

DAVID WILKES: So my name is Dr. David Wilkes. I'm the past Dean of the Medical School at the University of Virginia. And I'm delighted to be here today to interview Dr. Ed Wood for this very important moment.

And so we're going to start off with a couple of questions for Dr. Wood. And really looking forward to hearing your answers. So just to begin, could you tell me why you decided to apply to medical school and pursue a career in medicine?

EDWARD WOOD: Well, Dean Wilkes my decision to apply and seek a career in medicine arose early in my life, in my childhood. My interest in pre-medical science courses, while I was a Dartmouth undergraduate school led me to want to seek admission to my state university. Well, in those days, seeking admission to the state university for colored applicants was not too profitable.

But my brother insisted that, since we had paid taxes in the state of Virginia for over 90 years, I should apply and let them refuse me, if so was desired. And so I then applied to the University of Virginia for medical school. And sure enough, I was asked to come for an interview.

That was the biggest surprise of all. So in my senior year at Dartmouth, they asked me to come to Charlottesville for an interview, which I set up for the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, as I would be traveling to Virginia at that time. Now, I got a chance to come to Charlottesville.

And I was interviewed by Dr. Parsons, Dr. Kenneth Crispell, Dr. Birdsong and Dr. Klingman. Those names, I remember. Can you believe it?

DAVID WILKES: Wow. That's amazing.

EDWARD WOOD: And they were so hospitable and warm to me. I said, what am I doing? I'm so pleased that I've been selected to have an interview. And after the interview, my mother and father were in the car outside.

And they said, how did things go? I said, I think it was pretty good. So I'll wait and see what the results are. And after I got back to Dartmouth, on the Monday after Thanksgiving, now-- four days later-- I got a letter of acceptance from Dr. Lippard's office. Do you remember that name?

DAVID WILKES: I remember. I know the name. Yes. Yes, I do.

EDWARD WOOD: The name, Dr. Lippard is the one whose office sent me a notice of admission. And I was so pleased, I didn't know what to do. Now then, here I am set up to go to University of Virginia Medical School. But what am I going to do for my food in this southern, segregated, Jim Crow, southern university and town of Charlottesville?

So away I went to do a little investigation. Across the street from the medical school was a university cafeteria. I don't think it's there anymore.

DAVID WILKES: No. No, it's not.

EDWARD WOOD: And next door to it was the Virginian Restaurant, which may be still there. So I sought my way to the front door, and saw the managers of those two institutions. And they assured me that I could get my food and meals at those places, as well as the hospital cafeteria. So I now found that I had some place I could buy my food in this Jim Crow town.

DAVID WILKES: Wow.

EDWARD WOOD: Well anyhow, you don't remember those days. Because you were at Villanova and Temple, then.

[LAUGHTER]

DAVID WILKES: And you're right-- exactly right.

EDWARD WOOD: Am I right? So that was not part of your background. Well anyhow, I was lucky enough to be able to obtain a place where I could get my meals. And there I was, set up to go to Charlottesville. So there we are.

DAVID WILKES: You mentioned, in one of my questions, your experiences as a medical student at UVA. And you've already alluded to a couple of those things-- finding a place to eat, and things of that sort. But are there any other stories about your experiences as a medical student at UVA that you would like to share? One example could be describing your relationships with some of your fellow students, the faculty, or others at that time. Or maybe it's just describing what your most significant challenges were as a medical student at that point in time.

EDWARD WOOD: Well then, don't let me make you think that everything was so easy and pleasing as I came to the university. Sounds like it was a nice avenue. But there are so many things that I was not able to perform. I was not able to play golf, except on Mondays when the golf course was closed and open to people of color.

DAVID WILKES: Wow.

EDWARD WOOD: I was not able to ride on the bus except in the back. And incidentally, there are other things which were not as pleasant, as you would think. But I was able to overlook these things and hope that all will go well-- as it did with me in my tenure there.

DAVID WILKES: Yeah. That's amazing. I can't imagine having to endure all of that, and to be successful as a medical student. That's quite remarkable.

EDWARD WOOD: When I got to obstetrics and gynecology, the medical student was required to sit with the lady in labor while she was in labor, until her child was born. And I was required to sit with only black ladies, which to me was no distress. But things did change later on, I understand. And that rule was passed up. You may not know about that.

DAVID WILKES: No, actually, I do know about the segregated aspects of the Medical Center. Yeah. That's not one of the better parts of history, per se.

EDWARD WOOD: And of course, there were other things that I was not able to perform while I was in Charlottesville. But I overlook these things as insignificant parts of my career. And I did not object to that too much. Riding on the back of the bus, going to the movie through the alleyway to buy a ticket, as well as not being able to participate in the sporting activities of the town, except on certain days, which were reserved for color.

DAVID WILKES: Wow. And one other question. In 1955, I'm sure you recall an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in which you were featured. And it was authored by Sarah Patton--

EDWARD Sarah Patton Boyle. I know the name.

WOOD:

DAVID WILKES: That's exactly right. Yes. I'm sorry. Say that again?

EDWARD Her husband was a professor at the university.

WOOD:

DAVID WILKES: Right. And she wrote that article, entitled "Southerners Will Like Integration." And I read that article.

But are there memories about this that you would like to share? It was a very provocative piece, I'm sure, at that time. But what are your memories about that?

EDWARD Now, Mrs. Boyle was a very, very forward-looking lady. She was related to General George Patton. You may not

WOOD: know that. But she was related to Lieutenant General Patton.

DAVID WILKES: Patton-- World War II General Patton?

EDWARD World War II General Patton.

WOOD:

DAVID WILKES: Oh, my. No, I didn't know that.

EDWARD And I'd been invited to her house, on a couple of occasions, to dinner. And it was very hospitable-- accepting her

WOOD: invitation to do this. And the article that she did write-- the title was, "Southerners Will Like Integration."

It was printed in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the magazine of which I think is not in existence anymore. At least, I haven't seen it. And I still have a copy of it in my home.

But Mrs. Boyle was very nice. And she sought avenues that should be broken, and was a woman who wanted to break down the laws of segregation. And as such, she was instrumental in having me to her home several times.

DAVID WILKES: So did that publication impact your life at UVA, per se?

EDWARD It was received really, very well at UVA. At least as far as I know, I never got any repercussions from the

WOOD: demonstrations that were given over what was printed on that article. So I thought it was very instrumental in my acceptance there.

DAVID WILKES: Oh, wow. That's pretty amazing. Certainly provocative at the time-- and it's good to know that it had a positive influence. That's quite amazing.

So tell me. You've had a long medical career. Can you describe to me your medical career after you left Charlottesville?

EDWARD Well, after I left Charlottesville, the next thing I had to do was to seek a place where I did my internship. And I

WOOD: was lucky enough to apply to the internship at the Bronx municipal hospital-- the Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx, New York, at the Albert Einstein Medical Center. I received my invitation to accept a rotating internship there.

And it was very rewarding. That was one year, of course-- rotating internship. But then after that, I was instructed to go and join a plan called the Berry Plan-- B-E-R-R-Y.

DAVID WILKES: It's the military.

EDWARD WOOD: The Berry Plan was for military people who would be exempt from being drafted while they were in their training.

DAVID WILKES: Yes, I know the plan.

EDWARD WOOD: Oh, you heard about that?

DAVID WILKES: Yes. I went through medical school on an Air Force scholarship. The Berry Plan had just sundowned a few years prior to that.

EDWARD WOOD: And they only require that you spend two years active duty after you finish your training, which I did. So I joined the Berry Plan, and was inducted into the Navy. My first year in the Navy was spent at Portsmouth, New Hampshire submarine base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Kittery, Maine.

Kittery, Maine is right there, too. So after that, I requested that I be transferred closer to my wife, at that time. I'd gotten married.

My wife was teaching in New York. So they let me be transferred to Floyd Bennett Naval Air Station in Brooklyn. That was Naval Air Station at the end of Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn.

And I spent my next two years there. And luckily, I met the professor who was in charge of the Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn. And he said, and if you spend one more year in the Navy, I'll get you a residency at Kings County Hospital at Downstate University.

DAVID WILKES: Oh, wow.

EDWARD WOOD: So I was lucky enough to obtain that. And away I went to Brooklyn for the next two years of active duty, and one more year waiting for my training. Now then, Floyd Bennett Naval Air Station was a very nice tour of duty, but a very active place for aviators. And I did most of the aviators' examinations, and spent a very profitable time there.

DAVID WILKES: And then, that was your time after that. But you were trained in a medical specialty. And that was ophthalmology. Is that correct?

EDWARD WOOD: And I got a residency, trained and in ophthalmology at Downstate University in Brooklyn, at Kings County Hospital. So that's where I did my residency for three years. And here I am, ready now to go into practice.

And I've got the nerve enough to go into practice and stick my office in a building where there were 10 well-oriented, well-seasoned ophthalmologists. And everybody said, you're the biggest fool to do this. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I took all of their emergencies.

And I was available for everything that came my way. And I lived only five minutes from the office building. Not only that, I was in the building where the president of the American Academy of Ophthalmology had his office.

DAVID WILKES: Oh, my.

EDWARD WOOD: That was Wendell Hughes-- Dr. Wendell Hughes. So there I go. And I started my avenue for my practice in ophthalmology. And I did so, and remained in that building for 60 years.

DAVID WILKES: My word.

EDWARD WOOD: And I got to be an old man doing that. And then, the next 10 years, I had a job at Jamaica Hospital as their ophthalmologist in the outpatient clinic. So I got a lot of chance to get some experience with some very, very hospitable people.

DAVID WILKES: So a long career, highly productive career. And are there any moments in your career, or accomplishments that make you particularly proud?

EDWARD WOOD: Well, there are two things I can remember that I think of. I was able to do my training-- and of course, while in ophthalmology, by a man who was the father of phacoemulsification, it was called-- Dr. Charles Kelman. Dr. Charlie Kelman is the man who devised the procedure whereby the cataract in the eye is removed by an ultrasound through a small opening in the eye, which emulsified the lens, and evacuated the eye from its contents of lens material. So after I took his course, Dr. Kelman, having his office also in my building that I was working in, my hospital that I was working, the Doctors Hospital in Freeport-- Dr. Kelman sat with me on six cases that I was performing on patients who had cataracts.

And he tapped me on the shoulder and said, Ed, you know how to do this as well as anybody should. That was a very rewarding moment in my life. But one thing I remember also, that was very important, was the chance that I had to operate on a lady who was the oldest woman in the United States.

DAVID WILKES: Oh, my.

EDWARD WOOD: She was 116 years old.

DAVID WILKES: Wow.

EDWARD WOOD: And she had only one eye, the other eye being kicked out by a cow when she was milking it as a young woman, and then the good eye developing cataract. And I performed the procedure on her that Dr. Kelman had taught me how to do. And the next day, as she was in bed, when I would do my post-operative management of my patient, she looked at me. And she said, bend over here, won't you? She said, let me kiss you. She said, you restored my vision.

DAVID WILKES: Oh, my.

EDWARD WOOD: That's one thing that stuck with me for all these years. I'll never forget it.

DAVID WILKES: Yeah. It's the impact of medicine providing that level of service. It's an amazing feeling. I can relate to that.

So as you look back on your career, you've faced many challenges. But could you identify perhaps the most significant challenge that you had during your career?

EDWARD WOOD: Oh, wow. Trying to think. So many things.

DAVID WILKES: There were many. Yeah.

EDWARD So many things happened to me. I daren't think of what I should tell you.

WOOD:

DAVID WILKES: And that's OK. There are many, many challenges that you've already listed. So I would imagine it would be difficult to say the one most significant challenge.

EDWARD Well, one of the most challenging things was learning the procedure that was the most sought-after procedure for the ophthalmologists in practice. That is, the management of patients with this procedure called phacoemulsification-- emulsifying the lens that Doctor Kelman taught me to do. That was the most impressive thing I did. And as a result, I was given a lot of attention, being able to perform that procedure, as a lot of students of Dr. Kelman's were not able to manage.

DAVID WILKES: Wow. That's amazing. That is actually quite impressive.

So if you were to look back over your career, and think about what advice might you like to share with medical students today, or residents, fellows, or other young medical professionals-- if you could give someone some sage advice, what look might that be?

EDWARD I would say to anybody in the medical field, if you're interested in becoming an eye surgeon, please investigate the possibility of going into ophthalmology. Ophthalmology is the one field in the surgical realm of medicine in which 100% of the people who do it are satisfied with that work. Nobody did I ever meet in ophthalmology wanted to go to another field, whereas doctors-- here and there, you hear different stories, that I wish I'd sought another field. 100% of ophthalmologists are satisfied with the procedures that they do in their ophthalmology history.

DAVID WILKES: That's amazing. Yeah. I think back when I talked to prior medical students who have ended up in careers in ophthalmology, everyone has been thrilled that that was their career path.

And so what you're stating really resonates with me. That is quite true. And finally, we've talked about a number of things. But is there anything else you'd like to share that we did not get a chance to talk about today?

EDWARD Well, I say to anybody who's interested in medicine, do seek a chance to be accepted somewhere in medical school, regardless of where you want to go. All medical schools practically teach pretty much the same thing. And you would not be left behind by going to anybody's university to be taught the medical sciences. So don't feel like you'll be left out by going to certain universities with the bigger names than others, because they all pretty much give you the same background of training.

DAVID WILKES: Before we close it, Dr. wood, I'd like to say thank you for taking the time and doing this today, and for opening the doors that I've had a chance to walk through. So you're truly a pioneer. And I'd like to thank you for that.

EDWARD And I remember something you told me. You said, you know, you paved the way for me.

WOOD:

DAVID WILKES: That's right.

EDWARD WOOD: And I'll never forget your telling me that when we had dinner in Charlottesville that one time. And Dr. Tina was with you.

DAVID WILKES: That's right. And that is true. You did pave the way for me. And I will not forget that. Thank you.

EDWARD WOOD: Thank you for your attention. And you've been so well-thought of in my mind through the years. And how wonderful it is to have you serve as the Dean of the Medical School.

DAVID WILKES: Well, thank you.

EDWARD WOOD: Well, who am I? Well, I'm Edward T. Wood, a little country boy born in Lexington, Virginia, 1932, over the mountain into Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, in the town of Lexington, 60 miles from Charlottesville. And I'm the last child of six children born of Clarence and Nanny Wood.

And my maternal grandfather was Harry Lee Walker, an offspring of Robert E. Lee's family, "Dark Horse" Harry Lee, who conjugated, copulated, and fornicated with his slave mother, Bessie Walker. And out of this union came my grandfather, Harry Lee Walker. The Lee part of his name be given to denote his famous connection with the Robert E. Lee family.

Now then, such a person as my grandfather, Harry Lee Walker, was given some privileges, and assigned to the colored residents of Lexington. He purchased a house in Lexington called Blandome. Blandome was a house which was the home of John Randolph and John Randolph Tucker, who were former professors at Washington and Lee University, and now in the Congress of the United States.

These things may not be too much interest to you. But my grandfather had certain privileges allowed to him because of his connection with the Lee family. He bought a building on the center of Lexington Main Street called the Walker-Wilson building. And it bears his name, until today, as the Walker building, as well as the Jacob Ruff House across the street, which was a building which was occupied by a gentlemen of notoriety in Lexington named Jacob Ruff.

Well, enough of Lexington. But my grandfather also had purchased a 40-acre farm. And he prepared all the meat for VMI-- Virginia Military Institute-- for over 40 years.

And I remember him doing this as a child. So Lexington was very instrumental in directing me to perform my duties, and to be selected to go to a certain university-- to Dartmouth, of which I, after graduating, sought admission to the University of Virginia. And so that's where I started in life. And I am very grateful for my background.

When I came along as a kid going getting ready to go to school, state of Virginia will not allow students of color to go to school until they were seven years old. But my father and mother, who were very instrumental in teaching me all the things that I should know as a child-- they closed the gap that I was bored of in my early years of childhood education by teaching me at home. And then, along came a chance to go to high school.

And when I was ready to go to high school, the state of Virginia further consolidated the schools, which added another one year to the Black schools. And my family then decided to send me to Manassas Regional High School for my first year in high school, and in order to avoid another year. After that, of course, I then spent the next three years in Richmond at Armstrong High School, living in Trailerville. After the second World War was over, my brother, who was going to Virginia Union University now under the GI Bill of Rights and lived in a trailer-- and I lived in the trailer with him and his wife for three years, and got my education there before I went to Dartmouth.

In high school, I had a very good average. I made all As in high school. And my brother said, you should apply to the Ivy League schools. I soon-- I applied to Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth. I was accepted to Harvard and Dartmouth.

And Dartmouth offered me a full tuition free. \$5,280 a year, it cost to go to Dartmouth then. Four years of that, and they offered me also a job in the dining room for two hours a day in which I worked with Nelson Rockefeller's son for my meals. And they gave me an interest-free loan for my room.

So now I had everything set up to go to college. And I was able to do that. And I was lucky enough to go to Dartmouth.

And after that, I sought admission to the University of Virginia, which I loved. The experience at Virginia was something new to me. But I lived through it, and it was great.

Also aware of the fact that when I was a little kid shining shoes, during the second World War at Washington and Lee University, W&L in Lexington was taken over by the government as a Special Services school. And the Special Services school was for officers only. And I was a little kid shining shoes around there.

And one of the interesting members of the army was a man who was a known movie star, named Melvyn Douglas. The name Melvyn Douglas was a man who wrote the story *How Green Was My Valley*. He starred in the movie "How Green Was My Valley."

And he played in the Broadway play, *How Green Was My Valley*. He got me a chance to star with him at a presentation of the play *How Green Was My Valley*. And I sat on his lap.

And he said, "Eddie, all you have to do is look me in the eye and say, Father, why was corn green?" And he would explain to me why corn was green. And I thought that was the most amazing thing that ever happened to me as a child-- 10 years old.

This was about in 19-- oh, well, at the end-- not at the end of the second World War. It was during the war. Oh, yes. And my parents were not allowed to go to see me star with Melvyn Douglas in this Broadway production.