

Harris interview

01:01:30;27 01:05:39;10 mmi002-1 Harris

Sen. Byrd was a student of mine. This was quite a long time ago... in the late 40s and 50s and he was taking American history. He seemed to enjoy history very much and also American politics. Of course I tell him that everything he knows is due to the instruction he received at, what was then, Morris Harvey College, it is now the University of Charleston and he was always an excellent student. He was always prepared, he wrote very well, he was an excellent speaker and this was interesting because I had over a hundred students in that class. This was right after the war and a lot of returning veterans and they were tremendously able students, many of them eventually became legislators, attorney generals, academicians, you know, but he was particularly outstanding right from the very beginning. I remember that he was prepared for class, he was always prepared for class. Whenever he was to give a report or answer questions when we had discussion, I would never call on him, except for near the very end of the class, otherwise that was the end of my instruction of the class at the moment because he was so full of information and so interested in everything and this was true of many of the students at that particular time, but he was outstanding. That was interesting also. I often thought of how he was able to have as much energy as he had because he was campaigning for office part of the time, he was serving in the WV legislature, he was taking a full load of classes or many classes on campus, he was running a business, he lived in Sophia and had to commute, which took a lot of time. He really had very little time to call his own. No, oh no, he seemed to be extremely conscious of the importance of education and felt that going to school was very necessary for his career plans. And one thing that always stood out in my mind about him was the fact that he had such intellectual curiosity. He was so interested in everything. There are a lot of people who become interested in things and even try to support them, either through money or a little bit of time, but with him, if he was interested in something it was an actual commitment. It meant that he got involved, he participated, he did everything that he possibly could to engender his contribution to whatever it was. You can see this today in his service in the United States Senate. He gets involved, so this was something that was pretty outstanding. Not only that, but when he tried to do anything, he tried to do it as thoroughly and perfectly as he could. I remember once he was involved in a campaign and he was supposed to write a letter for, I don't know it's been a long time, some newspaper or some organizations on his position on a particular issue. And the letter was late. But when it came, it was so thoroughly researched and so comprehensive that it being late didn't really matter very much. And that seemed to always typify what he did. He truly tried to do the best that he could, which was really pretty outstanding.

01:05:43;14 01:06:57;28 mmi002-1 Harris
(Could you tell he was going to achieve a lot?)

Oh, I think so. You could tell that he was very ambitious and he planned a career in politics. And the very fact that he served in government while he was getting an education. But more than that, he attended what was then Morris Harvey College, now the University of Charleston, but he also attended Marshall. He also made contacts with many organizations in the state because he realized the importance of contacts and getting known, which is very necessary for a political career. So he knew from the very beginning what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it. And what impressed me was that when he gets to the United States congress and especially the Senate of the United States he was wise enough to know that by becoming very knowledgeable about the rules and the regulations and the operation of the Senate he would be able to have some influence and this was very perceptive.

01:07:04;23 01:07:52;05 mmi002-1 Harris

I think also it demonstrates his loyalty. He has always been very loyal to his friends. He has always had, I think, a warm place in his heart for our school and Marshall University and the people whom he had been associated with and I think also the very fact that he has written two volumes of the history of the Senate and actually an almanac on the operation of the Senate shows his loyalty to that institution and is interested in preserving the prerogatives of that governmental body. So he has been very loyal to his friends and commitment to West Virginia.

01:08:14;00 01:09:30;26 mmi002-1 Harris
(Reputation of being feared)

Well one of the important elements of the operation of the Senate is seniority, and he has been there a long time and because you possess the seniority therefore you have more power and I think anyone who has power is feared to some extent so I think that is what it is. I don't think people are afraid of him. I remember one of the things we did a long time ago when it was then Morris Harvey was to put on a movie. We did Little Abner and Daisy Mae and we still have it in our archives and Bob Byrd with his fiddle participated actively in that whole production, so I think when he was a student, not only did he participate in student things, but he was well liked by the

students and I still think that is true today with his associates and his colleagues. I think if you are occupying a position of power there is some fear that is associated with it, but actually I think more nearly he is respected and admired rather than feared.

01:09:52;14 01:10:12;13 mmi002-1 Harris
(Why was Byrd respected by his colleagues?)

I think because he does his homework. He says what he thinks. He is very conscientious and he is very committed to the institution that he is associated with and because of this I think he is respected .

01:10:15;27 01:12:05;20 mmi002-1 Harris
(How will history record Sen. Byrd?)

I think that his contributions to politics have been great. Although he hasn't always been on the side of the angels. When he was younger he supported the Ku Klux Klan and that was very unfortunate, however he did recognize his mistake and I think he matured because of the experiences he had and also because of the learning that he has been opened to and I think this has helped him a lot to broaden his outlook and because a lot more understanding of events and people and developments and things, so that he isn't absolutely considered perfect in every way, but certainly as a human being he has grown and become a most able representative and admired and loved by many people. I remember once that while he was a student at Morris Harvey he became very ill and became hospitalized. I believe it was bleeding ulcer or some such thing and when he left the hospital so many people had sent him flowers and wishing him to improve and recover and he took all of those plants and flowers and distributed them , brought them to people who he thought would enjoy them, so he was very considerate of others and I think that was part of it also.

01:12:25;00 01:12:46;15 mmi002-1 Harris

One of the things that I always remember is his activity. He was always involved in things. You know a lot of people make , support or indicate an interest in an idea, but with him it was always a commitment. And I think it made him.....(Train whistle)

01:12:50;04 01:13:47;14 mmi002-1 Harris
(Activity level, again.)

He always seemed to give so much of himself. He never worried particularly about how something affected him or bothered him. He was most interested in getting involved in something that he believed in. And he was a very effective candidate for office. He was very reactive in campaigning and very happy to meet people and the very fact that he could play the violin so effectively helped also. Many of the West Virginians loved his performances. He actually made a record of his fiddle playing which is quite excellent, so being such a versatile person and having so many skills and abilities and interests made him unique and I think made him a leader and many people recognize that he has been a leader for our community.

01:14:15;29 01:14:39;11 mmi002-1 Harris

The most important thing was that he was an interested student and that he was curious about everything and worked so hard. He really worked very hard and you can imagine that with all the obligations he had, that he carried through with everything. (And he didn't ask for any special allowances for that ?) No, absolutely not . Nor would he have been given any.