

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of
Daniel Reynolds '08
Conducted by
Mary Armstrong
October 6, 2017

Special Collections & College Archives

David Bishop Skillman Library

Lafayette College

2018

Reynolds

MARY ARMSTRONG: Okay, so it is October 6, 2017. This is Mary Armstrong. I'm professor of Women's and Gender Studies and English at Lafayette College. We have the great pleasure of having Dan Reynolds with us today, who has done a flying trip to campus to participate in the Queer Archives Project. Thank you, Dan, very much.

DAN REYNOLDS: Of course. My pleasure.

MA: The interviews have a structure that's pretty firm at the beginning because we go through all the nuts and bolts. And then, it has a very open structure. The idea is that this is your interview and your story. We want you talk about what was meaningful for you during your time on campus. The questions that I ask are more like prompts to try to jog your memory. I know it wasn't that long ago. But we start with -- if you would, state your name and say that your participation is voluntary and that you've given your informed consent. If you would, confirm that.

DR: This is Dan Reynolds and I consent. [00:01:00]

MA: Marvelous. So, reminders: any question or prompt I ask you don't want to address, you can just say pass, obviously. If you want to elaborate on a question or it seems like I sort of brought something up, and you're

thinking, "Oh, that reminds me," please elaborate because it really is your story. We don't particularly need you to answer x, y, or z. It's really just suggestions for things that might help you recall certain aspects of being on campus. If you're like me, you go home after anything like this and you remember four, five things you wished you'd said. So, if you have any desire to follow up with an email or you think, "Oh, I have this cool thing from school. I have photos." All that stuff, we'd love to have it, if you would like it to be a part of what we're doing with the project. Do you have any problem if we take a picture of you? To put on our timeline and make as part of our public project. Is that okay?

DR: That's fine. Yeah.

MA: Okay, alright. Then we'll have a photoshoot after that.

DR: Great.

MA: (laughs) Okay. [00:02:00] So that's all the nuts and bolts, and it really is your interview. So, personal pronouns that you prefer?

DR: He, him.

MA: Oh he, him, okay. Just the demographics: your relationship to Lafayette is you're an alum. What year did you graduate?

DR: I'm an alumnus, I graduated in '08.

MA: In '08. Okay.

DR: Mm-hmm.

MA: Oh, almost 10 years.

DR: Almost 10 --

MA: That's coming up.

DR: I know. Next year.

MA: Oh, cool. Hopefully we'll see you back for a reunion then.
So, an alum - other relations to the community or
connections?

DR: No, yeah.

MA: And your majors were --?

DR: English and French.

MA: Oh wow. Marvelous. We're asking folks to -- so we can
correctly say this as how you identify as a member of the
LGBTQI community. Some people say gay or lesbian, some
people have a different way of describing it, but how would
you describe yourself in that regard?

DR: I identify as gay.

MA: Okay. [00:03:00] And professionally describe yourself.
What you do, what you're up to these days.

DR: Yeah, so I'm senior editor of social media at *The Advocate*
magazine. My job is split between editorial, writing
features, interviews, op-eds, and also promoting content
from our site for different social media channels.

MA: Wow, how marvelous. And, how long have you done that?

DR: So, I started as an intern at *The Advocate* over five years ago and I've just stayed there working my way up the ladder. Yeah.

MA: Indeed, yeah. Worked your way up the ladder. That was --

DR: (laughs) I haven't left.

MA: So, you like it because you've achieved. From intern to writing editorials, that's pretty terrific.

DR: It's pretty awesome. I actually just had my first cover story this month, which was really awesome. It was --

MA: Congratulations!

DR: Thank you. Yeah, it was an interview with the cast of *Will and Grace*, and it felt -- it's our 50th year, as well as the magazine. So, it felt very important in many ways, yeah.

MA: It is important in many ways. I'm actually making a note right now to go out and buy that immediately. Is it out right now or is it --?

DR: [00:04:00] Yeah you can get -- I'll leave you a copy. I'll run to my car and get one, because I have a few in my car.

MA: How kind of you.

DR: Yeah, sure.

MA: Thank you. I know the Archives would love one. This is not the place to discuss my love of *Will and Grace* --

DR: (laughs)

MA: -- and how important it was to me, but I will just say thanks.

DR: Yeah.

MA: Thanks for your great work. *The Advocate* is putting things out there for the gay community for, as you said, 50 years. It's a job to really be proud of, I think. Anything else to add? And then, we can certainly talk more about your work and what you've done as we go along, but --

DR: In terms of --?

MA: In terms of just describing yourself. Did we cover the important stuff?

DR: Oh, yeah.

MA: Okay.

DR: I think so.

MA: Alright, great. So, the general topic that we start with is just being LGBTQ on campus while you were a student here; to get a sense in '08 -- so you'd be the first person we interviewed from '08 -- a sense of how the climate was when you go back and think about it. [00:05:00] Was it safe for LGBTQ people? Was there a community? Was it visible? Was anybody out? There's always a story about that, and what it was like. Really generically?

DR: Yeah. Well, one of the reasons why I went to Lafayette was because I got a campus tour from Greg Blevins, who was a former president of Quest.

MA: (coughs) Excuse me.

DR: Which of course was the LGBT and ally student union on campus. I was really impressed with him and the work that he was doing. I think he had brought Judy Shepard onto campus that year. I really loved his spirit and the opportunity that I saw to bring that to a college campus. I didn't really understand what it meant to be an out person at that time. I was just coming out in my senior year of high school. I resolved to be out when I came to Lafayette because I didn't want to negotiate the closet. And I found that to be extremely [00:06:00] difficult at the beginning.

MA: Wow, yeah.

DR: I had a lot -- I had a very hard time making friends because I think that lot of my peers hadn't known out gay men. So, it was hard to -- I could feel that there was a lot of misinformation and stigma and barriers to entry in a school where not a lot of people were out. Invisible. Greg was one of the few out gay men, other than me. I felt that burden of representation, and I also felt a lot of prejudice. I remember -- and when I met my roommate, after

he found out I was gay he stopped talking to me all together. So, I had this terrible roommate situation where we were inhabiting the same space and not communicating with each other.

MA: Oh wow.

DR: Someone wrote "fag" on my door freshman year. [00:07:00]

So, I could definitely say that there were challenges.

(laughs)

MA: Yes, indeed. Oh, my.

DR: I considered transferring. I eventually did find some key friendships that let me stay on campus. I remember, Quest at the time, the membership was very low and not many people came to the meetings. After the first semester on campus, the group actually was in danger because no one had volunteered to be the president of the group. So, they were missing leadership positions there that put its future in jeopardy. Because it was one of the few places where I could feel normal on campus, I stepped up and I was like, "Listen, I'll do it. I'll be the president of Quest." That's a position that I held for [00:08:00] my freshman, sophomore, and the first semester of my junior year.

MA: Oh, wow. Wow. So that was a good, long time.

DR: Yeah, it was. I really value that experience because initially when I got to Lafayette, I felt really helpless

about what I could do. I felt like I didn't have any power and I was facing this system that was blocking me out; I wouldn't be able to effectively change or make the situation better for me and for others. But, I find that as president of Quest, something that I hadn't -- probably wouldn't have pursued if it was a more (laughs) tolerating campus -- but once I was in that position, I realized that there are events, tools, and programs that you could implement, that could make the perception of homophobia that I saw on campus -- to shift that.

MA: Wow.

DR: So, [00:09:00] over the course of several years, we instituted several events and programs. We continued the - - oh well, we started the Drag Ball, which was my favorite event. I remember being like, "Okay, we have to -- we need to have a Drag Ball," yeah. It was so fun.

MA: What year was the first drag ball?

DR: I'm pretty sure it was '05.

MA: Okay.

DR: I remember we were terrified at the time because we did not know how the campus would respond to it. So, we had it in upstairs Farinon like in that back area, and we also hired security because we had no idea if it was going to -- (laughs) yeah, because we're like --

MA: Wow, but that says so much about the climate.

DR: Oh, I know.

MA: Security for a Drag Ball on a college campus in 2005.

DR: I know.

MA: Wow.

DR: We had no idea. We hired this drag queen that we had seen performing at Stonewall, which was the local gay bar in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She brought two of her friends. It ended up being [00:10:00] three drag queens (laughs) looking to get us to do these crazy performances and lip-synchs; the students also participated. I remember I lip-synched as well. It was -- did a Christina Aguilera number. It went really well. I don't know if it's still going on now, but we did it throughout the years I was here. We eventually opened it up to the rest of the community. We invited different frats and sororities to sponsor with us, so it wasn't just this, sort of, queer event. It became more of an ally event as well. So that was really neat. Our big program that we accomplished during my tenure as president was the "Gay? Fine by Me." campaign. I remember thinking, "Okay we really need to do a big visibility program," because, we wouldn't use these words at the time, but we didn't really have a way of showing whether or not people were allies on campus. [00:11:00] So, it was really

easy to see -- there were several hate instances that occurred while I was there. Like, I think swastikas were spray painted.

MA: Wow. Okay, yeah.

DR: Someone had tagged my door, as well as Greg's. I think there's an incident involving the flags, where -- do you remember this?

MA: Yeah.

DR: Like, there were flags from all over the world and they were all taken down.

MA: Yeah, that sort of chronic problem of stealing them or -- yeah -- inappropriate uses of them, yeah.

DR: Yeah.

MA: It's unbelievable.

DR: So, sort of, this crazy intersection of racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. Okay, like, how do we show people that there are more good people (laughs) than there are terrible people. In the *New York Times*, I'd read this piece about a school that was in the South, and they had done this t-shirt campaign "Gay? Fine by Me" and how it was really successful in terms of dispelling that atmosphere of stigma. So, I was like, "That's an awesome idea. Let's just institute it here." So, I reached out to their organization. [00:12:00] They connected me with their --

they already had the design created with the t-shirt company. So --

MA: Oh.

DR: We did a whole week-long campaign where we sat in Farinon and we had people sign up if they wanted a t-shirt. They also had to sign a pledge that said --

MA: Nice.

DR: -- that they would be, essentially, allies and they would fight for the queer community. It was on this big poster and eventually we put it in the glass windows of the Quest office. The response was amazing because there were more people that signed up than we had allocated --

MA: Oh no. Okay.

DR: -- resources for. So then, we had to go to student government and petition for (laughs) more funds, like an emergency. Like, "Okay we need to overnight these t-shirts to the campus." And it was just such this huge --

MA: How marvelous.

DR: -- yeah -- outpouring of support. [00:13:00] That occurred when we had a rally. I think it was on that weekend in the quad, and the students came out. Most of the t-shirts were green at the time, but a lot of the ones that were overnighted were all different colors. So, we had like a nice little rainbow assortment of t-shirts represented.

MA: Nice. Marvelous. Wow.

DR: It was great, yeah. I remember the local news came --

MA: (laughs)

DR: -- and, randomly. (laughs)

MA: That's wonderful. Wow.

DR: Yeah, so that was one of my highlights of my time there.

MA: What year was the first "Gay? Fine by Me."?

DR: So that would've been in '06.

MA: Wow. Amazing.

DR: Yeah, because it would have been right before I studied abroad. Yeah.

MA: Yeah. Where did you --?

DR: But --?

MA: Go ahead, keep going.

DR: Oh, well there's more to the story to it though.

MA: Yes, I want to hear it.

DR: Which was that, after we had done this, and we felt we had really done this change and it was like a milestone that we felt, for equality --

MA: Absolutely.

DR: -- and social justice, and the campus, the student newspaper didn't cover it. Their excuse was that, well, a lot of the editors were on this trip to [00:14:00] a

conference or something for student journalists. We were just so outraged.

MA: Wow.

DR: When we found out that they hadn't sent a reporter, we had an emergency meeting and we were like, "Okay, this is what we're going to do: we're going to write our own article and the next day, we're just going to put them in every single issue of the student newspaper around campus."¹

MA: Oh my gosh, that is brilliant.

DR: So, I stayed up all night typing this article.

MA: Oh my God, that is brilliant. That is fantastic.

DR: Yeah, it was like, so, the activism begot more activism. We printed them out, and I remember for whatever reason the only paper they had was bright green. Which was great because we had these green t-shirts. We had these like bright green things, and we spent all that morning just putting them, before everyone woke up, into these -- each and every issue of the paper.

MA: Oh wow. Wow.

¹ There is a missing piece to this story. We actually met with the editor of the newspaper before "taking action." They agreed to publish a version of the story online, but not in print, because it was "old news" at that point. At the time, the majority of the students got their news via print (unbelievable, right), so that's why we decided to add the physical insert to the paper. D.R. 9/7/18

DR: But this created an issue. [00:15:00] Once the editor-in-chief of the newspaper found out -- we don't really know what her beliefs about gay people were, but we knew that beforehand she was the president of the College Republicans. So, we had suspicions that, "Okay, we have a conservative person running the magazine, who had also run into issues with other social justice groups on campus before, who had complained that there was a lack of coverage of their events in the newspaper." She decided to make it an issue and filed a complaint with one of the deans at the time, Pam, Pam Brewer. Is that her name?

MA: Okay. Pam Brewer? Mm-hmm.

DR: Yeah, there were -- because I think her concern -- her argument was that, "Well, you set a dangerous precedent because now that -- this is our newspaper and we get to decide what's not in it and what's in it. Now, any group can just put whatever they want in this newspaper." I was like, [00:16:00] "Well, if they want to go through the effort --" (laughs)

MA: Yes. I was just thinking, "All that work."

DR: I know.

MA: Wow.

DR: There was this crazy meeting where we all did a roundtable, and on one side, it was me and my vice president, and then

on the other side, it was the whole -- every editor at the student newspaper. We had to explain ourselves and explain our reasons for doing this. Because I think she said something about a lawsuit. Ultimately, we left it there and we were like, "Well, we're sorry if we --"

MA: Wow. Wow. Wow.

DR: -- "did this through your publication, but you have to understand that there are people who are marginalized on this campus and struggle with [finding a] voice. It really speaks about you guys as the only --" who we felt was the only --"real way to communicate not only students but to alumni" -- right -- "that this had happened. That this was a failure on your part." [00:17:00] Our response was in response to that.

MA: Right.

DR: So, there were a few op-eds that we also submitted that followed up on that, that said that to campus. I'll forward that article to you guys too. If I can find it.

MA: I was going to ask you. If you have a copy of what you wrote and any sort of responses. I mean, the Lafayette is online, of course.

DR: You can find the op-eds I'm sure. In the editorial.

MA: But I was thinking of the bright green brilliant article.

DR: I know.

MA: I can also email you and ask -- and pester you about that.

DR: It might be in the archives because it might've been filed away in there. Because I remember there was a brief discussion about that.

MA: And the famous insert. (laughs)

DR: Yes, the famous insert.

MA: Wow, brilliant though.

DR: Yeah, but also another lesson, right, in how -- the importance of media in --

MA: True, yes.

DR: -- communicating a success and that image. Because the whole purpose of the campaign was to show that there are allies, but if you don't see it -- if no one else sees it who isn't on that quad [00:18:00] -- even though if it's had this wonderful support, then it's almost like it never happened.

MA: Right. It hasn't shifted the public discourse around.

DR: Exactly. That was also one of the reasons why I wanted to work in media, and one of the reasons why I ended up working at *The Advocate* was because I had learned some of those lessons early on.

MA: I was about to ask you, because the connection seemed very powerful.

DR: Yeah.

MA: Like the power of the press essentially, and public representation around these things.

DR: Absolutely. Yeah, it's all tied in there, so --

MA: Yeah. That's great.

DR: We had a subscription to out in *The Advocate* throughout all of our time there too. So, I remember, we'd be reading these articles at the time, and it all seemed such a far-off world where people were writing about LGBT issues. (laughs) And here we are today.

MA: How is that possible?

DR: I know. Now, it's great because it's really mainstream in terms of how media outlets cover it.

MA: Yeah. One of the things we've been talking about in doing this project -- which has taken on many faces happily -- is how important the written word, and media more generally, are to queer people at any point in history. Where you look for yourself and you can't find yourself. Then something out there, some novel, some book, some magazine shows you that there are other people out there. Or that there's a story about people like you. We've talked about that a lot because it seems to come up with a lot of people.

DR: Absolutely. Yeah. I'm a big supporter of GLAAD, which is of course, an organization devoted to supporting positive

representations of LGBT people in the media and through various types. Yeah. I totally believe in that message, and that's what drives me today.

MA: Yeah. How marvelous, that arc that you become someone who's also in that field is really -- it's so powerful. It's really great. But your activism has really been central, as you describe it. [00:20:00] The Drag Ball, which continues to go on, I think, on and off on campus.

DR: Oh good. That makes me happy.

MA: Yeah, there were some a few years ago. They were a couple years in a row. We should look into that, and how it happens and how often it happens. The "Gay? Fine by Me." is legend, I think, to people who have been long-time members of the Lafayette community. That's considered a major moment in history.

DR: I remember getting a flyer in the mail, and it was about civil rights things at Lafayette throughout history, and I remember that rally -- it was a photo of that rally in it and I almost wept --

MA: Of course.

DR: -- because I remember, at the time, it was just so hard to make that happen.

MA: Oh my gosh.

DR: And how it wasn't covered, and just to see it at the campus on official materials that's being sent out to alumni. It was --

MA: How beautiful.

DR: Yeah, it was a revelation.

MA: That's a full circle, if there ever was.

DR: (laughs) Yeah.

MA: The campus itself was -- I mean, talking about your arrival [00:21:00] here as one of the only -- sounds like counted on one hand -- out people, out students on campus.

DR: Very few. For men, I think there were literally -- it was me, Greg, and one more person, maybe two who were out. Of course, I knew several other people, but they -- we would talk about this -- they didn't want to come out because they were afraid of being socially ostracized. Maybe they were involved in some sports teams and they didn't want to complicate that. So, it's hard. Lafayette has challenges as well in the Greek community. I think it's harder to be an out person once you get into those crazy homosocial environments, ironically.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

DR: I actually rushed a frat as a junior because I wanted to -- [00:22:00] I don't know -- I was just curious what would happen. I remember I wasn't accepted. It was D-U, but I

remember my friend told me afterward, "Your admission and the conversation around it, lasted for a long time," and it got really heated. There was a big fight over -- on one side it was like, "Well, we don't know him very well," and then on the other side, there was a friend of mine who was like, "Well, that's just bullshit. You know exactly who he is. Let's not beat around the bush. It's because he's an out gay man," because there weren't really any -- other than Greg who was in Phi Psi, there were not any out men in Greek life.

MA: Wow.

DR: I don't think there were any out women in sororities at the time. Although, that changed while I was there.

MA: Thinking about Greek life -- because that's a very big variable, I think, in many people's experiences -- members of the [00:23:00] queer community at school -- was that running the social scene? What was your relation to Greek life, other than that story? Was there more to that, or would you just say, "Okay, that's that. That's not the place for somebody like me."?

DR: Well, I think at the time, if you wanted to have a social life, you had to be involved with Greek life in some way.

MA: Okay. Yeah, it sounds like it.

DR: I don't know how much that's changed in recent years, but the parties were all at the frats. I actually had someone try to take advantage of me sexually at a frat party. Thankfully, I wasn't -- I still had control over myself and I could get out of that situation.

MA: Wow.

DR: But that student -- I don't know how much I can say about it because there was a lot going on at the time, but he was also accused of rape by a male student a year or two later.

MA: Wow.

DR: I remember just being so heartbroken about that.

MA: Wow, that is heartbreaking.

DR: Yeah, and they did a campus trial -- or whatever it was -- and he ended up being suspended for a year or something.

MA: Oh wow.

DR: I think that whenever you push things underground, you push people in the closet, it creates a recipe for disasters like that. Where we're not speaking about it, and it's dangerous. It's dangerous for the mental health and the physical health of students. So, I don't think that -- at least when I was there, the Greek life was just making it worse because there weren't many options for socializing, for nightlife, and for social life outside of that.

MA: Right. Wow. You can see how it's a lose-lose in many directions with homophobia, right: the people in the Greek life, the people out of Greek life. It's a --

DR: Right, because, "Do you want to be an outsider [00:25:00] who's out of the Greek life? Or do you want to be --"

MA: The choices involved are all insidiously bad.

DR: -- I know -- "inside of the social system but closeted." It's just -- yeah. It's a rock and a hard place.

MA: Yeah. You're always an outsider no matter where you're in. It's setting that up for queer people, or queer-identifying people.

DR: Yeah. I went to a gay bar in D.C., I remember, a year after graduation, and there was someone I knew who was in one of the fraternities and he was there.

MA: Oh, wow.

DR: He saw me. He ran out the door.

MA: Oh wow. Oh man, yeah.

DR: The thing about Lafayette is that those social circles stay so tight even after graduation that the closet can go on your whole life, because --

MA: That's a chilling thought, isn't it?

DR: Yeah, because you've joined the fraternity for life, and that fear prevents a lot of people from coming out.

MA: Were there sources of support for [00:26:00] people out or not out. Did you have sense? Or did people feel like they were on their own if they were LGBTQ?

DR: In Greek life?

MA: Just more generally, at the school.

DR: So, I had some problems with stress. (laughter)

MA: Dan, I'd say --

DR: I got very sad. I think -- when was it? So, I saw -- there's counseling, right? At the health center.

MA: Yeah. Counseling services.

DR: So, I saw someone there who was -- I think he was a graduate student at Lehigh University. He wasn't amazing. He wasn't great, but it was helpful just to talk to somebody about this. I would lay out the situation to him and he's like, "But I don't understand. You seem like you're outgoing and that you're really nice. I don't understand why you have so much trouble making friends." And I was like, "What I'm trying to explain to you --" (laughs)

MA: Oh, my.

DR: -- "is that there is a systemic issue related to stigma and to discrimination, and that is --"

MA: This is not my personality in other words, it's about --

DR: [00:27:00] Right. "They don't want to hang out with me because I'm a jerk." (laughs)

MA: (laughs) Right, right.

DR: But, it was helpful talk to someone, I suppose. We also had our Safe Spaces program, that Quest worked with -- that worked with the campus. Although, I never personally had any experience with that. I never saw the sticker on professors' -- But, I remember -- because every -- before the school year started, all of the RAs would come in. We'd be like in unison, "We have these services, here are these stickers. If you want to mark yourself as an ally to your students, you can put this up. If you ever have any questions, bring them to a meeting on a Wednesday or something like that." But, I do know there were students that I knew that [00:28:00] did find help through it, that did talk to professors --

MA: Excellent.

DR: -- because they saw the stickers.

MA: Great. When I came to Lafayette in 2009, in the fall, there was a Safe Space sticker on what happened to be my office door. I was like, "Oh this is convenient."

DR: Convenient! Exactly.

MA: Yeah, and it evolved into Safe Zone with Safe Zone training and you'd be, I think, amazed to see how that program has taken off.

DR: Oh good.

MA: But that was just -- you see it on many, many doors all the time, and that's a good thing, with that very rainbow leopard that we have for the community.

DR: Oh awesome.

MA: So, it's nice.

DR: That's really great to hear.

MA: Yeah. So, there was that, counseling, and --

DR: You should talk to -- if you haven't -- Jess Elliot?

MA: Okay.

DR: She's '09.

MA: Okay.

DR: I think she lives in Lehigh Valley with -- I think she's married now, but I think she was the student who had a great experience with the Safe Zone sticker.

MA: Oh, okay.

DR: She has a lot of great stories because she -- she wasn't on the basketball team, but she worked with the team and knew a lot of the [00:29:00] queer women who were in the sports world, and --

MA: Oh, okay. Yeah.

DR: Because that was a whole other world that I wasn't privy to.

MA: The sports world? Or the women, lesbian experience?

DR: Well, the sports world, yes, but (laughs) --

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

DR: -- also the queer women.

MA: Right.

DR: Because there were other codes of conduct of how women operated on campus, that were very different than men. I found that the women, I think, had their own community, but they weren't necessarily out, but they were in and out, I guess.

MA: Okay. So, it was more like a queer women's community as a community, but it was separate from like an out community more generally?

DR: I think so, yeah.

MA: Okay, interesting.

DR: A lot of those women were involved with sports. So, there was a whole ecosystem that was happening that -- I knew members of it, but a lot of them didn't go to the Quest meetings, you know.

MA: They had a different community.

DR: Exactly.

MA: Gotcha. Oh, that makes a lot of sense. And athletics
[00:30:00] was not something that was a factor for you?

DR: No. I mean, I was in pep band, but -- I also didn't like
the social experience of pep (laughs) band. I had -- I
don't know -- I didn't f-- I don't know.

MA: Wasn't your thing?

DR: It wasn't my -- I don't know -- because I loved it in high
school, I was involved in marching band, but I don't know
if that's related to sexuality at all or just the peo--

MA: Or just because you didn't like it. I mean, that's also
fair.

DR: -- just the people involved.

MA: That's also more than fair.

DR: Although, the Catholic group -- what was it?

MA: The Newman Society?

DR: Yeah. So, I was involved (laughs) in Newman my first year
because I was -- I'm Catholic, I was really involved with
it in high school. I had done retreats, youth groups, and
all that stuff, and I did not find the embrace that I had
in my religious community.

MA: Oh.

DR: This isn't with the leaders, but I remember the other
students that I met - as a freshmen -- because I was out

and I just [00:31:00] remember being like, "Oh these people don't want to be friends with me." (laughs)

MA: Wow. Oh yeah, yeah.

DR: It was just very strange.

MA: A powerful sense of --

DR: Yeah, and it wasn't an active discrimination, but it was just kind of -- I was just like, "Okay. This is not going to be --" yeah.

MA: Yeah, yeah. I think any queer person -- even very young -- quickly develops a sense of, "I know I'm not welcome here."

DR: Absolutely.

MA: "I know you have a problem with me."

DR: Yeah.

MA: "I'm leaving because you're telling me, in many ways I understand, that I'm really not welcome here."

DR: I was listening to it on a podcast recently that mentioned Lafayette, and it was about a student of color. This must've been like 15 years ago, and it was about visiting Lafayette to -- because he was dating someone here -- and how he just saw this sea of white people --

MA: Oh, wow.

DR: -- and how he felt immediately like an outsider.

MA: Wow.

DR: I was like, "That's exactly how I felt too!"

MA: Right. The same experience in whiteness as well,

[00:32:00] "I'm not part of this somehow." Yeah, the --

DR: I wish that if I had to do it all over again, I would've worked more with the other social justice groups; because I think there were opportunities there that we didn't explore because we saw these things as different issues. Now I think -- especially now that we see the importance of -- I mean, we didn't even -- I didn't know what intersectionality was back then, and I --

MA: It was a pretty new concept for all of us, I think.

DR: Yeah, and --

MA: And trying to --

DR: -- there was often -- sometimes there were strife with different groups on campus. I remember when we were planning "Gay? Fine by Me.", there were members of the black organization on campus that said they were going to boycott it.

MA: Whoa.

DR: So, we immediately were like, "Okay. Not going to work with them anytime soon." (laughs)

MA: Yeah. Not on the allies list.

DR: Right, exactly. I think that was a missed opportunity for more conversations. [00:33:00]

MA: Right, and then certainly gives us pause to think about what it would've been like -- or what it was like. For surely, there was someone who was a person of color and also queer at that time. Like, how that must've felt to have been --

DR: Absolutely.

MA: -- caught between communities. How painful and difficult.

DR: We had people of color in our group. If you haven't spoken to Danielle Bero['07]she'd be a wonderful person.

MA: I know who she is.

DR: Yeah.

MA: I think she's moved out West, actually.

DR: Yeah. She's in LA now.

MA: Oh, is she?

DR: Yeah. So --

MA: Okay. We should talk to her for sure

DR: Yeah, because she won the Pepper Prize [in 2007], and she was involved in WORDS as well. She was one of the founders of it. I don't know if WORDS is still around.

MA: I've heard of it, but I don't think it's still around.

DR: Yeah, it was like a spoken word group at the time. Yeah, but she stood at the intersection. We had a trans student as well. I forget his name, but I know that his experience was not great [00:34:00] and that he also had an issue with

a member of the newspaper, who wrote this scathing op-ed that was anti-trans and --

MA: Oh, yeah.

DR: Yeah.

MA: I've heard of this student. Was it Bryan Fox?

DR: Yes.

MA: Yeah. He has come up, but this is a person we're not in contact with. We'd love to interview him to capture a story of really serious import.

DR: Yeah. Bryan did not have an easy experience on this campus.

MA: Yeah. I'm getting a sense of that from other people. It's sort of a touch-stone for trans people. We've interviewed two trans graduates, who graduated since Bryan Fox was on campus. I think they had many, many challenges as trans people on campus. But, that arc of that history, I think, is extremely important for us to pay attention to in this project. So, we're going to keep our eye out for --

[00:35:00] Bryan Fox stands as the reference point for out trans people -- students.

DR: Was Bryan the first to be out?

MA: That I know of.

DR: Wow.

MA: I mean, at least people reference him as the first to be out as trans. Like really out. So, that's something we really want to pay attention to. How about academics? How was the world of academics? Was there ever any gay content? Did it feel like a refuge? Was it a non-issue in terms of being queer on campus then? It may have changed over the four years you were here too.

DR: Queer content. Oh, my God.

MA: Or even the climate in the classroom. Any way that makes sense to you to talk about it.

DR: I had so many -- I loved my professors. I was in the English department. So, Professor [Lynn] Van Dyke was one of my first writing professors that I had while I was here.
[00:36:00]

MA: Wow, lucky you. That's great.

DR: Yeah, and she was wonderful. I don't remember talking about queer issues a lot in these academic environments, in terms of the syllabus or the things that were on it. I do remember in one class, I would always be asked as the gay person on campus, which I found to be -- because, by that time, I was a senior and I was very visible because I was the president of Quest. So, the professor would always turn to me to speak (laughs) for the gay community.

MA: Well, that's classic.

DR: Oh, I do have an experience. Okay, we read this book before our freshman year called "Understanding Diversity." I think that's what it was called. No -- no, no, no it wasn't. "The Working Poor" was the name of the book, but the first-year seminar -- that's what they're called, right -- what I took was Understanding Diversity. [00:37:00] I remember, we talked about it sometimes, because I was out at that point. I remember specifically making this poster with pictures of people because we were like, "Oh, we're going to see if -- ask students in the class who's gay and who's straight based on the people on the board." The point was, of course, you can't always tell who's gay based on visual stereotypes, or something like that. So, I do remember that --

MA: Wow, and you're like, "Okay."

DR: -- and having those conversations. I remember actually the first day it was like, we went around the table and the professor who was in char-- I think she used to head the volunteer efforts outside of campus as well. But she asked us to write about a group that we felt like we belonged with and a stereotype about them. So, people would write -- it was a lot of white people in this class. So, a girl wrote [00:38:00] "I'm Irish-American and drunk". (laughs)

Then it got to me and I was like, "Gay and AIDS."

(laughter)

MA: Just to switch up the tone a little.

DR: Just to switch it up a little bit, yeah.

MA: Oh, wow.

DR: "Gay and AIDS," you know. That was the first day of the class, and I was just like --

MA: (laughs) Oh wow. Wow.

DR: "Well that's fun."

MA: Oh wow. You really have a lot of courage. You do. You have a lot of courage, it's so impressive.

DR: Well, you don't even think about it. I'm not saying -- I'm not downplaying coming to Lafayette and staying there, but I didn't have any other way to measure it across other --

MA: No reference point.

DR: Yeah, and my partner went to Yale and he tells me experiences, and I'm like, "I don't even understand how this is possible. What do you mean that you had all these friends, and everyone was sort of queer, and --"

MA: Yeah, yeah. [00:39:00] It was in vogue.

DR: Right, and even straight men would be --

MA: Metrosexuals were about to be invented.

DR: Yeah. Everyone sort of fell into this gray area, and that's fascinating to me.

MA: Yeah, that is fascinating. It truly is.

DR: I mean -- yeah, yeah. Those stereotypes, they were real.

I felt -- I remember there was a student my freshman year; she asked me that question, she said, "Well, don't all gay people have AIDS?" I had to explain to her, "No."

(laughs) This woman is a doctor now, by the way. (laughs)

She was studying sciences, and I was like, "No, this is not --"

MA: Oh wow.

DR: -- "no, it's not."

MA: Oh wow. Well see, you left me speechless there for a second, but I'm struck by all the reference points you're able to provide, at how just out of touch this campus was [00:40:00]; like what kind of bubble you had to have built, for someone to come in and just be like, "Really?" Because it's so out of sync with so many places. I mean, it is 2008 you're talking about, 2006 or '05.

DR: I was -- yeah. I just imagine now what it would've been like if I hadn't been there.

MA: It -- yeah.

DR: Because then there wouldn't have been -- eventually my roommate came out: Charles Felix. But initially, there was no out people. How can you even have these conversations? Because often at parties, people would say "gay" and "fag,"

and I would have been like, "So, I'm gay, and I just feel really un--" but this happened so often. I remember talking to a friend of mine and I was like, "God, it's just so hard all the time to educate people." She was like, "It's not your job to educate every single frat boy on this campus," and I was like, "But, it kind of is." [00:41:00] (laughs) That's how I felt at the time, right?

MA: Yeah.

DR: Because it's like if I'm not having those conversations, then no one else is going to have them.

MA: Yeah, and that replicates the environment that is unbearable for queer people because no one's intervened. I know that, that load of being the person who comes in and says, "Please stop saying that. Please stop doing this," or, "I'm --" just being out.

DR: "So, I'm gay, and --"

MA: It's so -- wow.

DR: Yeah, and how about --

MA: I think people who aren't queer, or aren't of color, or aren't disabled, or whatever, people who aren't those things just don't realize the energy that that requires. The constant energy that that requires. I think that Lafayette really should perceive your presence here. You gave a great service to the college while you were here as

a student because you were willing to step up and be the person who said, "I'm gay. Don't say that." Even more than that, which is plenty. [00:42:00] Even if you had been here and "only," quote-unquote, done that. Right, that would've been an incredible impact, but you even went beyond that and took on a leadership position and ran these events. So, I'm thinking, you've performed incredible service to the college because those kinds of things really turn the wheel. Certainly, to the queer kids that came after you. I think you should be very proud.

DR: Well, thank you. It means a lot --

MA: I think you should be very proud.

DR: -- to hear that because in the moment, it just felt like what was necessary. I --

MA: Yeah, it was hard right?

DR: It was very hard, but I just didn't see an option, if that makes any sense.

MA: Yeah, well, you're a change maker obviously, and that's a really awesome thing. Change has been made because of you. What was the social scene like? It sounds like there were friendship groups and there were -- because you've been super political -- and even being social has been political for you as a student here. Saying, "I'm gay. Don't make that joke." You've had a very strong political presence.

[00:43:00] There were friendships groups it sounds like mostly? Queer women had those, and gay men had those, and not a dating scene per se because people weren't really out.

DR: Well, so, if you were gay and you're out, we would fill up one or two cars and we would drive to Stonewall on Thursday. That was wild because a lot of other students in other -- the area schools would do that. So, I actually met a boyfriend there. I dated a guy from Lehigh that I met at Stonewall because Lord knows there was no one at Lafayette (laughter).

MA: To my question --

DR: Right.

MA: -- the options are --

DR: I mean, unless I wanted to -- in the dark of the night -- (laughs)

MA: Oh, God. Not good.

DR: -- meet a man who's in the closet. So, we would all go to Stonewall, [00:44:00] and it was kind of a wild experi-- well, we had fun going there, but looking back it was -- because there was dangerous people there. I remember someone was stabbed in line once. There were a lot of drug dealers that were there. Sex workers. It's not quite this exciting now. I went back recently, and it seemed really

empty when I was there. It was also a place where we could be ourselves, which felt -- like after a week of having to endure, it was just such a release to go there, to go on a dance floor, and just kind of be yourself, so -- but, in terms of queer gatherings, I didn't really hang out with a lot of the gay people here. Charles was my roommate senior year. We lived in a house on Parsons [00:45:00] which was part of the art society, which was awesome. That changed the way I understood this campus, to not have to live in a dorm. I actually couldn't find a roommate my sophomore and junior year because I couldn't find another man in my year that would room with me, which was whatever. I mean, it was nice to have a single. My roommate actually moved out my freshman year without telling me.

MA: I was going to ask you how that resolved itself, but yeah.

DR: Yeah, so I came back for the second semester and his stuff was just gone. My RA was like, "Yeah, he just moved out," and I was like, "Oh, well, I would've appreciated a heads up." But, it was awesome because all of a sudden, I had that silence and that oppressiveness just disappeared. I had this whole room to myself.

MA: Yeah, and you were relieved. It was like a gift --

DR: Oh, my --

MA: -- he didn't mean to give you.

DR: It was such a gift, yeah. They called it a dingle because it was a double that became a single.

MA: (laughs) A dingle.

DR: [00:46:00] Yeah. So --

MA: (laughs) Okay. And that was a great thing for you.

DR: It was awesome. I mean, this was against policy, but I got a hamster and I named him [name redacted] after my old roommate that had left.

MA: (laughs)

DR: So, he'd be rolling around the room, and people were like, "Where's your roommate?" and I'm like, "He's right there."

MA: (laughs) That's awesome, that's great. That's great. It almost makes you think he was magically turned into a hamster and --

DR: I know. Like in "Witches."

MA: Absolutely.

DR: Yeah.

MA: That's so funny.

[section redacted]

00:47:00

[section redacted]

MA: You named a couple of really important moments: the Drag Ball, "Gay? Fine by Me.", this great article insert -- which I'm going to pester you to send us [00:48:00] if you

can find it. Other big moments that -- see -- I have to say -- this is such a great interview because you're the instigator of many big moments, and other people refer to them, which is really great. I think you should be very proud of that. Were there other moments that you associate -- whether you instigated them or not? The AIDS quilt would've already come to campus long before that. That's something that people name from earlier years. Other things that went on? Speakers, or --?

DR: Let's see -- who came?

MA: If not, there are little markers that sort of --

DR: Yeah, I remember we drove to see Judy Shepard at Kutztown, and that was a really life-changing experience for me.

MA: She's an incredible speaker. Yeah.

DR: Yeah, and I had never heard even just a mother of a gay man talk before. So that, for me, was [00:49:00] in and of itself a revelation; and, of course, the sadness around Matthew's death, and the importance of hate crime legislation. But, she had come to campus the year before that and Greg was a big part of bringing her there. I know that, that was a big deal for a lot of people. If you can, you should talk to Greg, because --

MA: It sounds like we should. Absolutely.

DR: He had a really bad experience here. I don't want to say anything because --

MA: Of course.

DR: -- he was dealing with a lot of demons, and he didn't even finish here because it was just too much for him. But, his story is really important because I think it shows, I think, what stigma can -- how evil it can be.

MA: Yeah. The real damage it does.

DR: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DR: But other things -- let's see --

MA: [00:50:00] Or anything else you want to share.

DR: There's -- yeah. Let me think. Gay things. (laughter)

MA: If you don't remem-- I mean, you started so many of them certainly, so -- it's fine, or you think of them later.

DR: Well, yeah. It was nice how -- cause I always dated people who were on other campuses -- and it was always nice (laughs) just to get away sometimes. I found that to be -- I was dating a guy who went to Princeton. So, we would go back and forth a lot. It was really interesting as well, to see how other queer students were at different universities and how they were other organizers that had to deal with each other. Because I didn't really have any

male gay friends [00:51:00] at Lafayette until my senior year.

MA: Oh wow. Wow.

DR: So, it w--

MA: That's some isolation.

DR: -- it was very lonely. I really had just one friend for probably my first year or two. Especially once people joined frats and sororities. All these people that I had started being friendly with, they just disappeared because they became involved in their own --

MA: Yeah. They go into that place, and they don't come out.

DR: They went to that place, yes.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

DR: Yeah. I'm trying to think about other classes I took. I don't know, it's hard. Charles, if you haven't talked to him already, would be an awesome person to talk to.

MA: I believe he moved to Seattle. Charles Felix?

DR: Yeah.

MA: He wants to do an interview. So, I'm hoping to find a way to do that.

DR: He can speak from the engineering perspective too because he was a double-major of English, theater, and engineering.

MA: Wow.

DR: [00:52:00] That field of study would've been more challenging, I imagine, than the English (laughs) department. Yeah.

MA: Yeah. The isolation within your major, which was probably not true, because Bryan Washington was in English and --

DR: Who just passed, I heard.

MA: Yes, he did a couple years ago.

DR: That was so sad.

MA: Yeah, very sad-- it's a great loss for us. It's a great loss for us.

DR: I never took one of his classes, and I always wish I had because everyone that had ever took a class with him, has raved about him.

MA: Yeah. Yeah, that was a real loss for the college, the community, the English department, everything.

DR: Yeah.

MA: Yeah, for sure.

DR: How heartbreaking.

MA: Yeah, that was very, very bad, but yeah, you're right that the discipline matters so much in terms of the experience of queer students on campus. What's your sense of the campus now? I mean, you come back, which is so marvelous, and I'm so appreciative of this interview [00:53:00] because a lot of people could walk away from the kind of

isolation -- you use the word stress, which was a gentle way to put it, right. (laughter) Of being, not just here and trying to thrive here, but being a leader here, being out, and being a representative in class, out of class -- whether you want to be or not -- of the queer community, right. That's just a lot of pressure for a young person at an institution, but you come back to us. I wonder how you see the college change, or what you hope we will still do, from your perspective.

DR: Well, I love that -- and I was involved at the very beginning -- but the fact that we started the Lafayette Pride alumni group. That was really awesome because I remember as a student here being like, "Oh my gosh, there's no [00:54:00] real way to connect with these alumni." It's so great that you're doing this too because I always wanted to hear their stories; because I'm like, "If this is bad now, I can't even imagine the people who came before you." I went to the mixer in New York, of course. It was so interesting to hear people tell their stories and their experiences here. You really don't get it until you're here. I don't know what the students are like now. I came back from homecoming last year and --

MA: You were at our launch party last year, and that was wonderful. Here for the Queer Archives Project.

DR: Yeah!

MA: I remember seeing that you were here for that.

DR: Yeah, the Queer Archives for the Arts Center, which was awesome.

MA: Wow. Yes. Yeah.

DR: Which gives me hope because I do think that, that will bring, at least, a diversity of minds, which [00:55:00] (laughs) is --

MA: Well said. Well said.

DR: Yeah, which I think is the biggest issue. I remember, I had to talk to the RAs during the orientation, and I would lay out the situation for gay kids on campus and this one student was like, "Well, I mean, so how are we going to get more gay kids on this campus?" I couldn't answer it at the time, but I remember thinking about that question and being like, "Well, the gay kids are already here." (laughs) They're already here and they're not out. So, it's not the question of "How do we get gay kids on campus?" It's like, "How can we make Lafayette just more open-minded, to be accepting of all kinds of diversity?" A part of that is diversity, a part of that interacting with other people who are around you, but I think another part of that is that diversity of thought and encouraging people to be more open-minded and to -- and kindness really.

MA: It's a climate complexly described. [00:56:00] It's also -
- diversity in some way, means not all the same. Just not
all the same. Variety.

DR: Yeah. There were more women than men at Lafayette at the
time. There were problems with rape, and the frats were
feeding into that. You hear these horror stories coming
out of some fraternities where they're drugging women with
these cocktails. It's like, "Well, okay. So, there's a
lot of women on campus, but that doesn't mean that you as
man are now a feminist. Or you as a woman are now a
feminist."

MA: Absolutely, yeah.

DR: I remember also, women didn't go to the feminist meetings.
We shared an office with ALF, and it was considered taboo,
a stigma as if the people in there were not normal. So,
it's one thing to put people who are different together.
It's another thing to get them to treat each other kindly
and with respect.

MA: Yeah. The difference between diversity and climate.

DR: Yeah.

MA: [00:57:00] The demographic versus the environment. That
was such a big learning curve for this community. I think
we really struggle with it. You were saying something
about, "Get more gay kids." It's like, "They're already

here." We've had several -- I have an out trans student, she's my Excel student right now. Working with trans students, someone said to me, "Isn't it great. We have trans students now." Of course, the answer is, "We've always had trans students. We've always had them here. Now they can come out," and it's like, "Oh, true. Isn't that great." It's like, until they all feel like they can come out and until they're thriving, we really haven't arrived. That's the difference between the demographic and the environment --

DR: Absolutely.

MA: -- that you so beautifully described. I think it's a leap for the college to try to get there. Kindness.

DR: Yeah, and it's also a part of college admissions. Because they have to break it down by numbers --

MA: It's true. It's true.

DR: -- and they hold it up like, "Look at all these people we have here," but you go to the campus and it's like all the black students are only hanging out with other black students. [00:58:00]

MA: That's telling us -- yeah.

DR: All the Posse people, are just hanging out with all the Posse people, and complaining about the (laughs) larger

student body. So, it's like you've imported them into this atmosphere -- potentially recruited them --

MA: Yeah, absolutely.

DR: -- but if the mechanisms aren't in place for people to form these organic relationships, they're going to be segregated and you're going to create bubbles within the bubble.

That's not good either.

MA: Right, right, right. Absolutely. Oh wow. Well, we have covered a lot of ground.

DR: (laughs)

MA: This has been such a great interview, and it would be impossible to thank you enough --

DR: Oh. Yeah.

MA: -- for making time for it.

DR: Of course.

MA: You were at the center of such an important watershed. I mean, you were a driver of such an important watershed moment for the college. It seems like the late '00s were a flip to -- you could talk about being gay, and the college started to pay attention to queer issues a little bit.

DR: Well, in history [00:59:00] as well. The moment was just there, and --

MA: Absolutely.

DR: I'm just really happy that I was there to help bring that message to the campus.

MA: I am so happy that you were here and I'm happy that you could say you were happy (laughs) because it would be possible to say this was hellish, difficult, and that I'm sorry it was me. But, it is no surprise to have you say you were happy you were here because you're obviously a huge leader and difference maker.

DR: Well, I wouldn't be the person I am today. I think that's a part of the larger education which a lot of people might not get, right?

MA: Right.

DR: Which is how to listen to people who say things that you think are detestable, and how to have a conversation with them. So, that was the most valuable lesson I ever could've gotten from college. So, I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful for the friends that I did make here. Yeah, my roommate sucked, but I mean --

MA: But he turned into a hamster, so --

DR: He turned into a hamster, and the people that I did meet and make friends with, I know that they're actually my friends and not just because I was in the same [01:00:00] fraternity with them. I'm going to see one right now. This afternoon, actually. So that's great.

MA: Lovely, that's fantastic.

DR: Yeah. I'm still proud to be an alumni and to represent the school. I'm hosting the Lehigh vs. Lafayette game [viewing party]. I've done it for the past three years, in Los Angeles. So --

MA: (laughs) That's fantastic.

DR: I love the people who graduated from Lafayette, who are in Los Angeles. I'm like, "You guys are awesome."

MA: Yeah, yeah. Fantastic.

DR: Yeah, and especially the younger ones. It's like, "Oh, the kids are alright." (laughs)

MA: Yeah. Yay, that's great. Speaking from someone who's on campus right now and from my perspective, they are alright; and man, you are also alright.

DR: (laughs)

MA: Thank you so much, Dan Reynolds.

DR: Of course. Yeah.

MA: Appreciate it.

DR: Thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE