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Oral History of
Woodrow “Skip” Dellinger

Alumnus, Class of 1963

Date: January 13, 2014

Interviewed by Art Ford

Professor *Emeritus* of English and Alumnus, Class of 1959

Transcribed by

Vernon and Doris Bishop Library Staff

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Mr. Woodrow “Skip” Dellinger ’63—Dellinger speaks fondly of his student days with the LVC Biology Department and of his family’s longtime connections to the College. The Dellinger Residence Hall on campus is named in their honor. He retired in 2003 from Johns Hopkins University as director of health services.

A: Okay, I'm here in the Frock Room of the Lebanon Valley College Bishop Library. It's now January 13, 2014 and I'm here with Woodrow Dellinger, Skip Dellinger. We're going to talk with him a bit about his experiences at the College. But first let me ask you a couple of questions. Where were you born?

S: I was born in York, and I grew up in Red Lion, where my dad was a general practitioner. My mother was a nurse.

A: And you had brothers and sisters?

S: I'm an only child.

A: So you were privileged?

S: Well, I must tell you a little story. Most people think I was, but actually I was born with a form of cerebral palsy, so I didn't walk until I was about three years old. Dad and Mom had just started their practice in 1939. At that time medicine wasn't anything like it is now. He started with a cash-and-carry practice and never sent out a bill. He charged 50 cents for an office visit, and a dollar for a house call. When he retired, his prices had gone up to \$10 a visit and \$20 for a house call—that included two weeks of medicine.

A: When did he retire?

S: 1988. So I was privileged in the fact that I had two great parents. As far as finances and so forth, we lived modestly. Dad was a very great alumnus to this College. He gave and he was on the trustees board. So I was always privileged. We lived well, not like some doctors live today.

A: So he was a general practitioner?

S: He was. He was born at 100 South Main Street in Red Lion, practiced at 102 South Main Street, and died at 104 South Main Street. So he moved two doors down in 76 years.

A: You said your mother was a nurse.

S: Another good story. She was a very good athlete in high school and she was awarded one of the first women's athletic scholarships to West Chester

A: To play basketball?

S: To play basketball. She was a very good athlete, but she decided to study to be a nurse so she went to York Hospital. They had a three-year diploma program at that time she met dad. In fact, back then the doctors were the instructors who taught the nurses. Dad was a junior intern. It was his junior year in medical school. Mother was a first-year nursing student, so Dad was her teacher.

A: So he married his former student.

S: He married his former student.

A: So, you went to Red Lion High School.

S: I went to Red Lion High School.

A: Were you involved in extra-curricular activities there?

S: Very much so. I managed every athletic team that we had. Just about everything they had: class officer, Hilltop paper, yearbook staff, etc.

A: You said you were born with cerebral palsy?

S: Yes.

A: Did that affect the athletic part?

S: Yes, It did.

A: That kept you from getting into athletics?

S: Yes, I could not be one, so I had a great time with them as a manager. I had just a wonderful childhood.

A: Then you came to Lebanon Valley College.

S: I did.

A: Did you have a choice?

S: Dad gave me a choice, but it was not really a choice. If you go to Lebanon Valley College, I'll pay for your college. If you don't go there, you pay for it.

A: What year did you arrive here?

S: 1958.

A: What was your major?

S: Pre-med. Chemistry. Biology.

A: And then, after graduation, which would have been 1962, did you go straight on to post-graduate work?

S: I wanted to, and I was actually accepted into the University of Delaware. My first love, of course, was medicine, so I did everything you needed to do. I did some interviews, and went down to Jefferson. That was dad's alma mater, and I got through the interview. But before that dad said Dean Solomon wants to talk to you so I said okay. We went into the dean's office. He was very cordial, very nice. He set me down; he said, Skip, I want to talk to you. Academically, we feel you can do the job and get

through school. But he said medicine is also a lot of work. He said it's a lot of communication and so forth. He said you know we just don't feel we would be doing you a service by accepting you into medicine. And then he gave me this advice. He said, "Listen, instead of being one, why don't you prepare yourself to be a teacher of doctors." That made a lot of sense. So I got a master's degree in tropical medicine at Marshall University in West Virginia. I did two year's work at the VA, the hospital in West Virginia. They were accepting all the guys and gals coming back from Vietnam, who were suffering from malaria and other tropical diseases, and I got a lot of good background. So upon finishing that in '67, I didn't have a job so I came back and I talked to Dr. [Paul] Hess, the head of the Biology Department. He was a very important person in my life. He really got me on track. I wasn't a really good student my sophomore year here. Things kind of fell apart. He got me back on track. I was able to reach my potential. In my sophomore year, I was taking IS 20. I had physics and chemistry, and anatomy. Dr. Hess said, listen, I got a phone call from the acting chairman of the pathology department at the Hershey Medical Center. He said Dr. Naeye, who is the chairman, is looking for someone to help set up the labs. He said I'll call him back and I'll send you up there. We made an appointment for the next morning. I arrived at about nine o'clock, and before I got back home in about two hours, dad said there's a phone call for you. Dr. Naeye wants you to start working this afternoon. So I spent six years there. I did a lot of research, helped to get the gross anatomy and the microanatomy courses set up and I proctored the teaching labs on the tropical medicine of the pathology course, which was a good experience for me too. It got to the point where I couldn't advance any

further. I wasn't tenured, the only way I could get any further at Hershey was to go for an advanced degree. I had always wanted to go to Johns Hopkins for some strange reason. They had turned me down for undergraduate work so I tried for graduate school. I was accepted and I spent six years in the doctoral program. I was at the point where I was eligible to go on with it, but unfortunately, I suffered a very severe myocardia infarction, and I was dead for about 40 minutes. Thank goodness, they didn't stop working on me. I recovered and I had to take some time off, and I came back and worked on my dissertation. I had another attack. My chairman called me in and said, "Skip, he said, I'm going to recommend that you kind of just cool it with your dissertation." He said, "We don't want to lose you because you know there's a lot of pressure." He said, "How about if you join the faculty as a non-tenured faculty member, and you can do everything, but you won't be a member of the tenured faculty." That turned out to be a blessing in disguise because a lot of my friends who came with me and after me were in the tenured track. They couldn't get grants. They couldn't publish. They were consequently terminated. I was in a non-tenured track, and I didn't have to worry about that, so I had almost a forty-year career without being in the tenured track. That was an absolute blessing.

A: So you retired from there?

S: I retired from there in 2003. I've been retired about 10 years. I say retired with a small "r" because I'm still keeping active on committees, that kind of thing. I just can't quit, you know. I have to be doing something. People appreciated my work. I still keep in touch with some students. It was a good career.

A: You've had an interesting career.

S: I have. It's been an interesting life. It's been a different life from some people's and a rewarding life.

A: Well, good. Let's go back to Lebanon Valley College, and we can talk about some of your memories and some other things.

S: Okay. Sure.

A: The first question is now when you arrived on campus... Now, you had been on campus before?

S: Right.

A: But when you arrived as a student, did you live in the dormitory here?

S: Yes, the first year we started out in Keister Hall, which is now where the chapel is.

And Russ Urey and I were roommates. We had the first floor corner room facing the old music building, Engle Hall. We were not musically inclined, but we would study to the music coming from Engle.

A: You would study to all the music majors practicing. How was the food?

S: The food was wonderful. Remember Mrs. Millard?

A: Yes.

S: What was really nice was Russ had a work study scholarship. His work was in the dining hall. He would have to serve breakfast and he would be up four or five o'clock in the morning. We would both get up and after he finished serving, he would bring us back some breakfast, all sorts of goodies.

A: So you didn't have to go to breakfast. He brought it to you.

S: Yes, he did. The second year we had a three-man room, myself and Russ and Gene Stambaugh. I probably kept them up many nights because, like I said before, I was working and working and working. At that time, the Knights were kind of negotiating with Dean Marquette about a house, and it just so happened that he said well, you know you guys are good students and we'll let you have the building over behind Lynch Memorial Gym. That summer, we worked on it, putting in a new basement for a meeting room. We had it in good shape. Our junior and senior years we spent in the fraternity house, which was a wonderful experience.

A: What was it like to be a Knight in those days?

S: Very nice. My friends in Kalo and Philo would probably disagree, but we had the best fraternity on campus. Our GPA was through the roof. We had about four or five guys who were straight A students, you know. We were active in athletics. Out of the starting five on the basketball team, three were Knights. We had guys on the football team. We were active in sports. A wonderful experience, it really was.

A: I understand that at one time the Knights were very secretive. Were they that way when you were in the organization?

S: I don't want to tell all, but I wouldn't say we were any different than Kalo or Philo. People talk. I wouldn't say we were secretive. We were just a close group.

A: You also said you were student manager for the football team.

S: Yes.

A: What was that like?

S: A wonderful experience. I worked with Greg Stanson very well. The program was run under the direction of [Ellis] McCracken, Coach McCracken, who to say it in a nice way was a piece of work. When he left in our sophomore year and Bill McHenry came in as coach, he left Bill with an awfully good football team. We had some wonderful athletes in fact. Bill was able to produce miracles with that group. We were small in number. I remember one game we dressed 17 guys. Everybody played defense and offense. Our senior year we had John's death to deal with.

A: This was John Zola?

S: Yes.

A: He was a freshman that year?

S: No, he was a sophomore.

A: What was it like to go through that experience?

S: Well, for me and for the Knights it was pretty sobering. It taught us all about life and how very tenuous it can be. This was a very healthy guy, a great athlete. He had already gone through one year of football, and the first game of his second year he gets tackled, and he never gets up. Well, yes he got up, but he came over to the sidelines and collapsed. As far as the reaction of the team, it made us stronger, it made us better. It gave us a purpose for that whole year, and we never forgot it. We never forgot. And the team members were close to the Zola family. We would be with them when the awards were given out. Many times when John's younger brother comes down here to participate, it just kind of unifies everything. But it was a real shock. It was my first experience seeing someone die like that.

A: You were also responsible for the memorial statue and the dedication of that.

S: Right.

A: Were you co-chairman of that?

S: Bob Stull and I put that together, yeah. I think we did that on one of the anniversaries.

A: What brought that about? A conversation with a couple of people?

S: Yes, we felt—it was Hi Fitzgerald and myself, and Bob and a couple other teammates felt that we wanted to memorialize John, and the Zola Award had been established almost the year after John died, so we wanted to keep the memory going. And that's how it came about.

A: What are the courses you remember most from those days? What professors most influenced you? You mentioned Paul Hess.

S: Yeah, well, Paul was probably the biggest influence, academically. Others who influenced me positively were Dr. [Jean] Love, Dr. [Betty] Geffen. I struggled with Dr. Geffen's course, but I got an appreciation for history through Dr. Geffen, and I dearly love history now. Dr. Love's courses made me look differently at things in life. The most influential English teacher was Ted Keller. Hi and I were both having some trouble with writing impromptu themes.

A: This is Freshman English?

S: Yeah, Freshman English. The first three or four themes, he handed them back to us, and there were 10,000 red marks on the papers. So one day Hi and I were down at Hot Dog Frank's, and, of course, Ted came in for coffee all the time. He came over to us, and

he said, boys, listen up, I'm going to make you two good writers if it kills me. We laughed. He said, don't worry about that. He took us under his wing, you know, and he really taught us how to write. Ironically, we both ended up writing papers in our careers. We were doing quite well, but I don't think I could have done that if Ted hadn't helped. He just said, relax, I'm going to help you.

A: What was the atmosphere like on campus in those days? You were in the very early stages of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights protest. Was there any indication of that on campus at all?

S: When we started in '58, we had a lot of the guys who were Korean War veterans coming back, and in the '60s we were kind of transitioning to the Vietnam War. We were much more influenced by the vets of the Korean War than we were by the Vietnam vets. They were a different breed. They were serious, but they were also hell-raisers. Coming in as a 17-year-old student and having these guys who were war-tested vets getting you up at 3 in the morning and making you go outside in your shorts, and all that kind of stuff. But we realized what it was for. It was welcoming us to the ranks of the adults, and so forth. We had several on the football team. Our two tackles were huge. One of our tackles was Cecil Kados, another was Ken Longenecker. We had a lot of guys coming in from New Jersey. They were both Italian- and Polish-Americans. They were a group of really tough kids but they were very serious, very good students, but they also liked to have fun. I was extremely naïve. I wasn't ready for it, really wasn't prepared for that, and I think that might be why I had such a rough year my sophomore year. I'm really certain I should have gone to prep school because I just wasn't ready for

that change in the culture and education. Everything came easy to me in high school. I didn't know how to study right. It got to the point where I was given all this material at one time, and I didn't know how to manage time, how professors wanted me to learn.

A: As you think back over the four years that you were here, are there any memorable moments that stick in your mind, that come to the surface?

S: I'm hesitating because there was John's death. One would be the championship season our senior year, '61. Another would be the snowstorm when we piled the snow up against the doors of the Ad. Building

A: What year was that?

S: That was... our junior year. We had just finished when it was just breaking daylight, and we had worked pretty much all night; we had garbage cans; we were really working, and it just so happens that that morning Dr. [Fred] Miller decided to come in early. Well, we were just finishing up when he pulls in the driveway. He gets out of his car and we say, "Oh, no." He says, "Well boys it's about 7:30 and classes begin at eight. That gives you a half an hour to open the doors." And he said, "If you do that, I won't say a word." We worked harder in a half an hour than we did all night.

A: So, you actually got it done?

S: Oh, yes, we did!

A: So, no retribution?

S: No. The only thing is we did get some good publicity out of it. We were in the papers. It was fun. It was a nice thing to happen.

A: They still talk about that.

S: Oh, yeah! It was quite a night. And then there was getting the first fraternity house on campus was nice. I wish they had sit-down dinners in the evenings. That did more for our socializations, for getting us together as a campus. The girls wore their nylons and their skirts; the boys put suits and coats and ties on. But you know it really taught us to be grown-ups and how to act in the presence of your peers. It was wonderful. It was wonderful. That's something our present kids don't have. I feel they're missing out on something. It was a wonderful experience. I should add, however, that we did have our Fink's Bakery runs behind Kreider Men's Residence Hall. The Pennway Hotel also helped to feed and house students between the early 1900s and 1970.

A: Was chapel mandatory when you were here?

S: It was Wednesday, so it was once a week.

A: What did you think of that? What did the students think of it?

S: No one liked it. We all schemed to get out of it. We were at the age when we were questioning our religious beliefs and so forth. We all had to take three Bible courses at that time. A lot of us thought, give us a break. We're going to all these Bible courses. Leave us alone. But we went and some of us took more away from it than others did. It was part of the school. It was part of our education at that time. I heard speakers. I couldn't tell you what they said, but they were good. And that was the time too when we were just beginning to break from the church, the school was. There was a lot of tension at that time between the number of ministers on the trustee board. A lot of push and pull at that time over which way you wanted the school to go. And eventually, the sectarians won out. But at that time it was part of what we had to do.

A: Your father was a member of the Board of Trustees.

S: Both my father and my uncle, Curvin Dellinger, were trustees.

A: There were a number of Dellingers who came from Red Lion to Lebanon Valley College.

S: It wasn't so much the Dellingers from Red Lion because it was only my dad, my uncle, and me. The Dellingers married into the Strayer family; consequently, we had far more Strayer family members come to school than we did Dellingers. Ned Heindel's mother was a Strayer. My dad's mother was a Strayer. Ned's mother's dad was my grandmother's brother. But there were other students who came from Red Lion, a constant stream of them.

A: Why from Red Lion do you think?

S: Remember Ted Sheckart? Ted and his wife worked at the school, and Susie, their daughter, came to Lebanon Valley. She was Greg Stanson's first wife. They really pushed Lebanon Valley. Then there was dad. He was influential. He said go to Lebanon Valley. But we still do get some students from Red Lion, but not like we used to. I guess part of it has to do with the economic changes. Red Lion isn't as affluent as it used to be. A lot of the students there are going to the state schools. Lot of changes, but if I hear of a good student, I put in a word for us, you know. It's changed, changed a lot.

A: We're going to begin to wrap this up.

S: Okay!

A: Two questions: One is a very general question, but looking back over the years to when you were a student here, what would you say Lebanon Valley means to you?

S: It's been pretty much my anchor in life. The skills that I used to make my living I didn't learn here. But what I did learn here was a wonderful foundation, to be able to go to higher education, to go to different schools and to be able to successfully compete against students who came from bigger schools, you know, academically, at least in stature. Lebanon Valley's my anchor, and I came back to Cornwall to be able to come back here and to participate and to continue... This is my home, not just my academic home, but I actually started life here. I am from Red Lion, but I know more people here now than I do from my own hometown, so it's my anchor.

A: The other question I have, also a very general question, is any further thoughts you would like to leave for anyone listening to this 200 years from now? Anything you think they should know about Lebanon Valley College or your experience here?

S: I would tell them to honor the words of our alma mater, to honor the words of our motto because it is truth in the end which frees you. Without truth there is no freedom. Without giving back to the school, without keeping your ties with the school without supporting it with your finances, with your talents, we lose a bastion of truth, and like I said, when that bastion of truth is taken away, which I feel at this point in our national history, we're in a very tenuous time. I think when they study the history of our time, they will appreciate a time when truth wasn't truth anymore.

A: Well, thank you.

S. Thank you.