

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of
Phil James '82
Conducted by
Mary Armstrong
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Special Collections & College Archives

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Lafayette College

2019

James

MARY ARMSTRONG: Okay, they should both be recording, and this is Mary Armstrong. I'm professor of women's and gender studies and chair of Women's and Gender Studies at Lafayette College. It is November 2, 2017. We're in the Weston St. Francis in San Francisco, California, where the sun is shining, and I'm in the company of Phillip - Phil - James, class of 1982. Phil, thank you for talking to me today.

PHIL JAMES: Happy to.

MA: I am really --

PJ: I'll pause --

MA: -- so happy.

PJ: -- to say this resonates with me. My passion is genealogy, so people are talking a mile a minute -- no, wait, which aunt was that? What? Where were you at the time? This sounds very familiar to me. (laughter)

MA: Oh, this is great. So you know the introduction.

PJ: Yes.

MA: And it'll be familiar when I ask you to please confirm that your participation is voluntary.

PJ: Yes, my participation is voluntary.

MA: And is it okay if we take a photo of you --

PJ: Yes.

MA: -- after? Okay.

PJ: Yes.

MA: Wonderful. Thank you. So first of all, our heartfelt gratitude for taking time out of your day, for being part of the Queer Archives Project. And the preamble goes that, [00:01:00] of course, any question that you want to decline to answer, you're free to. Most of all, please elaborate. The questions that I ask are really not formal questions. We don't have a protocol where we march through certain things. They're like little doors we try to open or little --

PJ: Right.

MA: -- you know, sort of, little prompts to help you think of things or remember things, but the oral history is your story.

PJ: Okay.

MA: And so, you should talk about things that are important to you and meaningful. We just hope to jog your memory as we go forward. Personal pronouns you prefer?

PJ: He.

MA: He, his?

PJ: Yeah.

MA: And your relationship to Lafayette is you're a member of the class of --

PJ: Eighty-two.

MA: Eighty-two.

PJ: So, entered in '78, graduated in '82.

MA: Okay, great. And how do you define yourself as a member of the LGBTQ, the letter? (laughter) Or the letters.

PJ: Sometimes I'm queer. In fact, today I was -- someone saying, "Why aren't you here in middle of the day?" I said, "I'm going to this Queer Voices interview," and it was odd to say in a work context, [00:02:00] but he said, "Oh, is that" -- I said, "Yeah, it's very queer." (laughs) So I think of myself as gay, but I also use the term queer.

MA: Okay, all right. Great. That's helpful. And how do you professionally describe yourself? That could be your vocation, work, life, employment, whatever.

PJ: Right. I get paid to be a quality assurance manager, a software manager. I work for a company that does marketing for other firms. It's called Zignal Labs, and we bring in social media, media, and traditional media on behalf of these companies, and then package it in various ways and show them reports and briefings and lovely graphics and drill down things and help them prevent problems and --

MA: Oh, wow. Okay.

PJ: -- yeah, so. I've been here for about two years, and I've been in social media for about 5 or 6 years total, worked for another company doing similar kind of thing.

MA: All right. So that's been a long term -- and previous to that?

PJ: So, I've been in quality assurance -- In fact, here's a Lafayette tie-in. [00:03:00] It wasn't quite computer science as a program yet at Lafayette, but I took a core concentration in computer science.

MA: Oh, okay.

PJ: And the professor at the time, Professor Schwar -- I still remember him -- I went to him for the homework for, you know, Fortran or Cobalt or something, and he said, "Come in. Close the door. I'm going to give you some career advice." And I (laughs) was like, "I'm not here for career advice." But he said, and Lafayette has always been both liberal arts and some technology. And he said, "You should not come to the hard science side of the world." That's what he led with is you don't belong on the engineering side. He said, "But, you shouldn't leave the engineering side. You're one of those people, and it's going to be difficult for you to kind of straddle the line. You should do some of both because you have qualities of both, and you'd be unhappy either fully in or fully out. You should

do something like technical writing or [00:04:00] quality assurance." And most of my career has been technical writing and/or quality assurance. I did a little development as well, but, I mean, you know, back in 1978, this professor at Lafayette really shaped my career by saying, "You're one of those people." And he also said, "You're going to have to read between the lines. You're not necessarily going to find -- You know, you'll find a hundred job descriptions, and 95 of them won't fit for you or you'll go to a company and say, 'Well, this is what I do. Can't we create a job?'" And that has been somewhat the case is I've had to kind of help forge what it is that I do or have a job created. But the main thing has been as a quality assurance manager, so testing software and then having a team that does software testing.

MA: Wow. Wonderful. He was prophetic and also helpful at the same time --

PJ: Well --

MA: -- it sounds like.

PJ: -- I go beyond prophetic. I mean, he shaped my career.

MA: Wonderful.

PJ: You know, I had one class with this professor, but he recognized I had reasons to be in [00:05:00] technology but reasons not to be fully in. And, you know, he could have

steered me into more engineering. He could've steered me out of engineering, but he knew that I belonged, somehow, on the peripheral and that it would have its challenges in and of itself. And I've passed that on to other people as well, but it really shaped my career.

MA: That's a great story and a connection back right at the beginning --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- of our story. So when you think back about your time on campus, late '70s, early '80s, this is a very generic question, but what was the climate like for LGBTQ people, if there was a climate? What was it like? How would you describe it, large scale?

PJ: Yeah. So I've always thought of Lafayette as a quite conservative college and campus. I am black, which might not come across in a (laughs) transcript.

MA: (laughs)

PJ: But I thought as one of relatively few black students, relatively few non-white students, [00:06:00] I felt there were lots of people there who felt I didn't belong at Lafayette. In fact, I was part of the students who had been provisionally admitted, so children of alumni athletes and other students who needed some kind of help on campus, and I was an advisor and a mentor to some of these

students. And so I had this kind of additional interface with professors who weren't my teachers, other than what some other people said. You know, you had six classes, but I also talked with or got reports from 20 other teachers because of this program. And I remember our advisor -- it was the head of the math department -- was amazed that I would then see these reports saying these black students don't belong here. If they're not here on their own academic merit, they shouldn't be part of this campus. And, you know, this is how I knew some of the professors felt --

PJ: -- was -- and I felt if that's how they felt about just something like race, then --

MA: Right.

PJ: -- I mean, [00:07:00] something that I can hide, which is the fact that I'm gay, that's something that most people are not going to know about. So I thought of it as a fairly conservative campus. I was pretty closeted for most of my time there.

MA: Those comments were explicitly racialized, that you, sort of, quote unquote accidentally --

PJ: Yes.

MA: -- saw.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: Wow.

PJ: Absolutely.

MA: Wow.

PJ: Again, kind of this blind assumption that if a student or just other faculty members are part of this program, they either were privileged to hear this or they would feel the same way. You know, it was kind of stark as a black, 18-year-old student to hear what some professors were saying. And again, the head of this program was amazed that this was happening. But I figured I'd rather know that that's how people -- You know, I wasn't necessarily going to change everyone's mind, so I'd rather know there were people who feel that way and then avoid them and/or prove them wrong.

MA: So, you felt like seeing explicit racism, then homophobia [00:08:00] would be just the next level of --

PJ: Right. Right.

MA: -- trouble.

PJ: Yeah. Also, so I came out to relatively few people. I was in a regular dorm my freshman year and then moved to Kirby House -- you know, sort of a half fraternity, especially at the time -- and stayed there for the rest of my other three years. And so it was a fairly small-type community. I had a little teasing there. In fact, there were a pair of guys

who were very close to one another, and they would tease me, saying, "Well, Phil, you know, we hear you're a pitcher," or "We hear you're a catcher." You know, of course, they would try to -- they just assumed by insulting me that I'm a bottom would be, (laughter) to use the vernacular --

MA: Right.

PJ: -- like that would be the most insulting thing. And I said, "Well, you know, and what about the two of you? I mean, do you just go back and forth?"

MA: (laughs)

PJ: I'm just like, "How dare you insult me in front of the rest of the [00:09:00] organization, Kirby House, when clearly the two of you are closer --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- "than best friends?" Like, don't go there. Don't even go (laughs) there, so.

MA: You were asking for it --

PJ: I was snapping with the --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- best of them at the time, so. There was kind of a truce, and then something that has been the case for me all my life is the fact that I'm black in a mostly white environment kind of protects me because people don't expect

that I'm going to be dating girls because most of the girls are white, and there's nobody for me, quote unquote. In fact, I remember -- I have a bigger brother. He's four years older than me. We grew up in Wethersfield, Connecticut, an extremely white community. He went to the senior prom and came home a half hour later than he left, crying. This is my brother, you know, football captain. He was crying because he got there, and the girl who he was taking's father had never met him, realized he was black, [00:010:00] said to his daughter, "You can't go to the prom with him." I mean, I starkly remember specific times of racial prejudice and just shocking moments, which kind of made me especially cautious. I thought of Lafayette as a fairly conservative place. Having said that, I was in the anthropology -- I started as a physics major, and then I thought about chemistry, and then I was a math major literally for three weeks and ended up in anthropology, sociology. And one of the reasons was the professors there were very welcoming. In fact, I remember asking one of my professors, "I don't understand why you would go halfway across the world and study a group of people who you're nothing like." I can remember the cocktail party he said this to me at. He said, "Well, most anthropologists feel that way in their own culture. They feel like they don't

belong in their own culture, and so they go to find what the familiarities are between different groups of people.”

[00:11:00] That was it. I changed my major. (laughs) I was like --

MA: Perfect.

PJ: -- okay, this is where I belong.

MA: Was there any kind of community of others? It sounds like you were holding your own in Kirby Hall, but did you know other gay folks or was it a sub-rosa kind of community or did race keep you, do you think, because that clearly was a big issue --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- the racist environment --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- at the time?

PJ: I did not know of or see a community of other queer people there. In fact, I went to one reunion and ran into a girl from my class who was there with her female partner. And I was surprised at it, (laughs) and her partner kind of stood off to the side, like, “I’m not allowed to interact with anybody from her school time.” It was the oddest thing. I didn’t know anyone else who was overtly gay. I did have a couple fleeting [00:012:00] encounters. At Kirby House, I remember one boy at the time, who I was very enamored with,

and I still remember his girlfriend -- she went to another school -- and she came to school one day. And I kind of avoided both of them. And then I'm standing there, and he came to my room and kind of hung out at my room, which he'd never done before or since, and then a few minutes later, here comes his girlfriend who explicitly came to meet me. And I said, "Hi," long as you're standing (laughter) here, "Nice to meet you, Kim," whatever her name was. And she turned to me and said, "Keep your f-ing hands off my boyfriend." And I looked at our mutual friend, and I was amazed, and I realized he had set the whole thing up. He was using some fake rela-- You know, it was just the oddest moment.

MA: Wow.

PJ: Never had [00:13:00] any other interaction with him, never saw her again. So it wasn't that attraction between men never came up, but it was kind of coded and weird and pretty suppressed while I was there.

MA: It was don't ask, don't tell, sort of little signals, maybe real --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- maybe not.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah. For instance, at the old alumni fieldhouse, I remember a rollerblade time, and I remember a guy who I'm

still friends with came around, and he saw me kind of struggling and took my hand. And we roller skated around for quite some time, but he thought nothing of it. And I thought this is the most out --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- thing I've (laughs) ever done here. He just thought nothing of it. He just didn't think it was a big deal. In fact, your question about was there a subclass or a subculture, he is [00:14:00] Jewish. And so, I kind of wondered at the time, did he already feel like he was an outsider in some ways, and people couldn't touch him? And so they would, therefore, not say a thing about him and me, so it was an odd time. (laughs)

MA: It sounds like it.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: It makes me think of, in doing these interviews, the intersections between being a gay person, a queer person, a lesbian, and being Jewish, or being black --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- and being marginalized in some way --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- that they have these -- they touch each other, and they connect somehow --

PJ: Right.

MA: -- as experiences.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah. I definitely feel that way.

MA: Were there any -- and I'm thinking in 1982 I might know the answer to this -- but were there any kinds of public conversations? Was there any support in any way, or did people just make it on their own as they sort of discovered their identity at that time?

PJ: Yeah. There was no group. [00:15:00] I remember taking a [sic] anthropology of the feminine or what-- I can't remember quite what it was called. And my advisor, who was a man, he was worried I was taking it because, as a man, I probably wasn't going to get as good a grade as I would have if I were a woman taking it because it was a class mostly for women, and most of the people in the class were women. But even in that class, really gender, gender identity, didn't come up.

MA: Oh.

PJ: I did come out to several people. I came out to my advisor privately during the summer by, you know, I wrote him a long letter. And I came out to my roommate. I was trying to think when that was. So I had a roommate my two middle years at Kirby House, and then we both stayed in Kirby House, but we were both in single rooms in our senior year. And I think I came out after we were rooming together but

before our senior year. [00:16:00] And there was no problem. In fact, I've talked to him and his wife now -- who also went to Lafayette -- and we've talked about gender identity, and we've talked about all kinds of issues. My advisor had no problem with me being gay. He was surprised that I thought it would be an issue. But to kind of extend your question, he also talked to me about -- So one of my fellow students, my advisor came to me and said, "She has a black father and a white mother or vice versa, and she's been told, 'Act like you're black.' Assume that people assume that you're black. Don't assume people think you're mixed race or you have half rights. Just act like people think that you're black, and that's the way you should approach the world." And my advisor was stunned at this kind of, you know, this idea that black parents or non-white parents have this kind of talk with their [00:17:00] children. And I said, "Yeah, that is kind of the way it goes." And the same would be true -- when I came out to my parents, there was this feeling like you're already dealing with so much. This is one more thing. It's going to make it harder for you in your life, so. The people who I did come out to at Lafayette were completely accepting of it. My senior thesis was about homosexuality and religion. I had a number of people come to my thesis talk, and it was

just kind of like I had to give them questions to ask me
(laughs) in advance because they knew nothing and didn't
care anything --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- about what I was saying. But they were there for
support, so I feel like, all in all, I was supported. I
felt like it was me making a stand on my own, and then when
I did, I was supported by the people in my local Lafayette
community.

MA: You picked good people, and reached out to them, and they
responded. You built your own support network, in a sense.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: You went and did it yourself. [00:18:00]

PJ: Right. I think of it a little bit more complicated than
that. I came out to my advisor. I thought, "I need to
come out to my parents because I need to do something about
homosexuality as part of my college study." I sort of
talked myself into, "I need to come out to my parents kind
of while I'm here because they're paying for my education,
and they need to know that I'm doing this gay thing." And
then I felt if I'm going to do something about
homosexuality, it'll be while I'm studying anthropology,
and so I need to come out to my advisor in order to do
that. So I feel like I kind of bootstrapped myself. I

convinced myself I need to take these outing steps, and, fortunately, the people who were there were supportive of me taking them. But I kind of -- I won't say I blame myself, but I forced myself into that situation.

MA: Yeah, okay. That was something you asked yourself to do --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- for those reasons.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: And what was your thesis on? It was on --

PJ: It was on homosexuality [00:19:00] and religion, culture and subculture. I was a member of and I studied the MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] church, and I reached out to different religious organizations and talked to -- I was raised as a Congregationalist. So I went to my pastor and said, "Hi, I'm gay, and I'm changing churches." This was when I was 16 or 17 --

MA: Wow.

PJ: -- 16, I think. And again, I just thought, "Well, I'm going to join the MCC church because that's where I belong, and I can't just not come to church." You know, long before I told my parents that I was gay, I told my pastor I was gay, had a long talk with him. And he said, "Well, I'm a big church person. We can accommodate everybody," all

kinds of things that didn't make (laughs) sense to me at all. I kept on going, but --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- I then kind of focused on MCC as an organization. And again, my advisor was very accommodating in helping me look at [00:20:00] gay subculture from a cultural perspective. So what are the group dynamics? Let's look at different authors that are talking about group dynamics and talking about subculture as a thing, you know, the gayness as part of it. And I would then bring my advisor -- I'd say, "Well, you know, I'm going to this church, and, of course, there's somebody in the third row who is speaking under his breath." "Well what's he doing?" I said, "Well, he's translating the prayers, because he's talking to God in Spanish." And my advisor just thought this was just mind-blowing, like, "What do you mean he's talking in Spanish?" (laughs) "What is this church like? How wide are the borders?" And he helped me realize this is an unusual organization. As you were saying -- being gay often brings people who are alike one another in their queerness or their gayness together who are unlike one another in other ways, and so the fact that this man spoke fluent Spanish meant he thought he needed to talk [00:21:00] to God in Spanish, so he sat -- you know, of course, we were reading

hymns that all the pronouns had been changed from him to him or her. He was he or she. (laughs) It didn't faze us that this is the way we're going to do it because this is a progressive organization. So that all happened to me while I was at Lafayette.

MA: Wow. And that thesis must be -- I mean, this is an assumption on my part but not a lot of them on homosexuality at that point --

PJ: Yeah. (laughs)

MA: -- as honest pieces.

PJ: Probably not.

MA: (laughs) I'm thinking --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- yours would shine out in that regard. I mean --

PJ: Yeah. I would think so.

MA: It's interesting to think about the role of academics in, sort of, queer culture and LGBTQ experience history at the school because it sort of brings up the questions of, "Did that ever come up in other classes, or did people at that point or would -- you have just found the topic because of the story you just described?"

PJ: Yeah.

MA: Normally, that wouldn't have come up in your academic experience otherwise, except you [00:22:00] went and got

it. Or was it out there because of A&S. Did it float in your academic experience at all otherwise?

PJ: No, it really didn't. I would say I had a fairly close relationship with my advisor. I came to anthropology/sociology pretty late. Again, I'd been through several majors before I found anthropology/sociology. So I was kind of scrambling for my last two years to take a lot of classes. And then my advisor was helping shape me. And this is Larry Taylor, by the way. He's long since moved on from Lafayette.

MA: I was going to ask you, though. Thank you.

PJ: Yeah. He then started shaping me toward, well, if you're going to be interested in being an anthropologist, let's talk a little bit about museums. Let's talk about putting on a display. So go take that display that's in the hallway on the fourth floor of Pardee. Go up to the attic, and there are -- I was like, attic? I didn't realize [00:23:00] (laughs) there's an attic. Yeah, here's the key. There are pottery shards, and there's all kinds of things. Find 20 things up there that you find interesting. Let's put together a museum display just for that case, and, you know, just all kinds of coaching and career shaping of this is a little bit about what it's like to be an anthropologist. You might be a cultural anthropologist,

you might be an archaeologist. So my answer kind of is no. I don't feel that my gayness came up in other academic ways, but I think Lafayette, in general, helped me realize that the things I was interested in, whatever they are, are worth my pursuit and that I should think as broadly as possible. And Lafayette was a place to help me shape what that was. So, for my thesis, I had my advisor and one other professor on campus and then a professor from Lehigh who had studied [00:24:00] homeless people and alcoholics on the street. As an 18 year old, I just, from Connecticut, (laughs) you know, I thought, "What are you doing? Why would you do --" you know, he would pretend to be alcoholic and talk about passing the bottle. It freaked me out, but he was very quick to talk about culture and subculture and talk about rules that are hidden. And he would give examples of, well, just because you're homeless, doesn't mean there's no culture to it. And if being alcoholic doesn't mean there aren't rules about sharing, for instance. And he really helped me realize any pursuit in anthropology and anything that I wanted to do, there are things to discover, and anthropology's a good lens through which to, kind of, study other people.

MA: And you did that very thing in your own culture, in that sense. You went to your honors thesis, and you looked at a

culture with rules and [00:25:00] with -- and it was perfect for what you were learning and --

PJ: Right.

MA: -- meaningful for yourself. It was like the ideal liberal arts --

PJ: Right. And then --

MA: -- experience.

PJ: -- also, I was in band. I was in the choir and band, and I thought of the band -- I've always thought, kind of, in group dynamics. And so I kind of would observe the band and realize, "Okay, the drummers in the band, they have a certain mentality that's different than the trumpet players." And the professors thought this was hysterical that you could do group dynamics on, you know --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- fraternity. And then they'd want to hear about fraternities. Like, I know nothing about fraternities. Well, let's talk to you about fraternities. Let's talk about the initiation rites of fraternities, and don't you think this is sexual? It's like, "Well, I'm at Kirby House. We have no initiation (laughs) rights, so." But they would describe things that were happening at fraternities. How could you be an 18-year-old boy and not

think these initiation rites involving raw eggs and carrots
(laughs) and being tied up, --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- how does [*sic*] this not [00:26:00] overtly sexual
(laughs) to you? I don't understand. (laughs)

MA: This is not a code. (laughs)

PJ: I just was (laughs) like, there's very little code here.

MA: (laughs)

PJ: Maybe there's some code, but yeah. So, Lafayette really --

MA: So, ethnography is your thing --

PJ: (laughs) Yeah.

MA: -- and you were --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- able to make it work in really powerful --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- directions.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: That's (laughs) really wonderful.

PJ: (laughs)

MA: I'm thinking about what you said. You said a whole bunch of
things that make me want to think multiple questions, but
the ethnography of the band makes me think of -- and the
carrots and the eggs --

PJ: (laughs)

MA: -- makes me think of the fraternities who you had nothing to -- like Greek life, like how did that -- you weren't in Greek life. You were in Kirby House.

PJ: Right.

MA: It felt like a living group, but it wasn't a fraternity.

PJ: Right.

MA: So how did the living situation, the social situation and Greek life are all different questions. But just --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- to throw them out there.

PJ: Yeah, so I would say I feel like I'm in a hall of mirrors because my experience at Lafayette started with and the culture, subculture thing started with I was a member of marching band. So, I was on campus [00:27:00] a week before other students were with the rest of the band. I'm still friends with -- I was talking to somebody on Facebook last night from the band. In fact, I said, "Now what was the name of --" I asked on Facebook, "Which hall was I in freshman year?" And four people answered me right away. Oh, that's right. Okay, it was Easton Hall.

MA: The community continues.

PJ: Yes, it does.

MA: That's wonderful.

PJ: It does. And I made really strong friendships even before school started at Lafayette. And then, kind of in my mind significantly, it was smack up against -- the only other people on campus were ROTC and the football team. So I remember my first day I come running in. It's late August. I'm all sweaty, tank top, trying to say goodbye to my parents. And the football coach said, "Well, hi. You know, we haven't met. Who are you?" I was like, "No, we haven't met. I'm Phil James." He's like, "Well, why are you he-- you know, what?" (laughs) I said, "Well, I'm [00:28:00] here for band camp." He's like, "You're not on the football team?" I said, "No." And --

MA: Oh, wow.

PJ: -- he kept asking me questions --

MA: Right.

PJ: -- assuming I was there for football. The reason I bring up band was that helped form a subgroup of friends. In fact, I really had to break away from them once I got to Kirby House because I'd remained very tight friends with five or six, seven or eight people through most of my college. And it started with being part of the group of fellow band students, and we would go to the -- at the time, at least, there were three or four fraternities that had keg parties or grain parties every night -- so, you

know, we would go. A bunch of people would go. I think the strangest thing Lafayette ever did -- but people tell me this happens at other universities -- is [00:29:00] the football game on Saturday and then everyone rushes home and puts on formal clothing and goes to a cocktail party. This was the oddest thing to me but kind of training to be an adult and do schmoozing at cocktail parties. So I did that as well. I went to fairly few fraternity parties.

MA: Did they control the party world? Did they have a high level of social control? There were a lot of fraternities at that time --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- I remember.

PJ: Yeah. I think we had about 18 fraternities, about 6 sororities, and I didn't think of it as control at the time. But most of the parties were -- but fraternities had some enormous liquor budget, apparently, (laughs) Lafayette being a huge drinking school, at least at the time.

MA: Right.

PJ: And so, you know, the liquor and, to some extent, the food flowed freely. Kirby House had a -- we had cocktail parties now and then. We were open after the home football game sometimes as well. [00:30:00] There were cultural events to go to as well. There were concerts and -- But

the day-to-day social life was mostly either you're with a group of friends. You're going out for pizza, or you're in your room, or you're going to one of the dances at one of the fraternities. Really defined social life.

MA: Right. That makes sense. And for you the world of clubs and associations was mostly band? Did you belong to other student groups?

PJ: Yeah, so many music related. So there was marching band, pep band, a little concert band, and then I was in the choir. I was actually president of the choir, and the barber shop quartet at the time. In fact, one of the people I came out to was the woman who was vice president of the choir, and she said, "You know, no big deal. It doesn't surprise me, except a lot of people wonder why you and I haven't gone out." [00:31:00] And she said, "I'm glad it's not that you don't like me. It's just that (laughs) you don't like girls." And she and I are still friends.

MA: Nice. That's great.

PJ: It was a no-brainer, no problem at the time. And so, I was in those musical organizations. I was a, as I mentioned, a mentor to the students who'd been conditionally admitted, and I worked for the admissions office. I did tours. And not a lot else. Those were my primary outlets.

MA: Well, you were busy. I mean --

PJ: Yes.

MA: -- those are a lot of things. So thinking about the social scene -- probably not a same-sex dating scene -- did people have relationships? Did you know other gay folks? Or was it sort of a process of your own coming out, and was there a dating scene? I'm thinking probably not because it sounds like it was a pretty quiet --

PJ: I think there must have been, you know, what I would [00:32:00] now think of as a down low, kind of -- I assume there was sex happening. I didn't see any expression of emotion between members of the same sex. I remember the guy who I mentioned earlier who introduced me to his girlfriend, he was at the far end of Kirby House. And I went down to visit him one time, and his door was open. I went in, and he was sleeping. And I just sort of thought, "Well, this is lovely." (laughter) I turned to leave, and turns out, he wasn't sleeping. He was pretending to be asleep, watching me watch him sleep. And I just thought this is just so twisted.

MA: Wow.

PJ: I'm going to stay away from this. And I never saw any affection between men or I don't think between women either. Nothing overt. Probably something that could be

passed off as, "I've had too much to drink." That doesn't
[00:33:00] even ring true to me. I don't remember that at
all.

MA: Were there any moments on campus life or sort of public
moments? Like, sometimes people talk -- this is years
later -- but about the AIDS quilt came to campus, where
there was a brouhaha about X or Y or something like that.
Was there anything that resonated around queer life or was
it mostly individuals making their way?

PJ: Yeah, at least for me, I would say it was individuals
making their way. That's how I felt. I had very few
clandestine meetings of any kind. In fact, there was a boy
I was very interested in, and I went to visit him in his
room and knocked on the door. And he invited me in, and he
was in bed with his girlfriend. It was like, "Oh, okay."

MA: (laughs)

PJ: She found out later that I was gay and that I was
interested in him, and she just thought that was hugely
insensitive of him. Again, probably some kind of power --

MA: Power --

PJ: -- dynamic --

MA: -- play.

PJ: -- going on.

MA: You're just lucky [00:34:00] with -- (laughs)

PJ: I remember meeting his now-wife much later, and she and I talked about whether he's a good kisser or not. So I feel like I got --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- my revenge. (laughs) I was like, "That'll show you to invite me to your concerts."

MA: There you go.

PJ: I'll talk to your wife about you.

MA: (laughs)

PJ: I'm trying to think back, for instance, like I remember the Joffrey two ballet coming to campus. And, you know, that would have been a prime time for people to either express "these men are very graceful" or "this one looks gay," and I just don't remember any of that --

MA: Wow.

PJ: -- at the time. I just don't remember that ever happening. I've probably blocked it out.

MA: Well, yeah. It sounds like there was a lot of silence during that time.

PJ: Yeah. And also, in thinking about the community of Easton, there was an us versus them mentality of, you know, even football [00:35:00] players need to walk in twos or threes going down the hill into town. So there was a feeling like, well, you wouldn't want go downtown to meet other men

because you might get mugged just because it's a rough area. You know, it's an old coal town. It's a poor community, which it wasn't that way for long. It became, from my understanding, more of, kind of, this distant suburb of New York, more upscale. Housing stock went up. But at the time that I was there, it was a big deal to go down into town. I did it now and then, and I could tell there were gay people in and around the area. But I never made connection with anybody from the town either. And again, I kind of think of it as there was kind of an us versus them cultural kind of barrier between, you know, mixing with people from town. So that [00:36:00] kind of put a stop to any exploration in that direction.

MA: So, precluded that as a possible way to --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- find a community or something --

PJ: Right.

MA: -- like --

PJ: Right.

MA: -- that?

PJ: Plus, I lived on the other side of New York, so I could take a bus to New York and did a number of times, stopped in New York for a day or afternoon or a couple days one way or the other. And, you know, there was gay life to be

found in New York City, for sure. It was two hours away, so.

MA: Right. Right. Not far at all. The black community on campus, was that very, very, very small? Was it a very small number of black students, students of color on campus while you were there?

PJ: Yes. There were 2,000 students at the time. There's more like 2,800 now? --

MA: About 25.

PJ: Yeah. So there were 2,000 students. There were probably -- my memory would be like -- 40 students of [00:37:00] color.

MA: Wow. Okay.

PJ: And 30 of them were black.

MA: Very, very small.

PJ: Yeah. In fact, when I left, I told the admissions office they tried so hard to recruit me as a black student, I almost didn't come. You know, come to the black weekend, and stay at the Association of Black Collegians, or we're going to pair you with -- you know, we found -- (laughs) we went out into the upper classmen and found a black. In fact, one of the people I knew pretty well was in the band, so --

MA: Oh.

PJ: -- he and I bonded about being in band. But he was from Brooklyn, and we had nothing in common, but he was one of the other few black students. And the school tried really hard to -- I wouldn't say herd black students together, but they tried to treat us in a similar and special way, which didn't work for me because I was from the white suburbs. In fact, I baldly said to the admissions office, [00:38:00] "You know, I'm the black students you want, so I don't know what you're looking for, but you want people like me who really come from an all-white background. We speak the same language. You don't really want, you know, kids from the inner city who have no idea what this suburban lifestyle is like. So, you need to be more -- if that's really true, like, I'm your target audience, you're not hitting me as a target." In fact, the other thing that comes to mind is there was one white guy who was in my year who was -- he hung out with all black students, and he was, I think, from Brooklyn or the Bronx. And he and I kind of -- We were like twin sons. Like, we would kind of nod to each other. You know, he would be crossing the quad with a pack of black students, and I'm crossing the quad with a pack of white band students. And he and I would kind of nod to each other, like, literally, we were orbiting the sun around each [00:39:00] other, and we never really

became friends, but there was kind of this, you know,
racial sort of association of --

MA: You understood.

PJ: Yeah. You're in your world. I'm in mine.

MA: Yeah, you understood.

PJ: And you're like, "Hey, how's it going? Is it okay for
you?" But, yeah.

MA: Wow. That's fascinating. That could almost be a
marginalizing experience to have somebody recruit you in
ways that aren't making sense to your whole cultural self.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. And then, you know, once I got to
school, and as an upper classman when I was working in this
program for students who'd been conditionally admitted, I
just felt like, well, this is exactly what I thought. Some
of the professors, you know, who had been there for 20
years and they were educated in the '40s and the '50s, of
course, they feel this way that these students don't belong
here. But I just didn't expect to hear it in writing.

MA: Unbelievable.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. [00:40:00] So it sounds like you found ways
to be really happy, in many ways, at Lafayette College.
You were successful in a lot of musical organizations, a
stable living group, friends, across to all those different

places, academic success, an honors thesis. Was it a good experience for you at the college? I mean, at the same time, you know, overt racism, and a homophobic world but also a conservative end of a homophobic world at Lafayette College in, say, 1980 or whatever.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah, I would say --

MA: I mean, I don't mean that as a simple question with a yes or no.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: I know it's complicated.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: But in just thinking about, that's a lot.

PJ: I've said over the years, Lafayette was a very good place to get an education, so I'm glad I went. It was serendipitous that I found it when I was in high school looking for schools. We had a tie-in to a computer at Princeton or somewhere that you go to the guidance [00:40:00] office, and you could type into the little telet-- It was a teletype. I'm so old. It was a --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- teletype. You'd type in, "I want a school in the Northeast." Okay, that's 5,000 schools. I want it between 500 and 2,000 or 3,000 students. Okay, that's 300 schools. And you would say, "I want the following potential majors

as part of it." And it would narrow it down, narrow it down. If you got below 20, you could then get a list, and, again, it's like band dominates my life. I got a list of five schools, and one of them was Lafayette College in Easton. And when I was in high school, our marching band had competed against Easton Area High School.

MA: Oh, wow.

PJ: I had no clue otherwise what La-- people I talk to now, "Oh, yeah. Lafayette College." I had never heard of it.

MA: Wow, yeah.

PJ: I knew it because of our band competitions.

MA: (laughs)

PJ: And --

MA: Band is a powerful --

PJ: (laughs)

MA: -- force.

PJ: It's really big. And I applied. Again, back to the racial side, you know, the schools that I applied to, and the U.S. Army was calling me up. [00:42:00] By the time I started picking schools, I had three shopping bags of pamphlets of schools I had not immediately tossed out.

MA: Wow.

PJ: So, these were just the ones I was left looking at. I had really good SATs and PSATs. The Army was calling me. You

know, the Army's the right place for you. I was like, "I know the Army's --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- "not the right (laughs) pla-- you don't know why, but the Army is not the right place for me." The Army was insisting, "You know, you're a young black man. We've got the great educa--" I'm, like, no. No, I know that's not the case. But Lafayette did fit the -- you know, I wanted it far enough from home that it wasn't like a two-hour ride home. I wanted a small liberal arts school. The schools I ended up looking at Haverford, Hamilton, Lafayette, Wesleyan, Bucknell, couple others, were largely in New England, small schools. It had a band. The band director was hugely interested. Like, "Oh, you're a drum major? Are you going to continue [00:43:00] with marching?" The choir director was interested. I got letters from both of them.

MA: Oh, wow.

PJ: The music element and, of course, again the Association of Black Collegians through the admissions office really reached out and said, "This is a good place for you. It's a good liberal arts education." And it resonated with me because I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do, so I wanted a little leeway of if you move from major to major,

which I did three or four times, this is still a good place for you. I also wanted a range of I didn't want to do nine hours of homework just to get by. I also didn't want to fly through. I wanted to kind of be middle of the pack in some ways, and Lafayette seemed like that was going to be the case as well. And that did prove to be the case. I could work really hard. I could do the honors classes. I really connected with several professors. And so it turned out to be a good place for me. I would say I was astounded to hear [00:44:00] that there's a GLBT organization because that would have been, and I assume is, it must be a different experience because I really feel like as a gay boy and man, I feel like I went through it on my own, although there were support footholds and places to plateau. And I was fortunate that there was no bashing. There was no overt complaints. There were no turned down, missed opportunities or bad reactions from anybody. And I had a really understanding advisor who helped me knit together this idea of what I'm interested in in my own life and kind of realizing that that was a passion that I should be pursuing as I study anthropology and as I complete -- in fact, he was giving me homework during the summer. Go read Alexis de Tocqueville. You [00:45:00] need to read this book and understand America is about volunteer

organizations. And every time I see a new volunteer organization --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- well, we're going to talk about bylaws for three months, I'm thinking, "Oh, my advisor was so right." So, here's a book from 250 years ago, 300 years ago, and it still -- that part of my Lafayette education, which in a nutshell, is a couple key professors, not just connecting with me, but connecting with what would make sense to me and helping shape what my personality was going to be. Yes, I had a few struggles at Lafayette. Yes, I wish I were more overtly gay. Yes, I wish it were less conservative of a place at the time. But, yeah, looking back on it, it was a really good place to get my college education.

MA: It sounds like you had what we all hope our students have, which is a place that -- in the academic sense, what we all hope our students will have, which is a place where faculty are [00:46:00] excited about what they see in you and your abilities and want to give you opportunities to expand and grow in those ways.

PJ: Right. And it's about the student --

MA: And about them.

PJ: -- but each professor has a unique set of experiences and skills to offer.

MA: Something to offer, yeah.

PJ: Right. And again, the computer science professor off to the side, I never expected. Same thing with my philosophy professor, Professor Panichas, who I remember he came out here, and he did a cocktail party. And we went to The Olympic Club or something together, and he said, "You know, here I am this, you know, commie liberal Jew. They wouldn't let me in if I weren't speaking here." And I said, "Yeah, and I'm a gay black man, and they wouldn't let me in otherwise (laughs) either." So glad we're both here.

MA: When was this?

PJ: This is te-- 15 years ago, something like that. So kind of a long time ago, but --.

MA: But your point is well --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- taken.

PJ: Yeah. So back to your point of the [00:47:00] idea of, kind of, people from separate worlds, I really do sense that there was -- Lafayette helped be a gathering place for people of different backgrounds and, you know, real diversity. Really, not just we're all the same in some way, but you have something to bring to the table. I have something to bring to the table and let me further what your passion is because it's valuable, and you will be a

better person. This will be a better community because you brought that here. I really got that sense from Lafayette.

MA: It's almost like diversity of academic thought and intellectual diversity is like a model for the other kinds of diversities we hope will also be bringing their best to the table and showing all these --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- things.

PJ: For me, it started with Lafayette as both a liberal arts, you know, fuzzy, touchy (laughter) kind of place, and a [00:sic] engineering school. [00:48:00] So I literally I had Cobalt programming at eight and philosophy at nine and then Fortran at 10. And your mind, you can do two hours of half hour of each of those homeworks because they're so different, and you'd see the professors out at the different gatherings. That was where the diversity began, and it extended to things like gender, gender identity, even though it was, you know, I was very quiet about it at the time.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. And it sounds to, for lack of a better word, you had good luck. You were wise in who you chose to come out with, and that's an important skill --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- I think we all learn --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- which is you've got to come out to the right people.

PJ: Yeah.

MA: But you never can quite be sure how they'll react.

PJ: Right.

MA: So, you picked good people, and they reacted in the way that nothing ever backlashed on you.

PJ: Right.

MA: And we're trying to make it less of a place that relies on that kind of luck. But you had that luck, so it was a good experience.

PJ: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

MA: Yeah, wow, and that's good. [00:49:00] Do you ever get back to college, living way out here on the West Coast to -- we've changed so much. I usually ask how you think the college is now, but it might be that you haven't been there in a while.

PJ: I've been back for two weddings and one reunion. All of those were quite a long time ago. Haven't been back in -- let's see. I've never had my husband there, so it hasn't been in the last 12 years. So it was longer ago than that. I think I went to my -- I don't remember now -- my 15-year reunion, my 10-year reunion. So it's been a long time.

MA: Right. Then sort of the comparative is not something, and that's fine. You're out here in San Francisco.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah.

MA: And that's something else.

PJ: Again, I'm so glad to hear that there is an LGBT student group, and it's something that I've given money to because --

MA: That's great.

PJ: -- I want to know that they're thriving and doing more, and I do expect that -- [00:50:00] my husband has done a lot of work in philanthropy. He's worked for the Marin Community Foundation --

MA: Oh, yeah.

PJ: -- out here.

MA: Wonderful.

PJ: He did that for six years --

MA: Oh, wonderful. That's great.

PJ: -- so. And he is not interested in any communication with his college, and so (laughs) it'll all be channeled to Lafayette. I was like, "Oh, could we nee-- I need to bring you to Lafayette, and show you what it was like here, and you can relive all these bad stories you've heard me say about, you know, everything that happened --

MA: (laughs)

PJ: -- "on campus ever. I'll show you where it all happened."

(laughter) It was mostly good stories, and just --

MA: That's nice.

PJ: -- some wonderful memories there.

MA: That's really nice. Well, when you bring him back, you have to promise to introduce him to all of us working on this project.

PJ: Yes.

MA: I will thank you first for this really wonderful interview and your perspective and your insights. And I will just sort of say that one of the things the Queer Archives Project is trying to do is bring the academic experience, the classroom experience, and thinking about gay cultures [00:51:00] and, sort of, queer history, and those things into students' lives through the classroom. You went and made it happen yourself, but not every student is able to do that for a number of reasons, capacity or sort of confidence or independence or even achievement that lets you --

PJ: Yeah.

MA: -- build your own, which you had. And I think one of the things we are trying to do is make the tie that you've made so beautifully, which is diversity of thought is the precursor to diversity of society, learning that different

parts make more than their sum. And I really do think that that's something the Queer Archives Project is trying to do as well, so your interview has spoken to that in a really gratifying way, so thank you for that.

PJ: Sure. Well, that's great to hear. I think of, you know, students are so young. They've had so little experience. As a 57 year old, I look back on, oh, I just knew so little at the time (laughs) and thought I knew so much at the time. College is so eye opening, and it's such an [00:52:00] opportunity to ask so many of those questions. And, again, I met some really religious people that I had some late-night conversations with that I just -- it's hard to imagine -- it seems like most schools I would've gone to, I would not have met ROTC people and very religious people and people, you know, future doctors, and I just would not have met the diversity of people that I did at Lafayette. And it helped me -- geographic diversity, and, again, since I was in anthropology, so I remember interviewing a fellow student, and he was talking about he was from an African country and very tentatively talking about witchcraft, talking to me about, you know, well, he's kind of waiting for me to just kind of mock him. It's like, no, I'm a trained anthropologist by now. (laughs) I was like, "I'm not going to mock you. I want to -- I put

myself in what so -- how is it that you knew the witchcraft was working?" I just [00:53:00] kept asking questions, and, again, I just, even at the time, I thought, "Wow, this is an amazing opportunity to really hear about somebody else's world view." It wasn't his hundred percent of his every day. So this is 40 years later, 30 years later, I still remember those kind of moments from Lafayette, so --

MA: It's a --

PJ: -- good luck with your work there. (laughter)

MA: Thank you. Well, more students like you would absolutely be the desire (laughs) --

PJ: Yeah. (laughs)

MA: -- of faculty members like me. Thank you, Phil James, for this wonderful interview.

PJ: Sure, happy to.

END OF AUDIO FILE