

Bobby Kittredge '71

My Panel's Subtext

In March of 1971 this procrastinating, and wood-carving-intimidated senior began his Belmont Hill panel. I also turned 19 years of age that month. An age most irrelevant except for the war in Vietnam. Our student deferment was about to be revoked; my lottery # (remember them?) was 54 out of 366 (1952 was a leap year); the military could pluck me out of Williams College at will. My 1953 yeared, or plus 100 lottery numbered classmates were safe. At least for another year. I was not.

Naïve as I was: women, love, money etc. I knew the war in Vietnam was bogus. I was right but paid the price with heated arguments about it. I made a vow then to never raise my voice in political discussions again. 50 years later – vow honored.

So when panel deciding time arrived I wanted nothing to do with “the war at home”, government’s “credibility gap”, politics, industry, my draft status, etc. The gold standard for panels in my mind was always Cowboy Fisher '68, older brother of classmate David Fisher '71, both sons of the varsity football coach. He had brilliantly reenacted his name; a joyous cowboy – reins in one hand, cowboy hat in the other, riding a bucking fish.

I had nothing so clever and remember embarrassment at my choice. At the time I had a subscription to National Wildlife magazine. The natural world the perfect countermeasure to all my verboten topics. The image chosen; a mature male Elk in full winter coat and mane. The image made more dramatic by its crop – neck, head and antlers only. And what a neck! A neck so long it seemed anatomically incorrect; but there it was, an untouched photo.

Mr. T did most of the work.

Now is the time for some reverse metaphorizing. Because at the time I had no such thoughts, such as, “would I stick my neck out?” Answer:

- not at Williams
- not at IBM

But 2 ½ years into my IBM employment I really did. I dropped out of the corporate world completely. I became a hippie; poly-amorous, dope growing and smoking, living frugally off savings, nude Frisbee on the beach ... hippie. A full 180. How prescient my panel was!