magazine, that was patterned, looked a lot like *Life Magazine* for Black folk. And those magazines, find them in the barber shop, found them in individual homes. They, they exchanged hands, many, many times, one person might have bought *Jet*, I don't know, maybe 15 cents? But if one person bought it, 100 persons read it.

PACKARD: Right. Yeah.

WRIGHT: And so those magazines gave us, you know, told us what was going on in America. And so we got a chance to talk about those things in life and segregated South Carolina. At home and and what, what we can do about it.

PACKARD: That's interesting. so just before we sort of move into talking about your time at Dartmouth, is there anything else from like your your childhood or upbringing that you wanted to mention?

WRIGHT: [pause] No, if something comes to mind that I think relevant, I'll I'll, I'll interject.

PACKARD: Yeah, please do.

WRIGHT: But the the important thing is my mother really emphasized education as a way of getting out of the mess, which was the '50s in the '60s segregated south for Black folk.

PACKARD: Right. Yeah, yeah. And so, what sort of did go into your decision to go to Dartmouth? What, like, what was that process like for you?

WRIGHT: Well, it seemed to me, I'd read. One of my favorite periods was, and still is, the American Revolution. And I wanted to see New England. I wanted to see Concord and Lexington, Bunker Hill. I wanted to see the Old North Church. I wanted to see New York, Wall Street. New York was the first Capitol. I wanted to see Philly, the Liberty Bell, all that good stuff. And one of the, one of the one of the people I admired, though, was Daniel Webster.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: And so obviously, there's a big connection between Daniel Webster and Dartmouth.

PACKARD: I'd say so.

WRIGHT: I understand—I always say, one of my heroes is also Bill Clinton. I always tell people, my heroes are all human with flaws. And, and Webster was no different than some other heroes, because while he was a great statesman and contributed a lot, I understand there were compromises he made, particularly on issues of slavery that some would criticize. I always try to put myself in the shoes of, of people. At the time they lived and, and try to project what they may have done with respect to their decisions. There's there are some things that I find unforgivable, like, Jackson, Andrew.

PACKARD: Yes.

WRIGHT: And, and his genocide of indigenous people.

PACKARD: Horrific, yep.

WRIGHT: I find nothing admirable about John C. Calhoun, whose statue, thank goodness, they took down in Charleston a few years ago.

PACKARD: Oh, good. That's good.

WRIGHT: Calhoun Street is a main drag. He, his statue overlooked that street. Wherever you went, you could almost see that damn thing. So anyway, I was so glad that they took down that statue of John C. Calhoun.

PACKARD: That's good.

WRIGHT: But anyway. That's—I wanted to see the North. And I applied different places and ended at Dartmouth.

PACKARD: Yeah, that's great. So, so you got here in what that would have been the fall of 1964?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Fall. Yes, I did.

PACKARD: Okay. And um, what was sort of your first, and you had you hadn't visited, right? You had never, you said you hadn't been up here before?

WRIGHT: No, never. Never, never visited. Saw pictures, read the stories. Read the—read the songs.

PACKARD: Ah, yes, the songs.

WRIGHT: You know, Glory to Dartmouth. You know, the banks go cheering by then followed by Glory to the Dartmouth. In those days, Men of Dartmouth. And it just seemed that it just it, that that stuff turned me on. The tradition and the fellowship.

PACKARD: I completely agree. That's like part of what I wrote my Dartmouth application about was how much I love the tradition here and the history.

WRIGHT: Mmhmm.

PACKARD: So, what was sort of your first impression upon when you got here?

WRIGHT: I took the bus up from New York. I worked, I worked in New York, the summer of 64. My sister who was a nurse at Harlem Hospital got me a job in the in the operating, in the emergency room. Pushing go round with people on it. I was there doing the Riot of '64 [Harlem Riot of 1964, New York Race Riots of 1964]. I was 17. You know, with with all hell breaking loose. But anyway, I'll take a bus to White River Junction [VT]. There was, I may have been the only one on that bus by the time I got to White River. And got off. Those days, it was during the day and there was a Dartmouth cab waiting. Because you know, and I got in the cab, you know. And we came across the Ledyard Bridge from White River. And the trees are not as big. You know, 60 years ago. And so you could see Baker Tower coming in on Wheelock. I guess that'd be West Wheelock [St.], that stretch. And you could see Baker, you could you could see Baker really clearly and the sun was shining on the on the tower, and it was like a—it was a magical moment.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: Never. [pause] Pardon me.

PACKARD: No.

WRIGHT: [pause] I'll never forget it.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. I completely agree. It's beautiful here.

WRIGHT: I fell in love with the place.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: And love it more now.

PACKARD: That's good, that's good. So when you see you got here you got off the bus and then what was so you came up by yourself, right?

WRIGHT: Yes, I did.

PACKARD: You were moving yourself in and what was all that like?

WRIGHT: Yeah, yeah, very self—you know, my mother taught us to be self-reliant, there was nobody else to do it. She was too busy working. You did what you had to do. And the the cabbies they knew what you needed to do. Took us to B and G, you know, to get pick up the key.

PACKARD: B and G? What's B and G?

WRIGHT: Buildings and Grounds.

PACKARD: Oh, okay.

WRIGHT: I don't know what they call it now. But that's the it was over there at the power plant. That's that's those people that took care of the buildings and the grounds. And that's where you got your key when you got, when you got to get on campus.

PACKARD: Yep.

WRIGHT: And I got a key to 203, what, 203 B or was it A? I can't remember. It was was Suite 203 Brown Hall, over on the Choate Road. Got the key, opened the door. And I think that's the last time that door was locked. And, but, I don't know how things are these days, but nobody locked any doors.

PACKARD: No, we still don't.

WRIGHT: While I was there.

PACKARD: Well it's just like what's the point?

WRIGHT: Yeah, no. [laughter] And so after that first trip, to B and G, buildings and grounds. I know that the problem still is there in whatever iteration because somebody has to take care of the buildings and grounds.

PACKARD: Yes, they do.

WRIGHT: And, and I never picked up a key again. For the rest of my career at Dartmouth, I was at Brown Hall. I was impressed enough to ask for the Choate Road dorms because they were all new. They look great in the pictures, so forth and so on. I didn't mind the walk so forth and so on. I ended up staying there for two years, because the walk never bothered me. Close enough to, close enough to the Green. Short cuts everywhere. So, I was I was there for two years in Brown Hall.

PACKARD: Okay. And then where did you live after that?

WRIGHT: Met a fellow who's still my best friend named David [L.] Walden ['68].

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: David Walden is a white guy from Roanoke, Virginia who went to UVA law school. Got a Master's in taxation from NYU. Practiced in Georgia for years, International Tax Law. Retired about 10 years ago, bought a house on East Wheelock Street.

PACKARD: Oh, really?

WRIGHT: Right on the other side of A Lot.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: And when I come when I come to town, that's where I stay. He bought a house with a room for me.

PACKARD: Oh, really?

WRIGHT: Yeah.

PACKARD: Okay, that's nice.

WRIGHT: But anyway, David and I got to be friends, and come junior year, David was a suitemate in freshman freshman year. He lived in



another room in the suite. Second year, I stayed in Brown. He moved into an adjoining dorm. I can't remember which one it was. Bissell [Hall].

PACKARD: One of the other, one of the other Choates? Bissell, Cohen [Hall].

WRIGHT: Choates. Cohen, yeah, but.

PACKARD: One of them, yeah, yeah, yeah.

WRIGHT: But we ate together. You know, one of us—For the second year, we would still hang out together. We ate together every year. Every just as many meals as we could together. Instead of being suitemates we were dorm mates. We weren't roomies because of a combination of different things anyway. But junior year, a senior named Corky [Curtis W.] Stewart ['67] needed two roommates to keep his room in Middle Fayer. So he had been a suite-mate of ours our freshman year. So now it's junior year. [laughter] He came to see us--we'd stayed in touch. We got along. He was a senior, we were juniors. You said, "You guys. I need two roommates. Do you want to live in Middle Fayer?" We said, "Are you kidding? Who doesn't want to live in Middle Fayer?"

So, he talked us—it wasn't hard—into asking to be his roommates in Middle Fayer. So, David and I were roommates with with Corky, our junior, his senior year. We all got along great. He was a fine guy. He had a Shelby Cobra Mustang with all kinds of power and stuff, he was insane. Anyway, we had a good time with that Mustang. And junior year, senior year, David and I, we stayed there. And we got a sophomore, a '70 who lived next door, our junior year to move in with us our senior year. And so, Bill Weale ['70], who is over in Vermont now, who I see just about every time I go to town. He has been married to Joy. Think she's retired now. She worked at Dartmouth for years. But anyway, they met when she was at Wheaton. Anyway, when when they met—either his freshman or sophomore year. And when Dave and I were juniors, so we got to know them before they got married and had kids and grandkids.

Dartmouth was good for me. I made lifelong friends. Heck, I just had dinner a couple months ago with my freshman roommate, who is a judge from Alaska.

PACKARD: Oh, wow.

WRIGHT: He was he was in town visiting his grandson at Southern Methodist [University].

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: And so. Go ahead.

PACKARD: No, no, no. I was just listening.

WRIGHT: And so, I'm best friends with my freshman year roommate, best friends with my freshman year room, suitemate, best friends with my junior and senior roomies. And when I come back in June, I'll stay at Dave's. His name is David Walden on East Wheelock. Never thought, you know, I'd be one of them old guys, you know, walking around the green, living in Hanover.

PACKARD: Yeah. Well, I'm on East Wheelock Street right now. So, not very far away. [laughter]

WRIGHT: [laughter] Not too far, not too far away, I guess. Near near Dana. Near Dana Lane [Dana Road].

PACKARD: It's a nice location he's got.

WRIGHT: Yeah, it's it's really nice. walkable to the Green. At least it's still walkable, I don't know how many years it's going to be walkable.

PACKARD: Fair. So, what what activities were you involved in when you were at Dartmouth?

WRIGHT: Ah, let's see. ROTC, four years. I always wanted to be an Army Officer, or a military officer. I originally wanted to go to the Air Force Academy, but I couldn't persuade any of the local politicians in South Carolina to give me an appointment. So, I joined ROTC, and also it was paying \$50 bucks a month, then \$55 bucks a month, junior and senior year after you went to the advanced program. That was a lot of money.

PACKARD: Yeah, that was.

WRIGHT: You know, I ate on that. I don't know that's probably 10 times as much these days. It might equate to several—it's \$100 bucks now. It sure would have been with inflation. I joined a fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi. The, the branch in Mississippi objected to my joining. Little did I know that I would have been.

PACKARD: Like, the other chapter?

WRIGHT: Yeah, the other chapter. They had they had a rule that any chapter could object to any pledge at any other chapter.

PACKARD: Oh my gosh.

WRIGHT: We didn't know that. The guys in, the guy in—at Dartmouth, you know, we're told that either that I couldn't join. Finally, you know, you know, they had something called sink night, but anyway, or they'd kick the chapter out, you know, they said they, you know, I got blackballed—no pun intended—by the Mississippi chapter at the University of Mississippi, I think. And so, Phi Kappa Psi became Phi Sigma Psi. The guys went local with, you know, they, they went public with the, with the, with the, with the, with the racism. And the college, you know, wouldn't stand for it, you know. And—but the chapter they weren't, they, they weren't interested in, in going along with, with the exclusion of Black folk. And so, we went local, became Phi Sigma Psi. Most of those guys, I still know a lot of 'em. And I'm still in touch with a lot of 'em. they became lifelong friends.

PACKARD: That's great.

WRIGHT: I also did the Dartmouth Christian Union. I became a Vice President over there. It was across, I think it was in the same room with with, with ROTC and a lot of those guys were big time anti-war.

PACKARD: The Christian Union?

WRIGHT: Yeah. At the Dartmouth Christian Union. You had your Student for a Democratic. What is? SDS? What was that?

PACKARD: SDS, yeah.

WRIGHT: I can't even remember what.

PACKARD: Students for a Democratic Society.

WRIGHT: Society—yeah! But but we could talk about it and disagree about it, and still eat and socialize together without it being a big, big deal. I didn't lose any friends because I was gonna serve and they were not—or opposed the war. The war divided people, but it seemed to me that Dartmouth was different. It seemed that we could disagree agreeably about different things, about different things. Yeah, you know, I didn't lose any friends. Now, it seems, seems like we've lost that ability.

PACKARD: Evidently, yeah.

WRIGHT: There are people who I can't talk to anymore.

PACKARD: I know.

WRIGHT: Because their politics. I'm a, I'm a left wing, radical liberal New Deal Democrat. I think Franklin Roosevelt was deity.

PACKARD: That's great.

WRIGHT: Okay? That's fine. You say, "that's blasphemous." Okay! Fine.

PACKARD: No, I I'm right there with you. So. [laughter]

WRIGHT: Okay. [laughter] And I've got people who think FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt] is a four letter word. But we can't talk about it anymore. It's almost as if they're just two different societies just going different ways. And I hope that, that those who come after me, are able to solve that rift.

But anyway, Dartmouth was a little different. But anyway, at Dartmouth Christian Union, I ran something called the Valley Tutorial Program where Dartmouth students—I coordinated it—and a bunch of Dartmouth students would go to Lebanon High. Maybe Hanover High. I remember Lebanon High because we had to, because we had to find somebody who had a driver's license.

I didn't, you know, and so that was a big deal. We had Dartmouth students just volunteered to tutor those kids in different subjects. You know, all volunteer it so that's, that's they that was really active. I worked at the Dartmouth Dining Hall Thayer [Hall]. DD, DDA, Dartmouth Dining Association. It has nothing to do with with '54 Commons [Class of 1953 Commons]. It's just not different, we ate, we ate garbage off of trays. And had meals. You know, mystery meat "S on a Shingle." I mean, the food was terrible.

PACKARD: While you were here?

WRIGHT: Yes. I mean, that's why the '54s, you know, put the, gave Dartmouth the money to create that—as far as I'm concerned, magnificent dining structure.

PACKARD: I would agree, it's very nice.

WRIGHT: That's on the campus right now, I've seen, I've stayed in five star hotels, not as nice.

PACKARD: Fair.

WRIGHT: But, but Thayer, you know, they just the food was the food was terrible, but there was plenty of it.

PACKARD: That's good.

WRIGHT: What can I say?

PACKARD: We'll take it.

WRIGHT: Anyway, so those were my primary activities.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: Kept me busy. And I I studied a lot longer than a lot of the other kids because my education was not up to the prep school model. And I learned a lot. I was good. I was real smart. But gosh, it took me a couple of years of catch up.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah, that's, that's valid. But you said that you didn't really feel like there was a, like, no one sort of treated you differently because you were were in ROTC. Like, that didn't influence your social life?

WRIGHT: No! And, and, um, there weren't very many Black kids, you know. But I'll tell you, between working at Thayer, because that's how I, you know, I had work study because that's how I earned my food. And studying non-stop, you know, and sleeping very little, I was really too busy to worry about social life. Freshman year, particularly, even sophomore year, didn't have very much money. And the—going from a situation in Charleston where it was totally segregated and not having to deal socially with any Whites, to going Dartmouth where you hardly saw any people of color at all, was totally different. I can recognize it, but the academic but the academic grind was so intense that kept my mind off of it. It kept my mind off of being socially isolated. But more than that, it was an all-male school.

PACKARD: Right.

WRIGHT: And that made the social isolation less intense because there was no dating during the week. And so I didn't have to worry about—so I

was not concerned about being left out of at least freshman year, being left out of any particular social circle. There weren't any. They're just a bunch of guys going to class, studying, going to class, hanging out. [pause] Anyway, it's hard to explain.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. There's just something about this place, huh? Just does it to you.

Did you do you feel like you found like, what was sort of your primary community on campus?

WRIGHT: Oh.

PACKARD: I know, you're so involved in so many things, that might be a hard question.

WRIGHT: Well, I'd say my primary community was was, was relationships that developed at the fraternity. I'd say the fraternity and my activities with DCU. And the Christian Union in the Valley Tutorial Program because that was daily.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: Yeah, fraternity activities. ROTC was once a week on Wednesday.

PACKARD: Okay, it was only once a week?

WRIGHT: Yeah, I mean, you know, the drill. We had, we had classes: military science. I don't know if they have class. They had classes for credit in military science in those days. I know at some point this, they may have had those classes, but they couldn't give college credits for what they call military science. But, starting sophomore year, my primary community was fraternity, ROTC and Dart—and DCU. At some point in there, the Afro-American Society was formed.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: That's what it was called initially. I think the name has changed.

PACKARD: Possible. There are multiple, so I'm not sure which one it originally derived from.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Anyway. But anyway. The Afro-American Society was, was formed as an official college—I don't know when it became an official college activity, you know, on on paper. But that met once a week. I can't remember whether that's got started. I can't remember

what year it got started, but it was definitely before senior year. I could probably go back.

PACKARD: I'm sure it's online somewhere.

WRIGHT: Because I remember going to meetings from Fayer. I don't remember going to meetings from from Brown. But I, but I may have. And that, that was one of my primary activities.

PACKARD: Okay. Were you involved at all in like the the founding of that?

WRIGHT: I was not one of the founders. But, but I was one of the original members. Woody Lee [Forrester A. Lee Jr. '68] and what's Wally's last name? Woody Lee, who was '68, and some of the other guys were the inspiration of that. And they, they organized it, publicized it and got the rest of us involved. But I was not one of the leaders.

PACKARD: Okay. Gotcha. So, pivoting a little bit—I'm guessing and when I've seen from some Dartmouth history that anti-war activism was pretty active throughout your time at Dartmouth, maybe coming to a head your senior spring. Were you involved at all in that and sort of like what were your your feelings about the war while you were at Dartmouth?

WRIGHT: Oh, I thought it was a bad war. I thought um, LBJ was wrong. I, uh, I was prepared to do my duty as a soldier, but I did not think it was a—I did not think it was a good mission

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: I thought the domino theory was bullshit.

PACKARD: Valid.

WRIGHT: Okay? And it appeared to me that the President, first LBJ, then Nixon were involved in that war out of hubris in not wanting to be the first president to lose a war. But while I was at Dartmouth, I had to be careful, because after I became a—went into the advanced program of ROTC, I had to respect military discipline. And while I could support anti-war activities, while I can attend any lecture I wanted, I had to be careful with respect to how I presented publicly.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: There was one guy in ROTC, who jumped, there were, I think, on Wednesdays, there were demonstrations on the Green, where anti-

war demonstrators would just stand shoulder to shoulder. It may have been a silent protest, it may not have been, it's hard to remember that level of detail. But I know people being Dartmouth, being Dartmouth students, they made their share of noise. One of my friends attended one of those in uniform. He was on his way to being a rabbi or I think, I think that was—gosh, he was, he was, he was going to be a cleric in the army. And so he stood there in uniform and got into a little bit of trouble. Not a lot. The folk called him in and said, “you can demonstrate all you want against the war, but you can't do it in uniform.” And, and so we, anyway, we—I'm hesitating because I'm trying to remember details and some just won't come.

PACKARD: No, it's okay. Do you remember your friend's name who demonstrated in the uniform?

WRIGHT: No, I can't remember.

PACKARD: I should try and look it up because there's someone who's interviewing someone for the DVP this year who demonstrated in the uniform, in an ROTC uniform.

WRIGHT: Yeah, as far as I know, he's the only one who—ever did it.

PACKARD: Okay. Well, I'll have check, I'll shoot you an email when I when I find the name.

WRIGHT: Yeah, yeah, if you send to me, it may come. It may come to me or I may see a picture of it.

Anyway, in, we, senior year. I think in January, February, whatever of '68, somewhere in there when Eugene McCarthy was challenging LBJ, and he was anti-war, a bunch of us and in ROTC got together and pooled our money and took out an ad in the Manchester Union Leader, saying that we were ROTC students in advanced program, but we opposed the war. That we're going to go do our duty but we did not believe it was a good mission.

PACKARD: Right. Yeah.

WRIGHT: And that, you know, that went down. But I don't remember anybody in the in ROTC who did not feel that way, who gave us a problem, We knew guys in ROTC who, who we call and say, “gung-ho,” who thought that, you know, fighting communists and Indochina was, you know, the highest and best use of their time. And we knew guys who were in ROTC, because if they weren't in ROTC, they



were gonna get drafted. And they would rather go in as an officer. I think that was one of my motivations, too, because I was, you know, I would have been 1-A in Charleston, South Carolina. And as soon I graduated from Dartmouth, they were gonna send me there. And I'd rather be an officer than a private.

PACKARD: So, you said that you you always wanted to be an army, or did you say army officer, or be in the Army.

WRIGHT: A military officer? Yeah, it could have been, you know. I would have, I would, I would have settled for the Air Force Academy. In fact, I got an appointment to West Point right before I got admitted to Dartmouth, but I decided that I'd rather go to Dartmouth.

PACKARD: Yeah. What what was sort of the driving force behind wanting to be an Army officer?

WRIGHT: Ah! It just seemed to me that the, it seemed to me that the United States Military had freed more people, fed more people and protected more people than any other force in the history of the world.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: And it seemed to me that was something noble about that. And I understood. I am a, I love democracy. And it seemed to me that there's something special about a military that—first loyalty not to a person, but to an ideal. The Constitution. And to me, that's special. And I wanted to be a part of that. Being Black, I thought there was something special about hundreds of thousands of people risking their lives and dying, you know, at Gettysburg, marching through Georgia marching through South Carolina, freeing black people at Vicksburg [MS]. Seems to me, there was something noble about that. And I wanted to be part of that.

I also knew that Black officers were very rare. And I thought we, I thought we needed to do something about that. Because I also knew that Black, Black people came back from World War Two and they were treated, they were—German prisoners of war got treated better than Black veterans.

PACKARD: Hm, what do you mean by that?

WRIGHT: For instance, in Georgia, I think it was Georgia. There were German POWs in the South. And those POWs would be allowed to—under guard, I don't know, good behavior, whatever, they

weren't going to go anywhere, eat at local restaurants because they were White.

PACKARD: Okay.

WRIGHT: But Black veterans...

PACKARD: Were not.

WRIGHT: Were not allowed to eat at those restaurants. Those White soldiers, POWs, could go to movies, but Black POWs—Black veterans couldn't go to those movies. The movie theaters were segregated. There was a movie [theater] called The Lincoln in Charleston, where there were Blacks, that Blacks patronized. And interestingly enough, Chinese and Japanese soldiers, sailors, in the '50s and '60s after the war, that's where they went too, because they were not allowed to patronize one or more of the white theaters. And when Blacks were allowed to attend movies, in Charleston, we had to sit upstairs. There was a separate side door, we sat up—they segregated it, and we sat upstairs and the Whites sat downstairs with a good seats and the concessions. But German POWs—you can look it up, it's part of the history. German POWs—

PACKARD: No, no, I believe you.

WRIGHT: Say again?

PACKARD: I said, I believe you.

WRIGHT: Yeah, all over the south, they could go to restaurants and they could go to, into parks, wherever. They were treated like any other White. And they have privileges and Black folk didn't. And I thought being a part—I didn't know as much then about the Tuskegee Airmen as I know now. But there's no doubt that I served in their tradition. WRIGHT: You know? Why do, why, why would black men and women risk their lives to defend a country that has often let them down?

PACKARD: Right.

WRIGHT: And I had sort of—my personal answer is I thought we were on the journey toward a more perfect union. And that it was important to participate in that in that journey. And while those of us in the '50s and '60s might not see the end of that, you know, we were contributing to, we were contributing the foundation on which people could stand one day. As Martin Luther King said, you know,

you can stand on the mountaintop and see the promised land. So, anyway, that's—that's very philosophical.

PACKARD: No, no, I get it, though. Did you while you were at Dartmouth, did you feel like there was a big, like the civil rights movement was present on campus when you were here?

WRIGHT: No. It was present, but it was, but it was not, but it was not very visible. I mean, Dartmouth was a traditional, White, all-male Ivy League institution where the Harvard game was more important than anything.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: But there, but there were individuals. You know, there, there are individuals who made the place very comfortable for me. I made a lot of friends and while I, while I know that there—I ran into them, I ran into individuals who, who had racial attitudes. Overall, I thought the the student body, the, most of the professors—though I ran into one or two who who were very, very conservative—and the administration gave me the support I needed to have to be successful.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: Don't minimize, I won't minimize it. But, how should I put it? I grew up in a segregated south. You know, and I spent my life there and I come to Dartmouth at 17. Dartmouth was a much more open society than I'd ever seen. Maybe the guys who grew up in New York City or [New] Jersey or Connecticut, or Philly [Philadelphia, PA], you know. Maybe they thought that the culture of Dartmouth, the culture of Dartmouth may have been too White for them. But, but, I saw it as a step forward for me.

PACKARD: Just in how, in how it was different?

WRIGHT: It was more welcoming.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: I mean, I grew up in places where they had—even the bathrooms were segregated. There was a sign on it: White men, White women, Colored. They treated us as if we had no sex, no gender. [Inaudible. Connection difficulties.] Whatever, you know, it was very different battle. And that was the attitude of the whole society in Charleston.

PACKARD: Was, was what? Sorry.

WRIGHT: That was the attitude of the whole society in Charleston.

PACKARD: No, sorry. What, what, what were you saying the attitude was?

WRIGHT: They did not value Black people. Black Lives did not Matter. At least at Dartmouth I felt that Black Lives Mattered.

PACKARD: That's good. It's a step in the right direction. But you, I know we talked about this a little bit when we chatted on the phone the other week, but you were here for when George Wallace visited campus. And you already told me a little bit about that experience. But what was that like? And did that sort of feel like it—did it, were there tensions between like, the Black side of the student body and the White side of the student body that sort of became apparent there?

WRIGHT: No.

PACKARD: No?

WRIGHT: No. Obviously, there are a lot more Whites there than Blacks. And but the great majority of the people who came, went to the Wallace event went there to stop him from speaking, by being loud, not being physical, just being loud. He was never in any danger or threatened in any way. Yet I, I'm sure he had Secret Service protection.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: And when he got when he got booed down or shouted down, there were a few people in the audience who said, "Let him speak." And I didn't see who said it, but I'm sure it was a White guy who said, "We listened to Malcolm X, let him speak." And that was the attitude of some of the people in the audience. They just saw it as free speech. And, you know, you let Malcolm X speak, let George Wallace speak. But the great, great, great majority of the folk who were there, were there to stop him from speaking.

PACKARD: Okay. But the administration didn't react in sort of a, like they were they were critical of the students who protested, right?

WRIGHT: Yes, as I recall the university, to the academically liberal point of view, that it was a free speech issue. That allowing people—that the ideal of allowing speech even theirs on which you disagreed

was a high enough priority, that you let people use speak, even when you disagreed with them. And in theory, that's fine. But when somebody's speech, really is conduct, and that conduct is inimical to your survival, you don't let them speak. You know, "Hang Mike Pence," is speech, but that's really conduct. You really don't support that. And so a segregationist, like George Wallace—it's too dangerous to be allowed to speak. And that was my attitude and attitude of most of the folk. That wasn't very much of a difference in the student body. People weren't defending Wallace, or what he had to say, they were a few who are defending his right to speak, you know.

PACKARD: Okay. That makes sense.

WRIGHT: But I think I think it's not just a difference in degrees. I think it's a difference in time when the southern segregationist wants to spread that that kind of poison. But I think the university, the administration thought the ideal of free speech was was was important enough to allow in the speech. We disagreed.

PACKARD: Yeah. Did—the general student body was disagreeing with the administration? Right? So it didn't feel targeted?

WRIGHT: Uh, yeah. The idea not to give, the, the idea to deny George Wallace a platform was almost universal amongst the student body. There's no doubt about it.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. So but that would have been. Oh, I can't remember exactly when it was, but it in the in the spring of your senior year, was marked by like a ton of political events. Right? So that was—

WRIGHT: Yeah, I can't remember when Wallace was, but but since he was running, that must have been the spring—

PACKARD: Yeah, yeah. And then also—

WRIGHT: —of '68. It must have been this must have been the spring.

PACKARD: Right. But I was just gonna say some some of the other events that happened where like when LBJ announced that he wasn't running for for reelection and Martin Luther King was assassinated and then Robert Kennedy's assassination like what was the vibe on on campus with all of those?

WRIGHT: Oh. Boy, when, when King was, was assassinated—well, that was a real dark day. Because it, it was—we were all seniors in high

school when Jack Kennedy was assassinated. It all, you know, from my point of view, I've never articulated this, but it seemed to me that there was a feeling that from November 63 to, what was it April of 1968? It just seemed like all the progress that we had made, in that there five years that, it just went away. And it just almost seemed as if Jack Kennedy's being murdered was the day before. And all that emotion all came back. And it was very, very distressful.

Because it was as out of the blue as Jack Kennedy's— you know, Jack Kennedy's death. You know, just a guy who decided that that's what he wanted to do. Bringing down all the host of people who felt that we were on our way to a better place in society. That was very distressful.

Then, that June, a little after that, I can't remember exactly when Robert Kennedy got killed. And it just—and then Vietnam was was gearing up. Then we had the police riot in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention and Mayor [Richard J.] Daley and, and Chicago police and authorities essentially operating as a police state to stop peaceful demonstrations, and escalating the situation out of control.

And then ushering in Richard Nixon who was as dishonest a man as I've ever run into getting to be President. Those were pretty dark days.

But going back, going back to the spring. Going back to the spring and summer of 1968, because I do believe we graduated in June. You know, Dartmouth has a long year because of the trimester system. That's what we did. We were only there, we were not there in the summer, we were only there three quarters. But we started early and then we finished late. But anyway, I'm agreeing with you. That was pretty dark times.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. Do you remember where you were for any of those events? Like, how did you find out that King had been assassinated?

WRIGHT: [pause] Um. I think I heard on the radio. Either that day or the next day. I think he was shot in the morning. I can't remember. I think he was shot in the morning. I think I heard it on—and I believe, is my memory right? I think it was April.

PACKARD: I think that is right. Something around there.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I think, I I'm sure I heard it on. On DCR [Dartmouth College Radio].

PACKARD: Yeah, it was April.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was DCR. Are they still broadcasting at all?

PACKARD: Mm-hmm! Yeah!

WRIGHT: Okay. Yeah, that's where I that's where that's where I would have heard it. On the college radio. I don't I don't remember where I was when Bobby Kennedy got killed. Probably wanted to shut it off. I remember where I was with Jack Kennedy was killed.

PACKARD: Where were you?

WRIGHT: Physics class. And somebody came in. Teacher went out of the room, and came back in, and announced it. And it was like the world had ended. And we went home.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. That's crazy.

WRIGHT: It was right before Thanksgiving. Anyway.

PACKARD: Yeah.

WRIGHT: I think I think Bobby got killed on a Saturday night.

PACKARD: Oh, yeah. I think it was right after he'd he'd won the California primary.

WRIGHT: Yeah, yup. California. Gave a speech, going through a kitchen, Sirhan Sirhan. But anyway, I probably—did I answer your question?

PACKARD: Yeah! You did.

WRIGHT: Okay.

PACKARD: I had just asked, I had just asked about the vibe in the in the spring.

WRIGHT: Yeah, it was very, it was very, it was very dark. I think it was almost universal. Even those who may not have agreed with King. Though, by then, his mission statement was was more economic than than than civil rights. He had—his message was it was time for poor people and the disenfranchised to, regardless of race, to be given an economic opportunity in order to you know, realize the American

dream. His message was much broader than race. Though that was the foundation, you know. And anyway, there was just a feeling of hopefulness before his assassination that that his assassination sort of put a damper on for, for a while.

PACKARD: Yeah, I bet. Um, before sort of moving into into talking about sort of your your time in, in the Army and time after Dartmouth, is there anything else about your time at Dartmouth that we didn't touch on?

WRIGHT: No, um. No, there's nothing.

PACKARD: Okay. Again, just let me know if you want to go back at all. So, so you graduated in June of '68. And then, when did you, so did you have training after that at all? Or did you just report for for duty?

WRIGHT: There was a—I got commissioned the day before graduation, in the Transportation Corps, then I reported for active duty at Fort Eustis [Newport News, VA] in August. It was transportation, transportation officers basic course, all officers go through that. Can't remember how long that was, six weeks, eight weeks, at Fort Eustis, Virginia, that's the home of the Transportation Corps. Real logistics. We move people and things around in a timely matter. We can get anybody or anything anywhere in the world on time for any purpose. And so that's what we do. Logistics experts.

PACKARD: Okay. So what what was your training like?

WRIGHT: We'd—you'd do military things. It was weapons training, survival training. We learned organization of the corps, we learned tracking, we learned railroads, we learned shipping. We learned stevedoring. We learned helicopters to the extent we needed to learn how to do those things. We learned survival, escape and evasion.

PACKARD: Okay. You mentioned stevedoring, what is that?

WRIGHT: Long shore, longshoremen, loading and offloading ocean-going ships.

PACKARD: Okay, okay.

WRIGHT: That was my MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] finally. I did that in Saigon harbor. Moving cargo with freighters, actually loaded and offloading them mainly.

PACKARD: And how did you end up in the Transportation Corps? Like how did that assignment get made?



WRIGHT: As I recall, they give you a wish list. You know, at senior year at Dartmouth, last year of ROTC, they ask you where are the three branches that you would like? Everybody at Dartmouth would do Adjutant General. That's HR, human resources of the army, human relations. And every Dartmouth man always got that, because we always did the best on the exams. Then that was my first choice. I had a second choice. I did Transportation Corps. And my third corps course was I think was quartermaster. Those are the guys who actually handled supplies. You know, final destination, you know, they run in supply rooms. And as far as I know, everybody, we had some guys who asked for infantry or some other corps, but typically, Dartmouth guys would get A.G, Adjutant General. Well, I got transportation. I was really surprised. I think, I think somebody was trying to—how should I put it—encourage me to stay in the service in a combat support arms. And I think somebody influenced where I ended up.

PACKARD: Okay. You have a specific person in mind?

WRIGHT: Uh, yeah, but I don't want to say it.

PACKARD: Okay. That's fair.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Somebody told me that they needed more Black career officers in combat and combat support arms da da da da. I did not—I was not going to make this a career. I just wanted to contribute in that way. And so I wanted to contribute as an A.G. Officer. But I ended up in transportation, because that's as close to the combat arms as they can get me under the circumstances.

PACKARD: Okay. So, um, so you had training in August, and then when did you like officially start your two years?

WRIGHT: Oh, I started my two years in August. Cause transportation, the basic course, you know, that's when you go on active duty and you're there what, six weeks or whatever, whatever. Then and it's, it's essentially, it's infantry basic training. I think the 82nd Airborne trained us. Its infantry basic training plus the stuff that officers need to know. The reason I can say that is that I had infantry basic training after junior year at Fort Devens. So I had that again, which is mainly weapons and tactics, infantry, plus leadership, organization, command scenarios, and the theory of war, that stuff. Anyway.

Then after that, I went to Fort Sill [OK], to an artillery battalion. Somebody was really working hard to get me into combat. To an artillery battalion, not to a transportation outfit, but to an artillery battalion. And, and, November, August, from November. But training, I started that transportation tour started in August, and I didn't go to Fort Sill until November. So that training was fairly long, was a lot more than six weeks, apparently. But anyway, I went to Fort Sill as a Battalion Motor Officer in November. And I stayed a Battalion Motor Officer in an artillery battalion until July of '69 when I went to Vietnam. I didn't—I did nothing in transportation for that for a year. It was all—that's not true in the sense that I directed the maintenance of vehicles, including trucks. The two-and-a half ton truck is the backbone of the Army. But my main job was making sure that artillery pieces, artillery, self propelled howitzers—they look like tanks, but they're not—self propelled howitzers were functioning. So, I asked to be let out of that duty to go to a Transportation Company, but the battalion commander would not let me go. So I learned all about artillery in that year.

PACKARD: So, what was what was that like your time at at Fort Sill?

WRIGHT: Well, I met Lola in February of '69. We got married in July, right before we went to Vietnam. I asked her to marry me in April. So, I liked it at Fort Sill because Lola was there. Oklahoma, one army base pretty much the same as another, Oklahoma City was nearest big town. It was active duty. I found it interesting. I had to work real hard, because I had no artillery retraining. I mean, with pieces. I didn't—I didn't do live fire exercises but I had to take care of them. Those I had to take care of the ordinance. And I had no training in it. So I had to spend a lot of time at that. They gave me a duty for which they did not train me.

PACKARD: Oh, goodness.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

PACKARD: So, so you met Lola in February?

WRIGHT: I met Lola in February, I asked her to marry me—Lola. I met her accidentally a friend of mine and I were walking through a BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] and he saw her and, and asked her to have a drink with us. And she said yes. And I got to know her a little bit. We didn't we didn't hit it off. But I tried again, I took her out. And we hit it off. But, but, she was never a real drinker. She had a couple glasses of wine and threw up.

PACKARD: Oh, God. On your first date?

WRIGHT: Yeah, she threw up right in my lap.

PACKARD: Oh no, oh no.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Tagging food and stuff. I laughed. I thought it was, I thought it was hilarious. I should have known that I was in trouble.

PACKARD: When she throws up on you and you still like her? Yeah.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I just, "oh, well." You know, I cleaned up, got her home and all that stuff, and arranged for our next date. And so so we went out the next week. And we we just kept going out, got to be really good friends. And yeah, ended up saw a lot of her, saw her about every day. She was in a Bachelorette Officers Quarter and I was in the Bachelors Officers Quarter. They're just like dorms. I had a roommate, she had a roommate. And we were within walking distance. And we would eat, go get hot dogs, hamburgers. I didn't have any money and she didn't, she didn't seem to mind. We'd do things. We'd fly kites. We go up into the hills and watch the sunset, real inexpensive dates, yeah. So, so anyway, she was a captain in the Army Nurse Corps, she was an operating, operating room nurse. At the time I was a second lieutenant. Though I'm a little older. She'd been in the Army since '67. I didn't join until eight ['68]. And we got married in Pittsburgh at her parents' house. We got leave. We both had to take an advance on salary to afford the wedding. I was not real happy about that because I didn't want to get married in Pittsburgh. I didn't want to finance it. It wasn't my idea, it was her mother's idea, but I ended up financing the damn thing.

PACKARD: Yeah, that's how it goes.

WRIGHT: So yeah, and I had to get an advance on the on my pay to do it. And so, anyway, but we we got married in Pittsburgh. We had no honeymoon because we were scheduled to go to Vietnam, I think, July, that same month. I think she got her orders first, and then I got mine. But we all knew that we were going to Vietnam.

PACKARD: Did you—was it coincidental that the two of you were scheduled to go at the same time or was that?

WRIGHT: No, I think that once she got orders, and I got orders, I went to a Battalion Sergeant Major. Sergeants run the Army. They do. And

they teach lieutenants how not to get killed. And more importantly, how not to kill all their men.

PACKARD: That's helpful.

WRIGHT: Yeah, I'm not, you know, I'm not exaggerating, you know. Sergeants teach young officers how to be better officers. And senior NCO's [Non-Commissioned Officers]—I think I went to the Battalion Sergeant Major, and I told him we were married and we both were going to go to Vietnam and could he arrange for us to go together. And he said, "Sure. Okay." And he posted, you know, you going into Vietnam and he got to work on it. And he got us to Travis Air Force Base the same day. But as luck would have it, we traveled there together, from Fort Sill to California. But when we got there, found out that they'd put her on a plane, one plane, and put me on another. That was sort of typical of married life in the Army. Don't know why they did that. I asked them to put us on the same plane. The guy said, "Just can't do it. But if you can find somebody who will switch with one of you, you can do it. We'll do it." I said, "Okay."

So I found somebody. I started just working the crowd. You know, somebody's—she was on an earlier plane. So I asked somebody on that plane, I just asked, "Are you on this plane? Are you on that plane? Are you on that plane?" I am not shy. So, I just went through the crowd asking everybody. But finally, someone said, "Sure, Lieutenant, I'll switch with you." And he took my place on a later plane and I took his place on the same plane and we flew over. I think we landed at Midway and then Tokyo and then into Vietnam. I remember Tokyo airport. We never got, we never got to the airport, of course, cause it was military transport. World Airways, some civilian contractor.

Anyway, we landed at Bien Hoa airbase at night. I think all the flights went in at night. They didn't warn, they didn't warn us. They turned off all the lights on the airplane. Then they did a combat landing, real steep dive, real fast. You know, puts your stomach in your throat going in, you know, to avoid being shot at. Nighttime was always bad in Vietnam. It was raining. You know, I thought I was descending into hell.

We finally landed, they turned on all the lights. The guys who had been there before, they knew what to expect. And so you know [no] big deal, right? As I recall, nobody warned me about that. It was just sudden out of the blue just a real steep dive into that airport. To

keep RPGs, rocket-propelled grenades, and all the rest of the stuff from it from hitting the big jet.

But anyway, we landed at Bien Hoa and it was raining. It seemed like it was always raining in Vietnam. And they split us up. She went to the women's section. I went to the men's section and they gave me a bunk. And the bunk was right under a hole in the roof and that bunk was wet, and I went back and I tell them, and they finally found me a bunk.

But before we got split up, I told Lola I said. This is, you know, this was the processing. That's where they sent you before your first unit. I said, I said, "Honey, we're not gonna go to the same unit, you're medical, I'm transportation. I don't know where to hell they're gonna send me. You're gonna go to some hospital, could be anywhere. But, but, but don't leave without letting me know." Of course, she left without letting me know. So I didn't know where she was. I had no idea where she was in Vietnam, and nobody would tell me if they knew. Believe it or not.

PACKARD: So you had no idea where she was.

WRIGHT: I had no idea what she was. She had left already, Bien Hoa. And I still don't know how I found out.

PACKARD: You can't remember?

WRIGHT: I still can't remember. But of course, I found out. I raised hell. I think I refused to leave until they told me.

PACKARD: And where was she?

WRIGHT: She was at, she was at a field hospital. Uh, the 21st MEDEVAC, I think? Gosh, I think it was—I think it was the 21st MEDEVAC. Somewhere. It wasn't in Saigon. I don't think it was Long Binh, Bien Hoa. It was somewhere in the area, not that far away. But she was on her way to the 3rd field hospital in Saigon. She wasn't there very long. And then once I found out where she was, then I went off processing because, I think, I think I just refused to leave. I mean, what are they gonna do? They said, it was like they said, "What are you gonna do? Send me to Vietnam?" Anyway, so they, so I found out where she was. That was bizarre. But anyway, that was typical. People did not really, they. Jealous is is a harsh word, but it seems like I got a lot of resentment because my wife was in Vietnam. And theirs were not.

PACKARD: It's a very unique experience, right? Did you know anyone else who had whose spouse was also in Vietnam?

WRIGHT: No. Didn't know anybody. And didn't meet anybody during that during that tour. But I didn't expect it to be. I just wanted to know where she was. You know.

PACKARD: Right. That seems like a valid question.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Like, where's my wife, you know? Do you know where yours is? Chicago, wherever. I just want to know where mine is. But anyway, she ended up at the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon. It's a pretty built up, naturally. It was a major hospital. That's where they've medevacked real serious cases to. It, it was a brick and mortar hospital as opposed to a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit. That's where she ended up in the operating room. And they bivouacked her in the Newport BOQ, which was an old French hotel. She got a room there. That's where they had—that's where the officers stayed. The medical people. It was walking distance from the hospital right up right up the street. People walk up and down it, very safe, day or night. They're the medical people were pretty safe. There were guards all over the place. They didn't carry weapons. In Saigon, it was really near Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Probably the biggest air base we had and in Vietnam, the Air Force. Very built up. Very—for Vietnam, a pretty nice area. Back of the line. Rear echelon medical.

But anyway. So I went, I went to—that's where she went. This is July, I went to someplace called the 4-0-Deuce [402nd] Transportation Company in Long Binh. Near Bien Hoa, but the Long Binh, you know, everybody knows big, big post. 4-0-Deuce Transportation Company ran—when was I there? I was there. It's about 20, I guess, about 20 miles from Saigon. I remember doing it 45 minutes to an hour when when I was traveling back and forth. But anyway, went to Long Binh at the 4-0-Deuce Transportation Company. That, that company had lots of operations around, but my platoon—I don't know, 40 or 50 guys. My platoon had responsibility for control and operation of the Ho Nai Railhead. H-O N-A-I, two words, railhead. That was outside of the Long Binh perimeter where trains came in with supplies. We took them off and either stored and or shipped them to whoever they belonged or consigned to. Sometimes the people they were consigned to were waiting for them, that that train line came pretty much out of Saigon, I think.

And second thing was we had something called a Cogido Discharge Barge Site. C-O-G-I-D-O. That was on a river, can't remember the name of the river. They moved cargo up and down that river in the barge site was a secure, had secured perimeter. The infantry secured it. It was outside of the Long Binh perimeter. Transportation ran the operation, the infantry secured us and we moved supplies up that river, then onto trucks and sent it into the area where they belong. I did that from August to October of 1969. And during that time, I—being an officer, I could get time off, I would run into, I would hitch rides. I'd hitch rides in the Saigon to see Lola.

PACKARD: That's nice. How, how often were you able to do that?

WRIGHT: Regularly, pretty much—We had 24-hour operations, platoons running shifts, day and night shifts. We—I'd either be on the day or night shift. We switched off. Maybe a week, day/night. Week nights. But I don't think we had active operations on weekends. I don't remember us moving cargo, or moving cargo on Saturday. Even GIs you gotta give time off. Yeah. Still not being machines. You gotta give them some time off. So we didn't we didn't we didn't move cargo on Saturday, I don't think. Maybe Sunday. And on those days, I'd hitch a ride into town. Break of dawn. It'd take about an hour to get there. I'd hitch a ride with somebody. Somebody's always going into Saigon. Either from the company or the Long, the post main gate. I'd just walk up there. Stick my thumb out. Stick my thumb out, "Where are you going Lieutenant?" "Saigon, near Ton Son Nhut." "Jump in." Very safe during the day. At night, you had to be armed.

PACKARD: Okay. So would you just travel during the day or did you occasionally go at night?

WRIGHT: I never made that trip at night. I would come, I'd leave break of dawn, and I'd get back before, I'd get back before dark. Because I I'd only have the information to be gone during the day.

PACKARD: Okay, got it so you were in charge of a platoon right?

WRIGHT: Yes.

PACKARD: While you were there. So like what was being in that sort of leadership role like?

WRIGHT: Well, when when we were on duty, I was the officer in charge. I had to make the decisions as to who did what, when, discipline. At least

at the at the at the barge site because the company commander wasn't there. He was on Long Binh, though he came out all the time. Almost daily, but he had the company to run, so he was back on post. And you know, I made, I made decisions as to how cargo moved.

PACKARD: Yeah. I also want to make sure that I write—that I record you saying what was your official title while you were there?

WRIGHT: Oh. I was a platoon leader. That was that was my, my duty. My Military Occupational Specialty was 08-04, which is a deep-water port operations. That was—I think—that MOS was deep-water port operations. Hold on a second. No, exactly 08-04. Cargo Officer. That's, that's what—that's what I did.

PACKARD: So you were a Cargo Officer or Deep-Water Port Operations.

WRIGHT: Yeah, that that was 4-0-Deuce. That was that, pardon me. That was my MOS even when I was at Four 4-0-Deuce. Cargo Officer. But at 4-0-Deuce—when did I say I was there? August to October 69? We did the Cogido barge site in Ho Nai railhead. Barge operations on a river and, and rail operations. I asked for and got permission in—the whole time I was there, I was asking for a Saigon post. And eventually, in October, I got transferred to 154th Transportation Company at Fort Davies [Camp Davies] in Saigon. That was two, that was about it, that was a couple of miles from the 3rd Field Hospital where Lola was working.

PACKARD: Oh, nice.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And so I was at Camp Davies, it was lot easier to see her when when we weren't working. Again, we had the same schedule 24 hours. One platoon on 12 hours, another platoon on 12 hours and days off. When I got a day off, being in Saigon, I can take a cab over to the 3rd Field Hospital. But it was easy, but there are Army vehicles going all the time, somewhere close by, so I could always hitch a ride. Again, I told you it was near Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and somebody was always going to Tan Son Nhut, carrying cargo back and forth. And I knew where trucks were going since I was running them. And so, at the 154th Transportation Company at Fort—at Camp Davies, we operated the—there are three deep water piers in Saigon, that's where we offloaded and backloaded freighters.

Everything came in by freighter, from cement to tanks. We did that, and that was stevedoring, you know. It was charging, back-loading,



clearing general refrigerated cargo. Refrigerated cargo, refrigerated cargo. We were very popular. That's steaks and other things. We were very—the Marines, the Marines, they're the hungriest guys I ever know. Anytime there was a refri, or they call them a refri-ship, refrigerated ship, anytime one of them came in, you could count on the Marines showing up. And since we could, any cargo that was broken, and could not be repaired, we were authorized to dispose. And so I made sure that we have a lot of cargo to dispose to the Marines.

PACKARD: [laughter] Nice. Did you have the same sort of title and responsibilities while you were, you were there?

WRIGHT: Yes, a platoon leader. Instead of running rail, instead of using the railroad and barges, we were doing stevedoring, loading and offloading freighters. But ultimately, everything in the Transportation Corps ended up on a truck. So, we got so we ran trucks from, from the port to wherever, wherever they needed to go. And just as we did from the Cogido Barge Site and Ho Nai Railhead. But that was good. I was I was at Camp Davies in Saigon until January of '70. And that's when they, the Army reorganized this Fourth Transportation Command, Saigon Support Command and, and units. And my unit, 154th Transportation Company was transferred back to Long Binh where I started. Okay? And this time, I'm operating my platoon, one of the company in my platoon.

We were operating what's called the retrograde yard at Newport [Army Logistics Base]. That's where we shipped back damaged, obsolete, broken, need-repair equipment for as I said repair or recycling. I don't know about the modern army, but in my day 90%, 90% of everything was steel. So, so there was a lot, there was a lot of stuff to go back to be recycled. And we, the 1-5-4, as we called it, the 154 operated that retrograde 24 hours a day, round the clock. And with days off, my platoon— Newport was closer to to Saigon than Long Binh. So, I was able to get away and see Lola during the during the time of January '70 to August of '70. I know I talk about Lola a lot, but that was only—she was more important to me than the war.

PACKARD: That's fair. I mean, you guys have just gotten married, right?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And so, while we were there, we went to Hong Kong twice: once on R&R, I guess they call that what, Rest and Recreation? Recovery, Rest and Recovery? I can't remember what R&R stands for now. Then once on, once on leave, each one a week [long].

During that, during that year, we went to Hong Kong and liked this so much, we went back.

PACKARD: Oh, nice. And you did both of those together?

WRIGHT: Yes, we were able to, to buy—this is like, this is, you know, later into '70. How should I say it? I had learned the ropes by then. Okay? And, and I knew how to get things—I knew who to ask. Right? You didn't ask colonels or anybody like that to make things happen. You went to a Spec 4, a Specialist 4. You know? A guy of an equivalent rank of like Corporal. Entry, they're always smart, some college grad, company clerk, like Radar O'Reilly, you know? And you tell the company clerk what you need done. And they say, "I'll take care of it, Mr. Wright, Lieutenant Wright." And, and they'd make a few calls to their friends and so on and so on. There was there was nothing sinister or underhanded about it, it's just coordinated. It's just—how hard is it to get two officers who all want to go on leave together permission to go on leave together? You know, typically, you know, there's only one person going on leave, and they're gonna meet their family in Hawaii. But so, you get a— So, a company clerk will call another company clerk and they just work out the the coordination. So you ended up, you end up on the same plane with its destination as opposed to different planes. [pause] So we were able to go on leave and spend a total of about two weeks together in Hong Kong during that year.

PACKARD: Nice. That's good. Um.

WRIGHT: Yeah, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed Hong Kong! The best sauerkraut and and sausage I've ever had.

PACKARD: That's not what I would have expected you to say as for the food in Hong Kong. That's funny.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Best I've ever had to this day. Of course, before, before the CCP, Chinese Communist Party, took it over and ruined it, it was you know, it was really the melting pot of the world.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

WRIGHT: Hong Kong. You can—So that's why that's why it's not surprising that you could get the best German food in the world in Hong Kong, because that's where you can get the best French food too, best American food, best Italian food.

PACKARD: Yeah. So what was like the culture like among the the men that you were working with and like within your platoon, while you were in Vietnam?

WRIGHT: Lots of Southerners. Predominantly Southerners. Disproportionately minority, disproportionately black and, and Hispanic. We would say in those days, now we would say Latinx. Probably, a unit like mine would be about half White, a quarter Black, a quarter Latin. Lots of, mainly, mainly Puerto Rican. And like I said, most of the mainland American citizens would be Southerners. That's that's the military probably is still disproportionately southern. It's a part of the man on horseback tradition from the south I guess. The troops depended on one another so they get along well with one another. The—sometimes there were activities that were self-segregated, but by and large, the unit cohesiveness was was pretty, was pretty solid.

And the guys, we were all in the same boat together. Nobody wanted to be there. Well, almost nobody wanted to be there. Anybody with eyes could see that the that the mission was a failure, and that things would fall apart as soon as we left. Government was corrupt, you know, people were poor. The population did not appear to me to have a preference for for President Thiệu as opposed to the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese. It seemed to me that the struggle for daily survival took precedence over all that and worrying about whether or not the rules of the country were communist or small-d democrats or the traditional elites did not seem to be top of mind with most Vietnamese. That's why Americans can go back now and there's no real period of adjustment about hostility. People have, there was never a—I'm going, I'm going from my unit, not to the general population.

I'd never—I'd never saw widespread animosity from the people of Vietnam toward the, toward the GI. It always seemed to me that they both had a mission. The GI wanted to get home and the people wanted to survive. That they, they almost had the same mission, you know, survival and moving on. But the troops were good. The funniest thing about the troops, the only time we had trouble with them would be on weekends when any weekend a USO [United Service Organizations] show showed up. They—how should I? The alcohol flowed too freely. And, and getting the best seat at the show caused more combat than our mission.

PACKARD: That's funny.

WRIGHT: Yeah, that's—and I wouldn't lie to you.

PACKARD: Yeah, no I know, I know. Did you interact much with combat troops or were you more separated when you were there?

WRIGHT: Pretty much—I interacted with them in the line of supply. I saw a lot of Marines and I saw a lot of grunts coming into port, looking for supplies. So I interacted with them a lot. And whether they were telling me the truth or not, I believed them. A lot of supplies that we sent by civilian contractors, and even the Army of the Republic of Vietnam didn't get to where they were supposed to go. And so, we had to work around to get the Marines and the infantry what they needed.

PACKARD: Yeah, yeah.

WRIGHT: And that's, that's the thing that I am proudest of, that we we got our guys what they needed.

PACKARD: Yeah. Well, you, you were also awarded a Bronze Star for your service. Can you tell me about?

WRIGHT: Yeah, for meritorious, for meritorious achievement in ground operations against hostile forces. Well, we did a good job, but rarely, rarely did anybody shoot at us in Long Binh or Saigon. It was dangerous other places. But most of the time we were in Long Binh in Saigon, in built-up areas.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. Um, so the Bronze Star was that just for gen, like, general? Not for one specific event?

WRIGHT: No, no, it was just for the for the tour of duty.

PACKARD: That's great. Sounds like you did, did a good job.

WRIGHT: Well, we tried. I think they award them, they award them for valor. This isn't one of them.

PACKARD: Yeah, yeah. Um, so was Lola's experience similar like to yours at all? Or you said she was an Army operating room nurse?

WRIGHT: She was an operating room. She was in Saigon pretty much the whole time. They medevaced just the most serious cases to the 3rd Field Hospital. That I guess that was as close as you could get to stateside hospital with, with expertise, so on and so on, serious battle wounds. I used to ask her, I said, "Did you ever worry about

whether or not one of those stretchers I'd be on one of them?" She said "Nah, I never thought about that."

PACKARD: That's funny. That's great.

WRIGHT: And so, she saw real serious stuff, as an operating nurse, and that's where she decided that she wanted to be a an anesthetist, a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, because she saw the officers, the nurses who did that. And eventually, she graduated from the Carney [Hospital] School of Anesthesia in '73. So you know, she carried that. She got out of the Army, I think she got out of the army in '71. And we went to the—and she went to the Carney School of Anesthesia in Boston. Carney Hospital. Hear that Irish name. And, um, graduated with a, as a CRNA in in '73, right about the time I graduated from law school. She practiced anesthesia until about 2010, got sick in 2013 and she died of heart failure in 2016. We were married a long time.

PACKARD: Yeah. Yeah. Um, so what was like—did the two of you fly home together too? Did you leave together?

WRIGHT: No. I left a week ahead of time before she did. Because of my tour of duty, I didn't extend and so they needed to get me out of there in order to process me out by my—by a particular date. Because I had to be discharged by a certain date under the regulations. And so I left a week before she did and went to—and flew it back into California. I guess it was Travis Air Base. But I got discharged from from Oakland Army Depot, Army Terminal [Oakland Army Base]. Can't remember the name, the official name. Oakland, got around to somewhere, got discharged in Oakland. That's just what we're all the Vietnam vets came back through. And that was in August.

I went up to—where did I go? I went up to Seattle area and spent a week waiting for Lola. I went there. My buddy, Pete Buck [Peter L. Buck '68], Dartmouth '68. So another fraternity brother. He had gotten out of the Army. That's where he's from, where he grew up, where he was getting ready to go to law school. And he just got, he had gotten married in July of '69 in Denver [CO]. I was his best man in '69. He got married a week after I did, but I went up there, and I stayed with him in the Seattle area waiting for Lola to come back to town, to the States.

She flew in, got processed. She was still in the Army. She got processed, then got on an airplane in San Francisco and flew to Seattle. We picked her up. She was on leave. We spent some time in Washington state. Then we flew to Pittsburgh, I think, picked up

my car, drove to Fort Devens. We got quarters there, temporary quarters, at Fort Devens, or she did and I was along for the ride. And I went in and registered at Boston University Law, in August, and she was on active duty at the hospital at Fort Devens for about a year. Eventually we moved off post, cause that was temporary. I couldn't stay there anyway. They treated female dependents—female family members, as dependents. And gave them all rights and ability to live wherever they want to. But me as a male, they said she couldn't be my dependent because she was an Officer. And I couldn't be her dependent because I was a male.

PACKARD: Oh my gosh.

WRIGHT: I, yeah. You think I'm lying, don't you?

PACKARD: No, no, I don't. I wish I did.

WRIGHT: So they wouldn't let me, they wouldn't let me in the PX [Post Exchange]. They wouldn't let me go anywhere with her on post. Though a female spouse—I'm not I don't resent women—A female spouse could go anywhere with a soldier. It made no sense, I just, you know, I never did get that the modern Army has changed a lot of those stupid rules to keep people in.

PACKARD: Right, fair.

WRIGHT: But anyway. We got an, we got an apartment in in South Acton for the first year, until '71. Then in '71, we moved into Boston.

PACKARD: Okay. And what what was your experience like coming home from Vietnam, like as a veteran?

WRIGHT: People blamed us for the war when all we were doing was following lawful orders. They associated the war being unpopular, the war—the war being unpopular made us unpopular. That attitude has changed. People are starting to, people are acknowledging that Vietnam vets were not—were mistreated. And they're starting to give us some honor now for serving our country. But luckily, that same attitude is not attached to Afghanistan and Iraq veterans. People understand that, that we protect the nation. We don't follow political parties and that's the strength of the country.

PACKARD: Yeah. Did did your time in Vietnam change at all how you felt about the war?

WRIGHT: No, I thought—First of all, let me say, no, no GI sacrifices anything if he carries out, or she carries out, his or her mission. And if the if the mission is pursuant to lawful orders. Nothing, no sacrifice is too great. But those who give orders can sometimes be wrongheaded. Like Richard, like Lyndon Johnson, who I admired a lot but who wrecked the—who wrecked his administration on the shores of Vietnam by being stubborn and not getting us out of there. But, [pause] I guess, like I tell people all the time, I'm glad that I did it. I'm glad I served. I just wish the politicians had been smarter.

PACKARD: That's a good way of putting it.

WRIGHT: Can I take a short break?

PACKARD: Oh, yeah, absolutely. We can come back in like, however many minutes I'll just pause the recording.

WRIGHT: Yeah, thanks. I'll be right back.

[Recording resumes after break]

PACKARD: Okay, so we left off talking a little bit about your return to the US after being in Vietnam. Did you—you were saying you experienced some hostility?

WRIGHT: Um. The college kids I ran into in Boston, many of them could not seem to distinguish their dislike for the war, from the men and women who served their country. It was a visceral thing. You know. I was never abused physically. Like, I know some veterans were. But there was, there seemed to be, from time to time there was an attitude of hostility that got transferred from the war to the people who fought the war. I guess Vietnam was the first war this country had ever fought against the will of the people. And so, nobody really knew how to act. But, I don't resent that. I was glad, I was glad to be back. Love the country more than ever, having been outside of it. Appreciated it even more. And I was, I was more than willing to talk to anybody about it. I found myself a lot more mature after I got back than I was when when I went. I was I was an old 24. I'd been a young 21.

PACKARD: Yeah. Um, so you got back and you went to law school. Were any of your law school classmates also veterans?

WRIGHT: A few. Um but I didn't socialize with them and didn't get to know them very well. I knew who they were because like me, we wore

field jackets. We wore field jackets, our military issue. They're very warm, great for Boston.

PACKARD: Yeah, I bet!

WRIGHT: Yeah. I had, I got my—articles of clothing they let you keep because all they were gonna do is throw 'em away anyway. And so I kept my field jackets.

PACKARD: Um, did you stay in touch after getting back with any of the people that you were with while in Vietnam?

WRIGHT: No. No, I didn't.

PACKARD: For any reason?

WRIGHT: I didn't make any friends. We were, I didn't, I didn't make any relationships that I cared about. If you want to compare the relationship that I formed with a freshman year roommate who I still have dinner with. Or another roommate that I see every time I come to Dartmouth. People like I'm on Zoom with all the time. Fraternity brothers who, you know, I talk to all the time. People were friendly. I was friendly. But it just seemed like we were passing in a dream. It just seemed like we were all moving and going somewhere else. And there's, I never thought about it consciously. Just like I'd never thought about the fact that almost 60 years later, I'd still be hanging out with the guys from when I was 17. I never thought that I would not ever look up the guys I served with.

PACKARD: Yeah. Did you find yourself getting involved at all in any anti-war activism after the war, or did you sort of keep yourself more distant from that?

WRIGHT: No, I—law school kept me busy. I was a good student. I ended up on Law Review. I spent a lot of time working, studying. And I didn't, I did not involve myself in any of that.

PACKARD: Yeah. Did you enjoy law school?

WRIGHT: Yeah, I had a ball. First day of law school law, Lola would would confirm it. I came home to Lola, I said, "Lola. You won't believe it." I said, "Hon it's great!" I said, "Babe, I can't believe they're going to pay me to do that!"

PACKARD: So you liked it from the start?



WRIGHT: Yeah.

PACKARD: That's great.

WRIGHT: So anyway, I said, you know, chronologically, I can just tell you, being autobiographical, from from '64 to '68, of course, I was at Dartmouth. From 1968 to '70, I was in the US Army. I got married in '69. From 1970 to 1973, I was at BU Law [Boston University School of Law]. You know, I was Vietnam from '69 to '70. 1973, I was in DC, 1973 to 1976, I was in DC at a big firm called Arent Fox Kinter Plotkin and Kahn. Sort of. From '76 to '79, I was in Houston, with a small law practice that didn't work out, but the lawyer was from my—from my law school classes at BU and ended up a judge in Chicago. And, and we're still best friends. We talk all the time and text back and forth, so forth and so on. So anyway, I don't burn bridges. Okay? I don't ever burn bridges. It's just my, it's just my nature. It's, it's not calculated. I throw away problems, I don't throw away people.

And from '79 to '81. I was looking for a job. And another big law firm in Texas somewhere, but even then, they weren't hiring Black guys. And I was stubborn, I wasn't gonna go. I liked the weather. I didn't want to go back into blizzards. So I tried. Didn't work out. I think I had 57 interviews with firms. They liked my resume until they saw me. It's the, you gotta laugh to keep from crying you know? 1981 to '94 I practiced in Dallas in different iterations, either solo or with other lawyers so forth and so on. They didn't work out.

I told you before and I'll go on record as saying: I quit that because I found that I was doing all the work, that I never had questions of any other lawyer but they always had questions for me. That they never knew anything that I needed to know and I seem to know a lot of things they wanted to know. And I wasn't arrogant or selfish, it just didn't make any sense to me to carry that burden without getting—I believe in exchange. Lola taught me that—compensation. You give and you get. You don't take. She was very spiritual. I don't know what she was doing with a Dartmouth man.

Anyway, from '94 to 2020, right before the pandemic started, I practiced solo. And then I retired. I quit taking active cases, I've maintained my license. I'm a member of the Massachusetts Bar. I took a while I was there, you know, just because I was there. Who who does that? Dartmouth grads do that!

PACKARD: Why not?

WRIGHT: Yeah, I'm here. I'll take the bar exam. It's not hard. Anyway. In truth, that's, that was my attitude. I'm a member of the DC Bar District of Columbia Bar. Obviously, I was there. I had a good time at ArentFox. It's just that I felt that I wanted a smaller practice. Little did I know that I'd spend most of my time solo. It's really insane. And, and I maintain my license, and my Texas license. Worked too hard to get them, so I pay whatever fees necessary, do whatever, continuing education that they require just to keep them license. I mean, knows the right case might come along and get me out of retirement.

PACKARD: Yeah. So what have you been up to now? While you've been retired.

WRIGHT: I spend a lot of time with Dartmouth activities. There's something called the Community Service Project Class of '68. That's where we have a website where we talk about things that are community services, from education to charities. My big one was, I was for thirty-some years, I was on the board of directors of the Visiting Nurse Association in Texas. We did, the big thing we do is Meals on Wheels. We feed old people, mainly old women. I've always liked old women. You know, now I date old women. [laughter]

Anyway, and so that that's that's the one thing. The second thing is something called Give a Rouse Award Committee. People—I don't know whether the military may be more dependable, or I gravitated toward it because I have am a very disciplined person. Give a Rouse, we give class we give awards to members of a class of 1968, who might not be well known. Some of them are well known. Hank [Henry M.] Paulson [Jr. '68 P'97 HON'07], we gave an award to who's a former Treasury Secretary. Then I'm giving an award, we're given an award this year to a guy who tutored, who was a college counselor at an American school on Taiwan for years. Well, nobody really knew him. But a couple of the kids who generated, at least one I'm now going to be teaching at Dartmouth.

PACKARD: Oh my gosh, wow.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I mean, that kid never would have known about Dartmouth if he hadn't been a counselor over there when he was a teenager. You see now that that's, that's award worthy. And we have a dinner once a year, and we frame a certificate really nice. And we read it and everything and we work through the year on nominees like it's the Academy Awards, and probably put in as much time.

The third thing I do, and it takes a lot of time, is the Dartmouth College Fund. From 2009 to 2018. I was the head agent. I don't know how much you know about the Dartmouth College Fund, but raising—that's the major function of the class, calling classmates and raising money for scholarships. And I, I spend hours a week doing that. And writing thank you notes, and calling classmates, and turning them upside down and shaking them for the money in their pocket. And I exercise.

PACKARD: That's great. That's good. So it sounds like you're obviously still super involved in in Dartmouth and Dartmouth alumni life. How would you say that, how would you say that that Dartmouth has sort of like influenced you like looking back on on your experience now? What is your it's your 55th reunion year? Looking back and that experience.

WRIGHT: It's, it gave me a foundation on which to stand. Like Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader who Joe Biden—one of my heroes—plagiarized. You may not know that story, I'll tell it to you one day. Neil Kinnock, and he essentially saying, "Why am I successful? Why Why? Why do I feel good about life? Why am I financially self sufficient? Not rich, but I'm okay. I think I'll die before my money runs out."

You know, Dartmouth gave me a foundation on which to stand. It ran—it gave me people I ran into who there was no rapport. It gave me people I ran into where there was rapport. It gave it gave me professors who I can argue with and suffer the consequences, because I didn't answer the exam questions the way I should have. It taught me self-sufficiency. It gave me lifelong friends. It taught me that people are basically good. And when given the opportunity, they'll respond to a call to support something worthwhile. And, can't beat that!

PACKARD: No, you really can't. Yeah, that's a really, that's a nice point, I guess to wrap up on. Is there, before before we do wrap up, is there anything else that you, you wanted to touch on?

WRIGHT: No, I'm, I'm through. I could talk forever.

PACKARD: The problem is that so could I! But anyway, so thank you, though, so much for doing this. This has been absolutely lovely. And I'm so glad that we got the chance to talk.

WRIGHT: Very good. If you need anything from me, please call. And congratulations on your graduation.

PACKARD: Thank you! Here, I'll just stop the recording now.

## Transcript Abstract

Joe Nathan Wright, Dartmouth Class of 1968 narrates an oral history of his experience growing up as a Black boy in segregated Charleston, South Carolina, his time at Dartmouth, as well as his time spent in the Army during the Vietnam War. Wright was raised by a single mother who prioritized the education of her children. At Dartmouth, Wright was the first Black student to rush Pi Kappa Psi fraternity. Despite not believing in the Vietnam War, Wright was in Army ROTC for four years. He began active duty in the Army Transportation Corps in August of 1968. He served stateside for a first year, during which time he met and married his wife Lola H. Wright, who was a captain in the Army Nurse Corps. The couple deployed to Vietnam together in August of 1970. Wright discusses the impact his time at Dartmouth and in the Army had on his life.