

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of
Mark Suffredini '93
Conducted by
Mary Armstrong
September 27, 2019

Special Collections & College Archives

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Lafayette College

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MARY ARMSTRONG: Okay, we're recording. This is Mary Armstrong. I'm professor of women's gender and sexuality studies and English at Lafayette College, and chair of the WGSS program. And I'm here with Mark Suffredini, who has been generous and kind enough to give an interview for the Queer Archives project. It's September 27, 2019. Thanks for being here, Mark.

MARK SUFFREDINI: My pleasure.

MA: So we have a little bit of technicalities that we always do at the beginning of every interview. We'll ask you to state your name, and to confirm that your participation is voluntary, and that you've given your consent.

MS: Mark Suffredini. I am participating voluntarily, and you have my consent.

MA: Thank you very much. And a question. Would you mind if we took a photo for use on the associated websites and with the file of you so --

MS: Not at all.

MA: All right. Marvelous. Thank you. I'll practice my photography skills after the interview.

MS: Okay.

MA: So [00:01:00] some general things just to know about the interview. So, I'll ask you a series of questions, but the questions are designed to just be prompts. So, the whole

idea is for the interview to be a space in which you recollect your time at Lafayette, as a member of the LGBTQ community. The interview is not directed at any particular outcomes so when I ask a question, it's not because we have a desire to know a particular thing, but just to sort of jog memories and things like that. There's no question you have to answer if you don't want to, obviously, we can move right along. Or if some prompt that I may offer, this part of life wasn't really significant to your experience at Lafayette, you can just say, "That wasn't really significant."

MS: Sure.

MA: So, it's really a way to sort of help you tell your story. You will receive a copy of the transcript for editing and approval before we do anything with it, and we'll send that to you after the interview is transcribed. And well, also [00:02:00] welcome, if you think of anything afterwards, any memorabilia that you might remember that you want to give to the archives, or if suddenly you think, "Oh I wanted to tell that one story, and I forgot." We try not to think of the interviews as magic moments that are only for this golden time, we invite you to be an ongoing part of the project, and to contribute as you see fit. So personal pronouns that you use. He, him, his?

MS: He, yeah.

MA: Yeah, okay. And your relationship to the alumni commun--
to Lafayette is as an alum, but you also have a role now.

MS: Yes, I'm chair of the West Coast Advisory Council. I think
that's the only formal volunteer opportunity, but obviously
been involved for decades in Alumni Affairs and with the
Admissions Office and that sort of thing.

MA: Okay, wonderful. And the West Coast Advisory, that's an
Alumni Association for the West Coast?

MS: Correct.

MA: So you organize activities or...

MS: No, it's different than the alumni [00:03:00] association.
So, what we do is we report into the development committee
of the Board, and it's to drive three areas: career
services, alumni engagement, and admissions. Just to help
those three departments in any area they need help, and
just to get a group of engaged alumni to keep them, you
know, at the forefront.

MA: Paying attention way out west.

MS: Yeah, just so the college can connect.

MA: That's wonderful. And exciting about admissions as the
college grows in its national scope to outreach to
fantastic students that are all over the country.

MS: It's transition for most just telling them what we think they should be doing, to us taking direction, and trying to help them execute their plans.

MA: Nice. Marvelous. Well, thank you for that, that's generous.

MS: Sure.

MA: And your class year?

MS: Nineteen ninety-three.

MA: Marvelous. How do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community?

MS: Gay.

MA: Okay, so here's a question, sort of open-ended, as we do the nuts and bolts. How do you professionally describe yourself? And that could be your work [00:04:00], or could also be your work of a vocation you feel you have, or however you sort of want to describe yourself right now.

MS: Professionally?

MA: Yeah, sure.

MS: Yeah, it's probably through my work. I'm a branch manager at Morgan Stanley. So, I'm in management at Morgan Stanley.

MA: And that's in LA?

MS: That's in Long Beach, CA.

MA: In Long Beach.

MS: Southern California.

MA: Okay, in southern California. Great. And anything else to add about who you are?

MS: I'm an aging married person, with a dog, who's going to adopt a kid soon.

MA: Oh, exciting! Are you?

MS: Scary! That's what Reza's doing right now. He's in a pre-interview with our background-check people.

MA: Oh, really? Wow. Well, congratulations on that adventure in your life.

MS: Thank you. (laughs)

MA: And your husband, Reza, is doing some serious work while he's here. Wow, how marvelous. That's really marvelous. Congratulations on all that. And I'm all for being middle-aged, by the way. I want to go on record saying that. (laughter) Nothing wrong with that. [00:05:00] Always start out with a really wide-open question. How would you describe -- or how do you think about -- the general situation for the lesbian/gay/queer communities while you were on campus? What was it like?

MS: It was just not discussed. It wasn't something, you know -- I mean, I was raised in the '80s so, you know, the classic -- it was a bad thing. So I was, you know -- up until my mid to late 20s -- really still fighting it. So

here? I mean, it was, you know -- it just wasn't an open -
- I remember when the FLAG organization started. It might
have been my junior or senior year. Friends of Lesbian and
Gay -- you would've thought, anyone who was associated with
it was automatically labeled a gay person.

MA: Really?

MS: You couldn't have allies back then, nobody knew what it
was. So, the college was starting to turn a little bit,
but it was still just not discussed.

MA: Total silence, basically.

MS: Mm-hmm. [00:06:00]

MA: And so that was -- you would have graduated just when that
very first organization started to come on to the radar
screen at Lafayette, and that was some sort of FLAG
organization.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Do you know how it started? Or do you know any of the
history? It's very interesting to think about that all.

MS: I don't know the history. I think it was younger alums --
I might have been a senior -- junior or senior. And it was
just some, you know, freshman maybe, that just -- or with a
faculty member -- decided to start it in Farinon. And they
had one of the four rooms on the first floor. You know,
nobody did anything -- you know, I don't think it was --

you could be so openly homophobic per se, but it was definitely one of those, kind of look the other way because if you're seen near there, you're going to be labeled.

MA: Yeah, okay, got you. So it was probably a pretty empty space a lot of the time because it was not the kind of atmosphere where somebody would want to be seen there necessarily. Did you feel like the climate was safe for people? Or there was just [00:07:00] so much silence that...

MS: I mean, it was safe. I mean, I didn't know anyone else who was out.

MA: Okay, that was my next question.

MS: And I was not out. So, you know, I had to find a way to kind of exist without -- you know, the questions, "Oh, did you hook-up last weekend? Did you hook-up last weekend?" "Oh, why aren't you dating anyone?" "Did you hook --" all of that. You know, it was sort of always about that because I was part of the Greek system so that's what a lot of these guys -- you know, so everyone had a thing that they got knocked for. "Oh, you're fat." "You're this." "You're that." Mine was always like, "Oh, you homo, you don't --" you know, "Why aren't you hooking up with people?" That sort of thing.

MA: Yeah. What was the fraternity you were in?

MS: DKE.

MA: Yeah. All right. So that must've been pretty challenging.

MS: It was. I mean, it taught me -- not a good thing or a bad thing -- to sort of compartmentalize my life. I mean, if you're always thinking about, "Okay, what am I doing here? Is someone going to think something if I do this or that?" But again, I was still in mode where I was, "Something's going on here, [00:08:00] but I'm not 100% sure, and I'm still going to try to fight through it."

MA: I think a lot of the -- so we're not that different in age so I'm thinking about growing up in the '80s and things -- you have a lot of -- and this is some of our interviewees have said this as well from our era -- is that people just tried to convince themselves they weren't gay because that's not something you'd really want to be.

MS: Correct.

MA: Essentially...

MS: I remember my sister had said to me -- and this was years later when I was working in Boston -- and it was the same thing. You know, I was in a leadership role in the branch, etc. so all eyes are watching. "Why is your brother single? I don't understand. He's successful. He's this/that. Why is he single?" And I just buried myself in work as an excuse to not be out dating, this, that, and the

other thing. And she came back to me -- this one guy in my office, we were out with him and his girlfriend and he said to me, "Your sister, like, just kept making these homophobic comments when you went to the bathroom." So years later, I'm like, "What are you doing?" Because I had come out [00:09:00] years later, and I'm telling her this story. I'm like, "Why would you have said that?" And my mother told me, she was like, "She was trying to defend you." And I said, "Defend me from what?" And it was just they didn't get it.

MA: Wow.

MS: Yeah. "Well, I thought if I said something homophobic, they would say 'If you were gay, there's no way your sister would say something homophobic.'" So that was proving the point that you must not be gay because being gay is such a horrible thing.

MA: This is the tortuous route of how things unfold. So she was being homophobic to convince people that you were straight.

MS: Correct.

MA: Wow.

MS: Correct.

MA: Yeah.

MS: As a single woman whose -- you know, and I had said to her, I said, "You know, you aren't really dating and people would say to me all the time, 'Is your sister a lesbian?' and I would just answer the question, 'I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no, but who cares? As long as she's happy.'" That's the appropriate response. So I wouldn't say it was shame as much as just -- I'm not going there.

MA: Seen as a negative that you don't need.

MS: It was a complete negative.

MA: Yeah.

MS: So let's [00:10:00] just power through, and maybe things will change, and I'll start liking women.

MA: Yeah. Great. Right. This will pass. It's a phase, right. And people give you excuses to think that way and so you just keep going.

MS: And Lafayette campus, at that time -- I remember meeting with the architects when I was on student government, and we did a meeting with the architects of Farinon, at the time, because Farinon went up my senior year. And I think I was on student government my freshman year, and sophomore year, and they were starting to think about it. And meeting with the architects, who were I think Boston-based at the time, they said, they were talking, "We want to do neon. We want to do this. We want to do that." And I was

like, "No neon. No this. No that." And they were saying -- he said, "It's amazing to me that the students on this campus are more conservative than the adults."

MA: Wow. Wow. What a telling story.

MS: And Lafayette, like, it's nice to walk around campus and see people of color. And it's much more liberal-leaning, I think the faculty has always been liberal-leaning? But the student body back then was very conservative.

MA: Wow, that doesn't help for being gay on campus.

MS: Very white, conservative, [00:11:00] and you know, everything was about drinking. So that's what I joining -- these people, I'm seeing three of them, they're driving from, you know -- to have dinner with us tonight because they're some of my best friends to this day, so there were a lot of positives.

MA: Of course.

MS: But, you know, doing the fraternity and we would just, "I'm going to drink until I go upstairs and pass out. And that's going to be my excuse to not go hook up with a girl tonight."

MA: Right. Okay. (laughs) Funny that a behavior -- heavy drinking behaviors, for example -- would be a way to get around the pressures, the sort of Greek life is about heterosexuality, in so many ways. So to participate and

just do the other activity, which would be to drink heavily, I suppose, gets yourself off the hook of feeling that sort of pressure.

MS: I had a lot of friends when I came out. Only one of my -- my best friend cried! He's like, "I'm just so happy you're normal." And I mean, you know, because he's like, "You not dating for all these years, I was like, 'What is wrong with him?'" And then he was like, "I am so sorry if I ever said anything." Because they don't remember if they said anything or not, and I knew it was never malicious, it was just like that was the thing they had on me. "You're gay or this. [00:12:00] You dress well. And you don't date. And what's wrong with you?" And I said, "What else you got? Anything else? It's been 15 years of this guys, like, new narrative please?" Like --

MA: Right. Right. Yeah.

MS: Gosh, you were fine. I never felt like I wasn't welcome, I never felt like I wasn't invited, or was ostracized. But I had to hide that part of myself, I felt, for years.

MA: Yeah. And it sounds almost like that kind of teasing, homophobic narrative is so normalized, that one wouldn't almost, I don't know, say, take it personally because, of course, it's not kind. But it's like what one would hear, straight or gay, if you happened to dress well and not have

a girlfriend. So it wasn't really that meaningful in some strange way?

MS: Yeah. I just tuned it out, you know?

MA: Yeah. And they're still your friends?

MS: Oh, still my best frien--

MA: Just goes to show --

MS: Yeah.

MA: Yeah, that your friendship went beyond, or deeper, than that.

MS: Oh, yeah.

MA: Yeah, amazing.

MS: It was crazy.

MA: Normalized homophobic language and behavior, so normalized. But, of course, it wouldn't have a chilling effect because no one would ever come out.

MS: Well, that's it. [00:13:00] And that's what a few of them said. They were just like, "We feel like you couldn't -- didn't fit --" because years later -- we were talking about Lafayette -- but years later, I mean, one of my friends just when they kept talking about it and talking about it, and he finally said, "If you guys keep this up, he's never going to hang out with us. Because every time you see him, you keep on this narrative, and if it doesn't stop, he'll just tap out. You know, we all love him, we want him to be

around so calm it, right?" And most of them stopped, probably late 20s, but there were still a couple that were pretty in.

MA: Wow, that's intense. But when you came out, they were...

MS: We had to do it one at a time, it was horr-- I was late 30s --

MA: That's tough.

MS: -- late 30s and I felt like -- you know, Rez and I met and neither one of us was out. He's Muslim. His parents were not amused. My parents -- my father could care less, but you know, my mom -- it wasn't horrible, but it wasn't great. And we literally had to call -- I called people [00:14:00], you know, one at a time, and just to tell -- and Reza just didn't want to deal so we'd just show up meeting his friends, and he'd be like, "Oh, this is my boyfriend, Mark." And they'd be like, "Okay." That's how they found out he was gay.

MA: Yep. Wow. Wow. The work of coming out.

MS: It's exhausting.

MA: Straight people can never understand.

MS: Exhausting.

MA: Ever. How hard that is.

MS: Oh, at the office, I mean, I didn't come out. I called my boss, I told him, and he's, you know, southern-white-guy

classic. He doesn't care, but he still, you know -- I wanted him to -- I worked for him for a number of years before I told him because, you know, I didn't want to be labeled the gay guy because corporate America's evolved significantly over the last five years. I said, "I'm not holding a branch meeting." And it was like, literally I was getting married, and I still hadn't told my office. Two advisors in my office knew who were friends of mine, a married couple. My boss knew. And he said, "Well I don't think that would be prudent." And I came back, and one of the women in my office said, "I need to talk to you." She was in her 60s [00:15:00] and kind of like the busy body around the office. And I said, "What's up?" And she was like, "Are you okay?" Because we took two weeks off to go get married. I said, "What are you talking about?" She goes, "You've been stressed out. You took two weeks off. You never take this much time off." She goes, "Do you have cancer?"

MA: She thought you were sick. Oh, my gosh. I knew it.

MS: And I said, "No, I got married." And held up my ring finger, which no one noticed. And she was like, "Oh, my God." And I told her about Reza, and she goes, "How do you want to handle this?" And I said, "I don't know, what do you think?" And she said, "Why don't I just tell two or

three people, and that's how it will get out to the office." And it's amazing that there are still -- this is four and a half years ago -- people at my office that have never acknowledged I got married. Some bought me wedding gifts, others it's just never been a topic.

MA: Isn't that amazing?

MS: They're the Trump people, by the way.

MA: Yeah. Okay. Fair enough.

MS: To this day, this is five years ago -- four and a half years ago. And still. And in California. And it's still -- people have a hard time sometimes with it.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. It goes to show [00:16:00] that we can be pretty glib about, like, just because there's gay marriage or X or Y law passes, it actually -- there's so much awkwardness and homophobia and there's so much to deal with as a gay person that there can be a glib assumption that there's -- well, glad that's over with though, everything's normal for you guys.

MS: To this day, once a week, "What does your wife do?"

MA: Yeah.

MS: And I've got pictures of me and Rez in the office. And I say, "Well, my husband." And they all feel stupid. Don't feel stupid.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The burden of educating people all the time's a little bit tiring.

MS: We can get to a Lafayette topic, but -- one of the women, I will not name the person -- in the gift office, we were at a dedication probably 3.5-4 year -- I'd just gotten married. So, here on campus, Reza was not with me.

MA: So you've been married three or four years?

MS: Just over our fourth wedding anniversary.

MA: Oh, congratulations. Lovely.

MS: Thank you. So, I'm on campus, and talking to this woman who works for the college, who graduated in my era, and she's like, "Oh, I heard you got married, congratulations. What does your wife do?" And I said, "Well, my husband --" [00:17:00] and literally put her hand over her mouth and said, "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to make you come out."

MA: Here? From our gift office? Holy smokes.

MS: And I said, "Um, I'm not coming out. I'm out. I'm married." And she went and talked to my friend of mine, said, "I feel so horrible. I didn't mean to say that or do that." He's like, "It's fine. He's married. You did not drag him out of the closet." It was like -- someone from my era at Lafayette.

MA: Right. Oh. You said, "Here we are. Here I am." Right? Isn't that amazing though? That's quite incredible.

Sometimes it's hard to explain the difference between homophobia, right? So, fear or hatred of gay people, and just heterosexism, that everybody thinks everybody's straight until proven otherwise. So they say, to you "your wife," or they say to me, "your husband." But that assumption, it isn't quite homophobia, it's something slightly different. It's almost --

MS: I haven't ever felt discrimination, it's just people are [00:18:00] just unaware. And they don't know how to talk to somebody.

MA: Yeah, and it's 2019.

MS: They were very good at the Enterprise Rent-A-Car. What is your marital status? You know, very generic questions as opposed to, "What does your wife do?"

MA: It always surprises you --

MS: A trustee asked me last night at Allison's dinner, "Oh, what does your wife do?" And I feel like an idiot, "My husband --" you know, because you don't want to make people feel stupid, but it's also, I'm not going to lie to you.

MA: Absolutely. But that puts you in a position that it's always your awkward moment to have.

MS: Correct.

MA: Yeah. And that's very hard. Yeah. It's not awful, and obviously, you handle it beautifully, but it's still not pleasant. Like, you'd rather it not happen.

MS: Oh, it's literally every week, to this day.

MA: Isn't that amazing?

MS: One of those instances.

MA: And also, because you are very cis gender presenting, right? You're a masculine-looking/acting, right? You know, your gender presentation is stereotypical-like in zero ways, if I, sort of, make that assumption. Please correct me if I'm wrong. But it certainly is sort of like normalist, stereotypes-like. And so, that's why people [00:19:00] don't get it maybe? It's really something. It's really something, Mark. But that's, I guess, the burden of it in many ways. So, well, this is really -- that's quite a story. Thank you for sharing it. So, some of the questions that I sort of have on the tip of my tongue about if there were pockets of LGBTQ life or any of the community being visible, it sounds like the only thing, you're shaking your head, it sounds like the only thing was really that FLAG.

MS: Yeah, the only guy that I thought might be gay was [name redacted by QAP], who was my year, because he was a little

-- swimmer or diver, a little effeminate, tall. And he dated a woman to hide, obviously.

MA: Okay. I don't know [name redacted by QAP].

MS: Yeah, so, I mean, we weren't friends or anything. That's probably the only person in my class who I said, "Huh, maybe he's gay," or something like that. But other than that, no, not even -- not discussed.

MA: It was just sort of gay-dar [00:20:00] and guessing. And nothing so just complete silence.

MS: You know, Riley Temple told me that one of the girls that he ran into at a grocery store -- [name redacted by QAP], class of '92 -- looked at him and said, "Riley, I didn't think there were any gay people at Lafayette." And he looked at her and said, "Are you crazy?" And that was the timeframe when I was here, it was just there was no community. Zero. Not disgust, not --

MA: It's like it doesn't even exist.

MS: Correct.

MA: Total isolation.

MS: Correct. Because it would've been complete -- I mean, I probably would not have been invited to join my fraternity, if they knew I was gay. It would've been a very lonely college ex-- probably would've wound up transferring.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely, I could totally see that. So, every -- given the absolute silence -- every gay or lesbian-identified person would absolutely stay in the closet because you'd risk your whole college happiness.

MS: I think that's probably fair.

MA: For most people, yeah. [00:21:00] It's funny we came up a little bit on the social scene and that kind of intersected with the Greek scene for you. So that was most of your social life, and it sounded like trying to avoid the pressures of, sort of, the dating and...

MS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. It was three and four nights a week, in the bar room playing beer pong, going to different fraternity houses. I was involved in LAF, and student government, and orientation lea-- all that stuff also. But yeah, it was a pretty full schedule of student government and activities and classes and, "Where we drinking tonight, boys?"

MA: (laughs) That sounds pretty intense.

MS: Yeah. It was fun. I mean, I'm not saying, you know -- it wasn't torture, it was fun. But it wasn't the healthiest choice, but --

MA: No, no, but youth enables one to endure those...

MS: That was Lafayette. That's what we did. People lived on campus, or right off campus, and it was, "What are we doing today?"

MA: Yeah, that was the culture, basically. Yeah, yeah. I could see that. [00:22:00] So thinking about Greek life, other things to add? It sounds like it was a very formative part of your Lafayette experiences and the friends. And obviously it was like the rest of the college, not a place to come out or be out, or anything like that. And you got teased, it sounded like.

MS: Mm-hmm. Correct.

MA: How about athletics? Were you involved in athletics at all?

MS: I played club rugby freshman, sophomore year. Other than that, not really.

MA: Yeah, you listed off a number of organizations, too. So we generally just sort of ask about what people were involved in. If they built an alternative community or anything like that. It sounds like your fraternity was your main group of people, but it was student government and some others.

MS: Lafayette Activities Forum, and then I did Orientation Leader. One year I ran the programs for the Dean's Office for the interim session. More of student government related. And I was always the guy -- [00:23:00] it was like, a lot of the student government people were in KDR and other houses, and I'll never forget, one year we were

out drinking -- and I'd known these guys for a couple of years -- they had no idea what fraternity I was in and they were shocked. They were like, "You're a DKE?" I was like, "Yeah, why?" Like, "Really? Really? You don't look like them." You know.

MA: Yeah, funny.

MS: Oh, I showered today, I guess, you know.

MA: (laughs) The stereotype, oh, that's funny. How about the classroom? What were classes like? Did this ever come up? Was it also silent?

MS: Classes were good. I was not Mr. Academically Motivated, I'll give you -- but I was a psych major, and the one class that really I remember the most was Susan Basow, she was great, about gender and sex roles. Or gender roles. That was probably the most interesting class I took at Lafayette. And got myself in trouble because I wrote a paper and then showed it to my parents. And I kind of trashed them a little bit with different things growing up and yeah. To this day, [00:24:00] my mother tells the story about like, you know, the paper I wrote --

MA: Uh-oh.

MS: where -- yeah.

MA: For Susan Basow's class.

MS: Yeah.

MA: That's funny. You showed it to your parents? Or how did it...?

MS: Mm-hmm. I showed it to them.

MA: Okay. (laughs)

MS: Yeah. It had nothing to do with sexuality, but it was just more gender roles and stereotypes, and this and that.

MA: Wow, yeah.

MS: I didn't want to play baseball as a, you know, kid. I felt like I had to because I was forced to because that's what little boys did.

MA: Yeah. Which is a pretty good argument because gender roles are really oppressive. They really are. Wow. That's an amazing story. So, Susan Basow, who is still here and about to retire this year, I'm sure she'd be thrilled to hear that that class was formative for you. That particular class, did gay and lesbian lives come up at all? Or was that sort of a...?

MS: I remember just in gender roles, Susan told a story once, that she was just [00:25:00] talking about just generally that everyone assumes gay men, for instance, are attracted to every man. And, you know, she was saying, you know, like, "What's wrong with you? Why would someone find you attractive?" And just like this weird thing. And I thought that was pretty funny.

MA: Yeah, that's great. That's great.

MS: Just because like how everyone -- you know, I'm not looking at you. You are not my type, trust me. Get away.

MA: Right. Right. Right.

MS: But it's assumed, "Oh, you're gay. You must think -- oh, get away from me."

MA: Yeah. That's funny. It's funny. All gay people know this, which is like honestly, straight people need to get over themselves. Because, honestly, we're just not attracted to all people. Like, who is? Nobody is. But that's wonderful she was trying to expose some stereotypes.

MS: Definitely.

MA: In that class. That's pretty impressive back then. I'm sure students were surprised to have those ideas put in front of them.

MS: My friend, Mark Ohler, and I were the only two guys in the class.

MA: Is that right?

MS: And he's a pastor. A pastoral counselor in NJ now.

Totally cool guy. Literally [00:26:00] the only two guys in the entire class. And they would look at us for every little -- (laughs) But it was a fun class.

MA: Funny how that is with gender studies. It's hard to get more male students -- I'm always wishing I had more men in

my classes because they bring a perspective, and they'd also, I think, enjoy it and learn a lot. So, yay for you is all I can say. And other than that courses, no homophobia in courses, it was mostly...?

MS: I mean, now I'm remembering this. See, you prompted a question. I actually wrote a paper on is homosexuality -- is it learned behavior or was it genetic?

MA: Oh, wow. Was that also for psych?

MS: That was for Susan Basow.

MA: Oh, wow. Okay. So some small chances to explore some of these issues in ways that didn't feel personally threatening.

MS: Yes.

MA: Yeah. It's a lot about academics, I think, [00:27:00] for even the students now that gender studies offers them a chance to think about topics in a public way that doesn't mean they have to come out, or it doesn't mean even that they're questioning or thinking about their orientation or their gender identity. They can just think about the topic safely, and that's nice that was true for you. That's great. Let's see. Did you feel any changes over time over those four years? It sounds like there was some change, that FLAG or the BFLAG or the FLAGB.

MS: That was probably the only thing that was sort of anything LGBT at the time. That I can remember. You know, I don't think the student body became any more evolved during that. It was just that period of time. It was a pretty conservative, not very open place. Doesn't mean there weren't great people and we had a lot of fun together, that sort of thing.

MA: Yeah, but it wasn't a place where you could feel that part of yourself really [00:28:00] expressed.

MS: Correct.

MA: Yeah. So no formative moments. Farinon was built, but no -- sometimes there are speakers or events that people recall when they think over their years. Thinking for example, when -- I think the AIDS Quilt came to campus. Not when you were there, I don't believe, but around there, around that time. Any formative events or speakers?

MS: Not that I can recall.

MA: Yeah. Do you have any sense of how the climate and the campus has changed? What's it like to be back?

MS: I think it's much more open. I think it's just -- I hate to say kind of cool to be questioning or gay. It's almost gone the other direction, where you're like, "You're not gay. Why are you doing this?" [00:29:00] You know? But I think, you know, shows like Glee, it just made it much more

cool to be a nerd and be a little more dramatic and artsy as opposed to -- So I would assume it's gotten better. I mean, I had two externs with me last January. And I found out late that they had nowhere to stay because they didn't know Los Angeles. And they wound up staying with me and Reza. They didn't, you know -- one was an athlete, one was -- they didn't seem to care they were living with a gay couple for three days.

MA: They didn't blink.

MS: It was a non-event.

MA: Yeah, I'm not surprised to hear that. I think it's just...

MS: Which, it's just more today, it's like, "Okay, what's your story?" "Okay, cool."

MA: Yeah. It's a different world in that regard.

MS: And I see it in Corporate America these days. Kids coming up. Kids -- younger people coming up. Most people don't - - you know, they just roll with it. They celebrate it. And then, you know, you can tell the mid-50s to mid-60s traditional white guys -- again, not homophobic -- but they just don't know what to do. They're lost. And they're just [00:30:00] -- I mean, I read an email last week from a guy who reports to me, he's in his mid-50s, to my boss who's 62. Both white guys. Both tut tut tut tut tut. And it's, like, talking about recruiting an African American.

"She's African American, and female." And it goes on to say, "and I set her up to have lunch with XYZ person." The only black person in the office. And I'm sitting here reading this email I was copied on, saying "Who..." -- "She's articulate and professional."

MA: No, no, no.

MS: Which, by the way, I read her resume. She went to Smith, she has a JD, yadda yadda. But it's like, all these buzz words, and my ops manager -- business services manager -- is a black woman, and she's very close to me. And I just showed her this, I go, "This is the most racist thing I've ever read." And they don't have a clue. They're just talking, like, "Oh, African American. Let's send her to lunch with the other African American female we've got." And it's the same with the gay people. I mean, I see that all the time with people. It's like, we don't all know each other, you know? [00:31:00] Or when you meet someone, and they have to tell you about every other gay person they've ever met so that they can show you how cool they are with it. So, it's this weird shift right now, where I feel like, even age group, I'm in the middle of it. I think I'm a little bit more aware of it, just how people address me, etc. I always say, "Do you have a spouse or a partner?" Or, "What does your significant other do?" I

don't say, "What does your wife do?" I mean, there's a guy I thought was gay in our HR department for years. Turns out, he's married with three kids. I still think he's probably gay, but I mean, I almost asked him what his husband's -- or does he have a partner? I was like thank God I didn't. I'd make that assumption. You know?

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's a generational thing.

MS: It is. And it's rolling over because these people are starting to retire, but the firms are trying to do just basic -- the most basic -- education. And those are all people who would've been '80s, late '70s, that kind of led up to, generationally, when I was in school. And then you just start, you know, mid-'90s, late '90s, it just [00:32:00] evolved.

MA: Slowly rolling over. Time is solving some of the problem. I mean, in the example -- that email, which is just somewhat stunning -- it would be difficult to explain to them all the problems with that. It's a different world. They're from a different world.

MS: I had someone turn to a black guy on our management team. We were just talking generally -- a group of five of us at a dinner -- about the election, and, you know, yadda yadda. And he turns to this guy and goes, "What do African Americans think of Trump?" And I turned to the woman next

to me, and I said, "Did he literally just ask the black guy at the table what African Americans think?" The same guy, again, nice guy, asked me if all gay people were democrats. And I was just like, "No, we vote the issues." I mean, it was just like non-malicious. Just clueless. And I think that was sort of, to tie it back, my experience at Lafayette, no one was -- a couple guys were malicious. But for the most part, no one was malicious, they just didn't know any better. It's just how they were raised. It was Reagan, and, [00:33:00] you know, it's just vilified. AIDS was this bad thing. All gay people have AIDS. They're coming to get me.

MA: Yeah. I was wondering how that -- mentioning the AIDS quilt actually jogged my memory to ask you -- that must have been -- that was a really tough time for the gay community. Thinking the time you were here, from the late '80s to early '90s. That must have been somewhat in play on campus, as just, sort of, an understanding that, you know, gay people are like dangerous in yet a whole new way.

MS: Yep. I was -- but it was never discussed. I just got completely talked about, "Oh, is he gay? Is he gay? Is he gay? He's not hooking up with people. Is he gay?" You know, "What's his deal? He dresses well, he must be gay."

MA: Yeah, so on a personal level.

MS: Yeah, but you could feel it in the air. Just a very, very conservative campus.

MA: Yeah, in a homophobic time, nationally, so that must've made it even more amplified.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Yeah, yeah. [00:34:00] It's funny how...

MS: I didn't feel it was hostile, it was just the way it was.

MA: Yeah, yeah. Silence is a funny kind of atmosphere. It's not exactly hostility, but it doesn't help you.

MS: Correct.

MA: Yeah, and it has...

MS: Doesn't make you feel like you can -- I mean, I probably would've come out 10 years earlier had I felt like all my best friends were on board. It's like you intellectually know it, most people go through this, but you don't want to risk it.

MA: Right. Right. Yeah, it's not hostile. It's interesting that you use that word. It's not hostile, but it's oppressive in the sense that it sort of presses you into a kind of silence. It doesn't let you be yourself.

MS: Correct.

MA: In a kind of passive way. Yeah. Yeah. It's hard to put your finger on exactly what -- I mean, it's familiar to me from my own college experience. So, I sort of like -- it's

hard to explain if nobody really says anything really bad ever, and yet it's difficult because you want to be yourself and you can't be. And you're young and so you're trying to figure that out. [00:35:00] Everybody is at the age.

MS: Well, you're closing off a part of yourself. So you're never fully -- there's always that wall.

MA: Did you ever get a chance to meet more gay alums from your year? I know you mentioned the one person, but...

MS: I haven't talked to or seen [name redacted by QAP]. I mean, we weren't really friends here. I mean, it's interesting from high school, recently I connected with a guy. We were never friends just because our high school was big, and we had different social circles. But I saw on Facebook, it popped up, "Maybe you should be friends with [name redacted by QAP]." So I looked, and I'm like, "Oh, my God, [name redacted by QAP] lives in LA." So I connected with him, and we had dinner, and he's gay. We started the friendship however many years later.

MA: Yeah. Wow, that's funny.

MS: Yeah. I mean, Riley Temple. I didn't know Riley knew who I even was. I just knew Riley was a trustee. We had had a conversation here or there on campus one weekend years ago. Once he asked me if I was a democrat and I told him I was a

republican at that time. And he just looked at me. Then I get this random email 20 years later like, "Hey, I ran [00:36:00] into [name redacted by QAP], she's a Facebook friend of mine." She's the one that said there were no gay people, she thought, at Lafayette, just innocent. "She said, 'Oh, maybe you should reach out to Mark Suffredini, he's gay.'" That kind of thing. So he emails me, out of the blue, "I'm not sure you remember me." "I remember you, why are you emailing me?" (laughs) You know, it was kind of just random.

MA: Oh, really? That's funny. I didn't know if you knew Riley, or if there was a connection there.

MS: Knew who he was.

MA: Yeah, sure.

MS: I mean, I didn't think he'd remember who I was.

MA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

MS: So it was funny.

MA: Well, he doesn't forget much. But that's really terrific.

MS: But it's a connection. There's something to -- I wouldn't say a bond, but, you know, I would be very open to meeting other gay alums, I just don't know who they are.

MA: Right. Right. So, the college started the Pride Network, not too long ago. And that's the Alumni Affinity Association. And I think that a lot of alums, like

yourself, don't know that it's out there. And I think a lot of people, especially the story of being here in the '70s, or the '80s, or the '90s, and going through these periods of your life where you make a lot of friends and discover a lot of things, but there's one part of you that's never allowed to [00:37:00] really be expressed, even to yourself sometimes. Other people with those experiences and sort of reconnecting to those folks would be very nice for folks. And I often wish the college would reach out more and let people know about that.

MS: You should talk to Mike Summers in Career Services, and see if they can sort of tag this new gateway link, networking site, maybe if you can loop that in, so you can search for alums if they're in the Pride Network.

MA: Yeah, absolutely. That's a good idea. As a faculty member the ways of the college, and how it manages alumni contacts are mysterious to me. And also, not my business, to some extent, but also, my great interest. Because I think, as I talk to more and more alums, there's different stories from different periods. And I'm really seeing how much the college, in some ways, has given people wonderful experiences, but in some ways, if they're interested, also owes them an opportunity to connect in ways that are [00:38:00] significant as gay or lesbian people. And not

just as alums. The college could do better, I think, at that, in many ways.

MS: We got a thank you note for hosting a reception to Mr. and Mrs. Kermani. Rez's last name was Kermani. So, Mr. and Mrs. Suffredini, I would've said, this woman who's an alum and writing it trying to be reaching out, doesn't get it. I showed it to Kim and Arlena when I was here a year and a half ago, and they were like, "Oh, my God, that's horrible." And I said, "Had they at least gotten me, as the alum, correct, I would not be -- are you kidding me?" He's never stepped on campus, and he gets it to him? I mean...

MA: That's just too much.

MS: And she's just like, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God." And I'm like, "This is my daily life." I'm like... (laughs)

MA: This is how I'm living. This is how I live.

MS: You can't even recognize me. (laughter)

MA: That's rough.

MS: All I can do is laugh, this is so absurd.

MA: Right, right. Institutions have a lot of learning to do, obviously, right? And we still do here. I mean, you just, you shake your head. I mean, if we didn't [00:39:00] laugh at this stuff, what would we do, right?

MS: Oh, yeah.

MA: You know? (laughs) Oh, gosh. Anything else to add?
Hoping you take a moment when you can to look at the site.
I can send you the links to the archival materials we're
putting up, and things. I think you might be interested in
some of the things we've found.

MS: Sure.

MA: You've been very generous in talking with me today on your
busy, busy day after coming from California. Is there
anything else to add?

MS: May I just say it was a great four years, or I wouldn't be
connected or involved to this day. But it would be
interesting to return in today's environment. To see how
much better of an experience it would've been, had --
during the time -- had any of us been allowed to be
ourselves.

MA: It's hard not to look back a little and think, "I wonder
what that could've been if I could've been me."

MS: I probably [00:40:00] would've wound up transferring. I'm
not kidding. It did not -- it would've been painful. I
think people would've been okay, like my close friends.
But I think it would have been -- you would've been the one
guy on campus. There wouldn't have been other people
following. I don't think it was that environment on campus

where if one or two people came out, the rest would say,
"Okay, it's safe."

MA: Yeah. Absolutely. No, you weighed the variables and you made the safe decision. That was probably the wise one, if you wanted to stay at Lafayette. I mean, it makes perfect sense to me, I did the same in school. I could absolutely see that. I think it would be, you know, one thinks back now, "What if you could be young at Lafayette today?" How different that would be. To be able to be out and be part of this organization and that organization. And a lot of our students are out and it's changed.

MS: Actually date on campus.

MA: Absolutely, yeah. Well, it's good it's changed to now.

MS: Exactly.

MA: It's good that it's different now. Thank you, Mark Suffredini, so [00:41:00] much for this interview, and your time, and your insights, and your stories. If you think of anything else you want to share, I hope you will.

MS: I will. Thanks so much for arranging this.

MA: Thank you, Mark.

MS: All right.

END OF AUDIO FILE