

Larry Estridge

Interviewee: Larry Estridge

Interviewer: Courtney Tollison

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Transcript

[PART ONE 00:00]

Dr. Tollison: Today is November 24th, 2004. My name is Courtney Tollison and I'm having a conversation today with Larry D. Estridge, a 1966 Furman graduate. Mr. Estridge is a native of Rock Hill, South Carolina. At Furman he won the Hughes Perpetual Trophy as Outstanding Army ROTC Cadet – this is a national competition. After Furman you attended Harvard Law School and graduated from Harvard Law School. You're an attorney with Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice and we were having a conversation earlier before we turned the tapes on about Leon Rice is a Furman graduate from, we believe, the 1940s. And you have served as a trustee at Furman, and continue to serve as a trustee at Furman today. You also were very involved with the split between Furman and the South Carolina Baptist Convention and I'd like to get into that a little bit later. Why don't we start out by you telling me about growing up in Rock Hill and your impressions of Furman – how you got to Furman?

Mr. Estridge: Sure. My father was a textile worker, we lived in a mill village in Rock Hill, we went to North Side Baptist Church. The Baptist church there was very much an important part of our lives so I learned about Furman very, very early because of its affiliation with the Baptist church. Within that culture of the small Baptist church in a South Carolina town some of the heroes in the church were the guys who went to Furman to become preachers so I knew about it from that standpoint as well. We had a number of the folks from our church went to Furman as ministerial students. I had, obviously I had a wonderful impression of Furman and it was kind of considered to be a part of the South Carolina Baptist life at that time and also a very fine college. When I was considering where to go to college in my senior year in high school one of the primary considerations was financial aid. My father was not in a position to finance college at all so it depended upon where I could get sufficient scholarship to help finance. Furman had a program called Furman Scholars – I think that they still have it –

Dr. Tollison: Yes, they do.

Mr. Estridge: To designate a certain number of students in senior classes of various high schools and we were invited to Furman for a weekend. My first physical visit to the Furman campus ever was the new campus and it was the fall of 1961, Saturday morning.

Dr. Tollison: Brand new.

Mr. Estridge: Brand new. And I can remember my impression – I got lost getting there – and I remember driving onto this campus and, of course, the “gotcha” effect that we talked about with the fountains out front. And in looking out across this beautiful vast expanse of land that had a number of brand new brick buildings – almost no trees – you could see the entire campus from a high point at the entrance because there were no trees. It was just a farm that had been converted into a campus but, of course, this beautiful Georgian brick architectural style, with the brand new classroom building, brand new McAlister, brand new dormitories, it was quite breath taking.

Dr. Tollison: And far fewer buildings than there are today.

Mr. Estridge: Except far fewer buildings and certainly far fewer trees. But I was quite taken by the campus and the program. Dr. Bonner [Francis W. Bonner] – actually I don’t think Dr. Bonner conducted it – I think Dr. Plyler [John Laney Plyler, Sr.] conducted the program along with folks from the admissions staff. And we all went away with a handful of literature and our names were automatically entered into the competition for Furman Scholars. Obviously not knowing whether that would be a possibility or not, I applied to a number of other colleges for scholarships at various places. Ultimately I got a letter. I can remember very well opening a letter one day from a person named Francis Bonner – I didn’t know who Francis Bonner was – that told me I had a full scholarship through the Furman Scholars program. So that settled it, ended any questions where I might go, and I became a Furman student.

Dr. Tollison: Terrific.

Mr. Estridge: Never regretted it one day since.

Dr. Tollison: What was your first impression of Dr. Plyler?

Mr. Estridge: That he was a wonderful, wise, scholarly, warm gentleman – always smiling. In fact, the smile is the first impression or the first thing I remember about Dr. Plyler, is that wonderful engaging smile that he brought into every environment.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh. And what about Dr. Bonner?

Mr. Estridge: Dr. Bonner did not smile as much. (laughs) He was very bright and businesslike – now he’s also a friend and I got to know him much better as years went on – so I can also say he was a very warm person. But it’s almost as though Dr. Plyler had to smile, Dr. Bonner had to frown, and between the two of them they got the job done.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh, okay, gotcha (laughs)

05:29

Dr. Tollison: Now tell me about being on the new campus.

Mr. Estridge: Well it was wonderful. It was like a vacation at first because everything was so fresh and so new and so good that we all felt like we were kind of the pioneers in new territory and take advantage of it.

Dr. Tollison: (laughs) It's a new experiment.

Mr. Estridge: We also, you know there are many many many stories – for instance the trees. I kind of get a kick out of seeing the very mature trees now because they were being planted when I was there as a student. And they would plant them by digging these huge holes and eventually they were going to bring in the tree balls, or the root balls, and put them in the holes but the holes seemed to stay there just as holes forever before they got the trees in. And so it was not uncommon to trip and fall into one of these holes if you were trying to navigate your way around campus at night. You particularly had to watch out for these holes...

Dr. Tollison: Right. (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: ...where the trees are now.

Dr. Tollison: What about new campus traditions?

Mr. Estridge: One of the traditions we developed in a hurry was throwing people in the water. I got thrown in the water quite a number of times. Two that are most memorable – these my grandchildren love to hear because they also like, love it here at the Furman campus and feed the ducks and they've heard granddaddy's stories. But two that are my favorite: When I was an Argonaut – which is sort of a freshman counselor who lived in the freshman dormitories – my junior and senior year. And so the freshmen were always trying to play jokes on the Argonauts and the counselors. On my birthday my senior year – and that's January – when it was nine degrees downtown Greenville, probably six degrees on Furman campus, those guys caught me in the shower – of course we had common hall showers – buck naked, hauled me, buck naked, down to the lake out by the student center and threw me in.

Dr. Tollison: (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: And then they ran off. And I hauled myself back up to the dormitory. My roommate Lewis Smoke remembers vividly sort of coming to my rescue and then wondering what in the world was going on. He said that I was blue when I went back in the shower to warm up. I did survive that but I remember that.

Dr. Tollison: Good. I would agree with you. (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: And the... After... There was sort of an inauguration of student body officers in those days and I had managed to buy a brown wool suit for the student body inauguration – this would have been in the spring of 1965 – my last year was '65-'66. And so I went through this whole inauguration process in this brand new brown suit and as the convocation – we called it convocation, it was one of these mandatory student body approved meetings – as the convocation broke up and I was coming out, some of my friends grabbed me and threw me into the fountains in front of McAlister as my initiation for being student body president. Of course the brown suit shrunk. (laughs) It was of no – it was a cheap brown suit – it was no good. But anyway that was my second most memorable being thrown in the water experience. But people would get thrown in the water when they were engaged to be married or pinned or accepted into graduate school, etcetera and all. It seems that almost every night somebody would get hauled out of the dining room and tossed into the lake in front of the whole [inaudible].

Dr. Tollison: What about administrators, did they ever get thrown in?

Mr. Estridge: You know, I can't remember. Certainly Dr. Bonner never got thrown in. I don't think we ever did. We probably would have thrown Dr. Bonner in if we hadn't feared being expelled or suspended or something. But no, it didn't extend to administrators in those days.

Dr. Tollison: Okay.

Mr. Estridge: Maybe later on they did that.

Dr. Tollison: (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: Another tradition I remember that the campus set-up really accommodated was serenading the female students, the girls, behind the girls' dormitory. Think about that set-up because all the guys were at one end of the campus and all the girls were at the other end of the campus so the housing was very much segregated. Well the fraternities, particularly TKE [The Knights Eternal] – it was the fraternity I was in – had little choral groups. And we practiced and then made our way over to the back side of the girls' dormitories between the dormitory and the lake. Now we always signaled that we were coming and went on out back there and start singing. We would sing the sweetheart songs and, "Brown Eyes," etcetera – acapella. Some of them could sing, some of us just sort of went along but accommodation was pretty good. The girls would come out on the balconies on the back.

10:25

Dr. Tollison: You bring up an interesting topic. TKE is The Knights Eternal so this was local fraternities.

Mr. Estridge: Well we were the first – my freshman class – was the first class that could not join the national fraternities. The South Carolina Baptists had pushed the trustees to pass an amendment to the charter – it actually went into the charter of the university – that there could be no Greek lead fraternities. So the students, in their ingenuity, that we were members of Greek lead fraternities, simply turned right around and formed quote “social clubs” and adopted names that were similar to the fraternity names...

Dr. Tollison: To the national organizations.

Mr. Estridge: ...and just kept going. So I was in the first pledge class of The Knights Eternal which was “Teke” and we called ourselves “Tekes,” of course. The SAEs [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] became the Centaur Club. The KAs [Kappa Alpha] became The Order of REL – Robert E. Lee. The Delta Theta Chis became the Ox Club and one other became The Star and Lamp, I forget what that translated into. So we had five social clubs instead of five social fraternities and just carried right on.

Dr. Tollison: Okay and decades later...

Mr. Estridge: Decades later I think it flipped back – well after the severance from the Baptist Convention then that was taken out of the charter and the national Greeks were reinstated.

Dr. Tollison: And would sororities come in then?

Mr. Estridge: Sororities came in then. Exactly.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh.

Mr. Estridge: Yeah, in the 60s we didn’t have sororities, we had “rush girls.” There were a lot of traditions that, by today’s standards, would be considered very sexist.

Dr. Tollison: Now what are “rush girls”?

Mr. Estridge: “Rush girls.” Well the rush process would be – the fraternities would have these parties to encourage the freshmen to join, or to apply to join their fraternity. And these parties obviously weren’t going to be all-male parties. They had “rush girls” join the parties.

Dr. Tollison: Now were these called – they call them smokers today?

Mr. Estridge: Smokers. Similar to that. But we called them rush parties.

Dr. Tollison: Rush parties.

Mr. Estridge: And so female students would enlist with a particular fraternity. You couldn’t rush for two fraternities. You rushed for... So that became a kind of organization

in and of itself, the “rush girls” for Teke, the “rush girls” etcetera. And they would attend the parties.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, gotcha.

12:48

Dr. Tollison: Now I’ve seen photographs recently of – and maybe you can enlighten me as to what this was because none of us could figure it out – of girls with very short shorts on and high heels on what we call E field?

Mr. Estridge: Right.

Dr. Tollison: Near the men’s dorms?

Mr. Estridge: With a brown bag on their head?

Dr. Tollison: Yes. And they’re all lined up.

Mr. Estridge: Isn’t that sexist? I can tell you who some of the winners were. Yeah, that was actually sponsored by the pep club.

Dr. Tollison: Okay.

Mr. Estridge: I don’t know whether pep clubs still exist anymore.

Dr. Tollison: I don’t believe so.

Mr. Estridge: But the pep club was organized for student support of athletic activities. You know for pep rallies, it was named for pep rallies, okay? The pep club also, in springtime, sponsored various outdoor events – you know, three-legged races, this kind of stuff. And this legs contest was one of the events that the pep club sponsored, coordinated, and the female students gladly and readily participated in.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh. And who were...

Mr. Estridge: I’ll say no more. I was never a judge.

[PART TWO 13:56]

Mr. Estridge: Well the one that I remember was Patty Murphy – she’s not Murphy now – she would have been class of ’67-’68. And I saw her at a reunion event the other day and it was an informal event and I guess she’s continued the tradition. She’s wonderful. But she’s the only one I remember. But she was sort of an outstanding participant.

14:27

Dr. Tollison: Now tell me, you were the president of student body

Mr. Estridge: It was called the student body at that time. That was before AFS [Association of Furman Students] was formed. It was a student government organization.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh. And this was elected by the student body?

Mr. Estridge: We had elections in the spring of the year for the four officers. And then we had – I think this was the person who was the president before me and I together developed the idea of having a cabinet – and so by the time I was president we had a cabinet and there was, you know, eight or ten people. And it... There was a student body budget as there is an AFS budget now and a cabinet member was given the responsibility for the function. So there was a cabinet member assigned to the social clubs, for instance, and a cabinet member assigned to academic liaison with the dean. It's probably, I think there's a similar one, probably not called a cabinet. But we kind of modeled it after the President of the United States cabinet – secretary of this, secretary of that. And where ours was... The student center which was in the Watkins Student Center...

Dr. Tollison: Right. Very new.

Mr. Estridge: In fact it was completed in the summer before my senior year.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, '65.

Mr. Estridge: '65. So it had an office for the student body president.

Dr. Tollison: Oh so you were the first one.

Mr. Estridge: So I was the first student body president that actually had an office. And it was a wonderful thing. It was all fresh, brand new furniture. We actually had an office. The newspaper had an office, the yearbook had an office, and we had a number of meeting rooms. We had cabinet meetings in one of the conference rooms. It was a great boost for student government just to have that facility. We got a lot more interest just because we had that facility.

Dr. Tollison: Sure, sure. So this became the new social center on campus. Now where did students congregate before?

Mr. Estridge: There was a little café, a little refreshment center, a little store in the classroom building – in Furman – right in the middle.

Dr. Tollison: Did they call it the canteen?

Mr. Estridge: The canteen. That's exactly. And there was a day student lounge adjacent to

that. That was as close as the campus had to a central social gathering point. There also were some lounges in dormitories. The building that connects the two sets of men's dormitories had an apartment – I think it was originally designed to be an apartment for the counselors – but it had a lounge on each end. The girls' dormitories had some lounges. Those were also popular gathering areas.

Dr. Tollison: What about the library?

Mr. Estridge: Yeah, not so much social because you had to be quiet. I mean, yeah, it was popular, not in terms of a single place – the little pockets of social gatherings. But you had to be pretty quiet. (laughs)

Dr. Tollison: Right, right. It's a library. (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: It didn't work.

17:34

Dr. Tollison: Tell me about how privy you were to administrative decisions, etcetera. I understand Gordon Blackwell was president at this time. He was very appreciative of student opinion.

Mr. Estridge: Well, actually, I was there for the transition from Dr. Plyler [John Laney Plyler, Sr.] and Dr. Blackwell [Gordon Williams Blackwell].

Dr. Tollison: Right. And with Bonner [Francis W. Bonner] in between.

Mr. Estridge: Exactly, Bonner in between. So we... One of the platforms on which I ran for the presidency – against Sam Wyche by the way, he was my opponent – was to have student representation on faculty committees.

Dr. Tollison: Okay.

Mr. Estridge: Dr. Bonner had been very cold about the idea but by the time Dr. Plyler [Blackwell] actually took office two things had happened: One, I think an accreditation committee had told Dr. Bonner that it's a good idea and Dr. Plyler [Blackwell] had told Dr. Bonner that it's an excellent idea. So I was able to fulfill my platform promise because Dr. Plyler [Blackwell] wanted students on faculty committees. So we actually planted, or embedded, a student on all the key faculty committees – I don't know whether they still are or not. It didn't occur to me to ask to have them on trustee committees because I don't think there were that many trustee committees. We did have the, the student body president was invited to attend trustee meetings from time to time just sort of make an appearance and then leave. But having the students on the faculty committees really worked and that did give us a lot more connection to what was going on. More important, it made the administration and the faculty more aware that

they were going to have to be transparent with the students, at least up to a certain point. And I think it changed the way they did business. Now, I'm not sure what happened after that but at least we got our foot in the door. And Dr. Plyler [Blackwell] was very open with me, very open. And, in fact, encouraged me to come in and talk to him one-on-one about what students were thinking.

Dr. Tollison: How was Dr. Blackwell?

Mr. Estridge: I'm sorry. I meant to say Dr. Blackwell. Dr. Blackwell asked... He initiated more student engagement. He started something called "fireside chats" at the student center. And they really worked, the students really came. And he – and I misspoke when I said this was Dr. Plyler because I was student body president under Dr. Blackwell – he called me in his office often just to find out what students were thinking and to sort of test on me reactions. And I felt very, very good about his administration. We were very proud. It was just... When Dr. Blackwell accepted the presidency it was almost like we were moving into a different league, you know. This man has been the president of Florida State University and he's coming to Furman as our president. And, of course, he lived up to his billings. Scholar; a gentleman; very warm; very, very hard worker. And his wife, of course, was one of the most delightful people that I have ever met. So that was a huge, huge step in Furman's history.

Dr. Tollison: How cognizant were students of Dr. Blackwell's campaign to achieve excellence by national standards? Was this something...

Mr. Estridge: Very much so because he talked about it. He talked about it. He may not have used that exact term in his first year but he talked about his vision for Furman frequently. And he had... And the students were very – welcomed that move. It was a time when Furman was in a transition between being a training ground for Baptist full-time professionals – and some school teachers and a few lawyers here and there – to being a time when Furman was going to become a nationally known liberal arts college and make its mark in the world. We felt like we were a part of that transition. There was a lot of pride in the Furman students in those days. For instance when I – as just an anecdotal illustration – when I first became interested in going to Harvard Law School because a classmate had done that and called me and said "Larry, you need to give this a try." This is all my senior year. He said "You need to apply and apply for a scholarship. I think you could do it." And I said "Harvard! I've never been north of the Mason-Dixon Line in my life." He said "Well, just give it a try." And one of the things that he had learned was Harvard Law School, at that time, ranked its graduates from one to whatever – it was an unfortunate system and they did abandon it later on – but you were first in your class or last in your class and you knew it, you knew what your number was. And Harvard Law School had done that for well over one hundred years. They also retained a separate statistic of the ratings, the combined cumulative ratings, of the graduates of colleges everywhere.

Dr. Tollison: Right.

Mr. Estridge: Harvard College was number two. Furman was number one. Yeah, talk about pride.

Dr. Tollison: Certainly. So they welcomed Furman graduates.

Mr. Estridge: Absolutely. So, you know, I had a leg up going in. Now while I was there they abandoned that system so I didn't mess up the statistics. (laughs)

Dr. Tollison: (laughs) I don't know about that.

23:10

Dr. Tollison: Tell me about Betty Alverson.

Mr. Estridge: Well, Betty, of course, was hired to run the student center, to coordinate the student center, and to coordinate student activities in connection with the opening of the Watkins Student Center in the fall of '65. I had a job. I had ROTC summer camp that summer and then I needed some money for the rest of the summer so I actually applied to Daniel Construction Company and got a job to work for about six or eight weeks digging ditches for the construction of the expansion of the Plyler Science Building.

Dr. Tollison: The science building

Mr. Estridge: I literally dug ditches for the underground basement level of the Plyler Science Hall.

Dr. Tollison: The old psychology department. (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: (laughs) Okay, you knew it well. Betty had come in that summer and started setting things up for the student center. She got my name and contacted me and said she wanted to meet me and have lunch with me. And I can't remember what it was, I went into the brand new student center. There was already a little snack bar set up – what is now the PalaDen – was already set up so we could have food. I came in with covered head to foot with red clay because I was digging ditches.

Dr. Tollison: Right.

Mr. Estridge: It didn't bother her at all, didn't phase her. We got to know each other and I have loved her ever since. It was just love at first sight with Betty Alverson because she began to talk – not only about student government and the student center – but about her idea about student activities. And, of course, at that time CESC [Collegiate Educational Service Corps] was a gleam in her eye. She hadn't started talking about such a thing, it was a while. But that was something she

had in the back of her mind as a part of her agenda. But she had some very strong ideas about what student government could do, about student government being more active and taking advantage of this new physical facility. And I spent hours and hours and hours with Betty Alverson that year

Dr. Tollison: Of what I understand, you were the first student that she...

Mr. Estridge: I think I was the first actual student that she met.

Dr. Tollison: Okay.

Mr. Estridge: Because of that, I think... Actually my former wife Diane – who was also a classmate and who was also active in student government and we were engaged at the time – we met her together, we shared that lunch that day. And so I think Diane and I together were the first two Furman students she met.

Dr. Tollison: Okay. And tell me about the development of CESC.

Mr. Estridge: The first thing I actually remember was a meeting with Betty and Max Heller who, of course, was the mayor of Greenville at the time. They asked me to come in and talk to them together about this idea she had developed of a student volunteer service corp. It did not have a name at that time but she had introduced Max to the idea because she wanted his help in enlisting the agencies in the community in which a student could serve. Now this was a time when students obviously were very, very busy with their academic pursuits. Fraternity life and social life was an important part of their profile. The Vietnam War was raging and was increasing in scope and therefore all the male students were very much concerned about being drafted or dealing with the military. All of these things on their minds. Student protests were just beginning, we were in the kind of the embryonic stage of students actually protesting against the war. So students had a lot on their minds. I was skeptical, quite frankly. As much as I liked the idea, I was skeptical that she would succeed in having a significant commitment of student time to volunteer activities in the community. As much as I wanted it to happen I remember wanting her not to get too enthusiastic about it and not to be too disappointed if the students didn't just immediately respond. Of course she was right and I was wrong and the rest is history. But I was very proud to be a part of just the thought process. I take no credit for it because I was her sounding board only. But she picked up on that idea and doggedly and steadfastly built it and within a couple years it was a reality.

[PART THREE 27:48]

27:50

Dr. Tollison: Now you were also ROTC at Furman. A very exciting time to be a cadet.

Mr. Estridge: ROTC was mandatory the first two years. I have a lot of great stories about it

because everybody – we sort of took it seriously but not too seriously for that first two years. But every male student except those who had a physical disability had to line up, put on a uniform, shine their shoes, and get information on [inaudible]. And then we had a student command hierarchy just like the military to run things to make that happen. Then we had a choice – at the end of your sophomore year you chose – whether you wanted to stay with the ROTC program and therefore obligate yourself to two years in the Army, or drop it and, in our case, subject yourself to the draft. And that was before we had a lottery, too. So if you did not go with advanced ROTC and – you had to gamble, you had to decide how you were going to [inaudible]. Because Vietnam was probably not going to go away and there was a good chance you'd be drafted as a buck private in the military. There were also deferments for graduate school and that was a... So if you thought you were going to graduate school there was a pretty good chance you'd be deferred until after graduate school, but that's only a deferment. So many of us who believed we would go to graduate school signed on: Number one, to make sure that if we did go into the military we would be commissioned as officers. Number two, there was a monthly stipend associated with it – I think it was \$27.50 which was a lot of money, a lot of spending money – you got paid that your junior and senior years. And then, at least in my case, certain speculation that after two more years of Furman and three years of graduate school that surely this thing would have gone away by then.

Dr. Tollison: Might be over. Right.

Mr. Estridge: And it didn't quite happen that way. I went through the rest of – two more years at Furman – three years of law school, one year at Fort Jackson and then Vietnam. I went to Vietnam in '70, I guess '70, '71.

Dr. Tollison: And spent one year?

Mr. Estridge: One year in Vietnam.

30:15

Dr. Tollison: Okay, and then came back.

Mr. Estridge: Came back. I went to work originally with a law firm in Atlanta, and then after a year decided that I'd rather be in Greenville and with a law firm in Greenville – not my present law firm – but at a law firm called Wyche Burgess Freeman & Parham and I spent 27 ½ years with that firm.

Dr. Tollison: This group office of your firm is fairly new isn't it?

Mr. Estridge: We started from scratch in January of '99.

Dr. Tollison: Okay.

Mr. Estridge: Actually there was a Furman connection to that because Mike Ray is a Furman graduate who worked with me at the Wyche law firm when he was a student and thereafter went to the University of South Carolina Law School and went directly to Winston-Salem to Womble Carlyle which, at that time, was just a North Carolina law firm. They decided in 1999, or 1998, that they wanted to open a Greenville office and Mike approached me and challenged me to start it from scratch and I said there I couldn't pass up. I started it pretty much from scratch. Although by the time we actually opened our door in January of '99 there were three of us. And then we've grown to where we are right now, about 25 of us with a very good sprinkling of Furman graduates.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, that's nice.

31:43

Dr. Tollison: Let's talk about the integration process that you were an observer of with the entrance of Joe Vaughn and the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the tensions there. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Mr. Estridge: I remember being very, very proud of the trustees and the student body in general was very proud of the trustees. Up to that point we knew very little about what the trustees were actually doing. We knew that they were all South Carolina Baptists. But the trustees resisted an edict handed to them by the South Carolina Baptist Convention not to desegregate and developed a plan to desegregate. And Joe Vaughn was the first African American student. That happened, again, in my senior year. Joe was exactly the right person to be the first – delightful, delightful person. The only article that I ever wrote for the student newspaper was an interview with Joe Vaughn. The editor of the newspaper, who was a classmate at Furman, asked me to do an interview to be published the first month that Joe was there. So I got to know him, I think the first day he was there and conducted an interview and wrote an article about it and we became very, very good friends. The student body not only welcomed Joe being there but eagerly awaited an expansion of that number to go beyond one initial – almost token – black student into a significant number. But Joe was the right person and had no problem. And I know from talking to him about it later that he felt very comfortable from the beginning and all the way through and made quite a name for himself.

Dr. Tollison: Now Furman had a reputation for being a fairly conservative college at this point in time. How can you explain the support among the students for desegregation?

Mr. Estridge: Well, Furman on a national scale was thought conservative because of its affiliation with the Baptist Convention. The faculty, if you sort of sampled the politics of the faculty you would have found them to be far less conservative. Students, I think – and again we had the full range – but they certainly were a lot, the balance of liberal versus conservative among the student body probably

would have come down somewhere in the middle, you know, on the national scale at that time. So the number of students who would have opposed desegregation would have been, number one, very small and very quiet, very passive. The Furman student body did not become active in its anti-war activities and sentiments as soon as Harvard, Yale and the ivy league colleges, but it happened fairly soon after that. And by, within two years after my leaving Furman, student protests and organizations – although at Furman I don't think it ever took the form of violence or aggression or taking over buildings. We can thank Betty Alverson, in part, for managing those activities so that they were constructive and not destructive.

Dr. Tollison: And you're talking about how open she was and how she promoted discussions.

Mr. Estridge: She promoted discussion and provided an arena and a forum so that people didn't have to force the arena as they did in many other colleges.

Dr. Tollison: And, of course, SSOC [Southern Student Organizing Committee] was founded several years after you graduated. Is that correct?

Mr. Estridge: That's right.

35:48

Dr. Tollison: Let's skip forward a little bit to your role in the split between Furman and the South Carolina Baptist Convention. If we can just back up to 1989-1990ish.

Mr. Estridge: I'll back up a little further than that. I went on the alumni board shortly after moving back to Greenville, sometime in the early '70s. The officers of the alumni association, in order to stimulate interest in their activities, had asked two or three lawyer members of that board to look into the possibility of the alumni electing some trustees. I had a little bit of knowledge of that because Harvard every year sends out a ballot for trustees and members of the board of overseers, etcetera. The alumni had an active role in selecting the governing boards at Harvard as they do in a number of other colleges. So the thought was that if the alumni actually elected some small number of trustees directly, that that would greatly increase the interest in the alumni association. So we looked into that with Dr. Blackwell and, of course, we ran immediately into his recollection that the charter of the university prevented that ever from happening and that that charter could be amended only by the Baptists themselves. And he scrambled around and got me a copy of the charter. So for a number of years that project became an attempt to convince the trustees to sponsor an amendment that would allow five of the twenty-five trustees to be elected by alumni and that went nowhere. I rotated through the board and was president a number of years and so we attempted a number of times as alumni to get something like that going and never went anywhere. In fact, it never even got to the Baptists because Dr. Blackwell and, at some point, Dr. Johns [John E. Johns] did not want to disrupt the relationship. They were legitimately afraid

that it might be seen as a radical move and it might disrupt the very delicate relationship that existed. That delicate relationship was simply this – and this had gone on for years and years and years – the charter of the university and the charter of the State Baptist Convention mandated that all the trustees be elected by the South Carolina Baptist Convention and that they must be South Carolina Baptists. But, in fact, the administration would select nominees who met those qualifications but also had the best interests of the university at heart, and we send those nominees to the Convention. And for decades and decades the Convention had elected those nominees. So Furman had in reality, sort of behind the scenes, had a role in selecting these trustees even though the pool of candidates was limited. I rotated through that process, went off the board. I was approached by the then current chair of the alumni association who was David Ellison, who in turn had been encouraged by Neil Rabon – he was a member of the alumni board who was also active in the South Carolina Baptist Convention – that the upcoming State Convention, which would have been fall of 1990 – I might be one year off but I think it was fall of 1990 – there was a move on to make sure the nominees were all very conservative Baptists who were aligned with the power shift within the State Baptist Convention that paralleled the power shift in the Southern Baptist Convention. I learned that there were already a number of trustees – seven exactly, to be precise – who were not Furman suggestions at all but who had been put in place in spite of, and against, Furman’s wishes. That was frighteningly close to one third, or being more than one third. Changing constitutional requirements like that usually requires a two thirds vote. I knew that even without looking at the documents. So David Ellison and Neil Rabon had put together a strategy of alumni through the alumni board to plan what to do at the next convention. Quite frankly, the primary strategy was going to be ‘let’s get Furman faithful to sign up – who are Baptists in South Carolina – to sign up and go to the Convention.’ Because the Convention really consists of whoever shows up and though there may be some maximum number that a church can send they seldom do so. You can kind of flood the Convention to make sure that we’ve got enough people there to avoid the wrong thing happening and to make sure that the right nominees get nominated. That was the primary purpose. But they also appointed a separate, kind of secret, committee consisting of lawyers only to consider what might be done as an alternative in the event things went wrong. And so I was on that secret committee along with Lindsay Smith, who is now one of my partners, and Mike Ray – whom I just mentioned – who was at Womble Carlyle in Winston-Salem, but who had represented Wake Forest in their dealings with the Baptist Convention. So he had the benefit of the Womble Carlyle files. And we had a couple meetings. We looked at some really crazy, crazy ideas – not crazy – but radical ideas because we were asked to provide a solution. We looked, for instance, at the possibility of taking the title to the campus which is actually the corporation, the nonprofit corporation called Furman University, it’s a corporation. And, if necessary, just deeding it over to a new corporation so that the new corporation would have control at least of the physical facility and the old corporation controlled by the Baptists would have nothing. [inaudible] We pulling that altogether, we were being very creative.

Dr. Tollison: Sounds very University of Georgia-ish.

Mr. Estridge: Yeah, exactly.

[PART FOUR 42:42]

Mr. Estridge: But as a part of that Lindsay Smith and I decided to examine the actual documents. Let's go back to the premise. The premise was that only South Carolina Baptists can elect them and they have to be South Carolina Baptists and that that rule was embedded in concrete, not only in the charter of the Baptist Convention, but in Furman's own charter. And to put an extra nail in that coffin, the Furman trustees in 1955 had passed another amendment to their own charter that said the Furman charter cannot be amended without the consent of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. See, they put that in their own charter. That's why it was considered to be invincible and that's why Dr. Blackwell had told me a number of times that university lawyers had looked at this and had said there's no way we can change it. That only the Baptist Convention can change it and the Baptist Convention is not about to change it. So we said okay, let's look at the actual documents, the original documents, right down to every single colon. And let's look at the evolution of those documents from the nineteenth century right up to where they are now. Let's also take the South Carolina nonprofit law – and Lindsay and I both had experiences in dealing with that law. It was pretty crudely written but it governed Furman. Since 1900 Furman had been considered a nonprofit corporation. Furman had been in existence before the law. It had been chartered by the legislature. The legislature granted a charter just like it did to churches and to Shriners organizations and Masonic temples, etcetera. But that was all changed when the legislature passed a nonprofit corporation law and subsequently said that Furman along with other institutions are now governed by this South Carolina nonprofit corporation law.

Dr. Tollison: So this was in...

Mr. Estridge: About 1920 I think it was. 1900 the law was passed. 1920 the legislature actually passed a specific act that said Furman is under this law just to avoid any ambiguity. So we've got this charter as amended over these years including that amendment that said only South Carolina Baptists can amend the charter and we've got the law. And so we just thought about it and thought about it and it occurred to us one day – and I can remember the conversation in which it came about – the law said that nonprofit corporations' charters can be amended by a vote of the "members," by a two thirds vote of the "members," given due notice by certified mail, blah, blah, blah, blah. Who are the members? Well Furman doesn't have "members." The only... Maybe the members of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, maybe the members of the faculty itself, but the only logical group who could claim to be members would be the trustees themselves. So you look back at that '55 amendment, the trustees had passed and signed that amendment as – guess what – as members. So there was a history of the

trustees identifying themselves as members under this law and of the South Carolina Baptists – who, after all, had pushed for that amendment – acknowledging that the trustees are the members. So ah hah, okay. The members are the trustees and if the law says that the members can amend the charter with [inaudible] vote, why can't those members pass two amendments. The first amendment does away with the amendment that said that South Carolina Baptists must approve amendments – so there's an amendment to do away with that amendment. And then there's a second comprehensive amendment that changes completely how trustees are elected. It puts in a whole new election process which causes the trustees to self-perpetuate – that the existing trustees elect their own replacements. So we came back to Neil Rabon and Dave Ellison and we said "We've got a radical idea here."

Dr. Tollison: And this is all without John Johns' knowledge.

Mr. Estridge: He didn't know anything about it, okay. But we quickly had a meeting with him.

Dr. Tollison: With John Johns.

Mr. Estridge: With John Johns. And he said "Boys, keep working on it. I like it." Now he wasn't ready to embrace it yet but he did encourage us to have a meeting with Minor Mickel who at that time was the chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees. And that lead pretty quickly to a meeting with the entire executive committee. We didn't have it at Furman, we had it downtown at the Poinsett Club. We had it in the middle of the afternoon so there weren't people around for lunch. We had very secret meetings – a series of very secret meetings with the executive committee. We also worked with them... Actually the first time I talked to Minor she was in China – I remember that because he encouraged me to reach for China – and I talked her through this concept. We brought Tommy Thompson in. Tommy Thompson was the university counsel. He immediately embraced the idea and we continued working. I actually was writing the amendment, hand writing it, having it typed, etcetera, etcetera, and disseminating the actual amendment among this committee. The executive committee...

Dr. Tollison: Now was that amendment one or amendment two?

Mr. Estridge: Actually it was both amendments, you're right. I've forgotten how we framed it but they were written simultaneously, so there were two amendments. The executive committee had a series of meetings to work their way through the whole process. Took the whole list of the existing trustees and sort of counted the heads of who they thought would support it and who were not supportive. Developed a procedure...

Dr. Tollison: Let me interrupt, did this fall along Baptist ministerial lines, in a lot of ways?

Mr. Estridge: No. As a matter of fact one of the most remarkable things about the whole story

is that two of the members of the executive committee were Baptist ministers, both of whom were former presidents of the Baptist Convention.

Dr. Tollison: The Southern or the South Carolina?

Mr. Estridge: South Carolina. They were on the executive committee so they had to be brought into this picture. We had a lot of talk about fiduciary duty. I can remember the meeting which they, one of the [inaudible], realized that though he had tremendous loyalty to the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and it was the Baptist Convention that put him where he is as a trustee...

Dr. Tollison: All of them, right?

Mr. Estridge: Exactly. That his fiduciary duty in this instance was to Furman, which is separate from the Baptists. And that the Baptist Convention, the mother ship in effect – wrong metaphor, you get my point – was in fact on a course of action that was contrary to the best interests of Furman University. They believed that. They were frustrated about what they could do about that and now they have a script in front of them of something they can do about it. And so now what is fiduciary duty? Their fiduciary duty, they were convinced, was to support this amendment even though they knew that was going to cause them to be a heretic in the minds of many, many, many of their best friends and their peers. But they agreed to do it. We then had one – we had all kinds of obstacles – but one of the obstacles was that, even though the executive committee had tentatively adopted the strategy and were willing to go forward, each of them said “We must know that John Johns is 100% behind it and ready to go. What does John Johns say about it?” Up to that point he had been saying “Thank goodness we have a plan, and let’s hope it will work, but let’s be careful.” He had not firmly committed to do it. We – Neil Rabon, by this time it was Neil Rabon and the legal committee – set up a meeting at my office, in a conference room at my office, in the Wyche Law Firm, in which we had the whole, the larger committee, this larger committee of alumni who were developing the strategy for the Convention, the upcoming Convention, and who had not really heard about this alternate strategy. We had a meeting of that group and invited Dr. Johns. In fact, Neil Rabon, in his great wisdom, invited a court reporter to transcribe the whole meeting. Introduced the court reporter to Dr. Johns. Told everybody that we felt that it was so important that we have a transcriber. And then we had... And then I made the presentation to the whole committee of this strategy with Dr. Johns there. Then we asked him the hard question. We said “Dr. Johns, in order to go forward, the executive committee of the trustees need to know if you are firmly committed. We need to know whether you are committed and we need to be able to quote you in our discussions with them. Can we?” And, of course, there’s a recorder going, a recording going on. And he took a deep breath and he said “I appreciate why I’m here. You do need an answer and my answer is yes. I’m going to support it.” Then he said “But let me tell you something, boys,” – he always looked me right in the eye – “if you’re going to take a shot at the king, you’d better damn well kill it.” And we all understood completely.

Dr. Tollison: What that meant.

Mr. Estridge: What that meant. It was a grave situation. But that led to us completing our discussions with the executive committee. The executive committee then got in touch with assigned members of the group of eighteen trustees of whom these six members were in the eighteen. There were eighteen trustees we felt would be supportive – and again a lot of this was guesswork. It turned out that one of them was the chief judge of the supreme court of the state of South Carolina and he said “I can’t vote because this thing is bound to end up going to the court.”

Dr. Tollison: His court, right.

Mr. Estridge: “So I’ve got to abstain.” So that’s seventeen – or maybe it was nineteen – yeah seventeen. No, he would have been number nineteen and so it came down to eighteen. Had to have eighteen votes in order to amend the charter and the bylaws simultaneously, because the bylaws also had to be amended. So a meeting was called for Monday afternoon. Trustees then met on Mondays because trustees had all been, most had been, preachers and so they liked to have their meetings on Monday which was kind of a preachers’ day off. It was a long standing tradition, had the meetings on Monday. So this was October in 1990. We got all the paperwork ready ahead of time, the actual charter. We spent hours meeting with Minor. Actually Minor – I said she was the chairman of the executive committee – she was the chairman of the board of trustees. Dwight Holder was the chairman of the executive committee. But Minor had presided over this meeting of the trustee [inaudible]. We spent hours and hours and hours. She was so smart. She was apprehensive, but so smart. She wanted us to lead her through every possible thing that could happen, every possible question that could come up, she wanted to know how to handle it and we talked about it and talked about it. We actually had the amendment signed by a majority. In fact, we had every supportive trustee – everyone whose vote we thought we could count on – to sign the amendment ahead of time so that the proof of the passage of the amendment was already in place and in writing and in the hands of Lindsay Smith, my partner, who would take it to Columbia. This had to be filed in the office of the secretary of state in order to be official. Well he actually had it in Columbia in his hand as the meeting was going on so that, once it passed, he could immediately file it. Thank goodness.

Dr. Tollison: Well, now let me try and understand this. You’ve got – in order to get eighteen at this point – you’ve got to get one of those seven...

Mr. Estridge: I think it was six. I think I’ve counted my number one wrong. We never got any of those. The swing vote was the chief justice. So we had the eighteen without him. That’s how the [inaudible]. We had six who were...

Dr. Tollison: So you were dealing with twenty-four votes.

Mr. Estridge: Right. Dealing with twenty-four instead of twenty-five because we had one abstention. So that's how we got the eighteen. And of course – I also failed to say – that this charter, the official charter is recorded in the office of the secretary of state. So whatever is officially recorded is binding. Now this charter amendment can't become binding until it's recorded. Now the function of the secretary of state – at that time was a guy named John Campbell – his function is only to stamp it and record it. He's not supposed to do anything to it or make any decisions about it. He's just supposed to record it. So Lindsay Smith had it there in his office. He got a telephone notice from Greenville. By then, of course, the press was involved. And then by the time the vote was taken, it was public because the press had been alerted that there was going to be something significant. They were standing out in the hall and they were told right after the vote. Now it was a very stormy meeting. There was a lot of debate at the meeting. But then ultimately the vote was taken – I think there were a couple of attempts to amend it or table it or something – but a vote was taken and all the votes were positive.

Dr. Tollison: Were you at this meeting?

Mr. Estridge: I was not at the meeting. Actually it was one of the unfortunate things about this is that I had a trial out of town that day and I had to do everything sort of by telephone.

Dr. Tollison: Now, could you have been in that meeting? This was a closed trustees meeting.

Mr. Estridge: No, I would have been outside. Tommy Thompson was in the meeting because he was general counsel and he participated in all the meetings. But at least I got the phone call that it passed. Sigh of relief. Then I got another phone call later that afternoon from Lindsay Smith. Lindsay had taken it in to be filed. The secretary of state, instead of having one of his assistants just file it, which is normal. Normally the secretary of state's not there. It's an administrative assistant: they take it, stamp it, file it. He was there waiting for it. One of the trustees opposed to it, having gotten the certified notice a few days earlier of the meeting, with the amendment – because under the law the amendment had to be sent out to all the trustees before they voted on it, three days in advance. He was... One of the adverse trustees was a lawyer and a friend of the secretary of state, and who knew this process. That trustee had told the secretary of state, and had convinced him, that when this amendment shows up for filing, don't file it. Don't file it because the charter of the university says that amendments have to be approved by the Baptists before they can be filed. And this amendment, even though this amendment purports to wipe out that amendment, you shouldn't file it. And the secretary of state went along with his friend and said "I refuse to file it." So now we have ourselves a constitutional crisis.

[PART FIVE 58:59]

Mr. Estridge: The next day we got in touch with the attorney general. And Tommy Thompson, thank goodness, was on very good terms with the attorney general. The attorney general assigned somebody in his office to work with us immediately and we started a series of filing briefs back and forth with the attorney general. Fortunately, several weeks later, the attorney general told the secretary of state that he had to file it. So at least we had it done. That was the... At the Convention that then followed, this had already been accomplished at the Baptist Convention that followed.

Dr. Tollison: This was November of '90.

Mr. Estridge: I believe. The chairman appointed a "study committee" to work with Furman to determine whether something could be worked out. I think they also suspended Furman's money. Yeah, in fact, I know they did because there was another resolution that said that the million and a half, or so, that we normally send to Furman – don't send it.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, they put it in escrow.

Mr. Estridge: Put it in escrow.

Dr. Tollison: Uh huh.

Mr. Estridge: That committee worked with Dr. Johns and Minor Mickel to develop some sort of compromise. They all seemed convinced that it was going to head to court, that it was going to be a major crisis for years to come and Dr. Johns was quite willing to work with some sort of compromise so long as it was a compromise that assured that Furman would be in charge of its own destiny, that the only people who could be nominated would be people who had Furman's best interest at heart. And they had to work out several variations of a system and, I think, the variation that actually made its way to the floor for the next meeting was one in which the Convention would elect a certain number of trustees and the Furman trustees would elect a certain number of trustees. The Convention's group of nominees would all be South Carolina Baptists. The Furman's nominees could be Max Heller, Charles Townes, Dick Riley [Richard Wilson Riley] – a Methodist. They could be people who weren't South Carolina Baptists. And the Convention's list of nominees had to come from a larger list of South Carolina Baptists that would be sent by Furman so as to prevent their ever electing somebody whom Furman had not blessed in advance. That was the compromise. And the executive director of the Convention and the officers of the Convention – at least we thought the officers – had embraced that compromise. A year later, at the next meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention – which took place at Municipal Auditorium in Greenville, by coincidence – the plan was to have that on the floor, debated, and passed. If that had passed, then the Furman trustees would have gone back and amended the charter once again to put this new system in place. So the chairman of the Convention, who was a Simpsonville businessman at that time and whom we

thought was supportive of the amendment, recognized the chair of the committee – whom, I think, was a minister from Rock Hill – who came to the podium and who read the amendment, discussed it, stated that this had the blessing of the special committee that had been appointed the year before to work with Furman, that Furman and the executive director of the Convention both endorsed it, and it's up for, and made a motion to pass it. Before that motion could be debated, maybe even before it was seconded, Chip [Campson?] – I think it was Chip – one of the lawyers who had developed an alternative plan, stood up and asked to be recognized. And the chair recognized him and he proposed an alternative motion, a totally different motion. From a Parliamentary standpoint, in my personal opinion, it was incorrect to recognize it. But instead of debating, he said I have an alternative motion. The alternative motion is that we use Furman's money and we sue Furman. We hire lawyers and we sue Furman and we undo this thing that they did a year ago. No compromise, no nothing, we take it to court and we use Furman's money to pay the way to take it to court. And the chair entertained that motion and took a second for that motion and debated that motion and asked... And that motion... Well, along the way, the chair asked his Parliamentarian whether it was proper to adopt and vote on that motion. And his Parliamentarian whose name was David Beasley, who was a legislator who was considering changing parties and running for governor perhaps and had hair down on his shoulders, long, curly hair. David Beasley, the Parliamentarian, said "Yes, you should vote on this alternative motion." And it passed by, you know, a few hundred votes. I was not a delegate to the Convention, I was not a Baptist at the time. But I was – the executive director of the Memorial Auditorium was a good friend of mine – and I was in his office looking down on the proceedings where it all happened.

Dr. Tollison: And John Johns still had to address the convention at this point.

Mr. Estridge: Exactly. I'd forgotten about that. Yes, he still had to come behind that. He was in a state of shock. So we then went through "the valley of the shadow of death" for a while. We had a lot of meetings. I remember John Johns would always begin those meetings by saying "Now, Larry," he says, "You told me this before, but I want you to tell me one more time, we're going to win this lawsuit aren't we?" I said "Dr. Johns – John – we should win this lawsuit, if there is a lawsuit." We had numerous discussions with Chip [Campson?] and Mike – whose name I can't remember – the other lawyer, who's a Furman graduate, who didn't practice law, was a minister.

Dr. Tollison: Are you talking about Mike Hammond?

Mr. Estridge: I think it was Mike Hammond.

Dr. Tollison: From Spartanburg?

Mr. Estridge: No, no, this is another person who was a minister – whose name I can't recall but I can get that for you – who was a minister in Charleston but who had gone

to Furman and had gone to law school. He and Chip had put together – they had put together this alternate and had gotten the word out through enough churches to get the voters there. A majority of the people at that Convention knew what they were there for – which was to vote, not for the compromise, but for a lawsuit. They had... One of the things that occurred to us lawyers when we thought about this prospect of their going out and hiring somebody and suing us, is “Who’s the plaintiff?” To start a lawsuit you’ve got to have a plaintiff, okay. Well the plaintiff would be the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Well we did some research on this that they didn’t. The Convention lawyers had not done this research because I remember telling them the first time “What is it? It’s a nonentity. There is no corporation. There’s no nonprofit corporation called South Carolina Baptist Convention. There’s nothing else except an organization, an association.” If I just start a group and say we’re going to have a meeting and we call it Group A, then that is an association. It’s the loosest form of legal entity. It’s whoever happens to call themselves members. So if I call myself a member I’m a member. And that group of people that shows up for that meeting is the convention. And that’s all they had. So the South Carolina Baptist Convention at its legal bottom was the group of 4,000 people that showed up and signed in for that one meeting. When the gavel came down on that meeting they no longer existed, they were nonexistent, until there’s another meeting and at the next meeting it would be a different group of people. So I said “Who are your plaintiffs? Are you going to put 4,000 names in your complaint? And what about the 2,000 that voted against it?” And they go [inaudible]. You got a “standing problem.” And although they said “Oh no, we know how to overcome that,” they never really focused on it. They never said exactly how they would sue and they never actually hired a law firm, I don’t think. I think they hired a firm to sort of do some research for them. But nobody ever appeared and said “We are going to file this lawsuit.” A number of months later after this resolution was passed and after we had our initial meetings with those lawyers, the executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention appointed another committee of I think it was sixty-two ministers, some of whom supported what Furman had done, most of whom did not support what Furman had done. And their mission was to find a way out of this. Their real mission was to acknowledge that it was a done deed and to cause it to happen completely in a way that appeared to be the Convention’s initiative. So they resolved to call a special convention, which they did. This would have been in 1991, maybe ’92. They called a special convention for the sole purpose of considering their new resolution. And their new resolution was that the South Carolina Baptist Convention would sever all of its legal and other ties with Furman University. Of course, they didn’t actually have any legal ties at that point. I went to that meeting as a... Actually, my father was a messenger from the Northside Baptist Church in Rock Hill and I went with him, we went together. I was a guest of Furman so I did attend that one. Pretty much a foregone conclusion what was going to happen. A lot of anti-Furman speeches. The resolution got kind of mean and actually got amended to take away the funding of the BSU [Baptist Student Union] at Furman, to take away the funding of any chaplaincy at Furman. And then there was a period of time when, you know, Winthrop and USC [University of South Carolina] and Clemson were getting more money from the Baptists

than Furman. There was kind of a swing of opinion on that. But that resolution, of course, passed almost unanimously. Furman was very happy that that resolution passed. And the new era – the new era had already begun – but at least the new era without a cloud hanging over it officially began. That took a lot longer to tell that story.

Dr. Tollison: No. This is great that we have this on record. It sounds like it was an exhausting process.

Mr. Estridge: And I want to say this, after having said what I said about John Johns at that meeting, from that meeting forward he assumed the leadership. His position was unequivocal, unambiguous, and assertive from that point on.

Dr. Tollison: From the meeting at the Poinsett Club?

Mr. Estridge: No, at the meeting in my law office where the court reporter was present and where he said “If you’re going to fire at the king you better damn well kill it.”

Dr. Tollison: Oh, right. When you said “We need your support. Can we get this on record.”

Mr. Estridge: Right. From that day on he took leadership and his leadership was firm, it was unequivocal. He did participate in the compromise process because he felt that the compromise was better than a legal challenge. But his leadership was still firm and he did a very good job. The leadership of Minor Mickel was extraordinary from that point forward. If either of those two had wavered the least bit I don’t think it would have happened. I think it would have fallen apart. Many nights I woke up in the middle of the night thinking about what would happen if it fell apart.

Dr. Tollison: I’m sure.

Mr. Estridge: I still can lose sleep thinking about what Furman might be today if we had lost, if we hadn’t killed the king and if the South Carolina Baptists had elected the next round – just one more round of trustees – they could have gotten into a majority position. David Shi wouldn’t be president. I sure wouldn’t be a trustee. You might not be here.

Dr. Tollison: (laughs) Right.

Mr. Estridge: We might have been Bob Jones II – no disrespect to Bob Jones.

[PART SIX 1:12:46]

Dr. Tollison: Did you ever have conversations with Minor Mickel about why she was so supportive? I mean she had observed the increasing fundamentalism of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and the Southern for decades since the ‘70s.

Mr. Estridge: Oh yes. Not only that, but she had been presiding over meetings of the trustees in which these adverse trustees, I'll call them, participated. She had observed, for instance, a new trustee come into his first meeting and express the fact that he was so impressed by the beauty of the campus – it was the first time he had ever set foot on it. He had been elected as a trustee and he had never set foot on the campus. He was a minister of music at a church somewhere in the northern part of the state. She observed that for instance. So she knew what was coming.

Dr. Tollison: Wow, that's a great story. (laughs) My goodness. I'll have to let that sink in for a little while. Tell me about how Alester Furman handled all this.

Mr. Estridge: When I was the president of the alumni association and we passed a resolution to seek to have the charter amended by the State Baptist Convention to allow us to elect five trustees, Alester was the chairman of the board of trustees. I knew him, not really well, but I had lunch with him and showed him that resolution. He was very eager to get it going. Alester had been a supporter of change for a long, long time. He had been the strongest antagonist among trustees for some sort of change. He had been open and vocal about that. So he was somewhat associated with change within the board of trustees and in the mind of John Johns as I was among the alumni association. So we got together, we presented this proposition to John Johns who had suggested that he and I should go down and visit the executive director of the State Baptist Convention and that perhaps we could convince him to support the idea. Again, the idea was just five of the twenty-five. And so Alester and I spent a day, went to Columbia and had a meeting with this gentleman. He was very, very gracious to us, listened to our proposition and then immediately said "I respect your opinion but I will not support it. We own the university. We control the university. We always have and we always will. Now is there anything else I can do for you?" So Alester and I were very disappointed in that result. But it was very obvious that without the support of the insiders, the executives who were paid to coordinate the Baptist denomination, we'd never get such a resolution passed on the floor of a meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. That was not going to work. But Alester and I became very good friends and we talked about it a lot and we became associated with that concept. We were sort of the rebels. So that, a number of years later, when David Ellison and Neil Rabon formed this secret committee they knew the logical person to put on that secret committee was me. And then Alester – actually I think Alester – no, he was a member of the executive committee when we first started talking to the executive committee. He and Red Hughes [R.E. Hughes], who was also a member of the executive committee, were the two immediate strongest supporters of the idea of a change in the charter. And they took responsibility for convincing a number of the other eighteen trustees immediately to vote.

Dr. Tollison: Solid support.

Mr. Estridge: So he played a very active role.

Dr. Tollison: Could you tell me a little bit more about Tommy Thompson's role in all this?

Mr. Estridge: Tommy's law firm had been...

Dr. Tollison: This was Love Thornton?

Mr. Estridge: Love Thornton Arnold & Thompson. They were general counsel to the university at the time when all of this happened. Tommy attended trustee meetings in that role. Very shortly after our committee met and introduced its idea to John Johns, he said "Let's bring Tommy into this." So we did. Tommy, at first, was skeptical that it could be done. He was then convinced that it could be done and provided a lot of the leadership officially. For instance, it was he who provided the actual resolution to the chair and explained it to the rest of the board during that meeting. But he was very supportive. He was a wonderful liaison to Dr. Johns and was a good liaison to a number of the trustees. A number of the trustees who didn't know me and didn't know Lindsay Smith and weren't sure whether we could be trusted – perhaps had heard that I was something of a rebel – definitely had confidence in Tommy Thompson. And so when he told them it was the right thing to do and that he believed it would survive a legal test, it gave them the confidence they needed.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, gave it credibility.

Mr. Estridge: Because he was such a wonderful, wonderful person. I don't know of anybody that did not like Tommy Thompson. And he was a good lawyer.

Dr. Tollison: Does the transcript from that meeting that the court reporter... Is that available?

Mr. Estridge: I'll bet Neil Rabon probably still has it. I never got it but I bet you Neil has it.

Dr. Tollison: That needs to be in the Furman archives.

Mr. Estridge: It does.

Dr. Tollison: Yeah.

Mr. Estridge: Actually I have a whole box of material that I'm awfully afraid got lost between my previous law firm and this one. And I tried to find it about a year ago. I mean, I know exactly what's in it and I can see it but I can't find the box.

Dr. Tollison: Don't know where it is.

Mr. Estridge: I still hope that it's out there somewhere. (laughs)

Dr. Tollison: I hope so too. (laughs)

Mr. Estridge: Because it should be in the library.

Dr. Tollison: Well, please let us know if you find it.

Mr. Estridge: It was right down to the handwritten amendment because I had to do it. We found ourselves faced with kind of a deadline in that – well, Minor wanted to see it. Minor wanted to see it and a couple other people wanted to see exactly what it would look like in connection with the meeting they were getting ready to have. I was in Charlotte meeting with a client. I had a break so I sat down and wrote it out, faxed it to my secretary, she typed it and gave it to Minor. So I still have, somewhere, those handwritten notes of the actual amendment.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, well, please let us know if you find them because that would be fantastic to have.

Mr. Estridge: Yeah, I'll keep looking because I was a history major. I appreciate the importance of these things. I'm just not as good of a record keeper.

Dr. Tollison: Oh well these things tend to happen.

1:20:19

Dr. Tollison: Let's jump forward and touch very briefly on your experience as a trustee. David Shi asked you to serve as a trustee?

Mr. Estridge: Yes he asked me to serve and I knew many of the trustees at the time fortunately. In spite of the fact that they knew me they voted me in. But yes David, I became a trustee after he was selected. No, that's wrong now that I think about it. He was dean.

Dr. Tollison: So John Johns was still president at that time?

Mr. Estridge: The year that I was nominated a trustee he was dean because I remember meeting him for the first time in a meeting in which he was meeting with some trustees. So I think I was selected right before he became president.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, so selected in '94?

Mr. Estridge: No that's wrong. No that was something else. I went on the advisory committee when he was dean and I met him in that capacity as an alumni advisor. So I became a trustee after he became president, that's right.

Dr. Tollison: Okay. So we still think '95.

Mr. Estridge: I still think trustee was probably about '97.

Dr. Tollison: '97. Okay.

Mr. Estridge: I should know better but...

Dr. Tollison: And '94ish, '93-'94ish for the advisory council

Mr. Estridge: Right. His last year as dean.

Dr. Tollison: Okay, '94.

Mr. Estridge: Right.

Dr. Tollison: And you were telling me before we turned the tapes on that you'd served on student services, academic affairs, grounds and buildings.

Mr. Estridge: Student services was my first choice because Betty Alverson was still the coordinator of that committee. Academic affairs. And for a number of years those were my two primary committees. I was asked to go on the executive committee and I've been on it for quite some time.

Dr. Tollison: How many people are on the executive committee?

Mr. Estridge: I think it's eight.

Dr. Tollison: And is this executive committee elected from among the trustees?

Mr. Estridge: It's actually appointed by the chair and it does what executive committees generally do – meets between meetings of the trustees and has the authority to act on behalf of the trustees when it has to.

Dr. Tollison: You also have served on the budget committee.

Mr. Estridge: Yes, I'm on the budget committee now and on the grounds and buildings committee.

Dr. Tollison: What about the trusteeship-slash?

Mr. Estridge: It was the nominating committee when I first went on and we changed our name to the trusteeship committee. It develops a slate of nominees and that's a very long and careful deliberative process because we take the selection of trustees very seriously. It also considers recommendations for honorary degrees. Those come from the faculty and they come through this trusteeship committee and then we recommend them to the board as a whole.

Dr. Tollison: Okay. So the impetus for all honorary degrees...

Mr. Estridge: Starts with the faculty.

Dr. Tollison: ...comes from out of the faculty meetings.

Mr. Estridge: That's right.

Dr. Tollison: That's interesting. Okay. Tell me about some of the issues that have come up on the various committees – student services – let's start with student services.

Mr. Estridge: The student services committee had dealt with all issues quite a number of times. With dietary problems, eating disorders, we've heard a lot about them. We've talked to counselors. We like to think we've given some guidance to Harry Shucker and his staff in dealing with those issues. We dealt with the student – we dealt with the concerns about North Village.

Dr. Tollison: What were the concerns with North Village?

Mr. Estridge: It's ironic when you look back on it, but our concerns within the committee and at the board level were simply this: Number one, the only way for North Village to work was to make it mandatory, that is make it mandatory for upper class men and women to live on campus. So we had a concern that if we made it mandatory they might not come. It might affect admissions because the upper class had grown so accustomed to living in apartments off campus – which they were free to do to pursue their own lifestyles – that the rising juniors would protest against having to live on campus and that that would find its way back – well first it would affect retention. The students would leave and it would find its way back into the admissions process in that prospective freshmen wouldn't come or wouldn't apply. We had that concern and that fear. So we spent a long time talking to students about that, pretty much satisfied ourselves that that was not going to happen and, of course, as it turned out it was wonderful it didn't happen.

Dr. Tollison: Those apartments are so much nicer than anything out the back gate.

Mr. Estridge: Of course! That was the secret. I mean if you build it right they will come. It was an ideal environment.

Dr. Tollison: I'd live there voluntarily and I didn't even have to.

Mr. Estridge: And we even had... We dealt one year with complaints from the students that the new North Village apartments did not have dishwashers and garbage disposals – luxuries to which they had become accustomed in their apartment dwelling. So we sort of treated that with a grain of salt.

Dr. Tollison: What about buildings and grounds?

Mr. Estridge: Buildings and grounds, I've only been on that for a year and a half.

Dr. Tollison: You've been active.

Mr. Estridge: Yeah, we... For instance, right now we are in the process of approving the design

phase for the Plyler Science Center expansion and renovation – of selecting the architects, of setting the goals, you know, how much money do we think we can raise and spend on this facility, and of approving the preliminary design. It may be challenging.

Dr. Tollison: Now Furman has strayed from Perry Dean [Perry Dean Rogers & Partners], the architects out of Boston, for quite some time now. Is that correct?

Mr. Estridge: Yes. We use more of an RFP, or request for proposal, that we can look at and consider a number of architects including local architects. Or, in this case, to take a look at architectural firms who have designed science facilities. Who have experience in designing this particular kind of facility. We did the same thing with the library.

Dr. Tollison: Specialization.

Mr. Estridge: Exactly. So we've gotten away from the original team. Their basic concepts are still in place.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, certainly.

Mr. Estridge: The architectural style has to be compatible with what's already there.

Dr. Tollison: The rest of the campus.

Mr. Estridge: Absolutely.

Dr. Tollison: And it is. What about budget?

Mr. Estridge: Budget is a fascinating process. The budget committee has a hands-on role in looking five years out and determining whether anything needs to be changed. You know, the revenue side or the expense side are tweaked in order to make sure we can continue to meet budget. We spend a lot of time deciding what the tuition and fees will be for the next academic year. And a lot of time deciding what to recommend in terms of increases in faculty salaries, increases in administrative salaries. In determining how to handle ongoing maintenance, the trustees discovered a number of years ago – not discovered – but came to grips with the fact that Furman had millions of dollars in overdue maintenance staring it in the face and set about to create a program to deal with that. So the budget committee has to deal with that component every year as well. And then we deal with how to finance the next round of improvements, such as the Plyler Center, and other physical improvements that we need in the future as to how we go about setting up how to deal with those.

Dr. Tollison: So the idea is that the official name of the building will change from Plyler Hall to Plyler Science Center, Center of the Sciences?

Mr. Estridge: Well, I'm not quite sure. I don't know that that's been determined. We certainly hope that there will be a number of names associated with it. Plyler, I think, will continue to be the primary name, but as a part of the fund raising strategy there will be a number of naming opportunities for various facilities within the facility.

[PART SEVEN 1:29:10]

1:29:14

Dr. Tollison: Speaking of naming opportunities, tell me how you got involved with the North Village Clubhouse.

Mr. Estridge: Oh, that's an interesting story. One of my dear friends and clients is Sarah Belk Gambrell who is one of the six children of William Henry Belk who founded the Belk organization.

Dr. Tollison: Belk Simpson.

Mr. Estridge: Belk Simpson is the local is the local subsidiary, or was the local subsidiary, of the Belk organization. In other cities it's Belk Hudson, Belk Galavan, etcetera. It's now pretty much just Belk. Anyway, Sarah Belk Gambrell was the only daughter, she had five brothers.

Dr. Tollison: Let me turn this tape over.

Mr. Estridge: Uh oh, we're way past our time.

Dr. Tollison: Do you have about two more minutes?

Mr. Estridge: Yes, let's do that. She was a dear friend, a dear client. Her husband, who is now deceased, was a Furman graduate. She had a very close affinity with Furman. She became a trustee a number of years ago. One of her committee assignments was the grounds and building committee when North Village was being built. One of the facilities was a commons building. She took an interest in that building because she thought it was too small and it needed to kind of be redesigned. The development folks noticed that she had an interest in that building. They were very good at noticing when trustees had an interest in a building and they – some of her changes were adopted in the design – and this was quite unbeknownst to me – they asked her whether she would be interested in making the naming gift to that building. The naming gift is generally the largest gift and so carries with it the right to name the building. So the building should have been – and she was quite willing to that, she wanted to do that – so it should have been the Gambrell Commons. There's already a Gambrell...

Dr. Tollison: Hall.

Mr. Estridge: Hall, that's right, which was actually named for her sister-in-law. And there's a Gambrell Scholarship that she had funded. She told the university that she would make the naming gift but that it should be named Estridge Commons in honor of my former wife Diane and me, we were Furman students. It was a total surprise to me. I learned about it after it was a done deal but was obviously very grateful.

Dr. Tollison: Of course. That's a very nice honor, very generous of her to do that.

Mr. Estridge: It was.

Dr. Tollison: Alright, well we can wrap it up now. Anything else that you'd like to add?

Mr. Estridge: Well, I'd much rather do this all day than to go talk about leasing.

Dr. Tollison: (laughs)