

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of
Bryan C. Fox '10
Conducted by
Mary Armstrong
November 6, 2017

Special Collections & College Archives

David Bishop Skillman Library

Lafayette College

2018

Fox

MARY ARMSTRONG: Okay, this Mary Armstrong. I am chair of Women's and Gender Studies at Lafayette College. It's November 6, 2017, and we are on campus, and I have the pleasure of sitting with Bryan C. Fox, a graduate of 2010, who has come from New York City to do an interview. Thank you, Bryan.

BRYAN FOX: You're welcome.

MA: I'm really glad to have you here. So, we do a few formalities across the interviews. I'll ask you to state your name and confirm that your participation is voluntary.

BF: Okay. My name is Bryan C. Fox, and I'm confirming that I would like to participate in this interview. I'm class of 2010.

MA: Twenty-ten. Great, great, great. Did I say 2010?

BF: I don't think so.

MA: Okay, good. I'm glad you said that. Would it be okay if I took your photo for the project? [00:01:00] Is that okay?

BF: Yes.

MA: Okay, wonderful. Thank you. We'll consider it part of the interview. So, a little bit of preamble. The interview is about your story. It's your story that we want to hear, so it's not like we have a set of questions that we have to

have answered. The questions are really prompts to jog your memory. If you -- if I ask one, and you're, like, "No, I don't want to really answer that," don't. More importantly, you'll probably think of some things that I don't ask about. That's what we want to hear. If you're like me, you get home, and you think, "Oh, I should have said" X or Y. If you want to write an email, if you want to be back in touch, it's not like this is some magic moment where you've told your story, and now you can't say anything more. The idea is this is an organic process. We're excited to hear what you have to say now, but also later. So, feel free to elaborate, or if you look back, and you think, "Oh, I have a -- I have this cool poster; I have this thing from Lafayette, or I kept some photos," and you'd like to share them with the archive, share them. You know, sort of representing your life is what we're excited [00:02:00] to do. So, personal pronouns and name. You go by Bryan? Personal pronouns?

BF: He and him.

MA: He and him. And we usually ask people to define themselves as a member of the Lafayette community. You're an alum. That's correct?

BF: Yes.

MA: Okay. And what was your major while you were here?

BF: I was an English major and music minor.

MA: Okay. You can't beat an English major, and I'm a little bit biased. (laughter)

MA: And how do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

BF: So, I identify as a transgender man, female to male, and I'm attracted to men and women.

MA: Okay, great. And the name you entered -- using -- Lafayette -- when you entered, matriculated, you used a different name.

BF: Yes.

[Section redacted by a QAP reviewer]

MA: Okay. And --

BF: I had the same last name, and then I changed my name [00:03:00] in the fall of 2007, my sophomore year. I changed my name to Bryan, Bryan C. Fox.

MA: Okay, great. That's really helpful for the records. Thank you. And so, Bryan, how do you professionally describe yourself? So, that could be -- I like to think bigger than employment. Right? Your vocation, your calling, sort of your life.

BF: I'm an artist. That's, like, my main passion. You know, I -- originally, I started off as a writer, as a poet. And I've been writing poetry since I was I want to say 15.

I've been, like, performing in Nuyorican Poets Cafe and things like that.

MA: Wow.

BF: Yeah, poetry contests, even in high school, and then going into Lafayette I was an English major. I took a lot of poetry, with a concentration in writing, so I took a lot of poetry classes, screenwriting, and I was also involved in WORDS, the Writing Organization Reaching [00:04:00] Dynamic Students.

MA: Wow. Great.

BF: Yeah. And so, that's been, like -- that's been my main thing. And I have a book out now --

MA: Congratulations.

BF: Thank you. Yeah, it's called *Political Romantic*, and it's for sale, I always -- you know, I have a few copies in case, even if you're interested.

MA: We would love a copy. We'd be happy to purchase a copy as well, of course.

BF: All right. And so, that's been my main thing, and then I've also got into painting and drawing, so I'm not only a writer and a poet, but I'm a visual artist. And my last -- very last semester here, actually, my senior year -- spring semester of 2010 -- I had taken a class with Professor Ed Kerns, a painting class, and it was mostly abstract

painting. And, I mean, I fell in love it. I found it very cathartic, very therapeutic. And so, I've been doing it since, and now I take [00:05:00] classes at the Student Art League in Manhattan, in New York, and also had some of my paintings in exhibitions. And I plan to get them in galleries and art galleries and try to make it really big. Because --

MA: Wow, fantastic. That's great. Now, when did you start -- so, you started painting, and so -- that last semester at Lafayette --

BF: Yes.

MA: -- and you jumped right into that art world coming out of college.

BF: Yeah, mostly the writing. I actually took a pause from painting. I was doing it a little bit here and there, but I really got serious about it again a year ago, and I've been doing it -- you know, my stuff is on Instagram and things like that.

MA: Wonderful.

BF: You can check it out.

MA: We'll have to check it out. That's fantastic. That's exciting. You've done a lot of creative work since you left the school.

BF: Yeah.

MA: *Political Romantic*. We won't forget.

BF: Alright.

MA: We'll get a copy for sure.

BF: And also, I wanted to say really quickly, you check my stuff out on Instagram. ISatheintrovert: I-S-A; [00:6:00] the; introvert. And then, also, my second calling, I guess you can say, is -- I want to say I work with LGBTQ youth, homeless youth, at an organization called the Ali Forney Center in New York.

MA: That's fantastic. So, you've been at -- you're volunteering at Ali Forney?

BF: Yeah, I'm working there as an employee. It's my day job.

MA: That's wonderful. That's a really important organization. That's really -- congratulations. Thank you for giving back to the community. That's a very vulnerable population that needs people like you helping. That's great.

BF: No problem. You're welcome.

MA: Wow, that must be really powerful working there.

BF: Yeah, it is indeed.

MA: Yeah, I can only imagine. So, general questions. Usually, we start out with just trying to get a sense of what campus was like. So, if you graduated in '10, you arrived in '06. You changed your name to Bryan in '07, so you [00:07:00] have a lot of really important perspectives on the campus.

Generically, and we just sort of say LGBTQ people, but of course there are different aspects of that community that experience the climate differently, so however you want to approach the question. But how would you describe the community for queer folks? Was it safe? Were people visible? And it may even have changed over the four years, too. So, just your general thoughts on that.

BF: I can say for me personally, and then I'll probably try to go broader as I go along. I think that it was a mixture. I think that Lafayette has every type of individual. You have people that are very religious and then you have people that are non-religious. You have people that are conservative, people are liberal. You have, like, every type of person here. And so, my -- going to my experience, [00:8:00] I had a lot of support, I do want to say. Then there were people that weren't supportive and made nasty comments, maybe not -- from what I've heard, not directly to me, but about it and about the transition and about being a transgender man and things like that. So, it was definitely a mixture of things. There was one particular student who decided to recite -- you know, they felt the need to recite, like, a biblical -- it wasn't biblical verse, but it was, like, a message that they had gotten from God about me basically saying I was wrong, you know.

MA: Wow.

BF: Yeah. It was basically things like that, and this came from a student. And I know when I made the report about it -- you know, I had reported it to the public [00:09:00] safety office, and I didn't -- I got mixed reactions from other students about it. I want to say, at the time, it didn't feel like I got the support that I would have wanted. I don't want to say that there wasn't any support. You know, there were professors and students that were very supportive but nonetheless, there were times I didn't feel that support. You know, I will be honest. So, it was a mixture, and I think that for others -- now, going to other students, a lot of students -- there were a few that were out, and we had each other, in a way. And there were many that, from what I've heard, weren't out, and there was a lot of what you call down-low kind of behavior [00:10:00] going -- or just people not being out about it and about themselves and about who they are. So, I would say that in a way, it wasn't supportive. People didn't want to touch on it. People didn't want to identify with that or as that, or really acknowledge that aspect of who they were. And then, in another respect, it was. So, it was a mixture, I think overall.

MA: Yeah, right. So, like, on the personal level, support, but more broadly, not an open culture?

BF: Right. Exactly.

MA: And so -- wow, that's really interesting, and it makes a lot of sense. So, an individual could find support, but the community wasn't -- it was a closeted community.

BF: Yeah. A lot of people were closeted from what I learned. There was a lot of, like, homosexual, like, [00:11:00] behavior or homoerotic things going on, and I say that respectfully. But people just weren't coming out about "Oh, this is who I'm attracted to." You didn't have a lot of that, at least from what I experienced.

MA: Okay, so there might be people that were having sexual experiences or same-sex or bisexual experiences, but they weren't identifying.

BF: Right.

MA: Oh, wow. Okay. And was Quest in action? Or was there a support group for students at all during that time?

BF: Yeah, we had Quest, and I personally -- even within Quest, the G and I'm going to say the B and the L -- they didn't really understand the T. So, I was kind of -- I kind of felt outside a little bit. It was kind of confusing. I didn't understand how -- I would hear comments from particular men who identified as [00:12:00] gay who would

be, like, "Well, how do lesbians have sex?" and this and that, or "What do they do?" or "How do they" -- and the way they were asking it was kind of -- it was kind of judgmental, or kind of like looking down on them, like, condescending. And so, there was, like -- even within the community, there was a little bit of misunderstanding or lack of support, or judgment. I mean, so -- I don't -- I think that, like I said, individually, there were individuals that were very supportive that were amazing people for me. I mean, professors and students alike. But like I was saying, overall, I don't think that it was -- yeah, it wasn't accepting on a broader level. Just the cultural things -- there were a lot of comments about being gay or being a lesbian. So, a lot of people who probably had these feelings [00:13:00] or were exploring themselves didn't really want to come out, come forth about who they were.

MA: Wow, that's a really powerful description. Because you describe a community that is a broader community that is homophobic, transphobic, but an LGBTQ community that is shot through with misogyny and transphobia.

BF: Yeah.

MA: It's not a -- it's not necessarily a healthy, supportive LGBT community in its appearance.

BF: Right, right.

MA: And being -- so, were there other trans people or gender-queer people or any of that T? Or were you the person who was sort of identifying that way publicly, and were you alone in that regard? Because it sounds like that was a point of stress in the community for you.

BF: In the respect, from what I knew, I was the only trans person out those years, '06 to 2010, out on [00:14:00] campus. When I left, I found out there was another trans person who just hadn't come out. That was right after I had graduated. And they were there, and I knew who they were. I knew of them while I was going here, but, like, I would have never known that they were trans or having those feelings. Everybody comes about who they are at their own pace.

MA: Absolutely.

BF: So, I mean, like, whether it was the Lafayette culture or not that kept them from -- I'm not sure. I can't really say.

MA: True.

BF: But, yeah, from what -- while I was there, I was the one going -- I was the main one as trans -- as a trans person.

MA: Well, I have to say, you were courageous and impressive. I mean, that's really -- thanks for being there for the community. I mean, that's really powerful.

BF: No doubt. I can only be who I was, and that's what came to me at the time that I needed to do, and I just did it.

MA: Yeah. That's great [00:15:00]. That's wonderful. I have trans students now, and I think folks like you paved the way. It's really important to be a pioneer in this regard. Were there services, like health and well-being? I know something that we fought for -- and I'm the advisor to Quest right now and talking about health issues for trans people in particular -- we -- the college still is not that strong in that regard. Were there resources for you in that way on the campus? Or did you need them? Perhaps not. But--

BF: I didn't really use them. I only used the health clinic basically if I had a cold, I'm going to be honest. I don't think they did, though, from what I remember. They didn't really have -- they would have -- if you educated them, they -- I remember the doctor that was there, he knew of trans people, and he knew -- when I told him I'd transitioned, he [00:16:00] was understanding. I forget his name, but he was understanding and very helpful and gave helpful information.

MA: That's great.

BF: I don't know if the nurses knew, or if his secretaries were familiar. I don't think they were. But he was.

MA: That's great. So, you felt like there was support in that regard.

BF: Yeah.

MA: So, tell me. One thing that we really try to pay attention to is the intersectionality of people's lives. Right? Nobody is just LGBTQ. They're many other things. And we think about religion and race and class and all those things. How was your experience as a trans man on campus shaped by those things?

BF: So, having -- being multilayered, and especially marginalized identities -- like, I have multiple of those -- I was able to understand -- I mean, I had already dealt with oppression, being viewed as [00:17:00] a "lesbian." You know what I mean? Being viewed as a black and Latino lesbian female at that -- so I knew. I understand what it was like to be marginalized. I understood -- it was, like I say, difficult, because we had the racial stuff that was going on here, too, and there's some very privileged students that are Caucasian, white, who didn't ever really have to deal with -- they probably -- I met some white students that only met maybe about three people of color in

their lives. So, I mean, there were some students that didn't have to deal with people of other races, and some, I would say, may have been racist to an extent. So, culturally, on this campus, [00:18:00] culture-wise, there was that element, too, on top of already being trans. And so, it was difficult. Yeah, it was very difficult. And even within the black community, there wasn't a lot of support at that time for the LGBTQ community. So, I looked to them. I didn't really -- overall, I didn't feel like I got -- again, overall. There were individuals that were very supportive. Overall, I didn't feel like I got it from the LGBTQ community that was here. There was a lot -- they didn't really understand and things like that, a lot of misunderstanding. A lot of people weren't out. A lot of people of color here that knew of me -- they didn't come out until after I had graduated, after they had graduated. So, at the time, they were very -- I remember them being not very accepting of LGBT, [00:19:00] and just because of various things, maybe religion and things like that. So, there was just a lot of -- I feel like I was able to see a lot of internalized -- I would say self-hate or self-denial. It was isolating. It made -- I felt like I was very marginalized in a lot of ways, yeah.

MA: It sounds very isolating, and almost like a classic intersectional problem. Right? You have these different identities, and in each case, you're not -- that group is not coming forward with the support that you need from the LGBTQ community, from the black community, that sort of classic falling through the cracks and being really marginalized.

BF: Yeah.

MA: And that's really a struggle, given the powerful racism. My sense is that Lafayette was very racially un-diverse at that time. I mean, we've gotten "better." We're still not good, but I imagine at that time it was an extraordinarily white campus from what you say.

BF: Yeah, very much. I think [00:20:00] we were 70, 80 percent white. I don't know what the statistic is now, but, yeah, at that time, definitely.

MA: Profoundly. Wow, that sounds like a really difficult road to walk, I mean, with those communities not sort of supporting you in that way. The multiple marginalized identities really sort of getting caught in between there. In your sense of your time here, was there a sort of -- you said the down-low. And one thing we ask is if there was a dating scene or a -- it sounds like at this time it was

more like a secret. I'm thinking about the day-to-day lives of students who were LGBTQ. It was more hidden.

BF: Yeah, I would say, or they were -- or maybe they were exploring or unsure. Some may have not wanted to come out. I would imagine that the Lafayette culture did in fact have something to do with that. You know, that's my opinion again. [00:21:00] So, yeah, I mean, for me, I didn't find anyone that wanted to go with me in that respect, so I wasn't really dating. I had friends and things like that. People were, but it was more heteronormative, and those were the people that were out, and those were the relationships that you saw mostly and that were noticeable. It was rare that -- to be honest, I don't recall an openly gay relationship or lesbian relationship or LGBTQ relationship that I can remember. Yeah, I can't really recall that I know of.

MA: Just not present?

BF: Right.

MA: Wow. The social scene more generally on campus, heavily dominated by fraternities. Was there one that you were able to enjoy that you could connect to, or was it more like a self-created [00:22:00] social group?

BF: No, definitely didn't identify with the frat or sorority culture.

MA: Yeah, the whole Greek life.

BF: Yeah, I just -- it didn't really appeal to me. So, I had my own self-created supports, friends here and there, mainly of POSSE, the POSSE organization, which I'm a POSSE scholar myself --

MA: Congratulations. That's very impressive.

BF: Thank you.

MA: That's great. It's a wonderful organization.

BF: Yeah. Thank you very much. And so, they were -- a lot of them were my main support, and then there were people outside of POSSE, a few of them that I knew that were also cool.

MA: Yeah.

BF: So, yeah, it was my own --

MA: Your own making, yeah.

BF: People that were just drawn to me, and we clicked.

MA: Tell me about your allies. You had some good ones, because you've described a culture that's really hard. It's racist, it's transphobic, it's a tough culture to be you in. And over and over you say there were these great individuals, [00:23:00] and that's really kind of warming my heart, because it's so important to step up and be a great individual in a culture like that. Who were your

allies? POSSE? Friends? Were -- you were New York POSSE, and they were accepting?

BF: Yeah.

MA: They were --

BF: My POSSE was accepting.

MA: -- cool with you?

BF: They may not have understood, but they were accepting.

MA: That's great. So, they were a source of support?

BF: Yeah.

MA: So, what did your allies network look like?

BF: I personally -- I want to give a shout-out to I'd say the whole English department. Professor Donahue, Professor Ian Smith, Professor Bryan Washington, rest in peace. A lot of people -- Rosie in the economics department --

MA: Rosie Bukics.

BF: Yeah. She was very supportive. There were some of -- I would say there were other professors, too. There was one professor from the math [00:24:00] department, Professor Chawne Kimber, she was supportive. So, I just want to give my shout-outs to them. And then there were also students that were allies, great, remarkable people that I met of all sorts of identities. A lot of the international students were actually very supportive, sometimes more so than the American students. They would just -- I don't

know what it was, but they were very supportive. So, I mean, if any of them from that particular time end up listening to this, I give them a shout-out. I really appreciate it. And all the professors I mentioned and anyone I haven't mentioned I can't think of, you're very much appreciated. I just wanted to say that. You're appreciated for helping and representing our community and educating people on us and our struggles and things that we go through. So, I appreciate that.

MA: Thank you, Bryan.

BF: You're welcome.

MA: That's a -- I'm honored to do it. I really am. And I'm honored to sit here with you. [00:25:00] It's beautiful to hear all those names of those wonderful people and to think that the academic community stepped up, and good individuals as students as well. Was your -- reeling off all my wonderful colleagues in the English department, and Chawne Kimber, and Rosie Bukics, and all these people, was your academic experience -- the classroom -- did that help? I mean, the professors as individuals helped? Were your classes -- were they more inclusive? Did it help in the classroom? What was the classroom like?

BF: I mean, because I took a lot of writing classes, and that was my focus, I was able to express myself. So, those were

therapeutic, too. I took a lot of classes where I could write, write, write, write, write, just write about what I was feeling. [00:26:00] And a lot of my poetry reflected that, who I was, the things I was exploring within, some of my pain, some of my past, some of my trauma. I wrote about it. Whether it was about me specifically or another character, whatever I was writing -- like, in screenwriting, I remember we had to write about -- we had to write, like, a movie script, basically, and I wrote about another character who -- a couple characters. One character [Section redacted by QAP reviewer] who molested them and things like that. And so, it was cathartic in that way to write about that. Those are some experiences that reflect who I am. And so, I would say the classrooms were very mind-boggling. They opened my mind up even more. Given my experiences, I came into [00:27:00] Lafayette already knowing about oppression, about what it's like to be marginalized. Like, I already knew. I just didn't have the vocab to put to it. And a lot of my classes -- my English classes, even my Africana studies class - Professor [Susan] Blake, that's another person I want to give a shout-out to. When she was here at the time, those classes helped give me the vocabulary to describe and explain what I was going through, who I was, what my situation was like.

MA: The "names for things," like, empowerment through that learning.

BF: Yeah.

MA: Wow, that's fantastic. That's great. Wow, wonderful. As a faculty member, you can imagine I'm thrilled to hear that, that --

BF: We had some bomb classes. I mean, it was like -- Lafayette had some epic -- with the liberal arts, that's the thing about liberal arts education. I feel like it helps you to [00:28:00] think in ways that you wouldn't -- you may not ordinarily do, even in a vocational studies program and things like that. And not to knock those, because those have benefits, too, but it's like this has its own thing, I mean, its own aspect to it.

MA: Yeah, that's beautifully said. It sort of reframes your mind and makes it grow and gets you thinking in new ways.

BF: Yeah. And there was another class, my choir class, actually, with Professor [Jennifer] Kelly. She was another who -- I don't know if she understood what it was like to be trans. I think I definitely -- she was definitely educated by me in that sense. And my voice changed through her choir classes, because I started taking choir in my -- spring semester my sophomore year. That was right when I started transitioning. And I was taking her class all the

way through my senior year, so she got to [00:29:00] experience my voice change and things like that. And I fell in -- that was another class I fell in love with. Just being able to sing -- like, I just enjoyed it so much. I mean, it was just -- the music that we were singing was epic. Like, I fell in love with it. Yeah, so that was another class, and I got -- had a lot of support from the students there, too.

MA: That's wonderful that so many opportunities that you took advantage of that -- to -- for self-expression, for growth and healing and intellectual and everything, every kind of sort of developmental moment. Right? It was just like -- to name yourself and be yourself and find yourself through art and music and all these -- in the classroom in all these ways. That the "academic experience" -- that the classroom was so empowering for you is really marvelous.

BF: Yeah.

MA: That's a great thing, and no wonder you're a poet and an artist and -- are you a musician, too, by any chance? [00:30:00] Or did you stop singing? Or are you still singing?

BF: I haven't been able -- I haven't found a choir -- it's difficult. But I've looked here and there, and one day, if I come across one, I would do it, definitely.

MA: Just hearing you, watching your face light up when you talk about it, makes me think, "I hope he's singing, or starts to sing again," because you just look so happy when you were talking about it.

BF: Yeah, Professor Kelly told me I have a decent voice, actually. I remember her mentioning that. And so, maybe I could go somewhere with it. Whether I can or not, that doesn't matter. I enjoyed it, and that's what matters.

MA: And you were able to express yourself and experience that at a time that was really important.

BF: Yeah.

MA: Was there anything in the curriculum about trans people, about the LGBTQ community, or was it more a chance to express your own self through the creative venues of English and music and art?

BF: I remember in women's studies, Professor Gilligan [00:31:00] -- they -- I think she may -- in her class, the particular class I took may have talked about it, talked about LGBTQ struggle, and that was the first place I learned about the whole having multiple layers of oppression and things like that. I forget the particular name of it --

MA: Intersectionality?

BF: Intersectionality, yeah. And that's where I first learned that name of what that was called -- was actually in her class. So, I remember we were talking about it a little bit, but that was the only class that I remember me personally taking. There were a few from what I've heard of, but not many. I think that Lafayette could have had more. I don't know if it has more now. It could have used more at the time, more exposure, more education, opportunities to educate people on our issues.

MA: The curriculum has grown somewhat [00:32:00] through women's and gender studies. We have a sexualities class now. We're hoping to really add more in terms of the sexuality, trans, LGBTQ studies aspect, because the curriculum is underserved still.

BF: Yeah.

MA: Not as badly as it was when you were here, but still, comparatively to other places, underserved. So, that information is still -- we're trying to get that out there. So, when you transitioned on campus, to ask a dumb question, what was that like?

BF: Like, I had -- individually, as a -- physically, the physical parts of it were amazing. I loved it. Just watching my body change and my voice drop and facial hair grow and things like that, of that nature -- just to touch

on the surface of what some of the changes -- there are some physiological [00:33:00] changes that occurred, too. But I enjoyed it. I loved it. And like I said, I had mixed -- but for other people, I had mixed reactions. I had people that were supportive. I had people that didn't understand it, weren't crazy about it, and some people voiced that. And so, it was a mixed bag. At the end, my senior year, I really had a rough time. I didn't feel I could speak about it. People felt like I was trying to change their views on life. And I don't know that I necessarily wanted to do that, but I did feel like it was valuable to hear. You know what I mean? There may have been -- I think that there may have been a certain level where I did want people to change. I won't lie. But I don't know that that was the be-all and end-all.

[00:34:00] I think that just putting this narrative out there, my narrative, is -- just to put it out there can help people that may be going through their own thing, their own struggles with coming out, with their sexuality, or not. Because there were a lot of other things that I was going through, too, and so I had a hard time. There was a lot of -- there was quite a bit of backlash from what I've experienced. I got a lot of flak for supposedly wanting to change people and things like that. And I

wanted my emotions to be understood. I wanted to be heard, and I think I wanted compassion, and I didn't always get compassionate responses. I developed -- I will be honest. I kind of [00:35:00] -- I developed, like, a bit of a drug habit here. I was drinking and smoking a lot in my senior year. That's what I was going to mention. That year I developed a habit, and I eventually kicked it. I'm now today six-and-a-half, almost seven years sober --

MA: Congratulations.

BF: Thank you.

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

BF: Thank you. I appreciate it very much. I kicked the habit a little bit after I graduated, actually. I stopped. So, it was rough to say -- I think that part of that -- there was a little part of it -- there was a part, not a little part. There was a part where I think I isolated and I think I focused on the negative aspects, and I didn't reach out to the support that I had enough. Or I felt like I'd be begging or relying on people too much, and I had a lot of shame around that. [00:36:00] So, there were a lot of feelings compounding other feelings that I wasn't really dealing with properly. I was self-medicating.

MA: Mm-hmm, which is, I mean, for so many LGBTQ youth -- and as we know, particularly in the T populations -- that self-

medicating is almost normative. I mean, there's not -- there's a million good reasons -- right? -- for withdrawal. It feels like you're young, you're vulnerable, you're not getting support. You're dealing with a lot of changes. And people go there, and I think it's a common response, and it's part of a -- it points the finger of judgment, for me, pointed to the community, that we have failed. If someone feels they have to withdraw, we haven't lifted up people and listened to them. It sounds like that backlash was -- you must have -- obviously, you felt it very keenly, and the story's very [00:37:00] poignant -- right? -- to think of people, your peers, sort of being unkind and failing in compassion and accusing you, because you want to be yourself and be wholly respected as a person. And they're not seeing that. They think you're trying to convert them to some political school of belief. Was that the -- does that feel like the jump --

BF: Yeah.

MA: -- they weren't making?

BF: Yeah, I feel like that's what it was. And there was definitely some backlash, and there was -- there were people who did care and love me, but maybe they didn't -- they were going through their own stuff. A lot of these people -- specifically, I'm talking about -- they were

people that had their own things with their sexualities. They hadn't come out until after graduating. So, it may have just reminded them of their own thing, and they didn't want to touch that. So, I am, like, a mirror for them in that sense, that me [00:38:00] being out is kind of triggering. It could have been that for them. They didn't want to deal with their own thing, and I'm kind of pointing that out, in a way. I'm bringing that to the surface for them. So, they didn't really want to deal with this, so there was a love on some level, but they didn't want to put themselves in my shoes. They didn't want to be the guy that was weird, that was marginalized. They didn't want to be that person, so they'd rather just avoid me to an extent, avoid getting into it with me or really connecting with me, because it would mean they would have to look at themselves.

MA: You raised their fears --

BF: Yeah.

MA: -- for themselves.

BF: That's what I believe, yeah.

MA: Yeah. And were you very public in being a trans person? It sounds like you were really out. Were you [00:39:00] making public statements? Were you -- I mean, because I'm

thinking people were responding to you so powerfully, I wonder --

BF: I was.

MA: Oh, were you? Okay.

BF: I did -- I was. Not in my day-to-day life --

MA: Sure.

BF: -- going to the gym, going to -- I didn't yell to people on skip "I'm trans!" It wasn't like that. But people saw it. It was visible, because I started in one way, and then I'm -- so, I mean, inevitably so, people knew, and people saw. And I made -- I did a couple speeches here and there. I spoke for Professor Basow for her class, her psych class, a couple times, and I did a brown bag one time where I spoke. So, those are the three -- I think those are three main times that I was out about it.

MA: Wow, that's so courageous. That was really generous of you to be willing to try to [00:40:00] educate a community that wasn't always welcoming.

BF: Yeah. Thank you.

MA: That was really generous. That was nice.

BF: Thank you. Yeah, again, there were people that were supportive and showed up, and they were appreciative. You know what I mean? Yeah, so, like I said, in my day-to-day life I definitely wasn't -- I wasn't out like that, but

people knew, and I didn't mind that people knew. I knew.

I was honest about it with myself, and that's what mattered to me.

MA: That's so impressive. It's really wonderful. So, one of things that we -- I'm just trying to think of the 360 degrees. One of the things -- you mentioned choir, and it makes me think -- were there other clubs or organizations that you were part of? You have a lot already: POSSE scholar, your singing in the choir --

BF: Yeah --

MA: [00:41:00] -- other activities like what were sort of life?

BF: What I loved to do -- I loved going to the gym. I loved the W.O.R.D.S. organization, Writing Organization Reaching Dynamics Students. We would perform poetry every Monday night at -- that's Gilbert's -- yeah, Gilbert's Café. And we'd have open mic night. That was one of the things I loved to do, and I also loved hanging out with my friends. I was just having a good time. Just the experience of having these discussions about oppression -- I found those very eye-opening, and I learned a lot bouncing things off of other people and things like that.

MA: That's great. So, the community of allies and friends.

BF: Yeah.

MA: That's awesome. Were there any moments -- like, sometimes people -- we're interviewing these different alums, and they'll say things like, "Oh, So-and-so came to [00:42:00] speak," or "The AIDS quilt came," or there's different -- were there moments where someone came to campus, or there was an incident, positive or negative, that -- was there a -- did anything happen on campus that felt like a moment for the community? Or was it quiet?

BF: There wasn't -- no, I don't think -- not regarding LGBTQ issues. I think that overall it was just a very closed -- they weren't going to -- people weren't going to discuss it kind of thing. There were a few people that spoke that were guest speakers. I forgot this guy's name -- Daniel Bauer (See *The Lafayette*, Oct. 24, 2008)

MA: Mm-hmm.

BF: He was a gay man, HIV-positive. He spoke, and I found that to be very powerful. His speech, for me, was touching. I don't know if it sent shockwaves through the whole wide campus. I think I kind of did that, in a way. You know, me being out and that [00:43:00] -- in a way, I was iconic in that way, and well-known. So, I created a lot of controversy. And then there were other people, possibly in Quest, certain events that were done. But again, it was -- Quest was still very small. You know what I mean? So, I

don't know that they -- they did a good job of educating. They didn't have the impact that I think that they could have, that I would have wanted them to have. And of course, a lot of professors being very -- allies of the LGBTQ community, if not in the LGBTQ community. Some of the English professors that I mentioned who identified as LGBTQ -- they also, like, I think helped with teaching people or challenging people's -- that's what I want -- I wanted to challenge people's views and things and hope that they think, not necessarily force them to just change. It wasn't -- I wanted to challenge people, [00:44:00] and I think professors did that, too. But it was a long road. Change, like, here happens slowly, for sure. So, I think they helped. I don't know if it was a major thing. I think it wasn't like a light switch that goes, it was more like the sun rising. It took time.

MA: Nice. That's a beautiful image. And you were part of that. I mean, I'm thinking about the out faculty. Professor Washington was out in many ways, at least to queer students. Professor van Dyke, I think, to some degree as well. There were a few. There's more now, I'm happy to say, but the out members of the community -- that slow build-up of feeling that this is a place for queer people. And you really [00:45:00] were part of that. When

-- I'm sorry we missed each other, even though, technically, we overlapped by a year. But I'm sorry we missed each other in person, because I was just coming to the campus.

BF: Yeah.

MA: After you left, people mentioned your name to me, and I was, like, "Who is this Bryan, this mysterious and wonderful Bryan Fox?" Because you had made a mark as a trans student who transitioned here and was a person who changed the college. You really changed the college.

BF: I'm glad to hear that, and I'm glad Lafayette got something -- that I did something. It's like I did something of service --

MA: You did.

BF: -- and that they took something from it. That's great to hear.

MA: It got traction. It's -- I think it's been important. That there was a trans person who transitioned while they were here is something that the trans students [00:46:00] that I know now know. So, in many ways, I'm thinking of your saying how you used the word "rough," and I'm sure I can't imagine how rough, but going through that experience, you gave something to the college that it didn't know it needed. And those individuals who were upset about it --

they're all gone, but you're the person sitting in Pardee right now talking to me, and I have trans students who know your name.

BF: Wow. Damn. I wouldn't have thought that. That's an honor that people --

MA: Well, it's a service you've given to the college, too, and it's really powerful. So, this is a great thing that you're here doing this. The influence of the professors is really powerful and makes me think how important it is to have queer faculty --

BF: Yeah.

MA: -- on the campus who are not afraid to be out. Yeah?

BF: Definitely important, because I know Professor Washington was a mentor for [00:47:00] a lot of other students who identified as gay. A lot of the gay, like, men that I knew -- he was definitely, like, a support for them. Anyone, I think, in the GLBTQ community. He was mentoring, like, a lot of them. He mentored one specific person that I know who graduated from here. We overlapped by a year. He was a freshman when I was a senior. So, he was a mentee of Professor Washington all the way through. So, it is important, like you say.

MA: Diversity matters.

BF: Yeah.

MA: It really matters, especially for people who don't always feel visible, or their visibility is challenged, as yours was.

BF: Exactly, so we know we're not alone.

MA: That's right.

BF: Yeah.

MA: So, we know we're not alone. That's very important. And part of this project is about making sure that every queer kid that comes through the school knows that they're not alone and they've never been alone. There have always been queer people [00:48:00] on this campus. Sometimes, when I talk to my colleagues, and they said, "Hey, isn't it great we have, like, trans students now, and gender-queer students?" And I always say, "Lafayette has always had trans and queer students." It's just a matter of creating a community where they can feel safe to be out and thrive. It's on us. It's not on them. I'm a member of the community myself, but I still think it's really important for the college to step up and make it possible. Trailblazers like you aside, it shouldn't all be on the students, and that's I think --

BF: Yeah.

MA: -- important, really, really important.

BF: Yeah, I think so, too.

MA: We should be making it a place where students learn, and not where students have to come and teach us, because you guys have got lots to do (laughs) when you're a student.

BF: (laughs)

MA: So, let's see. You mentioned to me just before we put the recorder on that you were at Professor Washington's memorial. [00:49:00] Would you be willing to share the speech you gave?

BF: Yes, definitely, and I will actually share -- I'm going to share -- because I had pleasant experiences with him. I had one unpleasant experience, and I'm going to share both. It's funny, on the bus ride here I was thinking about him, of course, because I'm going to Lafayette.

MA: Sure.

BF: And I remember the last time I was here, I was here for his memorial, and I was just thinking about him. Like, I fell in love with this man. How he taught his classes, his brash -- how brash he was at times, like, and he just said whatever. He called a lot of people out. He had no shame in his game. He didn't hold back anything.

MA: No. (laughs)

BF: And it was, like -- I was, like, "Man, I love this" -- he was hilarious, too, and I fell in love with this guy. But I'll tell you, there was the one time where it was one

class, and he [00:50:00] assigned us to read something. And so, he asked us about it, and no one was answering. And I had read it. I had done the reading, and I was -- I remember, I was going to raise my hand, but I just didn't know what to say about this particular reading. I just didn't really know what to ask or say about it in the moment --

MA: Which happens. Sometimes you don't know what to say about something. Sure.

BF: Yeah. And so, like, that happened, and he went off on us. Like, he kind of -- it was kind of -- it was rough. Like, he told one student they were wrongly named. He told one student something along the lines of they won't make it through med school or -- he called me -- this is before I transitioned -- he called me a dildo girl. Yeah. So --

MA: Ouch. In the classroom?

BF: Yeah.

MA: Oh, that's not cool. That's not okay.

BF: Yeah. So, I [00:51:00] mean, I was like -- I didn't really -- it was -- I kind of, like, laughed it off in the class, but that was hurtful.

MA: Big-time.

BF: I'm going to be honest. Like, I was like -- at first, I didn't even process all the feelings. I was just shocked -
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MA: That is shocking.

BF: -- by that.

MA: Yeah, that's unfortunate.

BF: And then, sitting there -- I remember sitting in Farinon after the class, and I just felt sad. Like, I just felt this sadness. Like, what the heck? What the hell? You know what I mean? And --

MA: Well, that's the classroom, right? Where a professor has a lot of power.

BF: Yeah.

MA: And also, just to say a hurtful thing like that anywhere --

BF: Yeah.

MA: Combining both --

BF: Yeah. So, I didn't share that word at the memorial. I just didn't want to use that phrase -- I just -- there were all these professors there, and I just didn't want to go there. Some people [00:52:00] that may not have known I was trans, that may not have understood -- you know what I mean? And I didn't -- I wasn't -- I didn't have the -- I didn't really want to go through having to explain everything to everyone --

MA: Sure.

BF: -- if people would have approached me. Because I feel like people -- many people would have approached me afterwards. I didn't really want that at that moment. It was about him, so I didn't want to make it about me so much. You know what I mean? But that's what happened. But since this is an interview -- you're interviewing me, one-on-one -- I will share that. That's basically what happened. And so, that happened in the fall of '06, and it's been over 10 years, and I still have feelings about that. And I had shared that in the memorial, and I was honest, and a lot of other students know about it and whatnot. And I had shared with them, because a couple former students went with me on the ride, too. A friend of mine drove me who was in the class of [00:53:00] 2011. There were a couple from the class of -- there was one person from the class of 2013 who went, and we discussed it. And I told them in the car ride over here when we were coming over here for the memorial what had happened, and they said then that was messed up and things like that. I don't know if it -- I don't think they still know the pain that I felt, being a sensitive individual and just still coming to who I am. There's still things I'm learning about myself. There's still things that I'm going through that add to my experience as

an LGBTQ person, one of them being I may potentially be high-functioning autistic, which I'm learning now. And people never would have known, because I was highly functioning and smart, and I did well in [00:54:00] school. And a lot of my -- like, my stepfather -- I had a conversation with him. He said I was -- he said that a couple -- someone he knows suggested it to him that I may have been autistic via some of my behaviors, some of the repetitive behaviors that I have, but he would have never known, just because I did so well. And I was ahead of a lot of my -- in a lot of my classes in high school and in college academically. I was very advanced. But nonetheless, I lagged behind socially. I would say I was behind most of my peers socially in terms of learning certain things and things like that that I'm learning now, that I probably should have learned in high school, that I should have mastered then. But I'm learning that now. And some certain inappropriate behaviors that I had and a lot of backlash I got for that, and shame around that, and now coming -- [00:55:00] forgiving myself for some of that and coming towards an understanding of that, and things like that. You know what I mean? So, I'm still coming to and still dealing with a lot of the pain and stuff like that, and knowing that I'm sensitive, knowing what I have to --

knowing more about myself helps me to understand how I'm going to react to certain things, what I have to do for myself for self-care. So, yeah.

MA: And more self-awareness --

BF: Exactly.

MA: -- and being better in touch with yourself so you feel like you're doing the right thing for yourself in the right way, and it's feeling good, and you're dealing with what you need to deal with.

BF: Right. And so, one of these is -- was saying that in the memorial, being honest, and saying this and that about what had happened. And doing this is also very --

MA: That's good.

BF: -- helpful for me, and being honest about my feelings, and telling people, "This is how I felt. I [00:56:00] didn't feel supported." And I didn't know how to do that very well then and articulate that, and I had a lot of fear around that, and now I'm doing it.

MA: Yeah, it's a wonderful thing for anyone to be able to say, "This was hard for me. And now time has passed, and I can come back and look at it and say now I'm handling things better, and I'm in a better place." I'm glad that this interview can be part of that. And I think for many of the LGBTQ people who have been on campus, many of whom have

experienced, if you think back decades, levels of hostility or isolation or outright aggression -- right? -- and really, fear for themselves, and all those things -- that's, in a way, our story -- right? -- as queer people. It's about -- a lot of it is about learning not to be afraid and learning to find a community that supports you, because you can't just go expect one. And I think a lot of that work is something that many people who've given these interviews can come out and say, "I did that work. I'm who I am now, and I found a [00:57:00] way to be okay." So, I think it's wonderful that you can also say that. And the work goes on, as it does for every human being in their lives. But, I mean, it's great to -- it's really great to hear you say that. And that inappropriate, hurtful comment -- I try to imagine a student coming in -- trans, starting to transition -- how devastating that would have been. You're not going to get over it in five minutes.

BF: Yeah.

MA: That's a big one.

BF: Yeah.

MA: And yet --

BF: It takes time, yeah.

MA: And yet, you're you now, and that's a beautiful and awesome thing.

BF: Yeah, because I think in life you're always going to be hurt. And I went through -- aside from my experience at Lafayette, there were other trauma. [Section redacted by a QAP reviewer] [00:58:00]. And then, talking about the whole -- the misogynistic aspect, too. A lot of nasty comments. So, I know -- although I don't identify as a woman, I definitely understand on a certain level some of their experience. You know what I mean? And having been molested and things like that and taken advantage of, not validated, feelings not validated by my own family, it's -- I think it's -- yeah, it's understandable that I would have turned to drugs and alcohol at one point. And now that I've come through it, do this; I feel like this is -- I would be doing -- I have to do this service, I feel like. I just have a calling for it. I have to tell people about this, my narrative, and things like [00:59:00] that, because there are so many people -- case in point, some of the clients that I work with in Ali Forney that have been through things like that, and it's not uncommon to have gone through even worse -- so that they know that they're not alone.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

BF: This is important.

MA: Yes, it's incredibly important. And also, when we serve, we heal.

BF: Yeah, exactly. It's healing.

MA: That's a wonderful thing. So, you have told your story, and I've told you that you've been an inspiration for many people. Did I forget to ask anything? Is there -- the moment is yours. Things that you want to recall, or things that you want to just express or say about your time here.

BF: No, not really. Just that I want to say it was overall -- I'd say I learned a lot about myself. I came out and learned [00:01:00] a great deal, and I didn't stay the same person. I transformed, and for the better, I would say, even though I've had my -- I had my lapses. I had my downfall there -- here at Lafayette. I've had my downfalls, and it was still -- I still met a lot of great people that I still keep in touch with and I appreciate it. Everything that I was given, I just want to say, by the people at Lafayette, the faculty, and my friends -- I just want to say thank you.

MA: Thank you, Bryan C. Fox.

BF: You're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE