

Dan Abramowicz: Joe, it is great to meet you. First let me just introduce myself. I'm Dan Abramowicz and I'm a graduate of the Graduate School Class of '84 and my Ph.D. is from the Chemistry Department. Since leaving Princeton, I've worked in industry for my whole career, working for GE, or General Electric, and then for Crown, or Crown Cork and Seal. But I've stayed involved with Princeton during my career through the APGA, the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni, the Alumni Council and through the Princetoniana Committee.

Joe Prather: Good for you. My son is also a graduate of the Graduate School Class of '98. And he got his PhD in Russian Literature or Slavic-Literature.

Dan Abramowicz: That's great for him. And his area of studies is rather relevant now, with what's happening in the world. Right?

Joe Prather: Yes, it is.

Dan Abramowicz: I agree. Now, Joe, if I could ask you to introduce yourself briefly for the benefit of the audience.

Joe Prather: Certainly. My name is Joe Prather. And I'm being interviewed, because I happened to be the Grand Marshal for a period of seven years. I was a member of the Class '61 and I actually left at the end of my junior year, because I remembered some words that I got from a lecturer talking about the importance of getting our genes on the genetic checkerboard. And so I did and married a nice gal from South Orange who I met at a Triangle Show.

Dan Abramowicz: Really! That's fascinating.

Joe Prather: Yes, I was participating in a Triangle Show. A friend of mine from the class of '60 asked me during my sophomore year, "Have you seen the Triangle Show yet?" And I said, "No, I haven't." And he said, "Well, you can go see it for free, if you go up there and work selling programs." And you get to meet the alums and have a nice cocktail hour, and dinner, and it was all pretty good, except we almost forgot about meeting the bus in front of the old Dillon Gym this one time. And I finally got up there to the destination, at Orange High School, where they had the Triangle Show. And I was selling programs, and my future wife was there. She was a senior at Beard School at the time and she was doing seating arrangements. People would go and show her their tickets, and she would help seat them. And we go down, I said, "Okay," I said, "Would you like to show me to a seat?" And she said, "Why don't you sit down and join me! So I thought I might as well. That's what happened and I fell in love with her on the first sight. And I ended up marrying her, and then dropping out of school, and never going back. And a good friend of mine, Jimmy Armitage, who's from the Class of '48, told me I should go back to reunions, because all Princeton alums were welcome back there, even though I hadn't graduated. But he insisted, and he brought me back for his 15th reunion in 1963, which was our Class of '61's second reunion. And I haven't missed a reunion since then except for the 5<sup>th</sup>

reunion, when I thought it was more important to be at the New Jersey Skeet Shooting championships.

Dan Abramowicz: Wow! That's an amazing bit of history! Excellent.

Joe Prather: So I didn't make our 5<sup>th</sup> reunion, which would have been in 1966, because I was shooting in the New Jersey Skeet Shooting Championships at the same time. I didn't do that well in the competition, so I never missed another reunion after that time.

Dan Abramowicz: It's amazing that you have attended so many reunions! And thank you for the fascinating history on how you met your wife. Changing directions a bit, I would now like to focus our discussion on the P-rade, the Marshals, and particularly your time as a Grand Marshal in support of this project I'm doing on the "History of the Marshals". And to kick that off, can you please confirm which years you were a Grand Marshal and how you came to be Grand Marshal?

Joe Prather: My first time I was a Grand Marshall was in the years 1985 and 1986. I was on the Reunion Committee or the University Alumni Committee of Reunions at the time. And I had a lot of experience with reunions and had run the 20<sup>th</sup> reunion for our class. So I was approached by Jack Joyce (Class of '52) as he was the head of the Reunion Committee at that time. It was at this time that Frank Gorman (Class of '41), who had been a permanent Grand Marshal of the P-rade for many, many years, passed away. So, the Reunion Committee was cast with the job of trying to come up with a Grand Marshal to replace Frank Gorman. And we did. It was Stu Duncan (Class of '50) that we picked at that time. And Stu did it for two years, and then he wanted out. And so Jack Joyce '52, who was still President of the Alumni Council Committee of Reunions, became the next Grand Marshal for 1983 and 1984. Jack was a very nice guy and he left as the Grand Marshal in 1984, and that set the stage so that every two years, the President of the Alumni Council Committee of Reunions would take over as Grand Marshal.

Dan Abramowicz: I had heard that practice was established, but I did not know how or when. Thank you for filling in that gap in the history of the Grand Marshals!

Joe Prather: As I was the President of the Alumni Council Committee of Reunions at that time, I took over from Jack Joyce '52 and then I was Grand Marshall for two years in 1985 and 1986. And then, Hugh Fairman '58 took over after that as Grand Marshal in 1987 and 1988. Hugh Fairman '58 was Ken Fairman's son, and he was also Jimmy Armitage's nephew. Jimmy Armitage's older brother, John Armitage, was in the Class of '38 at Princeton. Jimmy Armitage was '48, and Hugh Fairman was '58. So Hugh took over as Grand Marshal, and then after that, we went to Turk Thacher (Class of '66) for 1989 and 1990.

However, Turk Thacher was Grand Marshal for only one year, and then he decided that he wanted to march with his class. The Class of '65 had their 25<sup>th</sup>

reunion in 1990 and Turk Thacher wanted out of there with his friends from that class. Hugh Fairman got involved with some people who then suggested they appoint a Grand Marshal for a period of five years, because two years was too quick. By the time the Marshals figured out what was going on, Turk had decided that he didn't want to do his second term as Grand Marshal. So I filled in for Turk's 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 1990. And then I took it on being a Grand Marshal for another 5 years, from 1991 through 1995.

Dan Abramowicz: Very good; thank you. I was wondering, do you know how you came to do a "second term" as Grand Marshal? It's unusual, and you're the only Grand Marshal I've spoken to that's come back for a second term, so to speak. Two years initially, and then six years, later (filling in for Turk and then a 5 year term). Do you recall any of the circumstances for why they came back to you again? Or... I'm just curious.

Joe Prather: I think it was because they were concerned about the way the Grand Marshal was not really leading the P-rade, and organizing the Marshals, and so forth. And I had some experience, having done it for two years. And I guess they liked the job that I'd done. And as Hugh Fairman was a friend and as he felt I had done a good job, he suggested they appoint me for a five-year period, which they did.

Dan Abramowicz: Excellent. Excellent. Given all of your experience with reunions and as a previous Grand Marshal, you were a logical choice. And so as you initially came in the Grand Marshal role through the Reunions Committee. Had you ever been a Marshal before that?

Joe Prather: No, I had not. When I started marshaling, I think I was on the Reunions Committee. And I recall that I was very concerned about the Marshal uniform, and I always very prepared as I brought two pairs of black shoes with me, two pairs of socks, two pairs of white pants, and two jackets. And so I was ready to go, no matter what. And I had a black blazer, eventually at some point, because the blue blazer was not right. It should have been a black blazer. Then I got a black blazer and stitched the university shield on there. And I just used that for my Marshal's jacket.

And I remember one year telling the Marshals that they should wear black shoes and one guy was very upset. He was one of the older Marshals from the class of '50, or something like that. So I lent him my extra pair of shoes, because he was size 11, which I wore also at the time. It was very handy to have those extra shoes to lend out to another Marshal when they needed them. And it worked out very well. And I was very concerned if I got grass stains on the white pants, or something like that, I couldn't wear them leading the P-rade. So I always had an extra pair of white pants to wear as the Grand Marshal.

Dan Abramowicz: Joe, it sounds like you were always prepared, and that you were involved in trying to kind of standardize the Marshal uniform a bit, at that point in time.

Joe Prather: Right. I was making sure that ... but I wouldn't call it standardizing, as I think it was already standard and agreed upon, but not everybody knew about it.

Dan Abramowicz: Right, okay. So maybe 'enforcing' may be a better word.

Joe Prather: Right.

Dan Abramowicz: Great. So as a Grand Marshal, what did you view as the role of the Marshals in the P-rade?

Joe Prather: Well, a key role is to keep the line in marching order, to keep it moving along. Because one of the problems we had was that classes would stop to cheer another class, or something like that, and then there'd be a big gap in the P-rade. The first years, we used to march down to Clarke Field. We went down through '79 Arch and down the steps, and we'd send people around inside, so the Grand Marshals were on the side of '79 Hall there. And we would march right down those steps, and down Prospect Street, passed all the clubs, take a right-hand turn at Cottage Club, and go down the back way, back into the baseball field and watch the university baseball team play Yale.

Dan Abramowicz: Exactly, very good. Thank you for that. Now I'm curious, do you think there was any change in the role of Grand Marshal during your term? I mean, you spanned from, with a short break, from 1985 to 1995, so essentially a 10-year period. Were there any changes during that time?

Joe Prather: Well, of course, the P-rade route changed a couple of times. And of course, the Presidents changed during that time. I remember one time making sure I had a speaker phone handy because with the gaps President Bowen was wondering, "Where's the rest of the P-rade?" Usually the Old Guard went first, and the Old Guard was stopping and was a little slow getting down the steps and out to the hall and going around out to the hall and the like. And he wondered what had happened to the P-rade. Because I remember one year, we were down there, and the Old Guard came in, or half of them came in. And then after that, there was a 20 minute wait for the rest of them to come in. That was one of the things that the Marshals had to do a better job on, keeping the Old Guard together, and keeping it moving right along.

There was always one guy carrying a 1923 cane, a member of the Old Guard. And I have a casting of that cane that they gave me, a casting of the '23 cane. And as I mentioned, if they ever do it again, they are using the casting. Because one of my grandchildren got to playing with the cane, and one of the ears came off the tiger on it. The left ear, so I got another one, the casting. And I'd like to get an updated casting, if I could, of the silver cane that the oldest alum used to carry.

Dan Abramowicz: That's beautiful. That's a beautiful story about the cane and your grandchild.

Joe Prather: And I got into a standing grudge battle with my classmate, George Brakeley, over the cane. George had been the secretary and historian for the class for many years, and he is a very loyal Princetonian. He was one of the first guys that I met coming back to reunions as a classmate, and he assigned me the job of being Headquarters Chairman in the year of our 15<sup>th</sup> reunion. And by the time the 20<sup>th</sup> reunion came around, I became the Reunion Chair for the 20<sup>th</sup>, and then the 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> reunions. And then I ran the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion. But anyway, George Brakeley and I have always had sort of an urge to carry the cane in the P-rade. Of course, we would have to be the oldest living alum in order to get that right to do that. And George Brakeley was born in 1939, same year I was born. But I was born in September, and George was born in August. So if George is still alive, he's going to get to carry the cane, if we're both still alive. And we would have to live until we turn 103 or 104, which we would need to be to get that honor today! And if we're both alive, it will go to George. If not, I'll get the silver cane to carry.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, that's a great competition for you two to have.

Joe Prather: Right.

Dan Abramowicz: That would be an excellent and well-deserved honor, given your incredible experience with reunions for so many years. Now just thinking again about those years, this 10-year span, or so. Are there any stories involving the Marshals that come to mind? Something happened where they were involved in some way? Something unusual? Just, again, as I am curious to capture a little bit of this history.

Joe Prather: There's nothing that I can think of that is unusual, other than the guy forgetting his black shoes and borrowing my shoes. One of the Marshals did that. And in fact, I always used to carry down two sets of everything: two shirts, two ties, two pair of white pants, two pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, and so I'd always be ready, if I got grass stains on my pants, or something like that, the night before, I'd have a clean pair of white pants to wear in the P-rade.

Dan Abramowicz: That seems like a very organized and forward-thinking approach. That's excellent. You must have some great memories of the P-rade, from when you were a Grand Marshal. Does anything come to mind about the P-rade itself, while you were a Grand Marshal? You mentioned the route changed a bit, and that the President of the University changed. Did anything else unusual happen? Maybe a surprise, maybe something unexpected while you were marching with the mace?

Joe Prather: I can't think of anything, but carrying the Gorman mace was a real thrill. And I can't think of anything particular that happened. Although we did change the route at least three times, I think. Because originally, it went down to the original ball field. And then the ball field ended up on Nassau Street, or Prospect Street. And we went there for a year or two, to the end of Prospect Street. And the baseball field was there. Then I think the university finally

decided that they needed to hold graduation and reunions earlier in the year, as it wasn't fair to get Princeton undergraduates that the Yalies and Harvard students would get the best jobs.

I think basically that the professors eventually decided we should have the reunion sooner. So that's where the timing changed ... because reunions always used to be the first weekend in June. And the university right away thought that was too late, and they should graduate the seniors earlier, and get them out of there, so they had a fair chance at getting a job. Because otherwise the Yale people or Harvard guys were supposedly scarfing up all the great jobs. And Princeton guys were getting left out. But I don't know for sure.

Dan Abramowicz: That's interesting history about why the graduation and reunions were pulled up a little bit sooner, as you said, into May. Thank you for that. How about some of your favorite memories of the P-rade? When you were either as a Grand Marshal or perhaps just a participant.

Joe Prather: I guess the most memorable thing, which is what I touched on before, was with the gaps in the P-rade, which we were trying to get the Marshals to deal with. And being down in the baseball field, and finding big gaps coming in, and President of the University, Bill Bowen, at first coming over and saying to me, "Hey, Prather, what's going on? Your P-rade ... there's a big gap in it. Is it all over?" And I said, "No, no, we got plenty of classes to go yet, sir." And that's why I wanted to get some sort of a phone, so I could call people back on it. Before iPhones and cell phones were so popular, we needed some way to check back with one of the other Marshals and find out what was going on. Some way to make sure there are no large gaps in the parade.

Dan Abramowicz: Do you remember how many classmates came back for your big reunions, like the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 50<sup>th</sup> reunions?

Joe Prather: I don't have an exact number offhand. I know we got a great turnout for the 25<sup>th</sup> and for the 50<sup>th</sup>. But I can't think of any specific numbers that come to mind off hand, Dan.

Dan Abramowicz: No, no, that's fine. Is there anything that your classes did special to celebrate those big anniversaries?

Joe Prather: We had the Beach Boys one year for our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion in 2011.

Dan Abramowicz: The Beach Boys?

Joe Prather: Yes, but you can't do anything that big anymore. I mean, maybe they decided that it is too big a risk having somebody like the Beach Boys there on campus. And we did it in conjunction with the 40<sup>th</sup> reunion for the class of '71. And Jim Blair, a classmate of ours, and a guy from '71 put up the money for it and paid the Beach Boys to come. So we had a huge draw, basically, for a free Beach

Boys concert. And we had a big setup for it with the 40<sup>th</sup> Class reunion, which was a big thing in front of Brown Hall.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, that's just remarkable. That's remarkable that you were able to bring a band like that to reunions, a band that was so famous.

Joe Prather: Well, we had Chubby Checker for our 25<sup>th</sup> reunion. So we were...

Dan Abramowicz: Wait, Chubby Checker performed at your 25<sup>th</sup>? That would have been in 1986, right?

Joe Prather: Yes. And I remember being a little nervous about having Chubby Checker perform. He was staying in Blair Hall, that's where we had the tent. And he had a room there. And I went to see him, and I guess Jim Blair booked Chubby Checker a big room, too, I think. And we were a little nervous about Chubby Checker coming out, because I invited a lot of people, and I told them Chubby Checker would be at our 25<sup>th</sup> reunion. And we would all be embarrassed if he didn't show up. I went and found a room where he was relaxing before he came out to do "The Twist" and so forth, and he said, "Where are the young girls? Chubby likes the young girls." And I felt, "Oh, God, he had a little too much to drink." And I was thinking, "Oh, brother, it's going to be a disaster if Chubby Checker doesn't get out there." But he finally did come out, and he put on a hell of a show.

Dan Abramowicz: Wow. That's another amazing story. I didn't realize that the reunion classes would hire such well-known talent during reunions. You're right, I don't think anything like that happens on campus today anymore. That's quite remarkable.

Joe Prather: That's because the university doesn't want to worry about the security of the university, plus you've got to rush to get another band if they cancel.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes, we already struggle with 20,000 – 30,000 people coming back for reunions. Hiring a major star to perform would certainly add another level of complexity. No doubt about it. Well, Joe, is there anything else that you'd like to share that I didn't think to ask you about the P-rades, or about Marshals, or being a Marshal, or being a Grand Marshal? Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

Joe Prather: I wish I could come up with something more right now, but I can't think of anything further, Dan.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, that's no problem. You have given me some great history, Joe. So, as you pointed out, after Frank Gorman died, it appears the Alumni Council thought about the situation and asked Stuart Duncan, Class of '50, to take over for a couple of years. And then they asked Jack Joyce, Class of '52, to take over for a couple of years. And then they asked you to take over for a couple of years.

And then, at some point, they realized they needed a kind of a better plan for Grand Marshal succession. Does that sound right?

Joe Prather:

Yes.

Dan Abramowicz:

Essentially a better way to formalize the transition. And then, it began that the Grand Marshal served for a period of five-year terms. And that if you ran reunions for one of your class's major reunions, or served on the Reunions Committee, or were involved with marshaling in other ways, you might be asked to be a Grand Marshal.

Joe Prather:

That's right. In other words, then they picked people who had already done well in the marshaling corps to become Grand Marshall. Then at some point they realized that it would be good to have a woman in this leadership role and Arlene Pedovitch became a Grand Marshal for five years. And then, I think after her at some point, there was another woman who was Grand Marshal.

Dan Abramowicz:

Yes, correct. I'll include in the article the list of Grand Marshals. But yes, after Arlene there was Charlie Rose, and then Charlie Plohn, and then Jean Telljohann.

Joe Prather:

Jean Telljohann, that's her. Yes, she talked to me before she took the job of Grand Marshal, to get my thoughts on the role. So I had lunch with her up in Bedminster one day and it was very nice lunch.

Dan Abramowicz:

That's great that you helped to mentor her in the role. And of course, the current Grand Marshal is female as well, Heather Butts, Class of '94.

Joe Prather:

Yes, I saw her at one of the meetings they had about a year or so ago.

Dan Abramowicz:

Great. Well, Joe, I really do appreciate your time. Thank you again for meeting with me. It was a real pleasure meeting you. Thank you very much.

Joe Prather:

Thank you, thank you, Dan. All the best.

Dan Abramowicz:

All right. It's been a pleasure. Take care.