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University of California
Berkeley, California

EDWIN ELLIS
ATHENIAN SCHOOL DEAN AND ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne Riess
in 2004

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Ed Ellis
photo courtesy of the Athenian School

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INTRODUCTION—Edwin Ellis, by Eleanor Dase

As plans for this oral history project were unfolding, the goal was to focus on the founding of Athenian in Dyke's words. In initial conversations with Dyke, however, it became very clear that Ed Ellis was pivotal in Athenian's success. When he was hired in 1966 as Dean of Students, he became Dyke's right hand that took his beautifully articulated ideas and made them actual in the School's operation for 26 years.

Edwin Ellis grew up in a missionary medical family, living in Iran, Japan and then Berkeley. Educated briefly at the John Dewey School in Berkeley, he unknowingly at the time had Dyke Brown as a classmate. Following secondary school as a boarding student in the Stony Brook School in New York and college at Davidson College in North Carolina, Ed worked at a camp with young children and was then invited to teach at the Chadwick School in Rolling Hills, California. Developed by his uncle, Chadwick recognized Ed's talents as a team coach, athletic director and ultimate boarding school leader. Several years later, in 1963, Dyke Brown visited Chadwick when researching schools and spent considerable time talking with Ed about his vision for a school. Little did Ed know at the time that their paths would cross again three years later.

In 1965, a friend of Ed's was teaching at Athenian. Knowing the challenges that Dyke faced with a new school, the friend recommended that Ed visit Dyke to learn about the Dean of Students position. After spending a Sunday afternoon together on Athenian's campus, their philosophies meshed, and in the summer of 1966, Ed moved his family north to Athenian.

During Ed's 26 years at Athenian, he taught, coached, oversaw transportation and athletics, and assumed the role of Dean of Students. Throughout this time, Ed epitomized the ideals that Dyke envisioned for Athenian. To this day, the first question of alumni returning to campus is, "Where is Ed?"

Interview with Edwin Ellis
Interview date: August 11 2004]
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Reiss: Could you tell me about your family, and when you were born and where?

Ellis: Okay. My mother and father met and graduated from Wooster College in 1910.

Reiss: In Wooster, Massachusetts?

Ellis: No, Ohio. W-O-O-S-T-E-R.

Reiss: Thank you.

Ellis: After he finished medical school at Western Reserve University Medical School, they became missionaries and were sent by the Presbyterian mission to what was then called Urumia, Persia, which is now Rezaieh, Iran. [laughs] But at that time it was Urumia. They went out in 1915 and then I was born in October 8, 1916.

Reiss: And then how long were you out there?

Ellis: Well, it was couple of times. But in 1918 the Kurds came down and took all of the missionaries prisoner, and then the Turks came in and took over, and then around 1918 we were deported to Tabriz, Iran.

Reiss: Do you remember the details of that? You were very young.

Ellis: Oh, I have heard them so many times! [laughs] When the Kurds came in they lined up all of the missionaries, which is a rather interesting story, in, I guess it was our living room. And my mother was standing in front of the lemon tree, with this planted pot, slipped off her wedding ring and engagement ring and stuck them in the dirt behind her so she never lost her rings. Anyway, after a few days, I don't remember how long, but a few days anyway, the Turks came in and took over.

Reiss: So in the telling of this story, is it frightening?

Ellis: It was rather frightening particularly when the Kurds came in, because a lot of Syrians had been massacred and fled during that time. But anyway, we were then deported to Tabriz and we were in Tabriz for a couple of years, and then—

Reiss: Under arrest?

Ellis: Sort of house arrest. I think my Dad still did some doctoring in the mission hospital, but we weren't allowed to go anywhere. Then in 1920 we were allowed to leave and we came back to the United States, but we came around the far way through Japan and stuff, and my brother had been born in June 1918, just before all of this stuff happened, so he was just a really tiny baby. Then as we came home, we stopped off in Matsuyama in Japan where my

1. The ## symbol indicates that a new tape side has begun.

father's sister was a missionary. My sister was born there on December 24, 1920 (on my father's birthday). Then we came to the United States, and my grandmother Lee, my mother's mother, had a house in Berkeley.

Reiss: Lee, that was her last name?

Ellis: Right. I think we later rented a house in Berkeley, but anyway, we lived in Berkeley for most of that year.

Reiss: How did your father support himself then, do you think?

Ellis: Well, we were still being paid by the Presbyterian mission. My father was on furlough.

Reiss: Was Wooster a Presbyterian school?

Ellis: Yes. Yes. Well, the interesting thing about that is, my grandfather Lee was a Presbyterian minister in Spanish Fort, Utah.

Reiss: Oh!

Ellis: So my mother was born there, along with—well, she was the oldest twin. She had a twin brother and there were I think eventually eight children with three sets of twins. One set died and one single died. But she had living, her brother Don, who is her twin brother, and her sister Margaret, who later married Joseph Chadwick and founded Chadwick School, and her two younger twin brothers, one of whom founded the Palo Alto Medical Clinic (Dr. Russell V. Lee), who has a long oral history. [laughs]

Reiss: Yes. [laughs] It's amazing!

Ellis: [laughing] I just finished reading it not long ago. And his twin brother, Paul, later was an admiral in the Navy and a Chief of the Bureau of Ships during World War II. My grandfather Ellis was a Presbyterian minister in Montana, and ended up forming most of the Sunday Schools in the state of Montana back in the late 1800s.

Reiss: Wow.

Ellis: And he did that by riding from town to town on a chain-less bicycle. It's now in Helen, Montana with the Historical Society. There is a whole section about Reverend Ellis.

That's the family background.

Reiss: That is a marvelous background.

So arriving in Berkeley, by that time you were about five.

Ellis: About five or six, I guess. My mother always felt that we should start a school so she enrolled me in John Dewey School, and I was there for most of a year.

Reiss: Did you know anything about what the John Dewey School was?

Ellis: It was a new school at the time, as I am told. It was a small private school, and I don't know how my mother got me in, but anyway, she did. The one thing that I remember was that on one morning I was late going to school and my grandfather Lee had walked me to school. When we got there nobody was there, or very few students were still there- they had had gone, as I now know, to Mount Diablo to see a snowfall. Many years later I found out that Dyke Brown was a student there that same year.

Reiss: [laughs]

Ellis: After that year we then went back to Iran. My dad had a year's furlough, then we went back to Iran. We first went to a town of Zenjahn and then later back to Urumia, Rezaieh.

Reiss: And so while you were there, did you attend American schools?

Ellis: No. My mother taught us using the Calvert system. That was all through grade school and junior high.

Reiss: The Calvert system supplied the curriculum?

Ellis: Right. They supplied the curriculum and textbooks and all that. It was a pretty well known at-home-school system at that time. I think it was 1930—normally missions are supposed to be seven years, but we stayed until 1930 because my dad was trying to rebuild a hospital and schools. Dad was a very, very good doctor, but he was also somewhat of an engineer. So while he was in the mission field, he was always the one that was called on to design and follow through on buildings and that sort of stuff.

In 1931, my mother and father decided maybe I should come home and that I and my younger brother should start school. So I was then enrolled in the Stony Brook School on Long Island.

Reiss: Was that another private school?

Ellis: Yes, private school, very, then and now. Very much Christian background type of school. But it was also fairly close to Rockefeller Center, where my father's sister then lived, and she became my guardian.

Reiss: Because your parents stayed where? Where were they?

Ellis: Well, the first year they came on out to Berkeley, and I was at Stony Brook as a freshman, and then they came back at the end of the year and enrolled my brother there too. So, I don't know how it happened, but we ended up being in the same class.

Reiss: And they went on with their mission?

Ellis: And they went on back to Iran.

Reiss: I see. So, this was the first time that you really had been separated from them.

Ellis: Right, but Stony Brook was very good and I graduated from there in 1935. I also played football and wrestled. My wrestling coach was a man by the name of Tom Brohard, who

had graduated from Stony Brook and then went to Davidson College. He persuaded me to enroll in Davidson rather than Wooster, mainly because Davidson had a wrestling team and Wooster did not. And I mention that because wrestling really became key to me in those early years of my teaching.

Reiss: Was Davidson Presbyterian also?

Ellis: Davidson is a Presbyterian school, yes.

Reiss: Did you have any point where you were rebelling against this Presbyterianism?

Ellis: No, no, no. Actually, a lot of Stony Brook graduates went to Davidson.

Reiss: Where is it?

Ellis: It is in North Carolina. It is one of the top colleges, rated in the top ten colleges in the country academically today.

Reiss: Wow.

Ellis: But my Stony Brook roommate also went to Davidson and another bright classmate of mine from Stony Brook by the name of David Woodward went to Davidson. And David Woodward and I are still close friends. I went to Davidson, and again, I was not the greatest student, but I did well enough to graduate. But I did play football.

Reiss: And were you beginning to develop a sense of what you wanted to do?

Ellis: Well, when I first went, I was pretty sure I wanted to go into medicine. But after I took a chemistry course, as I remember, I decided that that was not for me. And so I gradually shifted into education. But when I graduated from Davidson in 1939, I didn't have a job. Some friends of mine got me a job or a prospect of a job in an auto parts store.

Reiss: In North Carolina?

Ellis: Charlotte, North Carolina. But that particular summer the assistant athletic director at Davidson and also the track coach was made the director of the Charlotte Observer Fresh Air Camp. He had never run a camp before, but he hired a whole bunch of us from Davidson who had all had camping experience. I used to work in camps during the summer. So his whole staff was very experienced and for the first time the Observer Fresh Air Camp was a total success. In fact [laughs], he was offered a job from one of the biggest private camps in the South the next year. I forget the name of the camp.

Reiss: And this was an inner city—

Ellis: Yeah, where we had kids who were almost totally off the street, and it was a great experience because we learned how to handle them. There was only one session where we ever had any real major problems.

Reiss: Was your life pretty much up to that point constrained—not an integrated life, would you say?

- Ellis: Well my schools were all pretty much Christian oriented.
- Reiss: Men's?
- Ellis: They were all men's. Davidson at that time was an all men's school. Stony Brook was an all-boys school. It is now co-educational, as is Davidson.
- Reiss: So I wondered whether dealing with a kind of different population was very interesting to you.
- Ellis: It was interesting. But I always seemed to get along very well with young people. Towards the end of the summer, my aunt wrote me. Well, let me go back one step. During my senior year, I became engaged to a girl from Charlotte, and her brother and I in particular got along very well. I did the camping, and then in late July or early August I got a letter from Margaret Chadwick asking me if I would come out and teach at the Chadwick school. She had just—well, she had this school for a couple of years in San Pedro in her home and then Mr. Vanderlip (who owned all of the Palos Verdes peninsula, and was very much interested in education), became interested in her and offered her land on Palos Verdes peninsula to build the school.
- Reiss: Why had she started a private school?
- Ellis: Oh, her husband had been in the navy and was retired and they were living in San Pedro and she had always been a teacher and had just started it with a few family friends and it gradually grew.
- Reiss: And it was secondary?
- Ellis: That is an important thing in my life. It started with pre-first and went through high school. She asked me to come out, and I said I would, provided I could get married and bring Georgia with me. So on August 31st we got married, jumped in a car that my dad gave me, drove like mad, got to Rolling Hills, California in time for the opening of school.
- Reiss: So what was your job at the school?
- Ellis: Well, actually, it was primarily doing some teaching and starting the physical education program.
- Reiss: Because at this point it was no longer in her home.
- Ellis: No, it was in brand new buildings. The Chadwick's had a beautiful house on the campus. When we first arrived we had a large room [laughs] in one of the buildings that eventually became the senior girls' dormitory, but it was not that then. Then the next year they built a boys' dorm—well, the dormitory that they had that first year was divided in two with girls in one end and boys in the other end. Then the next year they built a boys' dormitory and then Georgia and I ran that dorm for most of that year.
- Reiss: You were there for—

Ellis: That was '39 to '42. That was also the beginning of World War II, and at one point during that time I was the only male faculty member on campus at night. So I became the air-raid warden and had all of my shelters, which were furnace rooms that were reinforced concrete furnace rooms.

Reiss: You expected to be called up soon, didn't you?

Ellis: I was in the draft but it happened, as it will come out later, my draft board was very much in favor of teachers, so I didn't get called. I would have probably joined the navy but I am partially color-blind so I couldn't. So I decided I would fight it out. [laughs] There were good years there at Chadwick and I learned a lot, but after three years I decided I should get a master's degree. So I enrolled in a school in Chicago, and I don't even remember the name of the school, but I had made arrangements so that I would have a part time job and teach wrestling at the YMCA as my part time job.

Reiss: Was Georgia working?

Ellis: Georgia did some work in the office, yes, as a receptionist.

Reiss: Of Chadwick?

Ellis: At Chadwick.

Reiss: Then—

Ellis: Early in the summer of 1942, we had a daughter by then, she went back with Peggy to spend the summer with her mother. And then we had an arrangement with my father who had retired from the mission field and was practicing medicine in a little town of Shreve, Ohio, and had an apartment above his office. So Georgia and Peggy were to live in that apartment, which was right across the street from my dad's home. She ended up also getting a job from Wooster Brass in their office. I don't remember what all she did.

I stayed at Chadwick through their summer school and then went back and was at my father's house at Shreve and my youngest brother was also there. He had graduated from Western Reserve Academy. His old roommate from WRA came by and he said, "You know what you should do? You should go up to Western Reserve. They just lost their wrestling coach and they are really looking for somebody." So I debated, well, that is a big change in plans, but Western Reserve is one of the top private schools in the country—was and is. And so I said, "What the heck, if I could go there and get a job, it might be worth more than an MA." To make a long story short, I went up and applied and I got the job, but the apartment that they had available for the faculty member was on the fourth floor of the freshman dormitory and was not really suitable for a man, wife, and child. So when I got the job Georgia and I talked about it. We decided that she would stay in Shreve for that year and then we would find some place to live, or whatever happened, because we didn't know what was going to happen. As it turned out, my year at Western Reserve was quite successful, both as I was the football line coach and head wrestling coach and I had a pretty good season. But [laughs] at the end of year Dr. Hayden, who was the headmaster, hadn't said anything about the following year. So I wrote back to Stony Brook and got an offer from Stony Brook School to go back there as a teacher and wrestling coach and so forth.

Reiss: Teaching in what?

Ellis: Teaching math. Algebra, primarily, which is what I had done at Western Reserve. That's a funny tale too, because they weren't quite sure how good a teacher I was, but they needed a wrestling coach. So I was given this freshman class to teach Algebra I to, and they were all the top of the class. So we breezed through that freshman year. [laughs]

Reiss: [laughs]

Ellis: Then, just to be sure that I had taught them, because I had almost all A's and B's, in fact I think I had one student who failed or nearly failed, but all the rest were at the top, they decided that this class should take a standardized test [laughs], and it ended up that they were all in the top of that test. So, anyway, that is a little aside.

Reiss: So Stony Brook said yes?

Ellis: Stony Brook said yes, and promised me an apartment in the dormitory for the first year and a house for the second year. So I went to Dr. Hayden, at Western Reserve, and said, "Dr. Hayden, you haven't said anything to me about next year, so I applied to Stony Brook and I have this offer." And he says, "What?"

Reiss: [laughs]

Ellis: And then he made me a very good offer. So anyway—

Reiss: Well you weren't being strategic, but that was strategic.

Ellis: I continued at Western Reserve as a head wrestling coach and assistant football coach and Algebra I teacher, and helper in the dormitory and all of that sort of stuff. Then in the spring of '44, the assistant head called me in and said, "Ed, I am sorry but we are not going to be able to offer you a position for next year, because the Akron Draft Board has said that there is no way that you are not going to get drafted during this coming year. And that startled me. So I started looking around.

Reiss: Akron. The Akron Draft Board?

Ellis: Akron Draft Board. My draft board still was in Torrance, California. So I looked around for something at a number of places but ended up getting a job with the Morris Instrument Company, right there in Hudson, which was a pretty good job. So we bought this hundred year-old house. We rebuilt it. We built it two blocks from Morris Instrument so it was easy walking. Then I started working at Morris. I first started on the punch press and then the general manager came by and he said, "How would you like to push a pencil?" I said, "Well, I am really not mechanically minded, I'd enjoy this." He said, "Well, that is what you are going to do. You are going to be the internal expeditor on this new job that we're just trying to get." which was a machine gun camera that went in all of the fighter planes during World War II.

Reiss: Was that sort of fun to be out of the teaching for awhile?

Ellis: It was interesting. I enjoyed it. But I got so I was working, but I still loved my kids. So after I got myself organized in this internal expeditor job, I was able to set up my hours pretty much as I wanted to do them. I would go in at 7:00 in the morning, work until 2:00, go up to the Academy, and I'd coach football and coach wrestling, and then come back and work until 10:00 at night. So I put all of my time in at work. Anyway, that ended up working out pretty well. In December, I got a letter from my Torrance Draft Board. In June, I had gotten another deferment for 6 months.

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Reiss: So you were saying.

Ellis: In December I got a letter from Torrance Draft Board saying, "You have to report to LA for a physical. And I wrote back and I said, "I would like to have it changed to Cleveland." And that took several weeks. I finally got it changed to Cleveland. I was in terrific physical shape because I had been working out with all of my student wrestlers, but I have always had a very, very dry skin. Scaly.

Reiss: Me too!

Ellis: And then in the Ohio winters, it was really, really bad. So anyway, I went in. I was sure I was gone. I went to the bank and made arrangements for the house and everything else while I was in the service. I went in and this doctor examined me, and fortunately, the Germans had just surrendered. And he looked at my skin and he said, "Oh, that's fungus susceptible, and you are 4-F." I was ineligible and never got in the army! But I also found out that it had been all set up with Morris Instrument Company, because by that time I was almost to the point when I was the planning and scheduling manager for Morris. In fact, they had offered me that job.

Reiss: So they had talked to the draft board probably.

Ellis: I don't know. But anyway, that was what I was told, that had I joined the army, I could have been assigned back to Morris Instrument Company.

Reiss: I see. Yeah. So you didn't stay on much longer because then—

Ellis: Because then the war ended. Morris Instrument Company almost shut down. It had been totally in photographic equipment including that camera, which incidentally I knew every part of by number. [laughs] But John Morris, the head of the company, was also a great inventor, and he had been working all through the war on trying to develop a method of controlling boats with a stick instead of the wheel. In fact, we had an experimental Chris-Craft boat in the plant there in a tank all during the time that I worked there. So I went and asked some of my friends who were boaters, and I said, "How would you feel about a stick instead of a wheel on your boat?" and they unanimously said that they wouldn't want that. So I thought well, there were some people in there reorganizing the whole plant, and they had offered me this job as planning and schedule manager and said, "If you do well here you can go to one of the big Akron tire companies and make a lot of money." Anyway, I still wanted to teach and coach so I said no, and WRA than re-hired me as a full time faculty member.

Reiss: In the meantime, the stick rudder or stick steering, I don't know what happened to that—

Ellis: Oh, I don't know what happened. Morris Instrument was later bought out by Rockwell and it would have been—it could have been a good job, but I got back doing what I really wanted to do. Then my son was born in '44, and I had another daughter born in '46 and another daughter born in '48. So I had three daughters and one son, and Western Reserve Academy was an all-boys' school and I decided that it was time that I got back to a co-educational school, which was what Chadwick was. My aunt wanted me back.

Reiss: You had been in touch about that.

Ellis: Yeah, for the last year we were. I hated in many ways to leave Western Reserve because I really loved it and I still love it, but this was a better situation.

Reiss: What is it about the place that you loved?

Ellis: I liked the people that I worked with. I liked the students. It was still an all-boys' school in '49, and Chadwick was co-educational and it started with pre-first, went through high school. Peggy was in second or third grade by that time. So we decided that that was the best thing to do. We went back to Chadwick. I was then, I forget what the title was the first year, but I was helping with football, which they then had started six-men tackle football. I helped a guy who was the athletic director with that, and actually ended up coaching a baseball team, and I taught, I think two or three sections of Algebra I.

Reiss: How big was Chadwick?

Ellis: It was about two or three hundred students, I think.

Reiss: Successful. Would it be characterized as progressive or—?

Ellis: It was—different. It was one of the few co-educational schools. I think there was one other co-educational school in California.

Reiss: And it was boarding.

Ellis: It was boarding.

Reiss: Did it have any international students?

Ellis: Not many international students, but Melvyn Douglas and Helen Gahagan Douglas were at their prime at that time, and he was always on a set someplace away and she was being her political self. So they enrolled their two kids in Chadwick, and those kids did so well that it became the opening door for the whole Hollywood group.

Reiss: Oh, that is so interesting.

Ellis: And we had Jack Benny's daughter, Joan and George Burns' two children. And you name the Hollywood person and we had them. But the thing was that Chadwick was the type of school that even though you came from a particular family, you were treated just like

everybody else. By the second year back, I was the Dean of Students and the Athletic Director, and I really had a full schedule. I was Head Football Coach and so forth.

Reiss: Tell me, we will just start with Chadwick, and it may change a lot when you get to Athenian, but what is the definition of a Dean of Students?

Ellis: He's basically responsible for all of the students and their care and behavior, and all dorm heads had to report to me. Any major disciplinary things, I had to handle them. And I think in that sense, students trusted me to be fair. I am fairly proud of this. The last three years I was at Chadwick, I had the yearbook dedicated to me twice. Then the last year I was there I had special recognition in the annual, and the year after I left the annual had a special recognition.

Reiss: May I take these copies of the yearbook dedication and we will type them into the transcript.

Ellis: Sure. The reason that I brought them is because you will notice that the thing in most of them is that they respected me and felt that I was a good counselor, as well as a disciplinarian.

Reiss: Did you have much contact with the families of the students?

Ellis: Yes, yes. I can tell you many a tale, which I won't go into. You know the *Mommie Dearest* story of Joan Crawford's daughter? I was very much involved when her mother withdrew her from school— Mrs. Crawford had just enrolled her twins—it was a daughter and son— when she got mad because Mrs. Chadwick told her she couldn't speak to her daughter in the manner that she was speaking to her on the phone. So she pulled them all out. So I know that story really well.

Reiss: Yeah. That must be really hard when then you lose the child completely. Then you can't do anything.

Ellis: Right. But fortunately in that case, she was sent to this Catholic convent school in Pasadena, and the Mother Superior there knew Chadwick pretty well, and she would sneak young Joan Crawford out and let her come back to Chadwick for certain social functions.

Reiss: Oh. Interesting.

Ellis: Yeah. Anyway, that's a whole other story...

In 1950 I became officially the Dean, although I don't think that the title was ever made that way, but basically it was the Dean of Students. I was pretty busy. I had that deanship job, I was also Athletic Director and Head Football Coach.

Reiss: You dropped the Algebra class?

Ellis: No. I taught three sections of Algebra.

Reiss: Oh! Hmm.

Ellis: And I don't remember just how it all came about, but in the next few years I was also in charge of the whole campus, all construction, maintenance.

Reiss: [laughs] You couldn't resist.

Ellis: No, but, you know, I enjoyed doing that so that is the way that it was.

Reiss: And for your wife, was she as swept into all of this?

Ellis: She started working in the business office and really was basically the receptionist. She answered the telephones and did all that. And all four of our children started with pre-first as they became old enough to be in pre-first, and went all thirteen years. Peggy went ten years, because I guess she was a third grader when she started.

My youngest daughter decided that she didn't want to do her senior year at Chadwick. She went to Rolling Hills High School. That was the year I left. For us it was very good because the kids got a great education which I could have never afforded any other way.

Reiss: Sure, yeah.

Ellis: So all went well until—

Reiss: —just a quick question, I don't want this to derail things, but do prep-school teachers get sabbaticals? Do you ever get a hunk of time off, in the middle of that?

Ellis: No, no.

Reiss: But you had your summers off?

Ellis: No, I didn't really have summers off because we had summer school. I also got very much involved in California in the interscholastic athletics. I was made commissioner or president of the prep league, which Chadwick belonged to, and through that became a member of the Southern Section CIF counsel.

Reiss: What does CIF stand for?

Ellis: CIF is the California Interscholastic Federation. That controls all interscholastic athletics in the state of California.

Reiss: Okay, so then—

Ellis: So I happened to get along with the Southern Section Commissioner very well and so there were certain eligibility rules that I was able to maneuver to change. [laughs]

Reiss: Good. [laughs] Good.

Ellis: I was in that until I think 1963, and I decided that I had done it long enough. That was mostly volunteer stuff because I never got paid for it.

When Chadwick was first formed after the house in San Pedro, Mr. Vanderlip had given them fifty acres. Then they formed a shareholding corporation, which was a real mistake, because the Chadwicks basically owned 49% and the Roesslers owned 51% of the shares. The reason that I am mentioning that is because in the early sixties— by that time I was also on the Chadwick Board of Trustees— we decided that we should make it a non-profit corporation because there were some major tax benefits that we could get. Although the state recognized it as a non-profit, L.A. County didn't. So we voted to make it non-profit, and the Roesslers didn't like that, so they called a shareholders meeting and 51% voted to rescind that the trustees' decision. So although the Chadwicks and Roesslers had been very good friends- that created bad feelings, and finally, in order to ease things, the Chadwicks volunteered to resign. The school then hired a new headmaster by the name of Pete Melcher.

Reiss: You were still there.

Ellis: I was still there, I was Dean, and when he came in, because I was member of the Chadwick family, he decided that I shouldn't be the Assistant Head.

He started changing things so that it was not the same school. It was about then, in 1963, when Dyke Brown was thinking about starting The Athenian School. He was touring the country visiting schools and he came by Chadwick. I can remember we sat down my living room and talked for a long time about what I thought should be the pattern of the school.

Reiss: And these issues of not-for-profit.

Ellis: Yes, and how the school should be run and a lot of things like that. At that point, I had been at Chadwick for fourteen years and I didn't have any intention of leaving. In fact, the Chadwicks had been training me, originally before this big break-up, to become their successor.

Reiss: Had you heard of Dyke Brown before this?

Ellis: No, I hadn't. I really hadn't.

Reiss: No reason to.

Ellis: No, both of us had really hit it off really well that day. Then a friend of mine named John Simon visited Athenian in 1965 because he had been interested. He had gotten involved in some of the discussions that we had had. He was just a young teacher who was at Chadwick for only a year that I remember, but he became a pretty good friend of mine. So he called me, and he said, "Hey you know, you should go talk to Dyke Brown. I think that he would really like you to come up and be the Dean of Students." So in February of 1966, I thought, what the heck. I took a Sunday off and drove up. It happened to be a day or so after Dyke just had fired the man he had hired to run the school for that first year! [laughs]

Reiss: Who was that?

Ellis: I forget what his name was, but the school will have it. I don't remember. Anyway, the place was in total uproar with people that were on Dyke's side and people who were totally opposed to him. Anyway, I went to Athenian and sat in Dyke's living room, and we were

having all of these discussions and people would come banging on the door. Dyke would say, "I'm sorry, I can't talk to you right now, I have this man here that I really need to talk to today."

Reiss: What kind of people would be banging on the door?

Ellis: Faculty.

Reiss: Yeah, yeah.

Ellis: And people who were upset and felt that they had to talk to him. We spent most of the afternoon talking about it and really sort of gelled things that we thought should be done.

Reiss: Well, he had to find out whether your thinking meshed with his very complicated idea of a school.

Ellis: Right.

Reiss: I would be very interested in how that conversation went.

Ellis: [sighs] I don't know that I can remember it all, but I know that we talked about discipline. It was in the mid-sixties, when drug problems were all going on. Berkeley was in an uproar. How I felt about kids who might be using drugs, and basically, a lot of things about how I felt. Whoever had my type of position had to have trust and belief in kids, and that was basically what went on. I am sure that we talked about some of his ideas of community service and student involvement and how faculty should be close to students, and all of that sort of stuff.

Reiss: Well now, in fact, had you had to handle a drug problem?

Ellis: Actually, we had very little at Chadwick. I remember one boy that I had to expel because he had gotten into it and he happened to be on the swim team and a great diver, but I had very little problem there. What happened was that Dyke was also looking for someone to be Head of the School at the same time. Dyke knew a man named Cullen from New York and Dyke really wanted him to be the new Head.

Reiss: That is what the title is, Head of School?

Ellis: Yeah, well.

Reiss: And Dyke wasn't the Head of School?

Ellis: No, Dyke sort of sat in the background and ran things that first year, because he wanted things going his way. But as far as I know, that first year he wasn't very involved in the day by day operation, and I know in the subsequent years, we were very good friends and we talked a lot, but he did not do much in the day by day operation.

Reiss: So you are saying that there in February of 1966, he was trying to fill two jobs?

Ellis: Right.

Reiss: Dean of Students and—

Ellis: The Head of the School. Right.

Reiss: And what was the job of the guy that he just had to get rid of?

Ellis: Basically the Head of School. I don't know whether he had that title, but he was the person who was supposed to be the one who was going to start this new school off and things were not going the way that Dyke wanted them to go.

Reiss: Had he had a Dean of Students also?

Ellis: I don't think so. No. That first year was pretty small. There were only freshman and sophomores. There was one dorm, Reinhardt Dormitory for boys, and all of the rest of the students that first year were living in what would have been the garage part of faculty homes in sort of a dormitory room. I don't remember how many students were in the room.

Reiss: So it sounds like this was quite a day in February.

Ellis: It was. It was a very interesting day. Anyway, Dyke made me an offer.

Reiss: Did he talk to you about athletics also?

Ellis: Yes.

Reiss: What was your role going to be?

Ellis: Well, he wanted me to start the athletic program. We decided that we weren't going to do football, Munzer Afifi was head of the math department, and he loved soccer, so he was willing to start a soccer team. We didn't have much of any facilities. Where the parking lot is now located was a small athletic field with a minimal amount of grass.

Reiss: And what about the Wilderness Experience?

Ellis: That comes up a little bit later. Let me just tell you why I ended up coming, because when I left I enjoyed my talk with Dyke.

Reiss: And he had made you an offer.

Ellis: And he had made me an offer, but I really wasn't ready. I had been seventeen years at Chadwick and I wasn't sure that I wanted to leave. When I got back to school, and I don't think that Melcher even knew that I had gone to visit Dyke, Melcher called me in and he said, "I am going to change your job." Instead of being Dean of Students and Athletic Director, although I would still be involved in athletics, he wanted to make me the college counselor, which I really had no desire to be.

Reiss: That would be the—

Ellis: To me it was a big demotion. I went to him and I said, "I don't think that I want to do that." He said, "Let me have a week." Then on Friday he called me in and told me he hadn't

changed his mind. I said, "Well, okay, then you have my resignation right now." And I went to the phone and called Dyke and I said, "I just resigned from Chadwick, do you still want me?" And he said, "Oh yeah, yes, yes!" So—

Reiss: And your kids of course, were launched into college by now.

Ellis: Yes, well, my youngest daughter was a senior that year but she was at Rolling Hills High because she couldn't stand going to school under Melcher, which is the way that a lot of the kids felt at that time. Strange thing was that he had someone there that was evaluating the school and Dyke had also hired him to come up and evaluate Athenian after that first year.

Reiss: You mean Melcher had somebody there that was—

Ellis: Yeah, I don't remember the name, but he was some guy who was supposed to be an expert.

Reiss: A credentials person, right?

Ellis: Yeah. I was in my office a day or two later, and I heard this man in the next office talking to Dyke on the phone and telling Dyke that he shouldn't hire me. I was so mad that I took my escape door and went out. The next day was the day that I had an interview with this gentlemen, and so I started off by saying, "You need to know that I am very upset because I overheard your discussion with Dyke Brown." In the meantime I had called Dyke and told him, "If you don't want me after talking to this man, that's fine. I will find something else." And Dyke said, "No way." Anyway, this guy, I never saw anyone backtrack so fast. He had never even talked to me, and here he was putting me down.

Reiss: That's awful.

Ellis: I finished up the year at Chadwick. Mr. Melcher, I felt, was ruining the school both financially and in other ways.

##

Reiss: I'm looking at the history of the Athenian School, and included in the appendixes is the name William Schwarz. It says faculty member, but he's the person who was running the school—

Ellis: I think he was the person— I never met him, so I don't know, but I know that he was supposed to be the person pretty much running the school at least that was the impression that I got. I'm pretty sure he was the one that Dyke decided was not doing what he wanted to be done.

Reiss: His background was from Phillip Exeter so maybe Dyke knew him from there?

Ellis: Probably did. I think Dyke had met or knew most of the faculty that were hired those first couple of years.

Reiss: So where we left things at the end of the first tape, you got into your car and you headed north.

Ellis: Oh, we were heading north. So we arrived at Athenian on July 5th and moved into House 5, which had the floor plan that I wanted and the location that I wanted. If I were going to be in charge of certain things I wanted to be near the entrance of the school so I would know—could keep an eye on comings and goings. My philosophy, I guess, was basically to try to prevent things from happening that would be bad for the students and for myself. I became known as hardly ever going to bed because I would get up and wander the campus.

Reiss: Now, this is—we are now in the academic year 1966.

Ellis: Yes.

Reiss: What was your impression of that first little handful of students? Where they a little handful of bad actors who had been sent to prep school?

Ellis: I didn't think so. I liked them. I got along very well with them. A lot of them were worried and scared after that first year because they thought I was going to be the bad guy coming in to set up rules and regulations, which they hadn't had to have the first year. So I came in sort of under that cloud. I came from Chadwick in which, as you can see by those articles, most of the students really admired and liked me. So that first year was a rather difficult one because I was trying to set up a program whereby the school would be run properly from a disciplinary standpoint. And from trying to make sure that I got to know the students and that they got to know me, not as somebody with a big club, but as somebody who is really interested in their welfare.

During the summer Mr. Cullen and I met in southern California-- that was when he was still being considered as the Head of School. We went out and had dinner someplace and had very, very good conversation and really liked each other. I was really looking forward to working with him, but he then got appointed as, I think, the vice-head of the University of the State of New York. So he got a big time job. His son was a freshman in 1966 at Athenian, so I got to know young Mark, and he and I are still very good friends. But when I first arrived at Athenian, Dyke made Bob Usellis the Head of School—Bob had been a faculty member that first year. So Bob Usellis was the Head for the 1966-67 and 1967-68 school years. Bob and I got along reasonably well. We were not always on the same page.

Reiss: You would need to be on the same page, after all, this was a very small school.

Ellis: I know. But I was so involved with getting this deanship going and with starting some kind of an athletic program. We didn't have the facilities other than the tennis courts, on which we also had basketball hoops.

Reiss: You had hardly enough students to have a game of football.

Ellis: I know. We had enough for soccer. In fact, Munzer did a real good job with soccer.

Reiss: And were they boy-girl?

Ellis: No, they were all boys' soccer teams. Girls were in running teams, and I forget what all, but that was before Title IX (Gender Equity in Sports) came in. So I finally got some kind of playing field and during the summer I tried to develop a soccer schedule. I don't remember how many games that we had that first year, but there weren't very many because soccer

was not very popular at that time. The second year, I think we ended up with games with Robert Louis Stevenson and another school down in Monterey, and a couple of schools around Danville. So we had a five or six-game schedule. And then soccer was becoming more popular, so we finally joined a league which was called the Bay Counties League and that gave us a little more competition.

Is the concentration on this because the parents really expect that the school would be able to have an athletic program? Reiss:

Ellis: Yes. Some kind of athletic program. They decided not to go with football because that really requires much larger squads and is quite expensive. I mentioned before that I was the head football coach at Chadwick, but Chadwick played six men tackle football, which was great for a small school because we could have a varsity squad. I enjoyed it because I converted my eleven-man football plays into six-man football plays. [laughs] But we decided that we wouldn't do football at Athenian.

Reiss: But there are some issues in the Kurt Hahn philosophy of athletics. In fact, from what I read, it sounds like athletics have a very much stressed, so I wonder if you and Dyke had talked about it.

Ellis: Well, we were small; we did talk about it. He left it pretty much up to me to design and schedule and do all that sort of stuff.

Reiss: Among the graduation requirements are what is called five blocks of PE. Now what does that mean? One block of work, I mean, along with graduating academically, you have to—

Ellis: Well, they have to have some kind of real physical education, and then those first years it ranged from playing soccer, basketball, and tennis. Tennis was very popular and we had an amazingly very good tennis team those first two to three years. We also tried to set up obstacle courses so that the kids would run and get some real exercise, and they had to do that course. We had obstacles courses that ran from the Main Hall—Dyke Brown Hall—all the way up the hill with things they had to go over or crawl under or do stuff. So the first year or two it was trying to build some kind of a program that would keep them physically fit, and doing some of the other things.

Reiss: Did some of the students resist that?

Ellis: Students wanted to have athletics, but they wanted to have it as a fun thing and not for earning letters or awards. We didn't have any awards—and I told them even when we were pretty well organized, “When you are ready for us to start awarding letters, come to me and we'll do it.” And they didn't do that until the late eighties. They didn't want cheerleaders. They wanted this to be different than any other school. Anyway, there were a lot of things those first couple of years that we were trying to organize. As I said, the first year was nothing but freshman and sophomores. The second year, the first year I was here, we had junior class with no senior class. The third year we had the senior class, and there were all sorts of things that still had to be done. I was trying to follow somewhat of a pattern that I had established at the Chadwick School, and so—let me go back a little bit.

We had that little soccer field that I spent a lot of time on repairing holes and getting it done, and we started building a new full-sized soccer field where the present soccer field is.

We had no gymnasium except for tennis courts and a basketball court on the tennis court. We did start a basketball team and had a few games. Most of them had to be played away. In 1967, Lawton Shurtleff, who was chairman of the Board of Trustees Buildings and Grounds Committee, came to me and he said, “Ed, I am going to take you into San Francisco and show you some plans that we are developing for the gymnasium.” So we went in and looked at those plans. Well at that time, Dyke’s idea of Athenian School was to be four campuses.

Reiss: This was the Oxford model.

Ellis: Yes. After we got the four campuses, the goal was to have about 500 students with about 120 on each campus. When Lawton showed me these plans I said, “Lawton, we will outgrow that in two years. That won’t do.” He said, “Well, what do you think that we should do?” So I drew up a floor plan for what I thought should be the gymnasium and the locker rooms, and the swimming pool, and exercise rooms. So that became the plan. The architects took it over and developed the total plan. Then the school was able to get some money at the end of ’67, and decided that they couldn’t build the whole thing, but they would build the gymnasium part of it. So the present gym is actually by dimension-wise in drawing the gym that I had planned out, and it turned out to be one of the best gyms in the whole area as far as size.

Reiss: You worked with the Ratcliff architect firm.

Ellis: Yes. But then Lawton knew a contractor he wanted to use. Ratcliff drew the basic plans and this contractor, who built big business buildings in Oakland, agreed to build the gymnasium, and he took over the project and did the working drawings. Ratcliff didn’t do the working drawings for this particular gym.

Reiss: I see. I see.

Ellis: I had to get down and beg for the wooden floor because at first they were just going to put in a concrete floor. So we got the floor put it, but we didn’t have any locker rooms. Well, that wasn’t particularly important because we were a boarding student body and kids could dress in the dormitories, which were close to the gym. So we didn’t—the locker rooms were put off. The first game that we played in the gym was against the Menlo School. Menlo School was planning an athletic facility fairly comparable to what our total plan would have been. When they came down and saw the gym, they were so impressed with it. And we built it for I think about \$150,000, and they couldn’t believe that, because their whole complex was going to cost about five million.

Reiss: [gasps]

Ellis: So the next day my phone was ringing off the hook, “How did you do this?”

Reiss: I am kind of curious on something like this, who—did you have a daily conference with Bob Usellis and with Dyke, or weekly?

Ellis: I had frequent conversations with Bob Usellis, but it was pretty much left to me to plan that part of it, because I think that they felt that I knew what I was doing. I would draw it up and then I would get approval from Bob or the faculty.

- Reiss: And where did Dyke fit into all of that?
- Ellis: Dyke sort of [pause] I don't remember too well. He sort of sat back there and watched over everything. He would have conversations with us, mostly with I guess Bob Usellis, and not so much with me, although we were very friendly.
- Reiss: So in the sense of reporting, did you report to Bob Usellis?
- Ellis: Yes. Yes, yes. Then in 1968, Dyke— Bob Usellis resigned after his second year and Dyke hired John Streetz as the Head. John Streetz had come in and he had been in a well-known school in Philadelphia. And John and I got along beautifully, became very good friends, and my wife became a very good friend of his wife and so forth.
- Reiss: You know, this is interesting, and probably perfectly predictable, but it didn't get off to a smooth beginning it seems like.
- Ellis: No. No, it didn't. Because Dyke had all of these ideas of what he wanted done and Bob Usellis was a real neat guy.
- Reiss: And he had been a faculty member?
- Ellis: He had been a faculty member.
- Reiss: Now, when you are able to offer a job like that and you know the comings and goings of the Heads of School, was the school operating on a sufficient budget that? In fact, how was it for you? Was this a rise in income for you?
- Ellis: Actually comparatively, I came to Athenian on a \$10,000 a year salary, plus a house. Which was a little higher than what I had been making at Chadwick. So financially I had a house and could take all the meals I wanted. Private school teachers in those early years when I started teaching—when I went to Chadwick in 1939, I had a salary of \$100 a month for ten months. The first summer I was at Chadwick I ran the Palos Verdes swimming pool during the summer in order to have a summer income.
- Reiss: Athenian was relatively well-heeled?
- Ellis: It seemed to me that it was. I really wasn't too privy to all of the financial things about it.
- Reiss: Yes. On the financial issues, who would you go and talk to?
- Ellis: Oh, if I needed something badly, I probably would have gone to the Head or to Dyke, or to the Business Manager.
- Reiss: But did you interact with the Board other than Lawton Shurtleff?
- Ellis: I got to know a lot of the board members really well and got along pretty well. Of course Gordon Sproul was the Chairman of the Board the first year or two. Then Fuller Brawner became the president of the Board of Trustees, or whatever it was called. He and I had many good conversations.

Reiss: So you got a new kitchen staff.

Ellis: Well, John Muller came to Athenian. John was eighty-five years old and he had a ruptured appendix.

Reiss: My goodness!

Ellis: So that was a rather stressful time then because I had to hire another cook, and I found a pretty good man. He came in with his wife and his daughter and started really taking over the kitchen. The hard part came a couple of months later when John had recovered. I knew that these two men would not be able to work together. I had to tell John after all those years of knowing him as a friend and everything, that I couldn't re-hire him.

Reiss: Well that is interesting that the kitchen is under the purview of the Dean of Students.

Ellis: In those days, a lot of things came under. I actually ended up really being responsible for the campus, the maintenance, any new buildings, everything like that that involved students came under my duties as well as the athletics and everything else. Actually, for a year or two I also did all of the admissions.

Reiss: Oh, so you were reviewing the applications?

Ellis: I was doing the interviewing, reviewing the applications, taking them to an admissions committee. The man before me was Malcolm Bird, and he resigned and went back east, so it sort of dropped into my lap. I was fairly busy with a lot of things. [laughs]

Reiss: In those years, how high did you set the bar for admissions? You needed students.

Ellis: We needed students. We had to decide whether we felt that the student could academically make it here. We had to make sure that they were, as far as we could tell, reasonably good persons.

Reiss: So there was an interview?

Ellis: There was an interview by me and usually by one or two other people, but basically, that is what it was. In fact, I remember my charts in my office— we had so many. [laughs] This would go until middle of August or later until we got the last 120th student or whatever it was then. We had to be full. We got at that time a lot of students from the LA area. In fact, we had twenty or thirty students from the Los Angeles area and it became a problem of getting them to the airport and stuff on vacation. So I finally worked out an arrangement with the travel agent, and I would book like twenty PSA reservations. When John Streetz was here, we finally ended up getting a school bus, and we would then have to bus them to the airport and bus them back from there.

Reiss: But this was before the days of having a lot of international students then.

Ellis: Yeah, yeah. The international students started coming in the early seventies, but those first years—there were things like graduation for example. I knew what we did at Chadwick and I decided that I would try to do somewhat the same thing at Athenian. So the first graduating class the girls all had to wear, as I remember, white dresses, and the boys had to

wear coats and ties. And we processed up from where the oak tree is. But I had decided other things. At Chadwick we had always had a dance the night before commencement. So we now had the gymnasium. This was in 1968. So I decided to have a dance the night before commencement.

Reiss: You were creating tradition.

Ellis: Yeah. And I hired a band. And nobody came.

Reiss: [laughs] Nobody came to your dance?

Ellis: Nobody came to the dance. It was eight o'clock, nine o'clock, then at ten o'clock, I sent the orchestra home. Then I remember Phil Parkman who was a senior, came to me the next morning, and he said, "Mr. Ellis, this wasn't against you, we just wanted to be together." So they had met in dormitory rooms and reminisced about their three or four years that they had been in the school.

Reiss: Oh. Yeah.

Ellis: So that went out then.

Reiss: So you didn't create that tradition?

Ellis: That tradition didn't come. The reception after the commencement, John Muller, the chef, did his strawberry shortcake stuff, which they still do; it has become a tradition. So that reception after commencement is still somewhat of a tradition. The following year they didn't want to dress all up, so the processional actually started from down here (House 9) and went up over the hill, dressed as scroungely as they could dress.

##

Reiss: I am going to introduce this last section by just asking you to give me some details about how you carried out what seemed to be essential philosophies in the Kurt Hahn school model. Creating rules and laws, self-discipline, inner life, dealing with boredom. These all seem to be issues that the Dean of the Students would have some impact on, and I really wonder how you did that job, that discipline job.

Ellis: Well, I did try to set up certain rules and regulations and have certain consequences if people didn't live up to them. I tried to avoid as much as possible any expulsions. There were some times when we decided on suspensions and kids were sent home for a week or two, if they violated the rules. But I tried basically to have them know that I wanted them to live within what we felt were important rules of behavior. We weren't going to be able to monitor them twenty-four hours a day, but I wanted faculty to be aware and be around. My theory was that if you had adults present, there was less chance of things happening. Or if someone was getting in trouble, I wanted someone to be able to sit down with them and talk to them, rather than going through a big, heavy, disciplinary thing.

Reiss: So there were house parents then?

Ellis: There were house parents, and there were good house parents and house parents that were not so good. I think there were times when there were some, at least I heard, and I never actually talked to them, I did talk to whoever was head of the school, but certain people that I felt were maybe using drugs with students, but we never really caught them doing that. There were times, as far as I was concerned, faculty who had any questions or problems could come to me at anytime in the evening when they were on duty, and I would come up and help them or do whatever. So they all knew that. Students also knew that I might be up and around wandering through a dormitory at any hour of the night, and I have just felt that if I was present that there was less chance of them doing it. I know since then that there were things that went on that I never caught.

Reiss: How many dormitories were there?

Ellis: Well, the first year that I was here there was Reinhardt, which was Boys 1. We built Boys 2 and Boys 3 and then built Girls 1 and Girls 2. So the first year that I was here there were five dormitories. Then, I think it was the next year, we built Boys Dorm 4 and Girls Dorm 3. So we ended up with seven.

Reiss: What do you think was the optimal size for a dormitory?

Ellis: Well I think the size was about right.

Reiss: About how much?

Ellis: I think that there were twenty in each dorm. The buildings were fine in themselves, but I didn't like the type of furniture that was in the dorms, and the first chance I got to really remodel was Boys Dorm 2. We re-did that dorm and put in all built-in furniture from desks to beds so that they couldn't be moved around or stacked, or hung from the ceiling, or doing all sorts of things that were happening in those early years.

Reiss: [laughs] When you place students in the dorms, did you also try to create a little cohesive group? Did you look at their profiles and did you know what you were doing?

Ellis: Right. We did, or, we tried to let students pick roommates and that sort of things. They got on pretty well.

Reiss: So there you were, occasionally wandering the halls, and let's see, we are pushing on into the seventies—

Ellis: Okay, John Streetz was here for two years and then David Murray, who was the business manager, became the Head, and he was the Head until Steve Davenport came in. That was an exciting search, when Steve was selected as Head.

Reiss: What I was sort of leading to was, what would be the worst thing you could find if you were prowling around the campus at night.

Ellis: Oh, find a boy in a girl's room, or a girl in a boy's room, or somebody smoking, using LSD, or smoking pot.

Reiss: And you were in such a remote area; did they have access to the outer world there?

Ellis: You know, anybody could get drugs some place in those days.

Reiss: Were they allowed off campus?

Ellis: They were allowed off campus. We would let them go to Danville occasionally, but they had to go in pairs. I was always worried about them getting picked up hitchhiking and getting in trouble from that. We also had some problems with outsiders coming on campus and bringing drugs. That was sometimes very hard to monitor, but I was able to do a reasonably good job—I got threatened one time! I called the police on some guys and ran them off, and they started threatening me. Fortunately, some of the students came to my defense.

Reiss: Yeah. Wow.

Ellis: I can remember that. Those were times which were really hard. The first year I was at Athenian there was no smoking; we eventually allowed students to smoke in certain areas. I knew they were smoking. They used to go up behind where the gym is now, and there was a canyon back there. That was noted for a place for them to go smoking [laughs] and they would hear me coming and sneak out, but that canyon no longer exists. Well, when Blackhawk went in—there are so many things that keep popping here... But anyway, let me go back to the discipline sort of stuff. I would much rather restrict somebody to campus and keep an eye on them than send them off campus. Even when they were caught using a drug or something, I would rather rehabilitate them than to necessarily expel them. That was my basic philosophy, was getting them to trust me enough so that they wouldn't do some of those things, but I knew that they went on, and alumni have told me about it now. But I still think that we did reasonably well.

Athenian was trying to be so different than everybody else. We were first of all, a boarding school, and there were practically no boarding schools. There were boarding schools, but no co-educational boarding schools. We were trying to do things that were different like the wilderness experience and with community service and the urban center that we tried in San Francisco. The thing that really pleases me today is how successful we became in trying to do some of these things and how so many other schools have followed us. Schools that used to sort of look down their noses at us, and we were always fighting that, because they considered us sort of too liberal or whatever.

Reiss: That is so interesting. It's important to look back—

Ellis: But that is one of the things that came in. We were fortunate in many ways—that we had a pretty outstanding faculty most of the time, from even the first year or two. People like Munzer Affifi who was head of the math department and soccer coach.

Reiss: And those were the ones who were the house parents also.

Ellis: Munzer was never a house parent, but they lived on campus, so their houses were open — particularly their classroom— so students could come in there and work in the evening and get help. One of the strong points about Athenian's boarding program was that students could always go to a faculty member in the evening if they needed help for studying.

Reiss: Because the houses are built with an adjoining classrooms?

Ellis: Well the classrooms still are—classrooms are attached to each house.

Reiss: One of the other radical ideas fairly early was to have an integrated population. In your early days of doing the admissions, were you also looking for African American and Asian students?

Oh yeah, yeah. We were not necessarily looking for them but if we found a student... One that comes to my mind is Deary Duffy who went on to work with Charles Schwab. At that time I met his parents, and I don't remember just where, but we discussed his coming to Athenian. There was scholarship money available. His parents and I really got to like each other. Deary wasn't that enthusiastic about coming, but he came, and he ended up being an outstanding student and athlete. He later came back and was a member of the faculty and even on the board of trustees at one time. Ellis:

Reiss: That's great.

Ellis: But anyway, even before I came there were a lot of Asian and African American students.

Reiss: Even before you came?

Ellis: Yeah, even before.

Reiss: That first year?

Ellis: Yes. There's Phil Parkman that I told you came and apologized about the dance. He was an African American, and probably one of the leaders of that first senior class. He has since disappeared, and is one of the few alumni that I have never been able to locate. But we always had a number of African American students. My first two years at Athenian I had an advisee who was a black girl and her name is Gaynell Obre. She had a difficult time, and she and I became very close. In fact, one time she decided she was going to leave, and went down what was then Blackhawk Road. I found out that she was gone and I jumped in the car and I found her and I brought her back to campus. Over the years she and I—even today, are very close friends.

Steven Davenport applied as Head after David Murray decided to resign. Steve Davenport and another gentlemen were the two finalists for the Head's position. They each came back for a second interview, and I discussed with them their feelings about students who used drugs and what penalties should be—and Steve was very much in line with what I thought. The other gentleman said that if someone got caught with drugs he or she would be expelled immediately. Originally, on the first interview, I had sort of been in his corner rather than Steve Davenport's corner, so I went to Dyke and Fuller and told them, "I think Steve Davenport is the one that we should have. I am not sure if I can work with this other gentlemen." I can remember the morning that they decided on Steve. Fuller Brawner went past my office on the upper floor of what is now Dyke Brown Hall, and stuck his head in my office door and he said, "I have got to make a phone call, but I think that you are going to be pleased." [laughs] I will never forget that because, anyway, it turned out that Steve and I really worked very well together. He turned over responsibilities to me that he knew I could handle, and we thought very much alike on many things.

Reiss: So he was there during all the rest of your years.

- Ellis: Yeah. Well, there was Sam Elliot. He was the Head for the last three years I was at Athenian.
- Reiss: Sam Elliot.
- Ellis: He was the head just before Eleanor Dase. Steve and I worked very closely together and were very supportive of each other, and so that was a very good partnership.
- Reiss: Okay, so let's talk about the Outward Bound experience. I think Kurt Hahn himself was the kind of inventor of that actually.
- Ellis: Right. Well, we started that I think in about 1968 or 1970. We did it the first year by hiring Northwest Outward Bound to come in and run the whole program. The program was only in the summer that year.
- Reiss: So they are like a franchise?
- Ellis: I don't know. There were a number of Outward Bound franchises, but they were in the Northwest. They worked out of Oregon, I think.
- Reiss: You thought this was a good idea?
- Ellis: Well, I wasn't completely sure. But I was very willing to give it a good honest try.
- Reiss: The model is that all incoming students do it, or what?
- Ellis: Well it became, I think, that we decided that all graduating students should go through it. I think that is what we decided from the very beginning.
- So that first summer the Outward Bound staff ran the program. The re-supply was done from Athenian. I did the re-supplies, and I did them very purposefully because I didn't want to go out on the course but I wanted to be at the re-supply point so I could talk to students and know.
- Reiss: I think you better describe how the program worked for Athenian?
- Ellis: Well, they would always go into a rather remote area. For Athenian's program, they went into Yosemite and went up into the high mountains above Yosemite. But they came down at the end of two weeks, I think it was maybe that long, to some point where they could get their re-supplies. This first one was at Bridgeport. I was able to talk to these small groups that came in. They had about four or five different groups of students, and they would come in and get their re-supplies and it gave me a chance to talk to them. On the first one, I still remember a student. Her name was Debbie Rose. She came in and she had a very bad burn. It was from sliding on a rock, landing on her hip, and I didn't like the looks of it. So I told the instructors that I was going to take her off, have a doctor examine her, and if she is okay, I would bring her back on course. It turned out that the doctor wouldn't let her go back because it was so bad. So I made the rule that from then on any student who had any kind of a serious injury had to be taken to a medical facility to be checked out. The Outward Bound people weren't very happy about it. But that's what we did. After that, we started running the course ourselves. I think we did it one other year with an Outward

Bound group, but basically we found a director for the Outward Bound course. We had, I think, three or four different directors over the years. The present one has been in that position now for almost twenty-five years. [laughs]

Reiss: He just does that, or is he—?

Ellis: *She* is basically just the Outward Bound person.

Reiss: So she is not in the athletic faculty.

Ellis: No, no. She hires her staff and manages the entire program. For the next couple of years I continued doing the re-supply. I can remember doing it with John Streetz. He and I did it in Yosemite at Tuolumne Meadows, and a bear came and [laughs] almost took our supplies. We had them locked up in the van. They didn't get to it.

Reiss: [laughs]

Ellis: But I woke up in the middle of the night because John was going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" I said, "What is the matter John?" he said, "A bear just went through here." Anyway, that has been gradually worked out. I was always on call while the students were out, so if anything went wrong the person in charge of AWE could call me and we would do something. There was only one time when it really got scary and serious. Steve Davenport was the Head and Arlene Ustin (the AWE Director) called in and said that one group on their final expedition hadn't come out where they were supposed to. In those days, on the final expedition, the instructors would tell them where to go and plan it out and then they would leave them. We went for about twenty-four hours, and it was in the Death Valley Outward Bound, and they finally came out. They came out to a place where they had first planned to, but their instructors had changed and planned to come to a second place. Anyway, from then on, the instructors had to shadow the group in case something went wrong.

Reiss: Oh boy, that must have been scary.

Ellis: Anyway, those things were gradually developed and the courses became very, very good. There was some resistance from parents at one time because they didn't want it to be a graduation requirement, but that has been all overcome now.

Reiss: What were the parent protests?

Ellis: Well, because it is not an easy course. The interesting thing is, I don't know of a student who has come off of it and hasn't been proud of what he or she did. And a lot of them want to do it again. Some of them are glad that they got it over with, but everyone has been proud of their achievements on that course.

Reiss: So it is now called Athenian—

Ellis: Athenian Wilderness Experience—AWE.

Reiss: And is it essentially the same?

- Ellis: It is essentially the same with a few modifications that we put in, in those early days, such as getting them to a medical facility with any injuries, and we've really been very fortunate. We have never had a serious accident.
- Reiss: It is such an interesting experience.
- Ellis: Yes.
- Reiss: A while back, I wanted to ask you whether there was a school psychologist or someone in that role.
- Ellis: We did have school psychologist.
- Reiss: On staff or just on-call?
- Ellis: On staff. We also had a doctor on-call. I know the first year that I was at Athenian I was not at all happy with the doctor because he seemed to be "penicillin happy." So I was very fortunate that the Alamo Medical Center got a doctor in that I heard about, and I talked to him, John Knowles. In my checking on him I found that he was a pediatrician, and I found that he had done work at a hospital in Los Angeles. It happened that my cousin was the head doctor in that hospital, so I called my cousin David and I said, "Do you know this John Knowles?" He said, "Oh yes! If you can get him, you can't get a better person." So that's the way that those little things happen.
- Reiss: So, back to the school psychologist though, I mean, this would have been a person that would have been helpful to you.
- Ellis: Helpful to me, I am trying to remember. I think we had psychologists that we could call on, and we had some faculty who were trained in that sort of work. I don't know if we had any major things. I don't remember that, but if I had felt that somebody needed it, I would have gotten somebody.
- Reiss: How would you have known if a student was in a depression that required more attention.
- Ellis: Oh, students would come to me and tell me.
- Reiss: Fellow students.
- Ellis: Fellow students, yes. Or faculty might notice it or something. We were a pretty close-knit group and for the most part students had enough trust in me. I was pretty good at first aid stuff, so people would come to me for that sort of stuff.
- Reiss: You mean psychological first aid, or real first aid?
- Ellis: Real first aid. But if they thought that somebody was having some emotional problems, they would probably come to me and talk to me and I would check on it, and if I felt that something was really necessary, I would do something about it. I can't remember any specific cases. There was only one instance where we had a boy commit suicide, and that was pretty scary. He had hung himself in Boys 1. And the faculty member on duty happened to go into his room and found him and called me. I came up and we cut him

down and I did CPR until medical people got there. He actually lived but later died in the hospital.

Reiss: I'm sure that was hard.

So we just have a minute or so more. Did Dyke remain more or less as you described him, as in the background just kind of in the background.

Ellis: That changed when Steve Davenport came as Head of School. Up until that time Dyke had lived on campus, so he was always there in the background. When Steve Davenport was hired, Dyke moved off campus to Orinda, and Steve moved into House 1. When John Streetz was the Head, we built House 9 and Dyke still lived in House 1. So Dyke had always been in the background. After he moved off campus he wasn't as closely involved as he had been, and Steve pretty much ran the school for the next ten years. When Steve left, we went through another search for Head of School, and Sam Elliot was hired. Eleanor Dase became Head five years later.