

DU ORAL HISTORY 1984-2014

Interviewee: Daniel L. Ritchie

Interviewer: James R. Griesemer

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Transcribed by: Terry L Zdrale

James Griesemer: [00:00:21](#)

Welcome to the University of Denver's oral history. Our series begins in the mid 1980's when DU was literally on the brink of bankruptcy and continues to 2014 with the University a regional academic leader poised for national prominence, a remarkable transformation by any measure. The interviews in this series present a panorama of progress against steep odds. It's a remarkable series of stories told by men and women who were personally involved in saving the university and undertaking an extraordinary process of renewal. Their narratives are a true renaissance tale.

James Griesemer: [00:01:02](#)

To continue our story, I'm joined by Daniel L. Ritchie, the University of Denver's Chancellor Emeritus. Dan Ritchie served as chancellor of the university for some 16 years from 1989 to 2005. If there's any single individual who can be credited with DU's rescue and renewal, what I call DU's renaissance it's Dan Ritchie. Although Dan would probably deny that and be quick to say that it was the work of many people, which is true, but it was his leadership that saved DU and began rebuilding of what is now the University of Denver. Dan Ritchie, welcome to DU's oral history.

James Griesemer: [00:01:42](#)

Dan, nobody was more deeply involved, or played a more significant leadership role in saving and rebuilding the university than you. There's so much to talk about, but I'd like to begin by asking you to share a bit about your background before coming to DU and maybe we could start about where you grew up, your family and some experiences that might've shaped you as a young person.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:02:06](#) Well, as you can tell from what you know. I'm mostly lucky. As you'll hear from what I'm going to say, I guess. And indeed it was a team effort. I happened to be the lucky person that the right person perhaps at the right time and but it, I, it turned out much better than I was expecting actually. Anyway, I was raised in a small town, a little mill town, in the Piedmont area of North Carolina called China Grove. my mother and father were, this, this was in the, I was born in the beginning of the depression, so tough times. There were times when we couldn't afford meat to eat except maybe once a week and so things were pretty tough when I was young but, they were wonderful folks. My father was a farm machinery dealer. He had a little dealership in the small town. Any rate, the, I think this story should probably begin when I was 15.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:03:17](#) I went to my father and told him that I was dropping out of high school. This was a waste of time. It was boring and useless. I didn't ask him. I told him, whew. But that's a 15 year old kid, I guess. At least it was me. And, fortunately for me, my father said, son, we'll find you a school that is worthwhile and you will find challenging and interesting. And we found a private school in Virginia by the name of Woodberry Forest, that we couldn't afford, but I didn't know that until years later. And all I thought, oh my goodness, what did I do? But anyway, that really changed my life. Before going there, I probably didn't know there was such a thing as Harvard University, much less thinking about going there and I learned all sorts of things. I loved it.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:04:15](#) And, it has remained one warm memory I guess I'd say.

James Griesemer: [00:04:24](#) And it really changed your life.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:04:25](#) And it really changed my life and it allowed me to apply to Harvard and to MIT. I got into both with scholarships offered and decided I would go to

Harvard because I wasn't sure I wanted to be an engineer like my father. And so Harvard was again an opening of my eyes and mind that I had not, I didn't really have any idea what I was getting into. I just thought it was a good idea. Anyway, again, to my surprise, my freshman year, I, was elected the chairman of something called the Harvard Freshman Union Committee of 40 students which really managed the social things and, and if there were food issues or whatever, and, I, I, again, I was surprised that, at my success, and I don't still quite understand it, I think, but any event, uh, we, did very well.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:05:41](#)

And, among other things we did that the university had never seen done by freshmen before got into academic matters. we collectively decided that, that what was being taught in our, the required, basic courses for everybody needed to be rethought. And, actually we got it changed and believe it or not, I was invited and had lunch one on one with the president of the university. James Ryan Conick. And, this is just little off course. But anyway, then I think as a result of our success there and my somewhat notoriety, my sophomore year I was asked to, head something called the Harvard International Activities Committee, which, was, had been founded by Henry Kissinger when he was a graduate student there a few years before and we were given kind of an open what we can do, whatever seems to be something we need to do.

James Griesemer: [00:07:01](#)

And this is your second year at Harvard.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:07:02](#)

This was my sophomore year. Yes. And, among the things we decided to do was a one to bring over German student leaders to the US because we had learned that in German universities, at the time. And this was not long after World War Two, of course, that, the, there had arisen a number of militaristic societies as they had had before, the war and that the students were doing. They would cut their cheeks with a sword to show they were. So anyway, we heard about this and decided

something needed to be done about it. And you can't learn about America. And Wow, this is a better idea by books or whatever. So we thought bringing student leaders over to study at American universities was a good idea and that we ought to get that done. So we didn't realize that we can't do that.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:08:10](#)

Uh, but we needed money of course. So I went to the university first and I asked for somebody to help us do it and they, they did help us, but that was enough of course. So we went to Carnegie and asked for more money and they gave us more money. But that wasn't enough either. So, does this sound like fundraising to you?

James Griesemer: [00:08:32](#)

It does sound like fundraising.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:08:35](#)

And anyway, then I went to the State Department and asked for money and explained that we could do things they couldn't do, that needed to be done and could they have some money they could help us with? And they said no. but maybe we have a friend who does. So, they introduced us to the CIA, which gave us the necessary money to finish the job. And later the CIA and number quite a few years later, they were accused of seducing students what the media didn't realize is it was students who seduced the CIA, or at least we thought now in hindsight it looks that way. But anyway, that worked. and the other project was to help students in Indonesia overthrow the government of Indonesia, which was a dictatorship that was really doing bad things to an education of the, they felt anyway, they succeeded in overthrowing the government entities and the new government wasn't much better. So it was, in retrospect, it was a probably waste of time.

James Griesemer: [00:09:53](#)

Now you went on to graduate school at Harvard as well, right?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:09:57](#)

Yes.

James Griesemer: [00:09:57](#)

Can you talk about that a little bit?

- Daniel Ritchie: [00:09:59](#) Uh, yes. I can, but I have some follow up. We'll find a way to add about Harvard as a result of these things. I was telling you this, I stopped going to class. I had a full time assistant and this was so, it seemed like more important than college. And anyway, and I stopped going to my other classes, intensive Russian and, I was about to be thrown out of university, I think, this would've been early April one morning. The, a universe, well, there was a knock at my door, my fifth floor, walk-up it, 7:30 in the morning, sound asleep, and I went to the door and there was a professor James B Mudd who was one of the top people and, in the university, out of breath at the door, I thought, oh my goodness, somebody must have died in the family or something.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:11:13](#) Anyway, I got him some, instant coffee and he sat down, caught his breath, and he said, you haven't been going to class. Pause. And I said, no sir. But sir, I'm just about to start. And he said, there will be a tutor at my house every afternoon at 3:00 o'clock if you'd like to come. That saved me. I graduated. Without that. I'm would not.
- James Griesemer: [00:11:48](#) What a story.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:11:49](#) I have a lot of gratitude for a lot of folks, my father and others that, that I felt that really changed my life and saved me really.
- James Griesemer: [00:11:59](#) Really.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:12:00](#) Anyway, sorry. I've talked
- James Griesemer: [00:12:01](#) No, no, no. But, but then, then you did go onto graduate school. (Yeah). Tell us about that. How did you find a Harvard business school?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:12:10](#) Uh, well, I, applied to both law school and business school and got in both, but decided again that I didn't want to be a lawyer. I spent the summer, the previous summer in a law office and decided that that was interesting and all, but I didn't want to

spend the rest of my life doing that. So I went to business school and, and again, I, I graduated,

James Griesemer: [00:12:37](#)

Now um, from business school. Um, many people know about your work here at the university, but tell us a little bit about your business career, which was a pretty extensive,

Daniel Ritchie: [00:12:48](#)

It lasted a long time. Yeah. First I went in the army. I was drafted and went in the army and, for two years and at the what was called machine records unit in Chicago, of the, the army there. And after that, went to work for Lehman brothers in New York when it was a partnership. And Bobby Lehman was, was senior pro. It was a wonderful place. It was very good to me. I learned a lot. Of course, Wall Street is a different kind of a universe than I was used to also. Then, I had made a lot of money for the founder of MCA, Music Corporation of America, Jewel Stein. And um, I, one day he asked if I would come to work with him in Hollywood. MCA at the time was the leading a talent agency in the whole world, just about everybody you ever heard of it at that time, were represented by them. But I told, Mr. Stein that, that I had, I felt Lehman hadn't gotten their money's worth for me yet and but I thanked him and, but a year later he went to Bobby Lehman and asked if he could just speak to me about and invite me and, he agreed and I, I got, I went to Hollywood.

James Griesemer: [00:14:29](#)

So you went to Hollywood?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:14:30](#)

Yes.

James Griesemer: [00:14:31](#)

And, and it sounds like a big change from Wall Street to Hollywood. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:14:38](#)

Well, they have things in common. I was a little uncomfortable in Wall Street, but, and I was more over the years I was, I worked for MCA, bought universal pictures and the, president. I was on the

board of trustees or directors. Well, MCA universal. It became.

James Griesemer: [00:15:14](#) And you met some interesting people, some pretty famous folks.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:15:18](#) About everybody you can think of then. I had a lunch with a Walt Disney at his house and the dinner, that, Alfred Hitchcock cooked at his house.

James Griesemer: [00:15:32](#) Oh my gosh.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:15:33](#) And so I, it was, it was great fun. But my problem was that Hollywood really wasn't me where if you were a star you could, do get away with almost anything and they did a more than the world realized. But I realized and so it really wasn't me. They were very good to me. I'd made a lot of money, bought a house in Beverly Hills and that had once been built for Elizabeth Taylor. It was really nice, but it wasn't me.

James Griesemer: [00:16:11](#) Now, you had a wonderful Avocado ranch that I've visited, on the west coast in Santa Barbara. did you acquire that at, at that time, Dan or later?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:16:23](#) No, I acquired that and began the process of acquiring the cattle ranch here in 1977. It was only later that because I, I left there in, the end of 69.

James Griesemer: [00:16:41](#) I see.

James Griesemer: [00:16:42](#) And part of the time that I worked for MCA, they, they owned the Columbia Savings here and I came here and that was kind of my early testing, of them and ran it for a few years.

James Griesemer: [00:16:55](#) So you were running Columbia Savings here in Denver?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:16:57](#) Yes.

James Griesemer: [00:16:58](#) And I, I assume that's where you began to meet local people,

- Daniel Ritchie: [00:17:02](#) yes, the folks who talked me into going on the board at DU, yes.
- James Griesemer: [00:17:08](#) And, let's talk a little bit about the cattle ranch and, and you and I've had a lot of experiences up there. Talk about about it. It is such a wonderful place.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:17:20](#) Uh, yes. I, I really planned to be a cowboy. I really loved it. The life, the people, the scenery. you know, the horses, even the cows and, and I really planned to do that the rest of my life. I didn't plan to do something else, but and I put it together over many years, really. I think there were 22 transactions as neighbors came up and as I could afford it, I kept adding, adding to it.
- James Griesemer: [00:17:58](#) and, and it, it turned out to be, as I recall, the largest, a cattle ranch in the mountains of Colorado.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:18:05](#) Uh, yes by quite,
- James Griesemer: [00:18:06](#) quite a bit. For folks who don't know it. It ran from Kremmling up to Muddy Pass and then over to the continental divide and then into Jackson County. It's a big, big ranch.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:18:22](#) The deeded ground was almost a hundred square miles. Yeah. Yeah.
- James Griesemer: [00:18:25](#) Um, so, then let's talk about, you mentioned coming on a DU board.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:18:33](#) Yes.
- James Griesemer: [00:18:33](#) So I guess my first question is, what, who connected you with or what connected you to DU in the very first place?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:18:42](#) Uh, I, what connected me was two people, that I had met, in Columbia Savings here and gotten to know quite well. And, I, I should mention that after Hollywood, I did go to a Westinghouse

Broadcasting eventually to Westinghouse and then to the broadcasting company and then became the CEO

James Griesemer: [00:19:17](#)

you were CEO

Daniel Ritchie: [00:19:17](#)

of it. And it was during that time a 1983 and I went to Westinghouse, uh, almost 10 years before that, would have been 74 I guess, and, but I had met John Love who was then governor here and Al Cohen, who was prominent on the board there and had a cattle ranch, it turns out as well in the mountains. So it was they who asked me to go on the board, and came to see me in New York actually. And I think they, well they knew I was planning to come back by that time the people knew I was to come back to Colorado. And so they wanted somebody, I think on the board from New York because we have a lot of people, of alumni there. And and then the connections, I guess to broadcast.

James Griesemer: [00:20:30](#)

So he would have come on the board about 83,

Daniel Ritchie: [00:20:32](#)

83.

James Griesemer: [00:20:33](#)

And, and, um, tell me about your first board meeting. I mean, here you are, you're coming to Colorado and how was it? What did you find?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:20:42](#)

Uh, it was a big surprise. it was, in early June of 1983. And, the chancellor at the time, presented the board with a budget for the following year because our fiscal year and and at the end of June, and so this was a to three weeks before the new year and the board was, asked to approve a budget. And, I was used to budgets and, and so I asked how are we doing this year? And so by comparison and uh, he didn't know how we were doing. They don't have the numbers and well I said we are 10 months would be just fine, and compared to budget and how was it? And, I was, a surprised to hear that he, he didn't know the answers and because I was used to having monthly figures of whatever I was

responsible for coming within a week or two at most, at the end of the month.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:22:18](#) And, I said that I'm sorry I can't vote one way or another. I don't have enough to reject it or accept it. I, I just won't vote. And he said well, maybe we could postpone this until this afternoon. It was an all-day meeting. His name was Ross Pritchard, by the way, was the chancellor at the time and, and he said, let's see what we can come up with, so maybe you'll have some. Anyway, came afternoon, he told us that we were running, about we're about to run a deficit of \$2,000,000, which in those days would be like 10 probably today, especially in this situation. Yeah. And, I was stunned that we didn't know and nobody had asked. So, the board did not approve and postponed the having a budget. And at the end of the meeting I went to my two sponsors and said, I have just resigned from this board.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:23:30](#) I, this, this man is either incompetent or dishonest or both and either way, I can't, I don't want anything to do with this. I'm sorry, I'm going back to New York. And and their response was, let's see what we can do. And I said, well, as long as this man is here, I am not going to be. But they said, well, let's wait till December meeting. I said, okay. And, and anyway, it ended up that, he, was given the option of resigning or being fired and he refused to resign. And so he was unanimously fired.

James Griesemer: [00:24:16](#) And then he was followed by, by Dwight Smith.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:24:21](#) Yes.

James Griesemer: [00:24:23](#) And that would have been in 90 18, 1984,

Daniel Ritchie: [00:24:27](#) Yes I believe so.

James Griesemer: [00:24:27](#) And, and, um, but the university, we've talked to Dwight, and of course you know this very well, but the university was going through very difficult times. What was your sort of take on that as you were, as a board member?

- Daniel Ritchie: [00:24:40](#) You mean at this time?
- James Griesemer: [00:24:43](#) Yeah, no, as, let's say, in, in the mid to late eighties.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:24:48](#) Okay. first, Dwight, is an honest man. He was, he is. A nice man, who cared about the place, but he didn't have the background of managing a complex organization. And so things were getting worse, not better. We were borrowing money to meet the payroll and that is about all you need to know about and we'd been selling off assets to, to get by. And, this was clearly a trajectory that was not, not sustainable.
- James Griesemer: [00:25:28](#) It wouldn't sustain. So um, at that point, someone must have approached you about becoming chancellor. Can you tell that story?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:25:41](#) Do I have to?
- James Griesemer: [00:25:43](#) I think so.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:25:45](#) Okay. yes, well, I was planning to be a cowboy most of my life and maybe be on the board a while and but I was getting very uncomfortable actually knowing where this was headed and and had said as much to the board. But one day Bill Coors, who was vice chair of the board at the time, called me at the ranch and asked if he could maybe come up for lunch someday. So, sure. I thought it was just a social thing, because we'd become good friends. He was a wonderful man who just passed away recently at 102 and we had many things in common, including our interest in, in wellness and mental and physical health. Anyway, so he came and it was very pleasant until about dessert and he asked if I would be willing to be chancellor of the university, that we needed to make a change and the board thought I could, should do the job. And my response was a long pause again. And Bill, I'm flattered. I wish I could. I'm just not qualified for that. I have no experience in that. And he was very smart really, until the day he passed away and

said, Dan, nobody's qualified for that. Oh, okay. Yeah. Maybe it will. So anyway, I, said, well, let me think about it, Bill, and let me talk to some folks. So I talked to three people. one is, was Marion Gottesfeld who was on the board and it was one of my favorite people, a Bill Daniels, who was a good friend and the title was, I think President of the university, of North Carolina, the system

- James Griesemer: [00:28:10](#) yes, the system president
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:28:13](#) It was, his name was Dick Spangler. He and I were classmates at Woodberry Forest.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:28:20](#) And we remained friends over that time and he also, by the way, became the richest man in North Carolina, which is a whole other story in itself. And he's the one who was responsible for the Bank of America being brought its headquarters to Charlotte. Anyway, so he was quite a guy. So I, Marion told me, Dan, you need to do this. We need. And Bill Daniel says, you don't have a choice. You gotta do it. Oh, and then I called Dick Spangler and I said, Dick, do you think I can do this? And his response was, Dan, if I can do it, you can do it. So, so I did it.
- James Griesemer: [00:29:05](#) Well. What, so, that you came on in, I guess July of 89?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:29:12](#) Yes. Bill Coors came up in May. So this would have been
- James Griesemer: [00:29:16](#) Okay. So shortly after. So when you came on as chancellor, what did you, what did you discover? I mean were things as bad or worse or what, what did you find?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:29:29](#) Things were at least as bad as I thought. What I also didn't fully appreciate before is that the student, applications and a new student numbers were declining fairly precipitously. And so we were really in trouble. And, I, I thought, gee, I can probably fix the financial side for a while, but we've

got a bigger problem here. The campus was, not being properly maintained. the, the faculty were unhappy and worried and some were thinking of departing, and so it was a, the more I got into it, the more. But I, my, my big problem in my mind is that, the faculty really, do they have any confidence in me? I was known for a while as our first cowboy chancellor, which I don't think was meant as flattery. And so, so there was that, that confidence issue that worried me and also why I thought maybe I could fix the financial things, but I can't fix the academic and the cultural issues.

James Griesemer: [00:31:09](#)

And then shortly after you became chancellor, you invited me to join the university as the chief financial officer and one of the things that struck me was what seemed to be a clear vision that you had for university. We were up to our neck in problems, that was for sure, but you seemed to have a pretty clear view of, of where you wanted to take the university. Not in a detailed sense, but in in a broad sense. Can you talk about your, your thinking at that point.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:31:39](#)

This is gonna sound a little crazy if not a lot. First I really believe if you're going to do something, you do it really well. It's about, you know, we had, when we started our strategic planning, we felt we were a Chevrolet and maybe we could get to a Pontiac, but my, my view had always been, gee, we can do a lot better than that. And we've gotta set our sights on quality and also, that, that each student is a unique person that one size doesn't fit all in automobiles, it certainly doesn't in, in young people. So it was a very different idea. But also, it was based, which, some other folks on the Board agreed that, it's also about character in that that character is more important than high school grades, that, that in life, that's really what it's all about.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:33:05](#)

and, one of my favorite quotes for a long time, has been a quote by Einstein, which is, he said, most people believe that a great scientist, is a, possible by, by intellect. But he said they're wrong. It's, it's

about, it's made by character. And now that I've been involved in that area, it's, he was, he got it right. And so the cowboy code of ethics was really my foundation and I happen to have in my pocket, which I always do somewhere here. I think I do. Yes. I do a may I read it. Would that be crazy though, because this is, it's the cowboy. A cowboy ethics. Is this,

James Griesemer: [00:34:13](#)

this is from the book.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:34:15](#)

Uh, yes. And I knew the author going back to my cowboy days. Anyway, live each day with courage. Take pride in your work. Always finish what you start. Do what has to be done. Be tough but fair. When you make a promise, keep it. Ride for the brand, which I really believe in too. Talk less and say more. Remember that some things are not for sale and finally know where to draw the line. And those were the things that literally I was thinking when we, that this, these were the principles. If we were to do it, that's because I didn't want to do it just to do something or. But to make a difference in people's lives as people had made in my life. And really my motivation behind all this was the stories I've told you that what people did for me, you know, without, without whom I would not have done anything.

James Griesemer: [00:35:22](#)

Now you during your tenure as a leading university, a number of things happened and we'll cover a number of those, but the most visible to the community are the wonderful buildings, the campus change, which for those of us, and it included many folks in Denver who saw the change, it was almost unimaginable.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:35:46](#)

To me as well.

James Griesemer: [00:35:47](#)

So, and that was something that you undertook early on. There were a lot of other things. We'll talk about those, but what, what led you to the decision that, that the, the physical aspects of the campus, were an important thing to begin on.

- Daniel Ritchie: [00:36:08](#) Uh, well as I said earlier, everything was a mess, the buildings were not maintained. The old science building literally had both bats and rats that the students saw. And, the old library was a, a falling apart, and Carnegie library, and the lawn was uh
- James Griesemer: [00:36:42](#) hardly a lawn,
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:36:44](#) Really not. There were big bare spots. There was trash all around and, and the first thing you see is the physical things. And, as I went around to the great universities, which I did, which is another story, perhaps a well for example, at Duke. I, spoke there and lectured and and I didn't see a piece of trash anywhere on the campus, I couldn't believe it. I thought, yeah, you know, because, you know, if there's trash it says something and people throw more trash because everybody does it.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:37:28](#) So, it was a matter of it was an essential ingredient to, to solve all these problems. If we're gonna get the rest done because it does set if you go to Harvard or Duke or the Yale or whatever, or(?) college, you know, the buildings are good, but they're different from buildings in other places. they are not like college campuses don't look like city hall or a commercial building or whatever. they, they have a unique quality of character and, and are rooted in history. You know, the, you know, if you want to build buildings that look like they were built in the year, you build them in 20 years, they'll look old fashioned and and cheap. Anyway, that sort of. Is that what you wanted?
- James Griesemer: [00:38:39](#) I, I, well remember because I was working with you when you said we're going to build buildings of the highest quality, buildings that could last 300 years. And at first people thought you were kidding until they saw the buildings. But you've touched on this a bit but, but what led you to the notion that, that we really needed to create such extraordinary buildings? Um, was it reflecting a set of values or what was your thinking?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:39:09](#) No, I, I, I think, oh, well let me, let me put this right. I've always believed in, in first rate buildings, if you're going to do something, do it first rate. And, I, uh, came across an architect Cab Childears who shared my beliefs and who had a great talent and, but also knowledge of architectural history and so forth. And so we were a natural, uh, partner, I tested him out, so he did a, my house up for cattle ranch and it was gorgeous really, and and was not wildly expensive but done really, really well out of stone as I wished. So that gave me some confidence, but the tower part of all this, the first building that we really worked on, that where we had a now have a tower which the sports and wellness center that the board named for me when I was out of the room, uh, we hadn't planned a tower. And Marion Gottesfeld and Joy Burns both said, Dan, this place needs a tower.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:40:56](#) Okay. so we, we scratched around the world. I looked around the world, for some months to find a model that seemed to work and we couldn't do it. We looked at, I think more than a hundred different things and we still couldn't come with something that worked with the style we had in mind until one day Cab Childears said Dan, what is your favorite building in all the world? And I knew that before, I didn't have to stop and think it was the cathedral at Chartres and and I said the cathedral, it's Chartres. He said, do you mind if I go? So it would be okay to take a trip to Chartres? Oh, well, I guess so you can and, and so this tower is different materials, but the proportions and the shapes and so on are really very close to, the north tower, the earlier of the two towers of Chartres. And it is, and we tried changing, dimensions and proportions and it doesn't work. So that's. And then that was so successful and that there are a lot of stories about that tower that, I could tell sometime, but probably not today, that led to others that everybody thought that indeed, if you go to Harvard, the, there are towers all over the place, a

little house where I lived in the Eliot House and Dunster House. And so that's how it all happened.

James Griesemer: [00:42:44](#)

That's wonderful. And it's become a signature for the university.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:42:48](#)

It has really. And it's fun.

James Griesemer: [00:42:53](#)

It's interesting to note that on the Sturm College of Law on that tower, there's a clock. It's got a kind of an oval shape. Is there a story to that, that you want to tell?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:43:07](#)

There's a story though, do I want to tell it. I don't think so. No, it, the, it was not my idea, but I have a watch. I have and wear still that is shaped like see if you can see it. I don't know, you, that's shaped like the clock here and they designed it that way. And at first I didn't connect the two, but that's where apparently they got the idea.

James Griesemer: [00:43:35](#)

It's a wonderful, wonderful story. Well, so we're a DU is building these buildings and, and as we both know, they were not inexpensive to construct. Um, and that brings me to the issue fundraising.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:43:53](#)

Could I, before you go to

James Griesemer: [00:43:54](#)

Sure. Sure, go ahead.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:43:56](#)

Could I talk about landscaping.

James Griesemer: [00:43:58](#)

Oh, please do.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:44:00](#)

Uh, it's really much more important than people realize because you kind of take it for granted. But, the, the landscaping, the brick walks, the, the curves in it, not too sharp, but curves, and the flowers where they are, there's a lot of art and a science actually in the, in designing a garden, that the Japanese and the Chinese and the, the English and so on, have learned about how to do it, and where the flowers are placed, the colors that you use when you use them and how you do together

the texture of the things, and the relationship between the, the grounds and the buildings, how they're organized and what is between them. All of these are really important I once, really twice made a trip to Japan to look at gardens there.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:45:14](#)

And I made one trip to see one garden on the west coast. uh, of Japan it's at, it's in Kanazawa and I, Kenroku Head is the name of the garden, that is just stunning, but it, but it's a composition. It was seriously how the trees, where the trees are, what kind of trees, the flowers, the water features. and I remember going there at dawn or a little before dawn and, there was a woman there picking up leaves one at a time and leaving the leaves that were still looking good, but picking up the leaves and I cried because it, the whole thing was perfection. So, the and, and here what I did was to send our grounds folks, several folks in our grounds to the, what I thought were the great gardens in this country. One was a Longwood Garden in Pennsylvania and the other was a Winterthur, which was Henry DuPont's place in Delaware because they are, they're terrific and how they use water and water flowers and so on. Because it's not as simple as you might think you're just planting grass, anyway.

James Griesemer: [00:46:51](#)

Well, no, your point is well taken because when people look at our campus, it's not just a collection of wonderful buildings.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:46:59](#)

No.

James Griesemer: [00:46:59](#)

It all works together.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:47:00](#)

No, that's right.

James Griesemer: [00:47:01](#)

Yeah. And so thank you for raising that.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:47:03](#)

And, how you divide it into different and how they're different from one another. Anyway. It's,

- James Griesemer: [00:47:13](#) Well, not only do buildings cost money, but flowers cost money. Um, so you, you're really known as one of the most effective fundraisers that almost anybody knows.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:47:26](#) I've had practice.
- James Griesemer: [00:47:27](#) You've had a lot of practice starting as a student. I see. Um, but would you talk about the whole business of, of raising money and I, I happen to know this story because you and I worked together in these things, but how you went about it, how did you, how did you approach the whole notion of fundraising?
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:47:52](#) Well, first you need to be trustworthy. If people are going to, to, to, contribute large amounts or small amounts of money, they need to trust you that you will do what you say you'll do. That it is a, and that you will involve them also in whatever it is so they know before you do it, what you're going to do. And also, people like to be involved with something that's really good and it's one of the reasons for doing buildings of this quality, that, by the way, I also said I want buildings that'll be beautiful ruins in a thousand years, anyway. Crazy. Anyway, but people also want to contribute to something that is of quality and enduring. A good example I think is The Newman Center that Bob and Judy Newman and lots of other folks, Joy Burns and so on, gave us money for. The Gates folks, know there are a whole range of folks who did that.
- Daniel Ritchie: [00:49:13](#) But anyway, when we first designed a building to move Lamont here from the other campus and create something special for that art, the estimate came in at a \$45,000,000 and we didn't want to borrow money to build a building where we would not make any money but probably lose money. And, but I couldn't imagine where we would find \$45 million dollars. I mean that would be like probably a 150 today. That was 20 years ago. And, um, but then we decided that if we were going to do this thing, let's do it as well as it's possible that anybody

knows how to do, whether we're talking about acoustics or whatever. And, so we designed the current building, which is really five buildings separated by a few inches, with acoustics that are really as good as there is in the world.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:50:31](#)

Uh, in fact, the, we brought over the, the, a chorus of London Symphony, London Symphony Chorus to perform and, here and they said this was the best place they had ever performed. And a few years later they came back, mostly on their money because they wanted to be here again. And, they gave us a Verdi's Requiem, which is quite a thing anyway. The folks who did the acoustics said it was the first time that they're 50 years, that, that the owners of performing arts building had not saved money by compromising a bit the acoustics. And so anyway, we raised every dime of the, of the, \$67 million it took. And, um, and you can see the results. And so that is part of it. The other thing is that, that most people measure fundraising by the quarter. How are we doing, are for the year? I think you measured by the decade, and because, to be pushy about it or to be, a) I wouldn't do that. but also people, really do appreciate not being pushed, I think. And we give you a couple of examples of people who left us their estates, who gave us like a \$100 a year every year. A one was a school teacher who never made more than \$40,000, who when she was young, a bought a duplex, traded that in on a four-plex, traded that in on an eight-plex. And when she died, she left a three apartment buildings.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:52:42](#)

Uh, another one, was a senior lab assistant at a, at CU, University of Colorado and she was a genius at trading stocks and when she passed away, we, we received seven million dollars. None of these that we know until just not long before they, when they knew they were going to pass away, but we treated them and never expecting anything like that. But as we would treat anybody with a, you know, listening to them and learning from them and

getting them engaged and and that's what we did that without expecting anything really, right,

James Griesemer: [00:53:32](#)

it was terribly effective. But as you say, at a pace that was appropriate, without trying to.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:53:41](#)

Do we got to do it this year or whatever. And, and we, but we wouldn't build a building until we had 80 percent of the money. That was our blind. We didn't start building until we were at 80 percent of what would be needed to finish it, and that was the right number and it's subsequently been followed by, the children's hospital.

James Griesemer: [00:54:09](#)

It has and in some cases we actually had a small endowment to help maintain the building.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:54:14](#)

That's exactly right.

James Griesemer: [00:54:16](#)

We have much more to talk about beyond the buildings because you've been involved in so much, but perhaps we could just raise a couple of things in this session and then continue because there's much more. And, I'd like to begin with what is DU's now famous study abroad program for students. Um, we have been ranked number one in study abroad in the entire U.S. And it was an idea that you raised. What lead you to think about that and, and, articulate it the way you did?

Daniel Ritchie: [00:54:55](#)

You Bet. Well I first became really internationally oriented my story at Harvard, and the summer after that experience, I spent the summer on a bicycle in Europe, through the UK and the not whole UK, through England, a little bit of Scotland, a France, the low countries, cycled up the, the Rhyne and everybody else was coming down and ended up in Rome. And, that really, it changed me and changed my appreciation of the global picture both economically, culturally, socially. I just learned so much. and so I, based on that experience really more than anything else. Oh. And by the way, I the only thing and I slept in ditches and under bridges. I went to jail twice, and so, but it

was, it was, a really great experience, but the only thing I took with me other than a blanket and a poncho, it was a, a, a book of Shakespeare Sonnets. So I got where I could almost recite them by memory.

James Griesemer: [00:56:28](#)

Well, it's had an enormous impact on students. And, and, um, it was something that DU decades before had had experimented with and then not followed through and then you brought it forward and it's had such a fabulous impact on our students.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:56:48](#)

Well, but what, what made it was the folks here, the faculty who were committed to this. It was led by Ved Nanda and some other folks and who did a splendid job of structuring it, making the deals with the right universities to be sure that, there was a match here. Also you need to stay with it so that if a university over there changed or if there were risks, to our students or if a student had a personal problem in the middle of the night, be over here, there was somebody to talk to. So, it was Ved and a lot of other faculty who went and they made trips to each of these places to check out and it was not just to go abroad to, to do some language or something. It was to, to pursue in that country their, their degree that they had committed to this was, it had to fit in, in the quality and in general positioning of what they would have done here.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:58:11](#)

So this was not easy to do, nor was it cheap. The problem is, that, you know, we, they, we didn't raise the tuition. so we didn't get it to spend here. It was spent there and then the trip back and forth and all the logistics that it took to support it. I, if I had been rational at the time, they wouldn't have done it, but, but I, I just believe in that there is no impossible dream and this is one because I really felt it was really crucial because also, I, the mission, which we haven't really finished, of my, my view at least was to do this better than anybody else. I visited a lot of the best universities around the globe and there's more stories there. But,

decided, gee, we can do this. We can have a better undergraduate program than Harvard or Stanford or Princeton or name one, which seems like an impossible dream too, but I don't think it is.

James Griesemer: [00:59:27](#)

No. I quite agree.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:59:28](#)

And, I can explain why, but go ahead.

James Griesemer: [00:59:31](#)

Well, well, let me just touch on one more item and then in our next session, we can go deeper on some of these, but your focus, you focused on a number of things, but at the center of it, it seems to me it's always been students.

Daniel Ritchie: [00:59:46](#)

Yes.

James Griesemer: [00:59:46](#)

And, you initiated a process of interviewing every student who applied to the University of Denver and whether that student was in Maine or California or anywhere in between, a panel of people interviewed that student. That was a huge logistical matter. Um, why did you do that? What, what did you hope to achieve for ourselves and for the student?

James Griesemer: [01:00:17](#)

Well, where I got the idea was a trip abroad, in India, and at the Indian School of Management in Bangalore, which was considered the best school in India, maybe still is. I don't know. But they have an incoming class, it's a graduate, of a 300 and they did 10,000 interviews across India to fill that, the 300 openings. And, and I talked to them about it, I said, are you crazy? Why in the world and you know, to do it as they did it all over India, which nobody ever thought of doing before. And they said, well, really it's simple it's the only way you can make the right choices. That you cannot judge from test scores or recommendations or essays or whatever. You wouldn't hire somebody without meeting them and getting to know them and, we feel the same way about these positions and there is no choice. So I called our admissions folks from India. What do you think about this?

James Griesemer: [01:01:50](#)

Did they faint?

Daniel Ritchie: [01:01:52](#)

I thought they'd hung up. But there was just silence on the other end. But we went forward with it. There was, usually there were three people, one at doing the interviewing, one was a trained staff person, one was faculty and one was an alumnus or an alumna and that really worked and really changed things dramatically here. And and I could give you lots of stories, and, but you can also use an algorithm to eliminate, I mean, if somebody's on their test scores is so poor that they couldn't, no matter what, they couldn't make it or whatever. You don't go to that extreme but, so you can reduce the number sufficiently and essentially that's what the Daniels Fund does. They do a full, interviews for everybody they give a scholarship to. And it's the same principle that it's really about character more than anything else. And grit and determination and motivation, all those things that really make, make us who we are.

James Griesemer: [01:03:07](#)

Right. Well, Dan, we have so much more to talk about in our next session, outreach to the community, athletics, a major story we haven't even touched on. And we will, we will approach all of those, but Dan, I want to thank you so much for contributing to the DU oral history and needless to say, for your remarkable achievements here at the university.

Daniel Ritchie: [01:03:28](#)

But again, this was, all of this is you've heard, may I just say that one of the reasons I decided not to go away after three years was the faculty, you know, we had a much better faculty than I realized when I was on the board because they do care, did care, do care about the students. And it's, it's not, and I thought they'll reject me or whatever, but we really worked together and had a great time. And, the faculty is really what makes all this work and and there, there's some stories there, but anyway, but I, I should say that.

James Griesemer: [01:04:12](#)

Yes, indeed. And we will get to some of those stories. So I hope you'll join us in the future as we continue the story of the University of Denver's remarkable renaissance. I'm Jim Griesemer here with Dan Ritchie. Thank you for watching.