

**LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**  
**LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview of**  
**Harlan Levinson '83**  
**Conducted by**  
**Mary Armstrong**  
**February 27, 2017**

Special Collections & College Archives

David Bishop Skillman Library

Lafayette College

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## LEVINSON

MARY ARMSTRONG: And this on -- OK, we're recording.

HARLAN LEVINSON: OK.

MA: Excellent. So, this is Mary Armstrong, and it's February 27, 2017, and I am sitting here with Harlan Levinson, class of 1980 [sic 1983]...

HL: Three.

MA: Three, and for the LGBTQ Queer Archives Oral History Project, and we're going to begin like we begin every interview and I'm going to state his name and confirm that his participation is voluntary. If you'd do so, that would be great.

HL: Sure. My name is Harlan Levinson, and my participation is voluntary.

MA: Wonderful. So, some reminders -- this is the small print -- a reminder that you can decline to answer; any question you don't want to address, please don't address it. You can elaborate on any question. So, anything we're talking about -- if it makes you think of something that I'm not asking, by all means go forward. The interview is not at all regimented or highly structured. [01:00] People will have a lot to say about one area and very little to say about another, so, it's not about covering the bases. It's about trying to reflect your experience and what you thought was important and what you'd like to share. Sometimes, we've had folks who -- I know I do this constantly --

as soon as the recorder is off, you remembered something you wanted to say or you get home -- we welcome any written comments if you want to follow up with an e-mail or anything if you suddenly think you have an -- if you have like memorabilia, you remember this thing, or anything like that is welcome. It's not like it's a zero and one interview stops everything. So, we generally start with sort of generic personal information. Your relationship to Lafayette -- you're an alum.

HL: Yes.

MA: And your class year is 19...

HL: Eighty-three.

MA: Eighty-three, and how do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community?

HL: Gay.

MA: And how do you professionally describe yourself, which could be your employment, but like a life vocation or...

HL: Well, I'm a financial advisor. [02:00] So, I work with individuals and families and non-profits to manage all aspects of their financial lives.

MA: [OK?], fantastic. Anything to add about who you are?

HL: Well -- (laughs)

MA: Like I said, we can sit for hours.

HL: You know, I'm a gay guy. I'm certainly out at work. I participate in the pride -- in the Morgan Stanley Pride Group. I don't know what else I would add. That's what I do...

MA: That's fine.

HL: Yeah. (laughter)

MA: That's fine. So, to start to think about the past, can you describe the general situation on campus for people who were -- and realizing that college is often a time when you find yourself, so, it's not like you necessarily -- one would come here identifying as a member of the community -- as a sort of the generic timeframe for you would be '79 to '83.

HL: Eighty-three, yes.

MA: [03:00] How would you describe the situation? Was it safe? Was the community visible? Were people out? Sort of like what did it look like during the time frame?

HL: I think the community -- there was no gay communi-- or, actually, that's not true. I found out later there was a gay community here, but it was so hidden and so sub-rosa that it was almost -- impossibly obscure and hard to find, and I think that as -- and I think the atmosphere on campus would for a gay -- an out gay person -- would've been unthinkable and unsafe. There's no question about that, and truly unsafe. I think you probably would've been beaten. There would've been -- there would -- because the campus itself I think for women at time was unsafe. So, if half the population felt unsafe, I think -- well, if half the population was at risk, and I think that a lot of the women that went here at that time would probably agree with that statement, that certainly gay -- even a tiny gay minority

would've been even more [04:00] unsafe. So, for all those reasons, I think in terms of finding yourself, it was virtually impossible. I think the college failed miserably in that role at that time. Now, it's changed a lot since then, which is a good thing, but I would say the atmosphere was -- you know, oppressive doesn't really begin to cover it. It's not -- it's easy to say, "Yeah, it was oppressive," but it was much worse than that, and, by the way, that's not the case at other places. That was specific to Lafayette. The times were oppressive; the times were not really accepting of gay people, but there were colleges that did, which I found out later in life.

MA: That's a great point

HL: So, it really was particular to the college that it was an unsafe place, so, it's not fair to say that, "Oh, the whole time was bad." Well, yeah, the time was bad, but other colleges dealt with it differently. Lafayette had no interest, [05:00] couldn't care less, and I think that anybody that was out then would -- I don't know. If I had come out then, and I think -- I didn't come out for many years beyond that, which -- and I don't blame that entirely on the college, but I wouldn't even know where to turn. Even looking back now, I wouldn't have known who on earth to have turned to, so, that's sort of the times.

MA: And you think there's sort of a discourse of institutions excuse themselves a little bit because they were more conservative times, and you forget there were places where it was safe to --

HL: Yes, well, as I -- I think I mentioned this to you before, but I was in Provincetown at a cocktail party, and I had met a man who was exactly my age, he went to -- he was class of '83 at Wesleyan, and he was a nice guy. He was a school psychiatrist -- a school psychologist in the Norwalk Connecticut school system and has been for years. He was a super nice guy, lives in New Haven, and we were talking about just gay life in college and I was -- and he was -- I said, "Well, were you out [06:00] in college?" He goes, "Yes." He said, "I was bartending" --

MA: (laughs) Oh.

HL: -- "at the Wesleyan Gay Student Association parties," and I was like, "What?" I didn't even know -- and I found this out when I was -- this conversation occurred when I was probably 47 years old. So, the idea that there was an out, gay student association at another college was mind-blowing. I didn't think there were any, but it just shows you how really sort of off the radar in many ways Lafayette was, and its physical location in Lehigh Valley I don't think really helped. I don't think there was a gay student association at Lehigh or anything like that. So, again, I think these things did exist. Now, I also have one of my very close friends from high school came out I think his freshman year at Harvard, and [07:00] now, he was a student at Harvard -- I don't know what the gay student association was at Harvard at the time, but I do know that he felt pretty

comfortable being out at Harvard, and he never looked back since. Those sorts of things were not possible at Lafayette.

MA: Wow, yeah, and that perspective is important because it's not -- that's not how college was at that time.

HL: Right. Well, so, the --

MA: It's the way Lafayette was in a very specific -- you said that you learned later there -- were there pockets of LGBT life and it was so heavily coated and closeted that it was --

HL: Yes. I found out later -- I was at a party -- I think I -- forgive me if I'm repeating myself, but I'll -- for the recording, yeah --

MA: No, no. Please repeat.

HL: Yeah, I was at a party. Every Saturday following Thanksgiving in Asbury Park there is a -- at the Empress Hotel, there is a thing called Santa Saturday, which is like a big gay -- [08:00] it's a weird, (laughs) sort of quasi-leather sort of bear gathering in the bar -- in the hotel lobby and in the bar, and they have an auction -- it's a charity, and it's really just a chance to drink beer in the afternoon, and I was in the hallway -- there's a hallway which faces the -- which -- the pool, which obviously it was November, so, it was closed, and a man walked by me with a battered or tattered Lafayette College cap, and I'm like, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Wait." So, I said, "Did you go to Lafayette College," and he said, "Yes," and I said, "What class were you," and he said, "I was class of '81." So, he was two

years older than me, and I'm like, "Were you actively out at Lafayette?" He goes, "Well," he said, "You know, I was certainly sexually gay and active at Lafayette, but I wasn't out," and then I'm like, "You were," and he goes, "Oh, yeah," and he -- I found out that -- he told me during -- there was a fellow who was in my class at Lafayette who transferred out of the college that they had spent the entire [09:00] freshman orientation weekend having sex, (laughter) and I'm like -- so, again, so --

MA: (laughter) Sorry.

HL: Yeah.

MA: Right, right.

HL: And I'm in this hallway listening to this and I'm like -- it's just incredible to me that that was sort of going on, and then this kid probably left because of -- and he joined a fraternity and it was all, again, super closeted, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) all that. Now, I have another friend who was the editor of the paper at the time. It was my class, Craig Cunningham, and he had mentioned in the past to me -- much later, after we graduated -- that there were certain -- he -- because he was editor, he had a finger on the pulse of the college a lot better, and he said, "You know, there were definitely kids who were gay, but there were not many," and he didn't really elaborate on it, but those were very few and far between things. So, yeah, so, [10:00] the atmosphere was not particularly positive.

MA: Wow, and it seems like gay life, then, meant like gay intimate relationships, as opposed to gay social life or the sort what we --

HL: Well, that would've been --

MA: Out of the question.

HL: The gay social life that we have now would've been unthinkable -- unthinkable -- and wouldn't've been allowed to happen, and I have one episode, which to the whole oppressive thing, I was the president of my fraternity, and it turned out that one of my dear friends who we both know, was in the same fraternity as me, but we didn't find out we were both gay until twenty years later.

MA: Well, there you go.

HL: So and yet -- and I was in -- the fraternity was having problems. We were off-campus, the college had admitted women, they hadn't (inaudible) -- so, the college's male population had been cut in half, yet this number of fraternities was the same, [11:00] so, something had to give, right?

MA: Right.

HL: They couldn't populate them all because -- so -- but the college never really took any steps to the fraternities to say, "This is happening, so -- this is going to happen, so, you need to make some plans." They didn't make any plans; they just sort of let the whole thing happen, or -- so, my fraternity, which was off-campus, which is now where the Lafayette Inn is, had a reputation for -- it was the original Jewish fraternity.

MA: Where the Lafayette Inn is?

HL: Yes.

MA: Oh.

HL: Yeah, that was my fraternity house.

MA: I didn't even know that was a fraternity.

HL: Oh, yeah, and was Pi Lambda Phi which was formed in the 40s or 50s. The college had -- I'm getting off on another topic -- the college had a Jewish population here, but they -- and the society was called Towers, but because of anti-Semitism on the college, they were not allowed to form their own fraternity, but the --

MA: And the college has a deep history of anti-Semitic.

HL: Yeah, I'm sure it does, and -- look, that's another --

MA: Right. [12:00] Sure, it is. Absolutely.

HL: That's for another time -- for another study so, we were in that fraternity and we were having trouble and because -- the fraternity was on the decline -- one, because Jewish students than begin to be accepted in other fraternities, so, it didn't need at least it didn't seem to need a separately segregated one, and by the time I joined, there were very few Jewish students in this Jewish fraternity and it had no real Jewish identity anyhow. And then it also had a reputation for being an off-campus or a druggie fraternity and that made it sort of renegade, off-campus, everybody here is very rah-rah, and, so --

MA: Yeah. (laughs)

HL: -- I was living in McKelvy House, and I wound up joining fraternity I think my sophomore because, like, well, off-campus is really quite okay -- in fact, maybe quite a bit better, but to the point one day -- but our fraternity was struggling. The house was struggling; the house was literally falling apart. It was a disaster. We shouldn't have been allowed to live in the house. The college [13:00] should've stepped in and closed it, but that's another story, but I was in College Hill Tavern, and I was having -- the layout of CHT in those days was different than it is now. It had a very long bar going down the side that we walked in; there was a long bar and there were tables off to the left, and there was always some neighborhood Lafayette alums at the front of the bar and they were hanging out. They would smoke cigarettes because smoking was allowed then. I think it still may be allowed then. I think it still may be in Pennsylvania, I'm not sure. Anyway, so, but I wound up sitting at the bar and I wound up talking with this alum and he said, "You know," he said, "I've got to ask you a question." He goes, "The reason your fraternity is failing is because nobody is getting laid in that fraternity house," and he looked at me -- he goes, "What's the story with that," and I (laughs) tell you, I still remember that conversation, [14:00] and I don't remember -- I didn't know what to say. I was 21. I was like, "Well, I'm not really interested in women." What was I going to say? I'm gay? You

know, which I wasn't prepared to say to myself at that time, but it was just --

I just remember that conversation thinking, "That's what the problem is." They all think that we're gay, which a lot of us were, or some of us were, but we -- I don't think a lot of us admitted that to ourselves, but that seemed to be the view of the place, or there was an issue that we weren't getting laid -- that there weren't enough women getting laid there, and that was part of our problem. I never forgot that.

MA: That's absolutely amazing because there was like a public recognition that some sort of heterosexual social life was occurring and that's actually a requirement for a successful fraternity.

HL: Absolutely.

MA: It's really -- that that would be a public piece of data that the public opinion is sort of --

HL: Yeah, absolutely.

MA: Wow, that's powerful. That's amazing.

HL: And, by the way, we were having parties with other sororities, but they would come down -- it was like, "Oh, [15:00] we're sort of a cool sorority, so, we'll party with this off-campus renegade fraternity," but it's true -- very few guys were getting laid, and there's a reason for that, and, so --

MA: Yeah, yeah, wow.

HL: -- partially some of us --

MA: That's an amazing story.

HL: Some were gay and some just weren't cool enough. It was a different, [sighs] so, anyway.

MA: Yeah, yeah. Wow, that's fascinating. Thinking about what you said a moment ago where you said, "Even if I come out to myself, I can't even imagine where I would look."

HL: Yeah.

MA: It sounds like there were literally, literally no resources for anyone on campus who was LGBT questioning anything. There was no place to go, whether it from health center to chaplain to -- it was -- there were nothing. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

HL: Well, I don't kn-- or nobody ever said --

MA: It wasn't part of the public discourse, you know?

HL: No. Where would you talk about -- nobody said, "Let's come talk about your sexuality," or --

MA: Yeah.

HL: So, no.

MA: Right. So, any allies and support or was it just a non--

HL: No. It was just a non-- it was a no--

MA: Wow. Wow. [16:00] So, one of the things that we've discussed in other interviews is the way people talked about gay people, which gay people heard, that many of us remember conversations about gay people without people knowing that you were gay or lesbian or tra-- whatever, and was there a lot of active homophobia -- the language, or was it just silence?

HL: Well, I think that's a good question. I'm thinking back to that time. I'd say there was this normal amount of -- I wouldn't say at Lafayette College there was an extraordinary amount of homophobia. I'd say it was pretty much in line with society at the time. The gays were outcast, weird, dysfunctional, you know?

MA: Yeah.

HL: That sort of a thing. So, yeah, there was -- I would say what was prevalent in those days was a bizarre misogynistic -- that was [17:00] a -- there was a -- the turning point came when the -- one of the fraternities had a back to the womb party. Have you heard about this episode?

MA: I have, but feel free to talk about it.

HL: So, the whole house is decorated in cotton swabs that have been dipped in red paint or so, it was a whole sort of -- and that was the -- it was ridiculous and stupid and these guys were just -- again --

MA: Childish.

HL: Yeah. I don't think it was done with -- it's like a lot of these things that are not done with a sense of like, "We're going to hurt women's feelings." There just like, "Let's have a back to the womb party. It's a great idea," and that exploded, and that was the first time that -- and that was about 1981 -- 1982 -- that was the first time that there was actually some sort of sexual [18:00] stir. I don't mean like a gay thing, even just like opposite sex -- like some sort of stirring of -- I don't

know what the -- gender, sexual identity -- there's a problem here and the college did take some action at the time. I forget what happened. Either the fraternity got suspended or the fraternity -- it didn't get suspended, but they had to stop having parties for -- whatever it was, and that was the last time that sort of a thing happened.

MA: Yeah, yeah, but it opened the discourse around sexual behavior.

HL: Yes, how to behave, exactly, which had gotten out of control.

The problem is is that -- the larger problem of the college at that time was is that the entire social life of the college had been given over to the fraternities. The college did very little and, so, it was just like, "Well, you guys have fun, and we're going home for the weekend." So, I --

MA: -- and there was a vacuum that everything took place.

HL: Yeah.

MA: Got you.

[19:00] [section redacted by the interviewee]

[20:00]

[21:00]

MA: Wow, wow, that's powerful. I will look it up.

HL: So...

MA: I will look it up. Which you're bringing in gender in this sort of the more -- the general climate aspect -- thinking about other aspects of identity and there obviously was a gay life on campus, but race, religion, social economic class as factors in your

experience as a person coming out to themselves on campus or to the extent that you see that.

HL: (sighs) You know --

MA: It's not for everybody, and for some people there's -- there're profound intersections.

HL: No. For me, I [22:00] found Lafayette -- I had gone to boarding school before and, so, there were kids from all over the country. It was a very sophisticated place. I found Lafayette to be -- not to sound like a snob, but it was mostly kids from the suburbs of New Jersey. It was really an unsophisticated place in those days. There were a few -- but the thing is is that, as I've always said, the people that were really intellectually curious ultimately found each other either at McKelvy or it was sort of like a weeding out process. They were here, but the problem is it that intellectualism was frowned upon, whereas conformity and --

MA: I don't why this has stopped, but this one is going, so we'll keep going. That's why we have two. So, I'll just double check that it's all right. We will restart it. OK, we'll restart. We're at 22 minutes and 57 seconds on the other recorder. [23:00] So, got you, so, the intellectual life and this sort -- the culture that was also part of feeling isolated for some people.

HL: Oh, yeah.

MA: Where's home? Because you've mentioned --

HL: I grew up in Manhattan.

MA: OK, so, you've mentioned geography a couple of times in the Lehigh Valley and that's --

HL: Listen, I -- so...

MA: We always talk about Greek life, and that was huge for you and for some people it's not at all, and you've described that in some (laughs) amazing detail, especially around sort of the fate of your fraternity. As a follow up, what happened to your fraternity? Did it --

HL: It closed. It closed.

MA: OK, soon after or --

HL: Yeah, soon after. A year or two after I left and it should have. It should have, so...

MA: OK, all right. Athletics is big for people. Was that an issue for you?

HL: You know, it's so funny you should mention that. The answer is in the beginning part of this ti-- no, and it was weird because I was a fairly avid squash player and there were some squash courts here, and I [24:00] played a few times, but I never really made a habit of it, and I never really became -- I was never on a team, I was never -- I did very -- and it's funny because I remember feeling a little bit left out. I would walk -- in the afternoons, class would be over, the campus would be very quiet because everybody would be up in Metzgar Fields or whatever they were doing. This was the Fall. The sky -- the light was very

yellow, and I remember walking across the campus -- I was going down to McKelvy House -- and the band would be playing on the quad, practicing on the quad, and I was like, "You know, I really need to do some more stuff," but I didn't know what to do and I -- I was sort -- you know, I don't know what -- I was involved with the radio station, [section redacted by the interviewee] [25:00] but I had gone to summer camp in Maine for seven summers and I was like not a great athlete. I was very effeminate kid, but I went and I did it, and it was a very -- my parents chose this camp -- well, my mother did -- because it was an extremely athletic, competitive camp, and she saw that I was not quite normal, so, this was an attempt to really sort of toughen me up as a kid, and I have to say it didn't work at that time, but the dividends that paid later in life were enormous and, so, she was right at the wrong time, but her instincts w-- her instinct was right. She couldn't know, though, [26:00] that what she was doing was planting the seed for future athleticism and -- because I could climb the mountains and I could -- I never shied away from -- I never won anything, but I did everything.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

HL: Do you underst-- you know?

MA: Absolutely.

HL: And, so, my junior year or my senior year -- I can't remember which one -- my friend Dick Hughes, who was -- I said he was a dear friend of mine freshman year, and then we started drifting

apart, and then I went to McKelvy, but we all sort of stayed in touch, and I'll tell you another story, which I'll tell you off-tape if that's OK.

MA: OK, of course.

HL: He came up me and he goes -- and he was the captain of the crew -- he's like, "Would you please come down and row with us," and they had some -- at those days, they had one shell -- two shells -- in a warehouse, and I was like, "Mm, all right," so, I went down and I tried it, and I had a great time, and I was rowing on the Lehigh and I went to the matches. [27:00] We went down to the -- Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, and I remember driving through the horse farm and rowing, and I had a great time, so -- but, again, it had nothing to do with being gay, but I felt like I was involved in the life of the college in a way that I hadn't experienced before, and that was a blast. I still have all of my Lafayette crew sweatshirts and things --

MA: (laughs) That's great.

HL: -- which I keep in my closet. Like I'm never going to wear it; I don't want to wear them because I don't want to wear them out. It's like weird. Anyhow, so, I must've really liked it.

MA: It's an important of yourself that you kept.

HL: Yeah, here.

MA: That's lovely, yeah.

HL: And, so, then later in life, because of the sports thing, I was able to play hockey. I went and learned how to play hockey as an adult. I started playing when I was 35. I learned how to skate and then I started playing every Friday, and then that started a whole thing because there was a gay hockey league starting, and I was not on that and I still wasn't out, but [28:00] a lot of my friends who were on my straight team started joining the gay league. And I'm like, "Wow, if these guys are all gay," and then things -- so, that's the sports things, and then I went and played water polo, and now I just do weight lifting because I'm done with team sports because I did for so long --

MA: (laughs) Yeah, yeah.

HL: -- but, so, yeah. So, that's the sports thing.

MA: So, it started out as a way to solve your mom's worries about like masculinity and stuff --

HL: Yeah, totally, yeah.

MA: -- but then it turned out to be a lifelong source of happiness --

HL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

MA: -- and belonging for you because you were obviously good at it enough to -- and enjoyed it enough to --

HL: Yeah, and now here we are thirty -- forty -- years later. Gays are incredible athletes.

MA: Yes.

HL: Incredible athletes.

MA: Yes, yes, yes.

HL: I don't care what the sport is. I don't care if it's wrestling or hockey or figure skating or whatever it is you want to do.

MA: Amazing.

HL: Amazing. I see these young kids that are out doing rugby. They're extraordinary athletes, and they're -- it's just such a different world.

MA: It is. It is. Yeah, I see that, too, and the [29:00] way in which athleticism and a sort of public use of your body in the sense of taking that on has changed over I would say our lifetimes, right?

HL: Oh, absolutely.

MA: For gay and lesbian people -- that it's suddenly -- it's what they do like everybody else, and they're amazing --

HL: Well, look at -- it started -- I think a huge kickoff was probably Greg Louganis.

MA: Yeah, I remember that very well -- perfectly well.

HL: He was huge, and it was like what?

MA: Yeah, and he came out as positive, too, right, at the --

HL: Yeah, yeah.

MA: Yeah, and that was --

HL: And now we have Caitlyn Jenner, which is also bizarre.

MA: Indeed. Indeed.

HL: Not bizarre, but it's just -- well, it is bizarre, and it's just unthinkable. I mean, Bruce Jenner? I remember Bruce Jenner.

MA: I do, too. I remember the Wheaties box with him as him on it --

with his bowl pixie haircut and his like movie star smile.

HL: And my women friends are like, "That guy was amazingly handsome as a man. Like he had an amazing body." They thought he was just incredible, and now he's become a woman, [30:00] and again, we live in unbelievable times.

MA: (laughs) It's really, really different. It's really different. Clubs and organization other than that -- it sounds like the club participation you had was --

HL: Well, it was mostly (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) the radio station --

MA: The radio station, right, right.

HL: -- and I had a radio show, and my friends revolved around the radio station, and then I was doing at McKelvy House, the year I lived there, and then -- you know, this is -- I'm trying to think back at what I occupied with myself with because my grades were terrible, so, clearly, it wasn't my studies.

MA: As a professor, I do twinge a little. (laughs)

HL: It was ridiculous, and it was because I wasn't applying myself.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

HL: I'm a fairly intelligent person. If I had studied more, I would've accomplished a lot more, but I don't -- again, I don't know if it's -- I think it's dope smoking, [31:00] I think it's a sexual short-circuitry that's going on in your brain, and a lot of things.

MA: Yeah, the stress around --

HL: And I also realized that I had no idea that I was hard of hearing and that didn't come out until later. So, I've been -- again, I don't want to give excuses for my behavior, but --

MA: Reasons were there it sounds like, for sure.

HL: And then certain things also -- there was some significant disappointments at Lafayette College during that time for me, and I -- which I think were valuable lessons, and I think the thing about being disappointed or not achieving something is -- you have to -- it's very hard to say -- it's very hard to think it, but you have to look at the opportunity in every failure, and it's very easy -- it's much easier said than done --

MA: Indeed.

HL: -- but it's true. So --

MA: I agree.

HL: -- I was going to say this off thing, but I might as well just leave it on the record because it doesn't matter. I mean, it doesn't -- it's not -- In retrospect [32:00] I don't care if it's on the record. I really wanted to -- I wanted to join a fraternity here. I wanted to join Zeta Psi. All my friends were joining, and in those days I was very concerned with my preppy image and things like that and Zeta -- it was sort of that sort of thing and plus all of my friends were joining there, all of them. And I didn't get a bid to join.

MA: Oh, that's big. That's big.

HL: So, it was very disappointing, so, it was off - separated from all of my friends who went on to -- and they were very nice about it. They couldn't quite --

MA: Yeah.

HL: And it's not like everyb-- but it didn't really --

MA: That's tough.

HL: -- happen, and it was disappointing, but that's when I joined McKelvy House, which happened at the end of my freshman year, so, it was like -- and I remember there was another friend of mine who came up to me and he said, "Oh, I heard you got into McKelvy House," and I'm like, "Yes, I did," and he goes, "Excellent." Like he didn't care less that it was an intellectual -- but it was like I had a place to go.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, got you.

HL: Like I wasn't stuck in [33:00] a dorm.

MA: Got you, yeah.

HL: So, and then I joined the Pi Lam, and then that all became much less important after McKelvy. I had met a whole different crowd of people, and then I joined a fraternity which was off-campus, and, so, I began to change that way, too.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that directed you in a different way.

HL: And then there was something else. Oh, I didn't get invited back into McKelvy House after my sophomore year, and part of it was my grades weren't very good, and, again, I think it was a lot of just partying and stuff like that.

MA: Yeah, that does have an effect.

HL: No question about it, but I also had a very bizarre episode with a professor during -- nothing sexual. He has since died. His name was Jim Crawford; he was a math professor here, and he basically founded [34:00] the McKelvy House program in the 1960s, so, now, he's getting ready to retire, and, so, McKelvy was founded in like '63, '64, I think -- something like that -- and Crawford had a huge issue, which he had been railing about the college for drinking on campus -- that the drinking age in Pennsylvania has always been 21, and the college -- no, the drinking age in Pennsylvania has always been 18, I'm sorry, and New Jersey at that point in time was -- wait, Pennsylvania was 21, New Jersey was 18. You couldn't drink until you were 21, but the college was turning a blind eye to it and there was drinking -- and they never checked IDs. Nobody cared. It was if you were 18, you went to the fraternity, and nobody cared. This was his cause celebre. It was his big deal, and during my McKelvy interview for the second year we had an enormous argument [35:00] because Nancy was standing right outside the door because she was the next person to be interviewed, and I was saying the issue was not the drinking age. The issue was education -- that people have to be -- which I still believe that people have to be taught how to drink responsibly, and the college isn't doing that, and he -- we argued and argued and argued, and he was getting really angry with me and ultimately, I think I lost his support for the

-- over that issue and it turned out ultimately I think it's been proven that I was right, that raising the drinking age only causes binge drinking campus and we still haven't tackled the issue of how do you teach drinking responsibly. Anyhow, I didn't get into McKelvy House again the next year, and that was when I wound up getting into Pi Lam, so, that was a disappointment.

MA: Yeah, yeah, and then --

HL: And, again, I don't know that that has anything to do with my sexuality, but those were just key things happening in my career.

MA: Yeah, yeah, and that sort of directed your --

HL: Yeah. [36:00]

MA: -- your path more and I think you -- in the many, many interesting things you just said -- one of them saying you're under stress, but you said like the circuitry is disconnecting the stress of being gay or trying to come out to yourself under circumstances like that affects your behavior, right?

HL: Yeah.

MA: You're coping with the feeling that something's up and something's going on and that adds to stress in these circumstances as well, I think.

HL: And I remember -- have memories of -- (laughs) it's just so funny you think about these things. I have a memory of a woman -- attractive woman -- we became friends and I think she wanted to have sex with me, and she took me back to her room and she poured me some drinks -- we had Rob Roys and I just remember she made

Rob Roys, and then I can't remember (inaudible) -- I know it has vermouth in it now I think. (laughs) I like them, but -- and it was clear that she wanted to have sex, so, she was going to seduce me and I [37:00] just was like -- I just fled. I remember that. I just left, and there was so many -- not so many, but plenty of episodes like that, you know?

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HL: So, (laughs) I don't know if that was -- these are all just little bits and pieces of my time here that's come back.

MA: Yeah, yeah, sure. Absolutely, and --

HL: And, so, in -- again, in those times -- and then don't forget AIDS started in 1981. That was when that first article came out in the Times about homosexual disease or whatever, so, from '81 on, it just got worse.

MA: That's right.

HL: It just got worse.

MA: Things took a terrible turn in the '80s.

HL: Awful, and it really into the 90s -- it wasn't until they came out with protease-inhibitors that you could --

MA: I really do think that just historically pointing out from 1980 to the mid-'90s with the anti-retrovirals and all those, that is a period of gay history that is a period of gay history. It affects who we are and how we are, [38:00] and it's not just about losing friends, and -- that's the most important thing -- the illness and the neglect of the -- all that stuff, but the --

what that -- how that changed what it meant to be gay. Right?

You're a public menace, you're a threat, you're a -- you know?

HL: Yeah.

MA: That really changed that --

HL: Oh.

MA: -- homophobia took a new a turn to a place that it's hard to explain to people now.

HL: Yeah, it's impossible, and even -- I'll tell you -- this has nothing to do with the college, but I was working in 1993 and 1994, which is really almost the peak of the thing because they still hadn't -- they had -- what do you call it? They had --

MA: AZT?

HL: AZT, which was sort of working, and I was working for a start-up internet company -- this is before -- actually, it was before the internet. It was an online company. This is when Prodigy was number one and CompuServe was number two. This is before the World Wide Web. And we were working in a little office in Greenwich Village in a building that has t-- it used to [39:00] be -- in the nineteenth century, it was a hotel for men, so, there were just single rooms, and, so, those single rooms because offices mostly for psychiatrists and psychologists because they were single rooms and our -- it was no bigger than this -- maybe a little bit bigger, and we had our office in one of these, which would've been a bedroom in the nineteenth century. It was about this size, but next door with an adjoining door, which was always

locked, was an HIV or AIDS testing station. So, I would be at my desk and you could hear --

MA: Oh, my God.

HL: Ever hear a mother scream when her son's -- kid's being given a death sentence? You don't really want to listen to that, and, so, I'd be at my desk wondering whether -- talk-- thinking about my own sexuality. I'm like, "Nope, I'm not going to deal with that," and I just keep typing away. Just like --

MA: Oh, my God. That's unbelievable.

HL: Yeah.

MA: Wow.

HL: That was a crazy time, and, so -- and then I had a colleague of mine with whom I worked -- to give you an example -- to take it one step further, I had a colleague of mine with whom I worked in a financial services firm, and [40:00] he was brilliant -- brilliant kid who was from the Louisiana Bayou who was the first person in his family in 250 years to go to college, and he got a full scholarship to Harvard, and a brilliant kid, and he developed AIDS and he -- I remember he came into work, there was -- we were a very small group again in a room maybe twice the size of this -- not much bigger. There were maybe eight of us in this very specialized team of people doing very esoteric forms of finance, co-industry swaps, and he called -- I wasn't part of the senior management team, but he called the senior people into the conference room and he told them, "I have AIDS," and he was going

to die, and they all came out and they were all like crying and stuff like that and I'm like, "What's going on," because, again, it never occurred to me and as we sat -- and he sat further away than you were and he got sicker and sicker and sicker and sicker and sicker, and, so, ultimately the group -- time passed, the group broke up, he [41:00] ultimately -- he died in 1995, so -- no, I'm sorry, he died in -- yeah, he died in 1995. The protease anti-retrovirals came out in 1996, so, if he'd lived six months longer, he might've lived, but, again, there was no mention of it made in the office. It was, "Lynn has -- Lynn has like lymphoma."

MA: Oh, no -- oh, all the things that --

HL: Well, whatever --

MA: Yeah, all the codes and all the --

HL: Yeah, anyhow.

MA: Yeah, wow, and the opportunistic diseases that would come (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

HL: Yeah. So, for my -- so, just getting into coming out --

MA: Yeah, sure.

HL: I'm in this oppressive (overlapping dialogue; inaudible), weird college place, then dealing with myself, then the AIDS crisis comes and shuts that down, so, it's not until I was about 45 that I said, "All right, well, now, I can just" -- and, as I said, eventually doesn't really matter because your sexuality -- and I've heard this [42:00] talked about by other psychiatrists and

psychologists -- that people come out at two parts of their lives, either early in their teens or in their forties when your mortality is becoming quite clear, so, you have --

MA: Yeah, you feel a different relationship to the timeline.

HL: Yeah, exactly, so...

MA: Wow. It is amazing how time shapes us as LGBT -- it just shapes us in this really specific way. Thinking about your time at Lafayette, I think I might know the answer to this, but one of the things people commonly talk about is their experience in the classroom, and it's less important in this issue, but sometimes it is. Did that play -- and obviously, there weren't -- you know, WGS was not offering LGBTQ studies classes, but did that ever come up or what was the -- or did it feel just silenced (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

HL: I think -- and, by the way, Lafayette College in those days, and still is -- I will say this -- Lafayette was a very rigorous place academically. [43:00] I'll give the faculty credit -- for all the bullshit and the partying and the back to the womb party asininity and the fact that the administration did nothing to help the social -- at least the faculty never relented on the academic demands of the college. You had to work here. You really had to work. You couldn't coast. You had to do the work they were demanding, and the workload was not onerous, but it was just right, but it was demanding, and -- but the answer to the question is -- listen, I -- in retrospect, I think the academic

life here was more of an oasis than the social life. It was fun to go to classes because at least you were dealing with adults that weren't part of that stupid bullshit that was the rest of the college, you know?

MA: Yeah.

HL: So, in that case, in looking back on it, it was kind of -- it was a relief to go to school -- to go to class.

MA: Yeah, [44:00] a place that was a safe place -- a safe space not in the way we mean it now, but in a place where none of the nonsense could permeate, where you could sort of concentrate and be sort of satisfied intellectually at least.

HL: Right, absolutely.

MA: Yeah, yeah, that speaks well of the classroom.

HL: Yeah, absolutely.

MA: It really does.

HL: Yeah, and I think -- yeah, there's no question about that.

MA: So, there's not a -- because with the time frame we're in, there's no -- you mentioned the back to the womb party and that seems to be the moment where sort of gender sexuality issues emerge into the public debate in some way, and it's been mentioned in other interviews, and it's historically, from women's and gender studies, it's often marked by faculty who were around at that time -- Susan Basow, for example, in psychology is still here as a faculty member, Debbie Byrd, and Lynn Van Dyke who just retired, who has also done an interview and has

mentioned it relative [45:00] to this is the moment when women's studies started in many ways. The faculty got together and they were like, "This is ridiculous. We have to start teaching around these issues." So, that seems like a big public moment. Other moments that you remember where this came -- or that was sort of the --

HL: Well, the --

MA: You were at the end of your career right around then.

HL: Yeah, so, it wasn't -- but there was also an episode where the faculty -- in 1979, Lafayette was mentioned in the *Preppy Handbook*. Do you remember that book? That was --

MA: I do.

HL: The *Preppy Handbook* was a huge runaway best seller.

MA: I remember that. It had like a plaid cover.

HL: Exactly.

MA: I do remember that, yeah.

HL: And, so, Lafayette was classic. I had gone to a boarding school, so, I already lived that, but for these kids that had gone to public school in New Jersey, but came from wealthy houses -- homes -- this book -- it was like a guide on how to act, and, so, everybody --

MA: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

HL: -- was looking, looking, the same, the same, the same -- it was the (inaudible) sweaters and the turtlenecks and blah, blah, blah, and it was much -- and I was part of that, too, but

Lafayette was rated the number three party school [46:00] in the United States behind Dartmouth and Bowdoin and --

MA: Holy smokes.

HL: -- and it was the number three, not party school, drinking school. That was -- to be specific, just because we had 17 fraternities and 6 sororities, and there was just so much drinking on this campus at that time, and I had classmates who, my sophomore year, had real like rummy faces just from drinking.

MA: Wow.

HL: And it was really amazing.

MA: Wow.

HL: I remember that. I'm not making that up because I talked about it with a colleague of mine recently -- with a classmate of mine recently, but the faculty got together in a meeting and they called in the director of admissions or -- no, the director of admissions went to the faculty meeting and said, "You have to take action on this drinking problem because it is causing a major crisis in admissions because parents don't want to send their kids (MA gasps) to a college where they think it's the number three drinking school in the country. So, things have to start changing."

MA: [47:00] Oh, wow. Wow, and --

HL: And I think they did to some degree, but it was -- again, these are just the very beginnings of the college sort of --

MA: Turning.

HL: -- moving into a more, I don't know, progressive -- I don't know if that's the right word -- just a more sane or just less -- I think the college had admitted women and I think they felt that was all they really had to do.

MA: Yeah, and then let it loose or just let it roll.

HL: Just let it -- yeah, we're (inaudible) -- well, it's not.

MA: Yeah.

HL: It's a different place. You have to make accommodation. Everything has to change -- the mindset. You have to accommodate women in other ways, and you have to get people's -- it's a co-educational thing. It's not enough to just -- and for -- sorority's were just starting at that time, and they didn't want to -- they certainly weren't going to force the fraternity's to go co-ed the way they had at other schools. The college, as you know, has a very complicated with the fraternity system here.

MA: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) yeah.

HL: So, they started sororities, so, it's really just replicating all -- it's like, "Well, we have this bad system. We might as well just replicate it."

MA: [48:00] (laughs) And create a parallel one.

HL: Yeah.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The sense that the LGBTQ community has changed doesn't even seem like the right question, right, because there wasn't a community during your time here. There was just a sort of silence and isolation. So, I can't ask you how it's changed,

but things have changed, and you've sort of meant-- you've gestured to that. It's an obvious thing.

HL: Well, yeah, but -- yeah, we come here and we have the Lafayette Pride Network, -- you know, the parties and people can -- there's an out thing and there was the -- that thing which we had the discussion about. What's the acronym they came up with?

MA: Oh, yeah, they have QUEST.

HL: QUEST and that whole -- there was a QUEST and all of that but that started, what, in the late 90s?

MA: I think so.

HL: Yeah, so --

MA: I think so, yeah.

HL: Yeah, [49:00] I think all those things changed tremendously. I think there's a lot more work to be done. It'd be great -- but I think it's a thousand times better than it was.

MA: Indeed. What do you think remains undone?

HL: I just need -- will gay students put Lafayette on their list if you really get -- would a student feel as home here, as welcomed here, as some going to like Wesleyan, where there's -- it's already been established for thirty years?

MA: Right, right, right.

HL: How do you do that? I don't know. I don't know how -- I've never worked in that area. I don't how you get the message out, other than to keep doing what we've been doing, you know?

MA: Yeah, absolutely.

HL: And things have changed for the better. I don't know why any student wouldn't feel comfortable and plus there's proximity to New York and everything else and blah blah, so, that really helps, but I -- and certain things -- [50:00] also, the college changed in terms of sexual behavior. There was a big deal -- I had two roommates that had girlfriends, and oftentimes when the girlfriends came by, I had to go find some other place to sleep, and that was ridiculous. I'm like, "Why am I leaving," in retrospect. I'd be like what -- but it was expected.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, because it was normal back then.

HL: And I think it was the president of Boston University, Silber, who is gone, but I don't think it was Lafayette, but somebody said, "No student should become an unwilling voyeur on their roommates sexual behavior," you know I'm s-- that sort of thing, and that happened to me once -- it was disgusting -- with my roommate at McKelvy House, and he apologized to me at one of our reunions for that, which made me feel a little bit, but --

MA: Because that's --

HL: So, that's sort of changed, too, I think, but I wonder now -- you know, you see that -- what would happen if you have a homosexual male student here [51:00] or a lesbian student who wants to bring back their girlfriend? How does that --

MA: Yeah, sort out --

HL: -- work --

MA: -- in these codes of how do you behave.

HL: Yeah, and it's like -- does somebody -- is straight girl going to -- who -- call -- who might be a homophobic, call her parents in Shore Hill to say, "My roommate is a lesbian and I have to move out while her girlfriend comes to Rutgers for the weekend." I don't know. (laughs)

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a lot to sort out with these kinds of things as we move forward and people are more out, and there are many layers to thinking about that.

HL: So many. It's really -- and in some ways it's very interesting because I think the larger steps have been taken. Now, it's the grinding work that is equally as difficult, you know?

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and the many pockets of -- there are many ways to be a Lafayette student now and if you are on the football team and in a science field, it might be tougher to find gay friends and be a gay person than it would be if you're in theater and you're in --

HL: [52:00] Sure.

MA: There's a lot of different -- I think the experiences sort of -- the spectrum is getting wide for I think LGBTQ -- it's really -- it's a homophobic school for some and welcoming for some in how we --

HL: Yeah. Yeah, abs--

MA: How we get it right for everybody is a question.

HL: Absolutely.

MA: Yeah.

HL: Yeah.

MA: So, anything else you'd like to add?

HL: No. I've just -- no, I don't -- I look back at my time as a student here and all these issues, and it's sort of a -- I don't know. As I've said to you before, I look back on it with like eighty percent was the times, so, I don't really get that sad, and sometimes I'm like, ugh --

MA: It could've done better.

HL: It could've done better, and twenty percent of it is like, "Oh, I made such a bad decision in coming here," you know?

MA: Mm-hmm, yeah.

HL: And it's very interesting how people's perception of the college change. When I was younger, I had a very pro-- [53:00] I was like, "Oh, it was a great place." And maybe I was trying to convince myself and my friends who I would I associate with, including one who -- my friend, Nancy, and who wrote that article -- and another friend of mine who was a very close friend, is now a very successful physician in New York. And he's a bright guy, worked very hard here, and he got into a very good medical school, was like, "It sucked," for the first twenty years --

MA: Yeah, yeah.

HL: -- and now, in retrospect, they're like, "You know, it wasn't that bad. We got great educations and it was fine and it got us to where we wanted to be," and now I'm like, "Are you kidding me?"

It sucked," you know? (laughter) It fucking sucked. You know?

What are you talking about?" (laughter)

MA: They're slipping back into nostalgia, and you're like, "Wait a second."

HL: "Wait a second." Yeah, totally.

MA: Your trajectory is totally different.

HL: Yeah, completely.

MA: This was awful. (laughs)

HL: Yeah, and so, it's fine. I do support with the college; I'm a part of it, you know, whether I like it or not.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HL: So, let's make the best of it.

MA: [54:00] Yeah, yeah.

HL: And I think it's -- I'm proud of the place. I'm proud of the work that it's done and people like you are making it a better place.

MA: Thank you.

HL: That the place is making process, and we all are together, and I think that's great, and we have a supportive, which is great, and we're lucky enough the college is -- it's lucky. It's not lucky. It's the result of hundreds of years of work of -- it has a huge endowment and that didn't just happen -- the planning and thoughtful planning and conservative planning that made that happen and how you spend that money and how you -- and has the

resources now to -- as I said to you, Lafayette's a very, very, very good college, but how does it become a truly great college?

MA: Yeah.

HL: That is what the goal is, and it has every -- and it drives me crazy because, as I've said, to be pretty vulgar, I've never seen a college or an institution step on its own dick more than Lafayette does, you know? (MA laughs) [55:00] It's true.

MA: Yes, I do know.

HL: You know?

MA: Yes.

HL: And it drives me crazy.

MA: Yeah.

HL: And I'm like, there's no reason that -- I think we're better than Lehigh in many ways and we're better than Bucknell in many ways, and I think there's no reason that Lafayette can't be spoken of in the same breath as Amherst and Wesleyan and Vassar, which it probably is. It's making strides in that way, and it's just got to keep pushing. We have every single possible resource to make that happen, you know?

MA: Yes. Yes.

HL: The college wants for nothing, you know?

MA: Yes. Yes.

HL: So --

MA: We have what other colleges would kill for.

HL: Oh, come on. It's crazy.

MA: Yeah.

HL: It's crazy.

MA: Yeah. Name a kind of resource from endowment to faculty to -- name it -- I mean, location...

HL: Yeah, and it's great because you can see the admission's numbers bearing that out.

MA: Yeah.

HL: So...

MA: I have over -- this is my eighth year at the college -- watched the quality of student -- the overall -- I mean, there's always been phenomenal kids but [56:00] the overall average -- the median -- the mean of our students just be-- more curious, more intellectually -- always smart, but more there, more willing to be creative, take risks. I think our admissions are just getting better and better and there's lots of new faculty. They bring new stuff, too.

HL: Yeah.

MA: So...

HL: I had a conversation with another faculty member about a year and a half ago, and she said, "I believe," she said, "that our top students can compete with any top student at any top university in the country -- period."

MA: Yep.

HL: And she said, "The bottom -- not the bottom, but the layer under that is coming up very quickly," which is great.

MA: Well, you keep giving back to the college, and one way that you have is this interview --

HL: Wow, thank you.

MA: -- and I'm grateful. Thank you, Harlan.

HL: OK, thank you very much.

MA: Absolutely.

END OF AUDIO FILE