

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of
Catherine Hanlon '79
Conducted by
Mary Armstrong
April 6, 2017

Special Collections & College Archives

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Lafayette College

2018

HANLON

MARY ARMSTRONG: OK. OK, so that's rolling. So this is Mary Armstrong, I'm professor of women's studies and chair of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Lafayette College. It is April 6th, 2017, and I'm sitting here with Catherine Hanlon. We're going to do the usual and ask Catherine to state her name and confirm that her participation is voluntary, and that you've given your informed consent.

CATHERINE HANLON: Yes. My name is Catherine Hanlon, I have consented to this interview in written and verbal venues.

MA: Wonderful. And a reminder, as we've discussed, you can decline any question you don't want to address. You can elaborate on any question, or contribute additional thoughts if you wish, which we hope you will do. The idea is not to follow our set questions, but for you to share the memories and the observations you'd like to share. If you're like me, [01:00] pretty much after everything you ever do, you realize later there were a few things you would have liked to have said, if you think of that, you can send us an email, you can write things down, you can follow up, you can do whatever you like.

CH: I'll be back.

MA: This is not some sort of moment -- good, that's what I want to hear. But you know, it absolutely is not some moment that comes to an end, right? It's about your story the way you want to tell it. So, a few of the nitty gritty questions. Personal pronouns and name you prefer me to use during the interview?

CH: Just Catherine.

MA: OK. And you -- how do you define yourself as a member of the LGBT community?

CH: I basically see myself now as gay. When I was here, I think I saw myself more as confused.

MA: OK. (laughter)

CH: Which I think may not make me unique, but I think a lot of students are at that point.

MA: OK. OK, great. Your class year?

CH: Nineteen seventy-nine.

MA: And how do you professionally describe yourself? Any way you like to describe yourself.

CH: I'm a physician.

MA: OK. And?

CH: And [02:00] I'm a professor of medicine.

MA: Excellent. And anything else to add about who you are before we begin?

CH: I've stayed active, so I define myself as an athlete.

MA: OK, fantastic. That's great, that's important. So really open-ended questions, because the idea is to get your reflections, describe how the general situation on campus was for the LGBT community. And we just turned the microphone on, but you were saying there wasn't one.

CH: There was no LGBT community.

MA: You know, was it safe, was it visible? There wasn't even a --

CH: There was no community whatsoever. Lafayette had gone coed in what, '72, '73? And I arrived in '75. There were maybe 400 women, and about 1,800 guys on campus. There were no sororities. I never really got into -- the sororities didn't really start until I was a senior, but I never got into it, because my sorority, my peer group, were the teams that I played on. [03:00] So we had a group of women that bonded over athletics, rather than a social living situation. But, there was a lot of talk about you know, who were queers and fags, and you certainly didn't want to be associated, or be suspicious of that, in the sense that I never felt physically threatened, but the ostracism, I think, would have been extreme. And the concern about am I, you know, what are people going to think if I've got to be in a locker room with them? Things like that.

MA: Yeah.

CH: So there were -- it was uncomfortable. I don't remember being afraid, I just remember being very uncomfortable.

MA: Right. And it sounds like there was a homophobic discourse, like to hear words like fag or queer, or would you say that was sort of the atmosphere?

CH: I don't think they went out of their way to make gays uncomfortable, but I think if it [04:00] ever came up, it was something that was discussed with derision. Because this was a very big jock, macho football place. Like I said, it had only gone coed recently before I had arrived here. And I didn't really come out, I guess, until the end -- middle of my sophomore year, I guess. And that ended very badly.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: Very, very, very badly.

MA: Very, very badly.

CH: I had someone who was a year behind me who was -- I'll just use the initials, [initials redacted] pursued me. A lot of, you know, the teasing, the banter, and I was feeling that tension, so we actually stayed the -- it was one of the nights right before Thanksgiving vacation my sophomore year, when we spent the night together. Within about -- and that just kind of blew it open for me, it answered a lot of questions and things [05:00] came together.

MA: OK. So you were wondering at that point, and --

CH: Right.

MA: -- yeah.

CH: I had dated, and I started dating very late, I had not been physically involved with anyone until the very end of my freshman year in college, when I dated a guy. Nice guy, but with this experience it just drove the point home that I began to realize what I was. She stayed friends with me for about three months, and then broke off, three or four months max, and then broke off the relationship. Said that her feelings had changed, it certainly didn't stop her from coming over and seeing my roommate, and ignoring me, except to throw a couple of zingers to the -- at me. To the point where my old roommate, she was a year ahead of me, this was sophomore year when I lived in Gates, my roommate, Doreen Buchman at the time, I remember turned to her and said, you know, why are you being so mean? Why are you picking on Catherine?

MA: Ouch.

CH: Because usually what I would do when she showed up is I would just [06:00] grab my books and go to the library, things like that.

MA: Yeah.

CH: So the year went on, and I didn't talk to anybody, and finished up sophomore year. And went home, down -- I think it was down the shore. And I got a phone call from [name redacted], that she was not coming back to Lafayette. That her parents, now her father, according to her, her father sat on [phrase redacted], I don't know when, I don't know if it was contemporary to the time that I was here, or before that. I think her mother was full-blown certifiably nuts, and had significant mental illness. But they pulled her out of school, and apparently beat the snot out of her.

MA: Oh wow. They withdrew her from Lafayette College?

CH: Yes, correct. And spent the summer trying to contact my parents. But my parents were schoolteachers, and they were down at the Jersey Shore all summer, so they weren't home.

MA: Her parents were trying to contact your parents?

CH: Correct.

MA: Wow.

CH: So, she called [07:00] me because she knew where I was, and she knew how to get a hold of me, and said, you know, watch out, I'm not coming back, and I don't know what's going to happen from here.

MA: Wow.

CH: And I came back, thinking OK, the only other person who I even know who was gay, regardless of what our relationship

was, they're gone now. I don't know anyone else, I can't talk to anyone else, I couldn't talk to my teachers, I couldn't talk to my coaches, I couldn't talk to my teammates. I couldn't talk to anyone.

MA: Wow. Total isolation.

CH: Yeah. And then I went to get my mail the first week of junior year. And there was note in my mailbox to report to Dean [name redacted] office. [Section redacted by QAP reviewer] [08:00] But he called me into the dean's office. Didn't know what this was about. So I walked over to the administration building, and he said that he had been in touch with [name redacted] parents, and they were upset, and we were trying to -- he put this in the context of how bad this would look in view of the fact that we were trying to recruit more women to campus.

MA: Oh wow. Oh, wow. Wow. Yeah.

CH: And he couldn't bring himself to use the word lesbian.

MA: I was just going to say, I was just going to ask --

CH: He didn't -- he would reference the relationship I had. I said, well -- and at this point, I felt like my bowels had turned to ice. I kept my hands clasped in my lap, because I didn't want him to see them shaking. And he talked about having me removed from school. [09:00] And in my mind, I'm just seeing things like falling. The only image I remember

is things falling, and a sense of things just all coming down. My future, etc. And he looked at me, and I tried very hard to talk about this without my voice breaking. And I said, "First of all, for what it's worth, she came after me." "Well you were the older one, you were the senior." I said, "Actually we're the same age, she was just a year behind me academically. OK? She came after me, and then it ended. It ended even before the summer. I am a dean's list student, I am a varsity athlete, and I'm going to be out of here in 24 months. But if I lose everything, then I have nothing left to lose. I'll go to the press, I'll go to the papers, [10:00] I'll go to whoever I have to go to, and talk about how I was treated here. And I don't know what that's going to do to your ability to recruit more girls here."

MA: It's brilliant, but it's a terrifying situation, I have to say.

CH: Well, I don't know if I was bluffing or not.

MA: (laughter) But?

CH: And he kind of sat back in his chair, and he didn't say anything.

MA: Yeah.

CH: And he said, "Well, let's just see what happens." I said, "OK, am I free to go?" And he didn't even say anything, he just kind of used his hand (inaudible).

MA: Wow.

CH: I can show you the bushes on the quad that I threw up on.

MA: Oh, gosh.

CH: On the way back to Watson Courts.

MA: Oh wow. Where was his office?

CH: In --

MA: In Hogg

CH: In the administration building.

MA: Oh, it was in Markle, OK.

CH: Markle.

MA: OK.

CH: And I remember going to my room, I had two roommates, and just [11:00] I didn't want them to see me upset, and I went back to my room, and I closed the door, and just, I just shook, and shook, and I dry heaved, and I -- because there was nothing left in my system.

MA: Wow.

CH: And it took a long time to calm down after this.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: I had a great deal of trouble concentrating in class. And like I said, couldn't talk to anybody. Not friends --

MA: Did they threaten to tell your parents, or?

CH: No.

MA: Interesting.

CH: He didn't threaten to go to my parents. He said something, I forget about what, about my position -- something about my position here as an athlete. And I can't remember what it was now. Kind of insinuating that, you know, if he couldn't throw me out, he could maybe throw me off the team or some-- or maybe that's just the way it hit me. I don't remember. [12:00]

MA: So, you were just --

CH: I was just --

MA: -- it just shook you so profoundly? I mean, of course.

CH: Yeah. And that's when I think, you know, get it together, go to class, that's when I started to get dangerous. Out of control. I mean first of all, it was the '70s, it was drugs, sex, rock and roll anyway. And I was never really heavy into the drugs, I never liked it. But boy alcohol and I had a really good time together.

MA: Got you.

CH: And I was almost rigidly disciplined from the standpoint of my academics and my athletics. If I had to study, if I had a test, if I had a paper, if I had a game the next day. But if there were a night when I didn't have something to

do the next day? Oh, I was just out and [13:00] out of control. Because once I started drinking, there was no off switch. And I didn't care.

MA: Was it self-medicating for the --

CH: Probably.

MA: -- psychological trauma of --

CH: Yeah. You know, they didn't have anti -- you didn't take antidepressants back then, you drank.

MA: Absolutely.

CH: Probably because it was the only thing that made you feel good.

MA: Right. And there's no mental health resources at all on campus at this time, so for someone in your situation, or you didn't know of them?

CH: I don't know, I mean there might have been a counselor here, but nobody I was going to talk to.

MA: Because they're threatening to kick you out, why would you go?

CH: Right. So, I started to get just that much more nuts. And I got a reputation for being absolutely crazy by senior year.

MA: Wow.

CH: So continued playing basketball, or until senior year, played lacrosse senior year, was captain, went to

nationals, but it wasn't until I was out, it was years after I was out of here that I started [14:00] even being able to tell friends of mine about what was going on. And they're like, we kind of knew. Yeah, we kind of knew. But the thing that saved me was senior year, I had a roommate who was a year behind me, her name was Pam McCall, there are six girls in her family, her mother was a feminist, and Pammy was a blistering lacrosse player, loved it. Her mom, the feminist, had had her read something, and she was the one, my straight roommate, was the one that gave me the copy of *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

MA: (laughter) Is that right? Wow. That's powerful. Wow.

CH: And I remember reading it the first time -- well first of all, I cracked up. Because I started reading all this feminist stuff, and it was just ponderous and heavy. It's like OK, can I go slit my wrists now? Oh, my God. And then you read someone--

MA: Not known for their sense of humor.

CH: No, no. I think that was illegal for them. And then, [15:00] the brilliance and the wit of Rita Mae Brown, who could get her point across with just devastating accuracy and one liners. And I remember reading that book, and I broke down and I just cried. Because I didn't have to know her, I didn't have to know who she was. All I knew was

that someone somewhere knew what I went through and felt like. Because she talked about getting thrown out of school for being gay. And having met her, and talked to her at length about several of her books, she said that she was involved in several things on campus at the University of Florida. One was the civil rights movement, and the other was the gay movement, and they couldn't throw her out because of civil rights. So they threw her out because she was gay. And that's when she ended up at NYU as a classics major. Which probably launched her writing [16:00] career, so I can only be grateful for that.

MA: Yeah, right.

CH: And I went through med school wondering, you know, I knew I was gay, I just didn't know where that fit. Because I didn't know anybody else like me that was gay. I was starting to explore the gay community here in town, and then in Philly, when I was in med school, I was a grad student down there. And I didn't meet anybody that I could relate to. I asked someone, I met someone at some point, I said, "So what do you do?" "Oh, I'm gay." I was like, "Can you get paid for that?"

MA: (laughter) Is this a profession?

CH: Yeah, really. And just, you know, couldn't really --

MA: That's funny.

CH: -- piece that together.

MA: Right, right. So you're reading *Ruby*-- so your straight roommate at Lafayette, you've been through this hellish traumatic experience. And you've experienced all this isolation. And [17:00] you have a community though, you're just isolated as a lesbian, right?

CH: Right.

MA: So, you have an athletic community --

CH: And I --

MA: -- and you have a community of friends.

CH: Right. I had -- at least the ego was intact from the athletic standpoint. All the more so because I was respected as an athlete.

MA: OK, yeah.

CH: So it gave me some sort of positive feedback and reinforcement. I was respected as an athlete, I was a good student. At least until second semester senior year.

MA: What teams were you on? Basketball?

CH: I played women's football, varsity women's basketball, and varsity women's lacrosse.

MA: Those are huge commitments to the athletic community, absolutely.

CH: So we played three --

MA: All the time.

CH: Yeah. And there were a lot of us that played more than one sport. We all played multiple sports, you know, the -- Carol Way who played, you know, Laura Roberts played hockey, basketball, lacrosse. Barb Kerlavage (Barbara Siegel), it was hockey and lacrosse. Sue Longenbach, it was football, basketball, softball. Me, it was football, basketball, lacrosse. Carol Way it was basketball, softball. So, all of us [18:00] played multiple sports.

MA: Yeah, OK.

CH: Here, you really can't do that anymore because your sport is now almost year-round. The preseason and postseason training, etc. And back then, you could do it.

MA: Yeah, yeah. So you had a cross-pollinated friend group from all these different teams.

CH: Teams, right. But remember, there weren't that many of us on campus. By senior year, I mean I don't know, I know that when I started there were about 400, so what were there when I was a senior, 600?

MA: (inaudible).

CH: And yeah, again, another 1,500, 14, 1,500 guys. The first sorority came in when I was a senior, two women in my class, Carol Stella and Barb Huster, started the first women's sorority. By that point, as a senior, there really wasn't -- I didn't really feel any great need to get

involved, and as I said, my peer group was the teams I was on. So I had a female support group here.

MA: OK, OK. Athletics really served that purpose for you, it gave you the sort of, like you said, the ego [19:00] --

CH: The bonding, the ego, yeah, the positive feedback.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

CH: Especially in view of the fact that I never played lacrosse until I came here.

MA: Wow.

CH: I picked up a lacrosse stick as a freshman and lateralized my basketball skills. I was elected to nationals as a junior. I was the fourth ranked left defense wing in the country, and became senior captain.

MA: (laughter) Well clearly, you're a really, really good athlete. That's very impressive.

CH: Got that from Dad.

MA: Well Dad did all right by you, because that's really super impressive. That's very, very cool.

CH: Yeah. Well we were all jocks in my family. I mean my sister was a -- we all, in addition to what we played in college, we were all skiers, we were all tennis players, and we were all, you know, body surfers and surfers on the beach in the summer.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CH: And to this day, we all still ski together, and we take all their -- my sister and my brother have five kids, and I ski with all of them. I was just there in January this year, I took my niece and nephew skiing up in Vermont.

MA: That's a beautiful thing. That's--

CH: It really is. The -- yeah.

MA: -- terrific. It's a great way to -- it's funny, it's a way to bond with other people [20:00] in this really positive and powerful way. And that was true for you at Lafayette, and it comes from your family, and it continues in your family, that's really beautiful (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

CH: Yeah. So that was -- the sports were a big part for me, and thank God I had it as an outlet. So --

MA: So your roommate, you're in senior year, you're reading this book. And you're having this revelation that so many of us have had, which is like --

CH: I'm not alone.

MA: -- I'm not alone. Absolutely.

CH: I'm not alone. I didn't need to her, or them. I didn't need to know how much was fiction and nonfiction.

Obviously, I think most people that read *Rubyfruit* the first time assume that it's autobiographical. There are -- she drew, she drew heavily from people she knew, and

experiences in her life. But it is still ultimately fiction.

MA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

CH: So my straight roommate gives me this, and it was a literary love story, because after that I went out and bought everything she ever wrote. So I'm reading that, and I'm exploring the gay community in Philly, which like I said, I had a lot of trouble relating to. Especially since [21:00] I was accepted to medical school on an Air Force scholarship.

MA: Yeah. Oh wow. You pick the tough stuff.

CH: Yeah.

MA: You do.

CH: Yeah. But, I -- again, my family is military. My father flew jets off of aircraft carriers in the Navy, my brother graduated from the Air Force Academy, a couple cousins were in the Marines and the Army Reserve. So, this was just one more --

MA: The service made sense.

CH: The service made sense to me.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: So they put me through med school, and you know, I would do my two weeks in the summer, or I would do a rotation at an Air Force hospital and fulfill my Reserve requirement while

I was going through. And the whole time, I'm sitting there going I'll probably get court martialed. I'm probably going to get court martialed.

MA: No stress, no stress.

CH: No, no stress, none whatsoever.

MA: God-- oh, wow.

CH: But I was not really physically, I was not dating anyone, I was not involved with anyone, I just, I identified as gay, but I wasn't [22:00] gay. I would go to gay events, but not, I didn't really meet anyone that I dated long-term.

MA: Yeah, yeah. And you're carrying this experience from Lafayette.

CH: From Lafayette, which was enough to, you know, blast you out of the water.

MA: Absolutely. Absolutely.

CH: Yeah, terrified that -- my father would, I don't even want to think about what my father would have done. He would have just killed me.

MA: That's just terrifying.

CH: I mean, [name redacted] at least lived through it. I'm not sure I would have. Sorry, you should take that name out.
But --

MA: OK. But no, it's --

CH: The person who got, who was my first lover here, who got pulled out, like I said, her parents beat the snot out of her, but --

MA: Terrible.

CH: -- I think my father might very well have killed me.

MA: Yeah, wow. It's -- the stakes are so high.

CH: So yeah, no pressure.

MA: Right, the stakes are so high. And then, the -- I mean I have to just pause for a second and say that I am struck with admiration for the fact that you were able to, I mean you described sort of being the wildest person on campus or whatever, it makes a lot of sense that one would, you know, party or do whatever, [23:00] to sort of take the edge off the fact that you're under, you're sort of under the gun, right? Because the college has said we will kick you out if you're like this. But you are like this. So here you are, like living in this sort of hyper contained bubble, I mean pardon me, that you got through the next two years is just, I mean that alone is an act of courage. Because you're describing a hostile climate where people have their eye on you and you're like, I mean that's really, your last two years must have just been incredibly hard.

CH: They were. They were difficult. And not knowing who knew. Like, did he talk, like did he talk to anyone else? Did he

talk to my teachers, did he talk to my coaches? What was I going to find?

MA: Right. I wanted to ask about that, if you'll let me.

CH: I never knew.

MA: Like to -- nobody ever told you like, nobody ever approached you? No professor, no coach, no -- it was just don't ask, don't tell? Or maybe nobody told? You never knew?

CH: Maybe all -- yeah, I never knew.

MA: Wow. So you could just always wonder?

CH: Yeah.

MA: Wow.

CH: I pretty much spent two years wondering. [24:00]

MA: That's pretty tough. Like who knows what? Yeah, people in authority, what person in authority knows.

CH: Yeah. Yeah. That's got me by the balls, so to speak. And you know, has the power to, you know, alter my life to a degree.

MA: Absolutely. In an almost blackmail kind of way, right?

CH: Right.

MA: It's just like anybody can hang it over your head. Wow.

CH: So I guess, you know, I felt better, I think by the end of junior year, because I hadn't heard anything from anybody. Maybe --

MA: Right, right. So it was backing off.

CH: -- so maybe they felt that all right, if she's not, you know, actively seducing the other girls on campus, I guess we're safe. You know? I didn't know what to think. But it was hard. It was really hard.

MA: So were your -- by the time you were in senior year, did any of your friends know? Did you come out to some --?

CH: I think they suspected --

MA: -- but that was -- it was too dangerous --

CH: I never -- I never felt comfortable enough while I was here to have a conversation with anyone.

MA: Right. Right.

CH: After I graduated? Different story. Came out to friends. Also met [25:00] other women who were gay from Lafayette. And I gave you that list. Dated two of them. One, well actually I wouldn't say dated. Had an affair with one of them, dated the other one. And, but I was just, I was moving. I mean I was just, I mean college, med school, and then I would see, I ran into a couple of other women in gay bars in Philadelphia who had gone to Lafayette. And then I did my internship in New York City, which was like queer haven.

MA: Sure, yeah.

CH: But really just had so little time as an intern that I couldn't really do much of anything. And then boom, I was off into the wild blue yonder, literally and figuratively, in the military. So my first assignment was out in Oklahoma.

MA: Wow, OK.

CH: Rural Oklahoma, but I was on a pilot training base. Yeah, I was the aviation medicine specialist for the pilots in training. So I did that, and then I was boom, overseas, I spent two years stationed in Europe, I was living in England, [26:00] where I was the flight surgeon to an A-10 fighter squadron. And we were flying all over, deploying all over. Had one or two very anonymous hookups when I went to London for a weekend. Something about an English accent always gets you, doesn't it?

MA: Yeah. (laughter)

CH: But just nothing sustained. Nothing long-term.

MA: Yeah, yeah. But you were always somewhere else, right?

CH: Right.

MA: You were always going from one thing to the next, one adventure to the next.

CH: Yeah. And I wasn't in one place long enough to really put down the kind of roots that would sustain a relationship. And I just said, you know, plus my first relationship had

gone so badly I didn't really think that it was -- and at this point, I will say actually not -- by the time I was out of Lafayette, not so much. But I did go back to dating men for my last two years at Lafayette, just to -- tried real hard to be straight. Tried real hard to be straight.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: If you have to get drunk to sleep with a guy, there's probably something wrong.

MA: Right, right, right. But the institution--

CH: Not necessarily [27:00] with the guy, either. I mean --

MA: Got you. (laughter) Yeah.

CH: Right. I mean, it just --

MA: Yeah. Your point is about you and your identity.

CH: Right.

MA: Yeah absolutely. No, that's absolutely right. But that's what the institution in a sense sort of demanded of you. Right, to at least act straight on some level, to figure out. Wow that's--

CH: So --

MA: That was pretty hard. When did you sort of -- your -- OK, so it's, I think, important to say that Lafayette College owes you a lot for the fact that you were a member of the Maroon club, you're sitting here in Pardee Hall talking to me, and the college treated you incredibly badly. Right?

It threatened you, and it forced you to sort of go underground and into survival mode, right? While you were here. And I just really appreciated, and am impressed that you have a relationship with Lafayette College now. And I think it speaks well of you [28:00] to the extreme that you would come back and give back to the college that did that. And so, I'm sort of wondering what is your history in resuming your relationship with the college? How did we have the privilege of you returning after what you described?

CH: Well I was away for a long period of time. You know, I left, once I graduated, you know, people could come back for homecoming weekends, which I might have done maybe once or twice when I was down in Philly in grad school. But became almost prohibitively difficult as an intern, then I was in the service, then I was overseas, then I came back, I had to get out, I had to finish my residency, and then I got my first set of boards, then I went and got my second set of boards, then I got an academic faculty appointment, and I just got busy, and it wasn't until about, you know, I would mail something in, a donation, things like that. But it wasn't until maybe eight years ago, Cindy Oaks called me, and you know the Oaks Leadership Academy? [29:00]

MA: Yeah.

CH: I went to school with two of -- all three of his daughters went to Lafayette, but I went to school with two of them. His oldest daughter Susan was a year ahead of me, and his younger one, Cindy, was a year behind me. We all played lacrosse together.

MA: I've heard her name (inaudible).

CH: Right. She's president of the Maroon Club.

MA: OK. All right. OK.

CH: So, she contacted me, and they were looking for more women to be representative on the Maroon Club. And I think she felt that as a former athlete who's now a physician, it would be a good fit for student athletes. I thought about it. And I came back and I did it, I did it because I don't think I would have gotten through Lafayette with what happened to me without the athletics. Because it was my team that got me through. So the chance to give something back to the athletics was why I came back and did it. And it's put me back in touch with the college, and it was very interesting to come back on occasion and see what was going on. Like I said, with the, you know, they had a gay dean, [30:00] you've got the archives, and I'm walking around going, "It took 40 years, but boy have things changed."

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

CH: I guess destination's a place, not time.

MA: Guess so. It must be nice to see.

CH: Yeah, it's very rewarding. And then I thought a great deal about what you had said with, you know, after I met you the first time, what if it keeps one kid from committing suicide?

MA: Right.

CH: Now I was not suicidal over this, I don't know how. I was ready to shoot somebody else, just not me.

MA: You make a good point though. When young people are treated that way, there can be a level of isolation. If they don't have the inner toughness, if they don't, you know, it shouldn't be their job to be that tough.

CH: Right.

MA: And they are in danger sometimes.

CH: So, I mean I do remember after that, I was like, what am I going to do? And how am I going to -- and I remember going to the, to the library and finding everything I could to see, look up and see whether the French Foreign Legion took women.

MA: Is that right?

CH: Yeah. Because I took like, five semesters of French, [31:00] my French was actually pretty good at one point. So I figured if I could manage, if I could figure out a way to get over there, because the French Foreign Legion took

everybody. No questions, murderers, rapists, you know, didn't matter. You signed up, you gave them your word, they would take you, no questions. They give you a uniform, they give you -- they didn't ask anything about your past. And I was like, my French is pretty good, I wonder if they take women.

MA: Wow. For real?

CH: Yeah, I went over and researched. I researched whether they took women. I was like, maybe they could use, you know, a translator. Maybe they could use anything. I mean it can't -- they've got to all be able to do something, you know? But that's what I was wondering if --

MA: That's where you were at, right.

CH: You know, where I was at. You know, where's the safety net for me?

MA: I was going to say, it wasn't suicide, but it was a different form of escape.

CH: Right. Escape somehow.

MA: Get out of here.

CH: Because I knew I wouldn't be able to go home.

MA: Wow.

CH: There was no way to go home.

MA: Wow. Wow. Wow. Right, so your background wouldn't have provided a haven for you.

CH: No. If I survived my father, my mother -- my mother is a Carmelite Catholic. [32:00]

MA: I hear you.

CH: Little tough to deal with.

MA: Wow.

CH: Although she has mellowed with age, as I have come out.

MA: Yeah. And that's a great thing, I'm happy to hear that. So, yeah. Your time here was -- I mean one of the things about the archives project is providing, you know, stories of survival for kids that even now, are in those difficult situations where it's like, how do I get through this? So there is a million more resources at Lafayette --

CH: Than there were.

MA: -- than there were for you. But I'm struck so powerfully about how much athletics is for you very much what we say it should be for students. Which is an unquestioning acceptance based on somebody's hard work.

CH: Ability.

MA: And ability.

CH: Not anything else.

MA: Right. That it's a community of value for kids that need a community.

CH: Right. That was my community. I didn't have to be out. I just knew, I always wondered what they'd think if they

found out. But I just didn't address [33:00] it while I was here.

MA: Yeah. And I wondered what has made you sort of not walk away from Lafayette entirely as an institution? Was it athletics and your friends group? Because a lot -- I'm sure that we have a lot of LGBTQ alums from the era of the institution you're talking about where they were treated like this, and they walk away and never look back. They go, "I don't need this place, I've got people, you know, I'm not, I don't want to go back to the place that treated me like this." And I'm really impressed that, you know, you still, you know, you've returned and that you're not part of -- I mean think about, you're part of the system, you've become the net that's going to catch somebody that had -- you know, I mean that's an awesome thing.

CH: It's interesting.

MA: But you've got to be tough enough to come back.

CH: I think to your point, I think I came back because if it hadn't been for Lafayette, if it hadn't been for the athletics, I don't know if I would have made it through. So giving back to the athletics was important to me. And it was, you know, this was the crucible that I was formed in. [34:00] You know, whether it was then going on to have the -- just the balls to try anything after that, I did,

you know, I didn't just go be a doctor in the military, I became a flight surgeon, I became an aviation medicine specialist, you know? I'm up 37,000 feet, pulling 4 G's on a stick, ripping the wings off an airplane, you know, working a radar in the backseat. Or climbing Kilimanjaro, or scuba diving in Antarctica, you know, all of this. Or getting that damn Harley that I waited my whole life for. I'm not --

MA: Do you have it though?

CH: Oh, yeah.

MA: OK.

CH: It's like, I'm not going to be afraid anymore. I'm not going to live afraid. And I'm not going to spend the rest of my life going, "What if?"

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: And what else? The other thing that helped me a lot with that was also the breast cancer. Having survived breast cancer, done.

MA: Everything was easy after that.

CH: Done. Everything's easy after that. So.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, wow. Powerful. Powerful, you spring boarded it, right? It gave you courage. Did you belong to other clubs, or associations? Or were there other things? Or was it -- you did so much, I'm wondering -- [35:00]

CH: I didn't really --

MA: -- if there was room for anything more. You know?

CH: Well the athletics really took up the time. I didn't, you know, I don't have the voice for glee club, or any of that. I didn't have the, you know, I didn't act.

MA: And multiple teams. Yeah.

CH: Right. You know, I was playing something every season. So that was really it for me.

MA: Got you.

CH: I didn't really join other clubs. I mean we hung out and did other things, you'd go to certain concerts, or you'd go to hear somebody talk, but my time was so limited in terms of how much I had to spend on anything else.

MA: Yeah. And were you involved in -- I know that sororities weren't there. How did Greek life shape the social life then? Did they just -- was that, you know, to what extent was that sort of part of the --?

CH: Keg night. Every single fraternity had a keg night. So you knew that -- and I don't have, these aren't correct, but just as an example, you know, Phi Delt and Pi Lam were Tuesday, and DU and DEKE were Wednesday, so every night of the [36:00] --

MA: Every day of the week?

CH: Every night of the week, somebody was having a keg night.

MA: Wow.

CH: Yeah. And it was --

MA: So literally the day you weren't doing athletics, or like up to your ears in work, you could go to a keg party?

CH: It was usually the weekends. It was usually the weekends for me, because I was so busy during the middle of the week. But yeah, Friday, Saturday night? God.

MA: Wow.

CH: God. I did, senior year I got off campus, went downtown, and got involved in like, a women's consciousness raising group, and then splintered off from there to a, there was a gay women's group that had a meeting like once a month, I think. And they were primarily working class lesbians, had a hard time relating to me.

MA: Yeah, yeah. In Easton?

CH: In Easton, right. Most of the -- some of them had been married, and had kids. I think one of them, our -- [37:00] the leader, the moderator, what was her name? [Name redacted], and she lived in the area, she was married, and I don't remember how exactly, I think she was married, or she had been married, and was involved with one of the women in the group, or had been -- I don't remember all of it, because I was only peripherally involved.

MA: Got you, OK.

CH: It was very hard, like I said, you know, the hard part was, you know, here's all these gay women that I finally get to meet, but I feel closer to my teammates. Because we have more common ex-- we have more in common, more shared experience.

MA: All the other experiences makes more sense in that group, right.

CH: Right. You know, we were all struggling to keep our grades, we were all -- three of us were bio majors, and we're all lacrosse players, and you know. So I had more in common with them. But one of the things that I remember was hysterically funny was, I was talking about, you know, athletics down there. So we're playing [38:00] out at Metzger Field, we're playing a lacrosse game against, I don't even remember who, and I turn around, there's like nine of these women, all in the bleachers, "Go Hanlon!" It's like, oh my God.

MA: (laughter).

CH: And my coach just asked me, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Coach Mitchell, she goes, "Are those the women from [NOW?]" I was like, "Yeah." Yeah.

MA: Are those the women from NOW? Really? Can you tell?

CH: What gave it away? They're all wearing Birkenstocks, nobody shaves, yeah, that was fun.

MA: That's --

CH: Well, and here's all these preppy lacrosse kids looking at these women and I'm going, they're not going to get it. they're just not going to get it.

MA: That's so funny. It's a different Hanlon they're talking about, it's not me. (laughter)

CH: Yeah.

MA: That's a very funny story. Wow. I can really see that, the role of athletics was complex.

CH: Yeah.

MA: That's funny. I usually ask a question, I know the answer to this one though, [39:00] I think it's, in terms of academics, it never came up. You never heard a word about the gay community in any class that you ever -- it was like, absolute dead silence?

CH: I mean, I don't know, we might have talked about *Well of Loneliness* in one of, in my English class, but that was --

MA: Oh, *The Well of Loneliness*, got you.

CH: Radclyffe Hall.

MA: Yes, yes. Oh, I know it.

CH: Yeah, Stephen and Mary.

MA: Yes, yes. Stephen Gordon and Mary Llewellyn, and Heaven save us from that book is all I can say. One of the worst written books (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

CH: Yeah, I read that one too.

MA: Yeah see, that's the problem. You know, I (inaudible) but that was the problem, you know, you mentioned Rita Mae Brown though, and you think about *The Well of Loneliness*, and how important content is for kids who are isolated with these identities. You know, that academic classes represent their lives, in the English department, in history, talks about gay history. And, you know, the academics have, you know, it's a way of I think contextualizing people.

CH: Well I only had one English -- I was required to take one English class as a freshman, and then I was so stacked [40:00] with the sciences for the rest of the time. Because the only other electives that I took were really, I stayed -- I definitely wanted to keep my language skills. So I took, I'm trying to remember, I know it was at least four semesters of French.

MA: That explains the French, you chose to keep going with.

CH: Yeah.

MA: Yeah.

CH: And it was fun, because sophomore year, I lived in Gates. And on my hall, was a woman who was from southern Belgium. And northern Belgians speak Flemish, but the southern Belgians speak Walloon, which is a dialect of French. And

Marie Biry was her name, and she was a bio major. So, we just made it a thing, whether we were in our dorm, whether we were playing Frisbee on the quad, whether we were at the bio lab, we spoke French to each other all the time. So that we could keep our skills up.

MA: Yeah, that's nice.

CH: And I have stayed in touch with her, and every -- I've gone to Europe, and met up with her, I don't know how many times --

MA: That's awesome.

CH: -- since I've been over there.

MA: Oh, that's great. That's really, really cool.

CH: Yeah.

MA: So, you have that to [41:00] connect you to some other folks as well. So, let's see. The thing that I was thinking about too is that obviously in your era, this wouldn't be the case, because of the isolation and the silence. But we're talking to folks from all different, you know, decades. And some of the alums have memories of events on campus that were important, the AIDS quilt came in the early '90s, for example, and things like that. Were there -- did things, were there debates in the newspaper? Or was it just silence? Or --?

CH: Silence. If there were, I don't remember --

MA: There's nothing (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

CH: I mean are you talking about the school newspaper?

MA: Yeah, just -- yeah, just sort of locally.

CH: Nothing.

MA: It was just silence?

CH: Nothing. There were -- it didn't even come up. Now remember, I graduated in '79. I don't think gay consciousness, I mean when was Stonewall?

MA: The late '60s, '68?

CH: I thought it was '68 or '69. But that was New York City.

MA: Yeah, right. It hadn't reached --

CH: But after -- [42:00] it hadn't reached here, number one. You had an incredibly, you know, even the minority kids were preppy and conservative. That's just what this place attracted.

MA: OK. All right. So, that was -- that's a good answer. I mean silence is an answer, I mean, because sometimes people --

CH: There was no gay, there was nothing -- you know, the political was OK, the, I think the election was, you know, there were political debates around the elections, but nothing that had to do with gay or -- and the term transgendered, that wasn't even in the language back then. There were trans-- the term transvestite was used in a

clinical or a scientific sense. But not transgendered being used, you know, juxtapositioned with gay and lesbian. And --

MA: It doesn't really emerge until the 2000s, really. Yeah.

CH: Right, right.

MA: Yeah, or the '90s, at best. Yeah.

CH: So there was nothing. And I just remember, you know, walking around every now and then going I can't be the only one here. I just can't be the only one here. [43:00] You know, and I remember reading statistics, 10 percent of the population's gay. I said, well we got the other 90 percent here, that's all I can tell you. So, I just -- and then, you know, like I said, I met, after graduation I met other, I think I only met one gay guy from Lafayette.

MA: Yeah.

CH: Somewhere, I forget when. But I've met about a half a dozen other gay women. Mostly from my -- roughly my era.

MA: OK, wow. Yeah. So that's been post-graduation and this community has sort of emerged out of there. Yeah.

CH: And I just, the one that I had suspected who was gay the whole time, ends up is living with her lover down in south Jersey. So there's another one in the class of '76.

MA: OK. So then, yeah, that's all been post, but it's there, right? So you wondered where is everybody, and you couldn't find the men, but later on people emerged.

CH: Later on.

MA: Yeah. (inaudible).

CH: Like I said, all I knew is, I knew [44:00] I couldn't be the only one.

MA: Well, you were right, of course. That's... All right. So, you already commented on the changes that you see on campus. They're phenomenal.

CH: It's -- yeah, it's just hard, because it's so different than what I remember.

MA: Yeah. Powerful to see.

CH: Yes. The, there was a dean of gender --

MA: Yeah, there's -- in campus life, there's a director of gender and sexuality programming. It's sort of like the partner to women's and gender studies. Women's and gender studies is the academic, and then (inaudible).

CH: He's the cultural.

MA: Right, intercultural (inaudible) yeah.

CH: I remember coming up, we had a bunch of us that had come up to homecoming one weekend for my alumni year. And I remembered seeing this, you know, you saw the rainbow, and you know, and a welcome, and I'm like, [45:00] seriously?

MA: Yeah.

CH: So I had told, you know, there was a whole campus program of events going on, and on the campus program was the gay and lesbian cultural center is having open house, and I'm like, I've got to check this out. So I kind of excused myself from my friends and said I'm going to take a walk around the campus. Well I went over, 10 minutes later they all showed up.

MA: (laughter) Is that right?

CH: And they talked about knowing me as a student, and they said they knew -- they could see that I was struggling, but they didn't know how to help me at that point.

MA: Wow.

CH: And one of them, whose boyfriend -- she came up with her boyfriend, and he was one of the first graduates of -- Swarthmore that went coed?

MA: Yeah.

CH: I think it was Swarthmore. He was in the first graduating class that took men, and he said, "Everybody thought I was gay. Because I went to an all-girls school."

MA: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

CH: So, and I love Louis. Whenever I see -- the friend of mine [46:00] was Barb Kerlavage, her married name is Siegel, she and I were captains of the lacrosse team senior year.

We're the two maniac skiers in the outfit, I just got back from skiing with her this month out in Utah. And she and Louis are close friends of mine, and have always been very just positive and very accepting.

MA: Wow, that's great. That's a great sort of tie the knot story that you go over there, and they come --

CH: And 10 minutes later, they came in as backup.

MA: That's really awesome, that's great.

CH: Still got my team with me.

MA: That's, I was going to say, that lasted the whole time, right?

CH: Yeah.

MA: And that's a really beautiful thing. It really is what you experienced.

CH: Yeah. And then to see that, and then it was -- I went into Skillman Library, and they were having a -- that's when I saw the sign for the Queer Archives.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: And I was like, whiskey tango foxtrot, when did this happen?

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: It's like all right, you know, and I was glad to see it. and I remember talking to the woman in there, and she said, you really need to talk to Mary Armstrong. And I was like

well, [47:00] I don't know, I'll leave my name. See what happens.

MA: That's wonderful that you did. It's wonderful you did. It is a -- it's been a hard road that brought you to this interview, right? But I think it's a triumphant one. At least I hope you feel at this moment.

CH: I like to think so.

MA: I think you should. I think we can call it that. I think it's safe to call it triumphant. I'm very proud to talk to you. Thank you for doing this interview.

CH: My pleasure. It's -- like I said, if it can help any of the students that are currently here, then I'm all for it.

MA: It will. It will help. It will help. And everything helps when people will step up and tell their stories, you know, because they're the stories that deserve to be told, but also other people that need to hear them. And we'll make sure that happens. Final comments, or --?

CH: Just that I'm, it's -- after I talked to you that day, it was like this weight was off of me that, like I said, I had talked to friends of mine, but I had never talked to anyone at Lafayette about what happened to me at Lafayette. And it took 40 years.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

CH: Because this happened in 1976. [48:00] It's good to let it go.

MA: I'm glad. I'm glad. And I'm very proud to be part of it.
And --

CH: Thank you.

MA: -- Dr. Catherine Hanlon, we thank you.

CH: My pleasure.

END OF AUDIO FILE