

# Oral History: Anton Vishio

*Recorded: June 27, 2012*

*Interviewed by Mac Barrett '67*

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## On the Origin of the Chariot Races and Latin Day

**Barrett:** I remember the chariot races. [Laughter] I remember the Latin declination? Is that the correct term?

**Vishio:** Declamation.

**Barrett:** Declamation, okay. What are your reflections on those events? You had to be the prime mover.

**Vishio:** Well, about 1967, I was...

**Barrett:** A great year, I might add.

**Vishio:** Uh, and why is that Mr. Barrett? [Laughter] But in 1967, I decided that we've got to do something to drum up business, and Latin Day sounded like a great idea. So, I decided first off to initiate a chariot race. The students would build a chariot and pull the faculty around the center track at that time. It was amazing that the same charioteer managed to win each year.

**Barrett:** The fix was in, perhaps?

**Vishio:** The fix was in from the very beginning. I remember Mrs. Duff and Charlie Duff — what year was he, Mac?

**Barrett:** A couple years behind, late sixties.

**Vishio:** Late sixties. It was Charlie Duff's eighth grade year, and I was losing the race to Mr. McDermott. Halfway around...

**Barrett:** We couldn't have that.

**Vishio:** No, so I decided halfway around to cut across the field rather than go the full way. And I told the students: I make up the rules. I'm the teacher. I'm the head of the department. And we cut across the field and just managed — Mr. McDermott went around the full track, all 440 — and we just managed to beat him, cheating that badly. And Mrs. Duff started hitting me over the head with her umbrella. It was a sunny day; she was carrying an umbrella. She was a wonderful woman.

**Barrett:** She thought this was outrageous.

**Vishio:** She couldn't believe that there were faculty at Gilman who actually cheated. And as much as I tried to explain it to her, she kept hitting me over the head with that darn umbrella. But I won the race, and I won the laurel crown at that time. Later on, we added to it. We did a Latin play. I think — it might have been before your day — Key Kidder?

**Barrett:** Same class.

**Vishio:** Oh, he was in your class? Key Kidder was Calpurnia, the wife of Caesar in the first play, and I practiced and practiced that play so it would be a drama, the tragic death of Julius Caesar. Key refused to memorize his lines, so he wrote them on his hands, both hands and up his arm, and began to sweat. And the play was supposed to be three acts, and Caesar was killed off, thanks to Key Kidder, in the second act. There was nothing else to do. So, I had the students bow, and it was known at that time as one of the better comedies that Gilman had ever performed.

At intermission — or in between acts — we had the students giving commercials in Latin as well and the eighth grade — ninth grade, I'm sorry — had a declamation contest in which they all would memorize a speech, in Latin, of two to three minutes duration, and the top five

winners would provide us with their oration during the Latin Day festivities. It was, truly, an evening to remember. That's why I've forgotten most of them.

**Barrett:** Next time I see my classmate — and neighbor, I might add — Key Kidder — I will ask him for his recollections.

**Vishio:** That's funny. I told his son, when I taught his son later on, the same thing. It was hysterical. And that went on for years and years, and finally we stopped it. Dr. Paul — not President Paul at Gilman, but the head of the department at John Hopkins — actually used to come and judge the finals of the declamation contest. He would give his speech in Latin to the students, and give the award — whatever it was; I think it was a plaque of some type — to the winning student. And that's the way the declamation contest would end. The chariot contest would always end in controversy, except for the winner.

**Barrett:** On the surface, it sounds like a lot of fun. Beneath the surface, it sounds as though there was a clear attempt to...

**Vishio:** *Recruit* was the word.

**Barrett:** To recruit and to help instill an appreciation for the language among Gilman students.

**Vishio:** Oh, there was no question about that. The students enjoyed the day as much as I think — they were nervous about the day — they enjoyed the day when it occurred and we managed to fill the auditorium with parents, with other students, with friends for the yearly play and for the declamation contest, and for the commercials as well. So, it was a pretty popular event, and it was the kids, basically, who ran the show. Faculty, you know, were onlookers, observers, but basically, the youngsters ran it, and they enjoyed that. And that was another aspect of it. Much like the Gilman Circus, the early Gilman Circus, which we all remember. The old-timers remember, anyway, which was much the same thing.