

Interview with Benjamin A. Raubvogel, '53, 7 April 1987

Allen: Which class, Ben?

Ben: Class of '51 but I graduated in '53.

Allen: Now one of your, what was your major when you were here?

Ben: Journalism.

Allen: And one of your major claims to fame was the Society for the Advancement of the Shmoo. Would you tell us a little bit about the Shmoo Society. How did it get started? Etc.

Ben: The whole thing started with Wendall Kellogg and we were introducing football to the university, and he was trying to think of some kind of a, we had no mascot or anything at that time, and we were just trying to think of something in which to give it a little zip. And at that time Al Capp, who was a New Haven boy, had quite a few things going on in colleges connected with his comic strip "Lil Abner", so Wendall suggested why don't we contact him and maybe we can work something out. Some kind of a celebration.

So we went down to see him, and he said, "well, there is really nothing". He, Sadie Hawkins Day, that was it, Sadie Hawkins Day. He said "that has pretty well shot its wad, but I got a new character that maybe we could do something with - the Shmoo". It was a white, furry, little thing. He said, "Gee, that might not be bad". And so we started talking with him and working something up, and we came back and Wendall went to the Board of Directors, and presented some ideas to them and the thing took off. Capp was presented with the Doctor of Delightful Living. But that us really how the whole thing got going.

And then then we thought that while the Shmoo was a lovable little thing, we started the Shmoo Society, and we had a big costume that we wore at the football games, and we had a parade, and we had a lot of fun, a lot of fun.

Allen: Now the Society was incorporated, and you were the president.

Ben: I was the president, John Cox was the vice President, ah, Jackie Keefe was the Secretary, and we used it for some of the charity affairs that we had around school, and I got from one of the manufacturers that was making toys for Capp, and he had a license, and we had the little white Shmoo button which we gave out, and we printed up some cards.

I thought I had one, I looked for it before I left home, I couldn't find it, but somewhere I have got one. And we spent a couple of years. And then of course eventually it kind of died out.

Allen: Now you started some chapters in other colleges?

Ben: Yeah, well, you know, a lot of, just like with the Sadie Hawkins Day, you know all that stuff was kind of in in the 50s. A lot of the other schools, they thought it was a great idea, too. And we had blown up Shmoos and we had to autograph that, you know.

Allen: Whatever happened to the Society after you left?

Ben: Well, I think eventually it just kind of died. But at the time it was perfect for the school, because we needed something to get the kids together, and to give us a little spirit, and it really served its purpose, that parade, you would be surprised how many people lined the streets downtown. It was really quite a thing.

Allen: Now, as a corporate entity in the State of Connecticut, the Society was never dissolved was it?

Ben: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. I think we were dissolved for the simple reason that after so many years, I think, that if you don't, it is automatically dissolved.

Allen: That is the only thing I can figure out without doing a search. I have not checked the records.

Ben: But basically we did that, you know, as a self protection. Kellogg insisted on it. That way, if anything happens, the school isn't liable and you are not liable and so forth. But it did the job, and we made Newsweek, and we had a lot of publicity.

Allen: You know there has been some attempt to reinvigorate the Shmoo on campus. From time to time there have been attempts to do this. It really hasn't caught on too well, but every now and then you see a bit of it.

Ben: Well, I tell you, we had, Capp, you know during the war had this rep of being "pink". and the Society came under scrutiny by Uncle Sam.

Allen: Oh, really? Tell us about that.

Ben: I found out about that. One of the, of our boys went into Army Intelligence, and he said it was discussed, and the Shmoo was one of the things, you know at that time, every thing was under suspicion. The whole thing was a big gag. He couldn't con-

vince them that there wasn't political undertones to the whole thing.

Allen: That is an interesting sidelight, I didn't know about that.

Ben: Well, it was something, you know, nothing was said, really much said about it, but I could understand in line with what was going on, McCarthy and so forth,

Allen: Well, we had our share of problems with the reds, the leftists and so forth.

Ben: But we never had that much influence.

Allen: Well, in later years we would get a little more of that. Particularly with McCallum and his anti-communist group. He took off on several of our faculty members. And then when the Student League for Human Rights invited controversial people.

Ben: Well, of course, in these days the student associations, the National Student Association, which we belonged to, came under scrutiny. There was a lot of comment. Later on in the 50s there was a great deal.

Allen: And then we find that the CIA was financing a large part of the NSA and -

Well, Let's go back to your days as a student. What are your memories of this period?

Ben: Oh, its a very exciting time. I came to this school not knowing what I was going to do in life. Because when I came to the school, I was an accounting major. Which I really didn't like, but I didn't know what to do, and a friend of the family was an accountant so I said I would be an accountant. But, how did it start? Oh, I know, I became the campus reporter for the POST, because I wanted to make a little money on the side. And that got me involved with Wendall Kellogg. And then we published a summer newspaper, do you have a copy of it?

Allen: No, I don't remember.

Ben: Well, Wendall wanted a newspaper to sort of tie the spring and the fall together over the summer, to keep every one in touch. So he came up with the idea we will have everything on the front page. We had a tremendous sized front page which we folded. And we put one out for quite a few years during the summertime. And Wendall was a promoter, and he had been looking for things to promote the university, to give a spirit to the kids, and I got involved in a lot of the stuff. He was quite a guy. In many ways a very conservative, type of person. He had a

religious background. From here he went to Long Island, Hofstra, and then from Hofstra, he went to the Protestant, the over all group of all the Protestants -

Allen: The National Council of Churches?

Ben: Yeah. In Chicago.

Allen: Is he still alive, do you know?

Ben: No, he passed away quite a few years ago about 25 years ago. He was there because I stopped off and visited him when I got out of the service in '55. He passed away a few years after that. But for a person from the midwest, with his very conservative background, he was really very hep. And he saw right away that Shmoo was a way of getting the school spirit going.

Allen: What do you remember about John Cox?

Ben: John was a hell of a guy. I got involved with John when he was running for President of the Class and I became his campaign manager. From there on in John and I were always working on something. Promoting the school and so forth, he was quite a guy. Again in many ways a very quiet person, conservative type of person, not very outgoing, but he was alright. We used to have a lot of fun. As I said, he had much to do with creating school spirit. You know at that time we had the split campus, most of the kids in the school at that time were day students. We had a very small live in group. And there was no coordination between the day and the campus students, everybody was going their own little way. And a lot of these little things helped to mould the school into a unit. Which is what we wanted to do. Everything was really just starting.

Allen: Makers of tradition? Some of which took and some of which didn't.

Ben: Well, nobody was thinking of thirty years from now. What we were thinking about was then. And I think it did then, for its time - another one of the problems that we had from the point of view of the student was that we had a lot of GIs. I remember in my fraternity, I was the youngest one, the other guys had all been through the wear and come back. These guys had a different outlook. It was not like the 20s or 30s college students. Some of them were more conservative, they had been through the war and they weren't interested in these childish things that college kids do.

Allen: And after graduation, you went into the service?

Ben: What happened was that I was in the National Guard and my outfit got called up and rather than go in with them I went in

the Air Force. And I had about 6 months to go for my degree, I came back in what they called operation Bootstrap, while I was in the Air Force. And when I finished that I went overseas. I went to Korea, ostensibly to go to Panmunjon to be part of the press center there, but typical military fashion, they needed one replacement and they got 5, so I became surplus. I went to K 14, they didn't need another information specialists and saw that I had a business background, why don't you come in and run the NCO club? So I ended up running the NCO Club. For about a year then we went over to Japan. I worked for Stars and Stripes for a while. and then came home about '55.

Allen: And then after that what did you do?

Ben: I was in public relations. I was with Seagrams for a while then I had my own agency for a while and then I had some personal problems, got divorced and my mother got sick, I went down south to be with her. And been there ever since. I did several things. I always was in the liquor business. In the service I had a liquor orientation, and I had been with Seagrams for about 7 years, and even when I was with the agency I had a lot of liquor accounts. So I stayed pretty much in the food and beverage industry.

Allen: Ben, I am going to turn this part off, and then we will talk more.

End of tape.