Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles:
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #20
BURKE, KEVIN (1950-) **AB 1972 PhD 1999**

At U of C: 1968-1972 and 1989-1999

Interviewed: 2013 (1 session)
Interviewer: Lauren Stokes
Transcript by: Lauren Stokes
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Interview (March 19, 2013) in Chicago, IL.

[00:00:00]

LS: Hi. This is Lauren Stokes, and I'm interviewing Kevin Burke in Jim McDaniel's [Interview #23] apartment on March 19, 2013. Alright, so we like to start by asking you how you got to the University of Chicago in the first place.

KB: I got to the University of Chicago because I was on this program called Scholar Quiz in Los Angeles which is like the College Bowl for high school students and our team won, it was great, and part of my prize was a set of the Great Books of the Western World from the University of Chicago and there were all these books, and I think, oh, this must—I was like sixteen—this must be a really good place [laughter], and I would open these books randomly and look at them and think oh, this is like really interesting, and so I thought oh, I'll check it out, and then my cousin, who's a year older than I, who's also gay, it turns out, was a GRITS kid. Do you know what those are?

LS: No.

KB: Grassroots in Search of Talent. What the University did in the sixties was go to rural communities and seek out persons who were really bright but from these relatively underprivileged backgrounds—she was from a farm family, not poor, but she would have never gone here—and encouraged them to come, so she came here, and then I realized I could go anywhere I wanted to go, so I visited all the schools I got into, and I came here, and I thought "Oh, this is it." Everybody was so crazy, I felt so normal, and I had a great time, and I knew I was coming.

LS: What did you study while you were here?

KB: Well, I had five majors… [LS: You had five majors?] Mmm-hmm. I started out in Political Science and I wanted to be a politician. I soon realized that if you were going to

be openly gay you couldn't be a politician, and I wanted to be openly gay, so then I became an English major 'cause it was close to History, Political Science. Then I *really* came out and I decided that if you were going to be gay you have to have like an art major 'cause you couldn't talk to other gay men, so I became an Art History major. Then I had four majors. Then I realized that was a really dead-end degree. All you could do was be a museum something or have interesting cocktail conversations, so at the last minute I switched to primitive art. I got an Anthropology degree, which I thought was a much more marketable degree, and it was a really good choice.

LS: Did that turn out to be a great choice?

KB: Yeah, it was a *really* good choice. Plus I found this woman to work with here… it was incredible, in college then basically everybody took the same thing for two years, and then you did whatever you wanted to do and you found a faculty member, and this woman was amazing, I think she's still at the Art Institute—Marilyn Hammersly—and I just had a fabulous time the last year.

LS: What was so great about her?

KB: What was great about her, she was a free spirit, you could talk to her about anything, she was incredibly bright, we did Bachelor's papers which were essentially like doctoral theses for any other school. I just ran with it and she was incredibly supportive. I did this cross-cultural study of the Ebo in Nigeria and the Kwakiutl in British Columbia and the creation of power through art forms, and for two years that's what I did with her.

LS: That sounds great. [KB: It was great.] So, you mentioned earlier that part of your whole major journey was influenced by your progressive coming out. Could you talk a little bit about how you came out at the University of Chicago and when you kind of decided to do that?

KB: Sure. It's really quite distinct. I came here—I'd never really been to a big city before, I'd never seen black people before—and orientation week was like overwhelming, there were all of these really smart kids, and I quickly sort of fell into a group of people I really liked, and I fell in love with a woman, and we both confessed to each other that we'd had one gay experience, and that they were really awful and we'd never do it again, and we went to the library, and everything in the library confirmed our beliefs that this was a disgusting, awful thing, and we were not disgusting, awful people, so…

We were really in love and I thought "Oh, I must not be gay," because I really love her, and we had fabulous sex, we just had sex all the time. This went on for a year and a half. Her parents were incredibly supportive. Her parents were both professors. We lived with them, and I assumed we'd get married.

LS: Her parents were both professors here at the?

KB: No, but they could both go on here. Her father was the chair of the sociology department, and her mother was, is—they're both alive, I'm still close to her parents—is a well-known sociologist. Who were also incredibly homophobic [laughter], like really supportive, but anyway…

LS: They were very happy their daughter was dating a man?

KB: No, I don't think that was it. This was a really dysfunctional family. They had dysfunction on so many levels. We all went to see "Who's Afraid of Virgina Woolf?" together and they said "Well, we don't need to go to that, it's our house every night," and indeed it was, it really was. After a year and a half she left me for her sweetheart from elementary school. She went to school here in Hyde Park—I'm trying to remember this—they're still together, they're married. He's on the faculty at Harvard. [LS: Wow.] Exactly. And I don't, she doesn't want to talk to me. I'm still really close to her parents, which is really odd, her parents are professional colleagues of my oldest friend and first lover, and I'm connected to them through him, now.

LS: Interesting. It's funny how these networks all swirl around this academic world. When she left you, how did that leave you thinking about your sexuality, all of a sudden?

KB: I cried all the time. We lived in a commune then, communes were big.

LS: A commune in Hyde Park?

KB: Well, Woodlawn. We decided the way to deal with racism was to move to the ghetto, so we moved to 62nd and Woodlawn. It was a really bad idea, really, really bad. I cried all the time, and one night I just wanted the pain to end, so I started cutting myself up with a broken-off wine bottle, at which point they took me to Billings, and I just totally unraveled, like totally unraveled. I don't know how else to describe it. I just—I couldn't function. They gave me pills which were like the best pills I'd ever had, they just numbed everything.

So I came back, I moved out of the commune, I moved into a frat house which is now the University's alumni group, it's 56th and—a Gothic little thing—56th and Woodlawn? [LS: OK, I can imagine.] And I moved there with two people I lived with in the dorm, both straight men, who were really, really supportive and really good to me. Slowly that spring—this was my junior year, no, this was my sophomore year, second year—you know, I just got through the winter, the winter was a really awful winter. Second year of Common Core, you were taking things you didn't want to take. [LS: Right.] Just, it was like the worst time of my life, that spring was the spring we invaded Cambodia. Do you remember—this is probably way before your time, yeah, way before your time—as a result, the University more or less closed and was really supportive of us figuring out what this all meant. It was really interesting, so I lot of courses were cancelled, you could do what you wanted to do, and I went to Oberlin, Ohio, where this guy I'd gone to high school with, we were like platonic lovers, we had no idea either was gay then, had come

out in Oberlin and had this circle of gay friends, and he fixed me up with this guy and I said "Oh, I must be gay after all," and that was that.

And then the woman that I was with, that we broke up with, we had planned to be in Europe that summer just hitching around for three months. We'd already bought the tickets, this was in the fall, when you did charter flights, and you planned like six months ahead of time, and I decided I would go, and she decided she would go, and she went with her now-husband, and they sat in the row behind me. [Laughter] And I went to Europe, and I just went from city to city looking for men, and I had no idea it was sexual—I mean, it did become it, but I would go to parks in the middle night, like "I'll meet a man if I go," and indeed I did.

Then I figured out that if you went to museums—and I was still an Art History major, I was starting to be an Art History major—that if you cried over paintings, men would come. [LS: Really?] Yeah, and the way it happened, the first time… [LS: Just the art museums?] Well, I was at the Prado, and the Prado is incredibly moving, it's just grandiose, and all these Goyas, and I was crying, and this guy came up and said to me in Spanish, "You look so sad, can I help you," and I said "It's just so beautiful," and he said "I know, I feel the same way, why don't we go to my house and talk about it," I said "Oh, OK." [Laughter] He was a Mexican artist studying in Spain, he was a few years older than I, and it was great.

LS: So that worked in multiple cities.

KB: Well, then I thought I'm not really going to pretend, so then I thought I'll go to these other museums, if things move me I'll just let it go. And it happened two other times. It happened once in Italy and it happened once in Vienna. I thought, oh, I'll just do it on purpose, then it didn't work, but…

So I then thought, oh, I'm gay. I came back and talked to friends and they said, "Oh, you shouldn't be gay, that's really bad." My best woman friend from high school said, "Oh, you probably are, it's great, I met some homosexuals and they're OK," I said "Really," she said "Yeah, it's OK." So I went to a Gay Liberation meeting. This is February of my third year, and I met this guy who was one of the founders of Gay Liberation. I was really attracted to him, we talked and talked and talked and then I said, "Oh, OK, I'm gay, I want you for my lover," and he said "Well, I'm just broken up and I don't think so." I said "Oh, we'll get over them," we were lovers for years and years. We're still best friends, and he's the man I keep in touch with my former partner's parents… [LS: through…] Yeah, you've probably interviewed him or something, Murray Edelman. [Interview #83] [LS: Yeah, yeah, he shows up a lot…] Oh, I bet!

[00:12:28]

LS: So you met him at a Gay Liberation meeting, what were Gay Liberation meetings like at that… this would have been one of the first couple years, right? [KB: It was the first year.] It was the first year.

KB: Well, Henry Wiemhoff, David Goldman [Interview #1], and Murray Edelman started it. This was the fall of 70.

LS: It would have been like 70, 71, yeah.

KB: Well, I met Murray the week before Thanksgiving in 1970. It was like among the very first. What it was, it was in Ida Noyes, and there were all these men, it was overwhelmingly male students and a few community people and a few, you know, Hyde Park lifers who had some connection to the University, and we just talked, and then it became more formal, we had consciousness-raising groups, and then—I'm trying to remember the progression—it was really political. I remember there was a faction that was really political, and that made perfect sense to me. The other thing that was going on with me was I was rejecting my strict Roman Catholicism at the same point, and I needed something to fill that void of rules and regulations, so I thought "Marxism-Leninism, it's just like Catholicism, there are rules for everything!" So I became a Marxist-Leninist on the far left fringe of Gay Liberation.

LS: Were those things very much connected in your mind? [KB: What?] Marxism-Leninism and Gay Liberation.

KB: Oh yeah. They were the same, I mean, they were to me. Because I knew the system was really wrong, it oppressed people. I'd never seen black people before, I couldn't believe how they lived, I thought, "Oh, I can't believe this," you know, these awful, awful communities, you know, it's just a matter of months until people wake up and say "We have to end this!" We were incredibly stupid, naïve, but there were a lot of us who felt that way in our late teens, early twenties.

LS: How did people find out about the Gay Liberation meetings?

KB: Well, I found out about it because my friend Brenda said "Go look for one, they're all over the campuses now, my campus has one," she said, "I'm sure there's one at your campus."

LS: And there was, so… you said it was mostly men, and mostly students, but also community people and Hyde Park residents?

KB: You know, I think it was about half and half. One of the first people I met at Gay Liberation was Jim McDaniel, who lives here, and he was, he had been out of the University for several years, he was a mess, he was trying to figure out his life, and there were a lot of people like him who'd been out of the University a few years who were at loose ends. There were surprisingly a number of black people, and I had never really talked to a black person as a friend before, you know, I related to the downtrodden masses, but I had no black friends among my student cohort, and it was the first time I got to talk to black people, I mean as peers, and that was really interesting.

LS: It was probably pretty unusual in terms of University of Chicago activities in terms of attracting black people at that point?

KB: In a way. There were also a group of women, my peers, who would only date black men, who would only date local black men. This was quite scandalous, and families were scandalized, and these were basically young women like myself, one of whom I'm really close to now, one of my best friends. "Joan, do you remember you'd only date black men?" and she's like "No, I didn't," and I'm like "Yeah, you did, you were *legend*," [laughter]. So some women would date black men from the community, not students, and that was interesting because they weren't allowed in the dorms, but they brought them up anyway.

LS: So that was also scandalous.

KB: Well, it was hidden. It was just hidden.

LS: In terms of community people being at the Gay Liberation meetings, would you then collaborate on political actions together? When you say that it was a very political group, were there actions you would take in terms of politics?

KB: Yeah, but I'm trying to remember if they were involved. I remember doing coalition work with the Black Panther party that wasn't really extremely tight, but we would… and they were a different group of people. But yeah, the group became political really quickly, a faction of it, like Murray Edelman, Hannah Frisch [Interview #24], Henry Wiemoff, me, Brad Edwards, Lucas Kamp, and we would do things that other people would look askance at, other gay people, other gay men, no, other gay people, there were a few women.

Another thing was that some of these people weren't openly gay then. Like Hannah wasn't gay then, but she was involved. She didn't come out until later, as I recall, but she was there.

LS: Were there other people who were not out yet? Was that a common thing in the group, that people were… I think the terminology I've seen from Maroon ads at the time is "undecided."

KB: Yeah, there were, like I was bisexual for about six weeks, but other people it went on for a long time.

LS: You said you were bisexual for six weeks, do you think of it now as a sort of phase that you passed through in terms of transitioning to a gay identity, or?

KB: No, I think it was just stigma management. I knew I was gay, but I continued to have sexual relationships with women ten years after I decided I was gay and they knew—there weren't that many—they knew, and it was fine with them. Finally I just, in the mid-80s, "I can't do this any more, it's just too weird."

LS: So going back to Gay Liberation for a second, I know that they had this big Gay Liberation dance in the first year. [KB: Here?] Do you remember that?

KB: You know, I don't remember that specific one, I remember dances, I remember dances more at the Circle Campus, University of Illinois. I don't remember—I mean, I wasn't a real big dance person, but I remember there were regular dances.

[00:20:01]

LS: Yeah, I have—I found this letter that you wrote to the Maroon, actually, where you're asking for office space from the University. You and Murray signed it. [KB: I have no recollection. What does it say?] It's asking, I guess Gay Liberation asked for office space multiple times and was turned down, and I was wondering if you remembered—not writing the letter necessarily—but this fight for office space and all.

KB: I do. Obviously the University is anti-gay, but this [points at letter], what year was this, do you know?

LS: This was spring of '71.

KB: I'm trying to put it in… what I remember is that when we were all arrested things changed and got a lot better. [LS: At the Quad Club?] Yeah, that they got a lot better after that. Then we could get whatever we wanted, and I recall more the University saying why didn't you ask before, but obviously I don't remember it that well. So we were arrested in January, it must have been January of 72, 71? Was that in January of 70 we were arrested or 71?

LS: I've been the archive person, right, so I just have all this stuff. So this is, this was your police report of that arrest, if you want that. So that's November 71, if you're thinking of the Quad Club arrest.

KB: That's right, it was November. [Looking at report] This is actually sort of true. [LS: How do you remember it?] They never warned us, they just started beating us. Other than that… and they did not desist. They were admonished, but they just started beating us up. Brad is two years younger than I! I had no idea. So I remember having that office early on [LS: In Ida Noyes.], which is probably the case, because this is soon after Murray and I met… Murray and I wrote a ton of stuff together, do you know about all the stuff we wrote? [LS: No.] We wrote tons of stuff, we went to academic conferences and presented papers. Margaret Mead trashed us.

LS: Really? [KB: Yeah.] Wow, so, tell me more about that, I'm very curious.

KB: Well, do you want to get us out of sequence? That's how I quit being an academic. Here's this brilliant woman, who I respected, just spouting bullshit about "How did you ever let them in!" And it was a good paper, it was a really good paper. It was the

American Anthropological Association in Mexico City, and I thought, "Oh, well, I guess I can't be an academic, either."

LS: What was the paper on?

KB: It was called "The Gay Liberation Movement: From Straight Myths to Gay Norms," and what we did was trace the development of norms among an emerging cohort. It was *very* academic, it was published by Temple University Press as I recall. It was good. I mean, it wasn't perfect, we were in our twenties, but it was pretty good, and the venom out of her mouth, God… The organizer apologized to us because he had invited her, and he said, "You must understand the difficult position I'm in," and he was a closeted gay man, and I thought "Wow, this is like… [laughter] you know, I figured I couldn't be a politician, well, academic, that's okay, nuh-uh, I can't do that either, because this really brilliant woman who you respect trashes you and says complete nonsense. I was all of twenty-four at the time, I think, twenty-five?

LS: Murray was a graduate student at the time.

KB: Yes, Murray was the oldest man I'd ever met, he was twenty-seven. Murray had these brilliant ideas but couldn't write. I could write and so that's how we wrote a lot of stuff.

LS: Do you remember… you must have been the only gay paper at that entire American Anthropological Society meeting?

KB: As gay as… there were others that approached it far more academically among, like, looking at homosexual behavior, I think we were with these ethnographies looking at homosexual behavior in some other weird country. We were the only ones that looked at people amongst us and talked about being a part of the group, and that was not okay then.

I had a degree in anthropology, it was a fabulous education I got, it was fabulous, and we just applied all these theories. So Murray would come up with this stuff and say "Oh, that fits this guy, that's Levi-Strauss," or you know "That's Durkheim again, *again* it's Durkheim." [Laughter] And we did it and boy, were they upset.

LS: I can't imagine being trashed by Margaret Mead. I mean of all people…

KB: Oh, I know! She looked like this little dyke, too. I'm thinking, "She's gay," [laughter] but anyway…

[00:26:30]

LS: So to go back for a second to the Quad Club stuff, you were protesting Tom Foran, because he had had anti-gay policies, or what had he done?

KB: He had prosecuted the Chicago Seven. And in prosecuting the Chicago Seven I don't think he was anti-gay, or it wasn't a prominent thing, he was just extremely right wing

and totally dismissive of people with leftist politics. Then when he ran for governor he became anti-gay and he repeated this phrase "We're losing our kids to the freaking fag revolution," so we all had buttons that said "Freaking Fag Revolution" with the flag of North Vietnam.

LS: [Laughter] Would you wear those around campus?

KB: Oh yeah, we got lots of points on campus for it.

LS: Was there any trouble, do you remember, say, faculty members or other students being very distanced from you as a result of your being a freaking fag revolutionary?

KB: No, but by then I was third year, you knew which faculty to avoid.

LS: You were out of the Core, you could…

KB: Well, one of the worst was a closeted gay man, Roger Weiss, who was extremely conservative. I took his Soc I class and one of the final questions was where did Marx go wrong, and this was before Gay Liberation, I was emerging as a leftist, and I said "He didn't go wrong, and here's why," and he gave me a C minus, and then I found out Roger was gay, and I thought wow, this is… and that was weird. You found which faculty to avoid, which faculty not to avoid. There were some straight people who were incredibly interesting who weren't gay but were really supportive. One was Shepherd Foreman, who was, I think he's really well known, he was like an expert on Brazil then, and he was in the Anthro department, and you could go to him with anything trying to connect anthropological theory to what you were seeing around you that it might apply to, and he'd be like "Oh, that's really interesting," whereas some would say "I don't have time, get out, get out."

[00:28:58]

LS: Interesting, so… there's so many questions that are in my head. So was your gay life mostly about the University community, or were you connected to gay people in other parts of Chicago?

KB: Well, our commune, well, we formed a commune, and we moved… [LS: A second commune?] No, the first one in Chicago was at 2214 Halstead. [LS: OK, this is a gay commune.] Correct, and everybody in it had some connection to the University of Chicago except for David Thierry, who was a black drag queen, and I don't know how David became a part of this, he didn't have any connection to the University. Everybody else had been a student here, was a student. Duncan wasn't, oh, but Duncan was a lover of somebody who was, okay, Duncan was at Northwestern. But there was an identity to this place.

But we thought that if we were going to be truly gay revolutionaries, we'd better not live in Hyde Park because it was sort of a dead end, and so we moved to what was then a Puerto Rican barrio that a lot of gay men lived in.

LS: What was it like living in a commune?

KB: Oh, it was weird. Well, first of all I'd never lived in a barrio before, and I thought, you know, this is sort of like when a few years ago we thought we should move to Woodlawn to experience what black people like… maybe we shouldn't go to this barrio. We had this long discussion, and said well, it's going to be gay in a few years, have you noticed, it was early gentrification, but we had no real analysis of gentrification then.

LS: But people were moving, there were a lot of gay men living there.

KB: Well, there were these incredibly beautiful houses for next to nothing. It was a really bad neighborhood.

LS: Were there bars opening up?

KB: The gay bars were a ten-minute walk away on Clark Street.

LS: Sort of in the Boystown area.

KB: There was no Boystown.

LS: [Laughter] Right, there was no Boystown yet, what we now call Boystown.

KB: There was no Boystown. Halsted and Webster. 2200 North and 800 West.

LS: How long did you live there for?

KB: We got evicted because the building was sold to a developer. We lived there, when did we move, we moved in the spring of 72. I was arrested in November of 71? [LS: 71.] Well, I was there then, only a year, I think. [LS: So you were in Hyde Park.] Yeah, we were in Hyde Park.

Well, I can place it, because after I recovered being crazy I moved in with four other men at 55 and Greenwood. Straight men. Sort of, some came out later. But not gay, not gay at all. So I must have moved there a year, and we weren't on Halstead more than a year.

[00:32:33]

LS: How did the University react to you being arrested? Were they…

KB: They were mortified. They were really mortified. Not by me, not by us, but by the fact that it happened in the heart of the University, and it was so ugly, and it was so out in the open.

LS: There had been a lot of people who saw it go down?

KB: They were beating us up in the alley and people came and watched them. They were dumb enough, the cops were dumb enough to continue beating us, and people were screaming, "We're watching! We're watching!" and I mean, the University did not want to have cops beating up its twenty-one-year-old undergraduates in an alley behind the faculty club. That was just really embarassing.

It was a really good time. So we go to jail, and I was reading Gide, and I thought "This is just like Gide," [laughter], and I was in a cell with a guy I was hot for, and he was hot for me. I was having a pretty good time. They're heaping abuse on him, they're saying "You're not American, you're going to be deported," and I said, "Oh Lucas, isn't it wonderful," [laughter], and I was like thinking, well this is really interesting, but I didn't know what that meant. They separated us, and they took Murray and Brad and put them away, and at like three or four in the morning James Vice appeared. [LS: He's the Dean of Student Life at this point?] Yeah. He's gay. Everybody knows he's gay. He sort of was apologetic but said "You won't do this again, will you?" I said "What do you mean, we're like, this is not the way to handle it, we didn't start it," that's when we said "Well, why did you have us arrested," and he said, well the University doesn't own the faculty club, the faculty does, they can do whatever they want to do.

LS: How did everyone know… he's come up as gay, multiple times, and I'm curious about how everyone knew?

KB: Roger Weiss and Howard Brown were like the heads of Hyde Park gay society. Howard was the chair of the Music Department and Roger had a dual appointment in the college and economics. Roger grew up in Hyde Park. They were conservative. Your identity was safe with them, but everybody knew. James Vice was a part of that circle, as was Jim McDaniel. Jim McDaniel was a transition figure that would go back and forth from Howard and Roger's circle to the Gay Liberation circle.

LS: So this kind of conservative and quiet about it circle, and you guys were kind of the political and sort of expressly…

KB: Their politics were generally conservative. They were all into opera. God, they were all into opera. Howard was a really well known Renaissance musicologist, so he would get these fabulous people to entertain them. They would do stuff at Mandel Hall too, or Rockefeller, but they'd be in his living room, too, so it was okay to be in this circle because… it was okay to be gay in this circle because people were so stellar, is how I recall it being. I was never invited to a party ever, and I wouldn't have gone had I been.

LS: Were students at all, or was it entirely a…

KB: Oh yeah, closeted, conservative, uptight students were welcome. Especially if they liked opera. Jim explained to me that you had to like opera to be gay, and that it would be much easier, and I said "Well, I'm not really into that," but he helped me, coached me. So I finally decided I could do light Spanish opera, and you had to have a diva that you knew everything about. I said okay, who's a good candidate, and he said, "Well, there are these two Spanish ones that are pretty good. Montserrat Caballé and Victoria los Ángeles."

So I checked them out and I decided, I really like Victoria los Ángeles. So I became an expert on her so I could go back and forth, and "She's okay, you know, she sings folk songs, too," but I clearly was not into it at the same level they were, clearly not, but it allowed me to at least show respect for them.

LS: So there's that and then your Gay Liberation circle. Did the Gay Liberation circle have any similar sort of subcultural markers in this way? Was there an opera for that circle?

KB: No. In the Gay Liberation circle I would say there was the subgroup of the men who were really into sex, sex and sex. They were there to have sex, and we weren't. We were there to change the universe, understand ourselves, and they wanted *sex*. Oh, some of us just did not… I was part of them that just didn't know about that. [Laughter] Sex is okay, but that's all they'd talk about.

LS: So, besides Ida Noyes and then this opera circle, were there other spots in Hyde Park that were particularly gay at the time?

KB: Well, there's the gay cruising area. [LS: In Wieboldt, right?] Yeah, but there was also this park that you can see from here that used to have a bathroom in it that was quite well-known. [LS: Where is the park?] It's like 50th, and, you can see it from here, I've seen it from one of the windows, like 50th and the Lake, [KB and LS walk to the window—LS: I see it! Wow, I had no idea] So anyway, I'm thinking I should broaden my horizons, I go there one night and I meet my French professor in the bathroom, and I had no idea he was, well as far as I know he's not gay, but he was certainly in that bathroom looking for sex, and that was… I couldn't process it.

LS: So there's a cruising spot in Wieboldt and also over in that park.

KB: Correct. Those were the main ones.

LS: Interesting. Huh. I never knew that about that park before. So did you, you moved out to this gay commune up on Halstead, was there a point at which you felt like your entire social life was with this Gay Liberation group and not with other students at the Unviersity? Do you remember how other typical students reacted to Gay Liberation?

KB: Well, some of my former straight friends shunned me. They wouldn't say anything bad about it. My cousin Diane, who was deeply closeted, who I came here to be close to, wouldn't talk to me. We're really close again, but I said "Why'd you do that," and she

said "You scared the shit out of me, I didn't want to be anywhere near you," that was a common reaction. Not like what you're doing is bad, what you're doing is disgusting, it's just like, "Get away." It hurt that some former friends were that way. But there were so many other opportunities. Plus student life here was nothing to write home about anyway. It wasn't like oh yeah, I *really* want you back, like, it was pretty depressing being with you.

[00:41:18]

LS: So are there other things I'm not asking about? Because I was going to go on and ask about what you did after you graduated. Am I forgetting asking about anything during your undergrad years?

KB: I don't think so. I'm trying to remember. One of the main currents running then was applying political principles to your personal life, and we went way overboard on it, like we went *really* overboard. I just wanted a nice, happy, monogamous relationship with a guy, and the prevailing opinion then was that was counter-revolutionary, that you really didn't want that, that was brainwashing. You wanted to be with as many different men as possible to experience as many different things…

So in the commune we would have our bed partners, sex partners assigned so we would deal with our –isms. So I had to sleep with David Thierry, who I really did not like as a person, but I had to deal with my racism. I was, "I don't think this is right." [laughter]

LS: Would you then switch your assigned partners so that you could be… breaking beyond monogamy?

KB: Yeah, and if there was a person you really didn't like, you had to be intimate with them because you had to deal with why you didn't like them. I mean, it was like cult, cult, and it was it… it didn't work. It really didn't work.

LS: It doesn't sound very sustainable.

KB: No, it wasn't. We were all really young and stupid—not stupid, we were smart, but we… it didn't work. The commune fell apart, and there were several dyads within the commune. There was Murray and myself, Ferd and Duncan, Bill Dry—I forgot who his partner… there were these dyads, but they were not supported.

LS: Because the dyads were seen as something…

KB: Yeah, that you shouldn't be doing this because it's counter-revolutionary. I mean it was really, some of the stuff we wrote, I went back and read it and it's, I mean, in theory it's fine.

LS: Are these your academic papers that you were writing, or?

KB: We wrote position papers on everything. There were little, there were nodes of Gay Liberation all around the country and we would all meet each other. We'd go to different communes, like in Brooklyn, Oakland, Madison. There were people like us in all these cities and we were all really political. And we'd all write these… we would write, a lot.

LS: Do you remember that scene, the commune scene as being very male overwhelmingly?

KB: There were no women. There were zero women. It was gay male communes. [LS: And you'd go around and visit each other.] Yeah, they would visit us. I remember we had this commune visiting us from Brooklyn and they got arrested for shoplifting. [LS: In Chicago?] Yeah. And that was just, like "I wonder if they're stealing from us?"

LS: Did you feel like you had to be totally welcoming to anyone else who was in a gay commune?

KB: Oh, we wanted to be, because they were really interesting. And this commune was mainly black and I didn't know any… [LS: The Brooklyn commune.] They were really nice. They were black transvestites mainly, not transsexuals but… yes, I mean, I would never meet people like this and they were really nice. But then when things would happen like they would be arrested for shoplifting, it was like "Oh, maybe I should reevaluate this."

LS: Interesting. So then, that commune breaks up, and then you graduate in '72? [KB: Yep.] And then where did you go?

KB: I went to CBS News in New York.

LS: CBS News. And what were you doing there?

KB: I was a researcher. Because Murray was the boss. Murray—did you interview Murray at all?

LS: We haven't interviewed him yet actually. He's sort of on our list, but he's in New York, right? So.

KB: Murray—well, quick background. How's our time going? [LS: Good, good. I just keep checking to make sure it's recording.] Murray's a statistician by training. He's quite brilliant. Murray was working at the Census bureau in DC when he came out. His boss went to CBS from the Census Bureau, a bunch of Census Bureau people went to CBS News. In 1968 Murray wrote a backup program in case everything failed to predict the election. Everything failed and Murray's program beat all the other networks out. OK, so Murray hired whoever he wanted to, so he hired Gay Liberation people to go to New York. Murray was in this straight corporate world and he would wear these overalls embroidered with Gay Love and you know, he could get away with it because he wrote the program. [Laughter] So I went to New York and Murray got me this job. It was an entry-level job. I'm a map freak so I worked my way up, I became in charge of the

seventy redistricting because I was obsessed about maps. I had a great time. And then Murray and I got—Murray and I could be a couple living in New York. I didn't want any of this commune shit.

LS: So at that point, no more communes, just kind of a monogamous…

KB: Oh no. No no. We had to guard against monogamy, we had to guard against monogamy.

LS: You still had to guard against monogamy but you could at least…

KB: Yeah, but it was basically we were in the same bed every night and you know, we still were guarding against monogamy, but…

LS: Interesting. And at some point you move out to the Bay Area, right? When was that?

KB: Right. That was… things changed really rapidly. In September 1972 both my parents were diagnosed with terminal cancer the same week. It was unbelievable, and my mom died right away, like three months, she had brain cancer, and my dad got better, he had stomach cancer.

Murray and I agreed—I said "Well, I really need to go out there." My younger sisters were still at home. My father was pretty accepting of Murray and it looked like he was going to die right away, so we moved back to LA, Murray and I. Murray really hated LA. My father didn't really like Murray as a person—it had nothing to do with him being gay. He was getting better and my father and I had this talk about you don't need to be here, go. [Laughter] And Murray really wanted to go, so we moved to San Francisco. I knew I was close enough in case he got really bad, which he did, I could go back down.

LS: What were you doing while you were in San Francisco in terms of a job?

KB: You didn't have to work. [LS: Really? You just] It was commune city. There were communes, you would go to communes and they would have the MUNI transfers so that you never paid for a bus fare, you just took a transfer from the commune. You had sex all day, you went to the beach. We had a five-bedroom flat at Haight and Baker for 240 a month. [LS: Wow.] Yeah, you didn't… and we organized the masses. We were communists. [LS: The communist masses?] The working masses. [LS: Oh, the working masses. OK, I think I was still thinking about the Catholic…] No, we were overtly left. The communes were, the communes were all gay men. There was not a woman to be found in the communes.

It was the beginning of the mass gay migration to San Franscisco. There were hundreds of gay men, not women really, pouring in from all over the country into the Castro, which wasn't called the Castro then, it was still Noe Valley. I can remember Fernan moved there—who lived in the commune—and they lived in this really nice house on Noe, 23rd and Noe, and they were being kicked out. It would sell for 23,000 dollars, which was an

outrageously high price, and you know, now it's like 2.3 million. [LS: Right, probably.] But there was this mass migration of everybody into the Bay.

LS: Why do you think that was? I mean, was it just a snowball effect?

KB: Well, it was beautiful. First of all, gay men like really beautiful stuff. [LS: The Prado.] So like, I can remember, when we would go, we lived in the Haight, to go to the Castro, you had to hike down this shortcut, and on the way we'd take beauty breaks. "Can you believe how pretty this is? Like, it's really pretty." It was really pretty, the weather was decent, you didn't have to work. There was as much sex as you could possibly want. We were all in our twenties. I mean, it was like "This is okay."

And the masses were not really wanting to be organized. We had study groups, oh god, we had study groups. Marx, Lenin. [LS: Lots of Marx and Lenin?] Tons. Mao. We even got Stalin. This was before Stalin was really bad. We read, let me see—let me go get coffee. It was an okay time, I remember it being really okay. But anyway, then I did go back to work, eventually decided, "Oh, I'd better go get a job."

LS: Did you stay in San Francisco then? [KB: Yeah.] I guess you got there and you couldn't leave…

KB: Well, after my father died I became really close to my sisters, and they had [LS: Younger sisters, right?] I have identical twin sisters, three years younger, and we never liked each other very much growing up, but they had to deal with, what they had to deal with was fairly horrendous with both their parents dying, them being in their teens, and they handled it really well, and they were nicer to me than they'd ever been. We became really close, and I said, well, why don't you move to San Francisco? They were living in Orange County. I found them jobs, and they moved up, and they lived there ever since. And then they both came out, they're both gay, and they're identical twins, but they're different as night and day. I mean, one's a super-butch dyke who, you know, "If I had to do it all over again I'd have a sex change, I've always been a man trapped in a woman's body." My other sister said, "I just don't think men are worth it." [Laughter] But all of her friends are gay men, and the other one, all of her friends are women. We just, over the years we've become extremely close. I spent last week with them.

LS: Are they still both in San Francisco?

KB: They're still in the same, they live in our old commune. [LS: Oh wow.] They live in our old commune, which, that's another story. Murray and I bought this broken-down Victorian in 1973 for our gay commune, which fell apart in seventy-six, five.

LS: Was it really—I am such a historian—do you remember the Lavender U, was that [shows KB cover of *Lavender U* magazine with a woman under a *Sappho* road sign.]

KB: Oh yeah, I took that picture. That's Brenda. That's the woman who told me she knew homosexuals who were okay. [LS: Hey!] She's gay too.

LS: Well, good, because this is a pretty gay picture. So that was, was that run by Murray and you?

KB: Murray and I started it. We started it with other people. Nobody ran it, it was anarchy. There was maybe a core group of six or eight people.

LS: And so that was for having these courses and these study groups?

KB: It was courses. And that was, there were a lot of women in this. This is the first time I can remember a lot of women being involved, not just token women.

LS: A lot of, a lot of lesbians? [KB: Yeah.] So in this Lavender U situation, so the courses were not like male-focused courses, or they were…

KB: Oh no, we were breaking down… The women would teach things like auto mechanics and the men would teach things like crocheting. We thought it was really cool for gender role breakdown. I taught photography. What did Murray teach? Something psychological. We had a course about how to write sex ads called Cruising 101.

LS: For the personal ads.

KB: Yeah, Peter taught that, Peter's an academic.

LS: Is there an art to it? [KB: Yes.] I'm sure there is, I've never written one myself, so I've never thought about it, but you just had courses that kind of ran the gamut.

KB: Yeah, really they did run the gamut. And it was also an incubator for other things. As I recall the Gay Men's running group started at Lavender U, which is now called Front Runners and which is like the first gay running group. It's now women and men both, but then it was gay men who would do runs together. But there were all of these other groups who would… it was sort of an incubator.

LS: For various gay interest groups that then sprung up.

KB: Not—gay persons who had interests. It wasn't gay-specific much, but it was like running, photography, auto mechanics, you know, where you could be with other persons like yourself.

[00:56:22]

LS: So you stuck out in San Francisco then, and then you, you said you came back here. [KB: Came back here in 89.] 89. That's an interesting time to come, right? For gay stuff specifically but…

KB: Well, I came here to get away from it. I mean, all my friends had died. Everyone I was close to died.

LS: What was that like? I mean…

KB: Well, it was like a really bad movie. [Laughter] In the University…

LS: Were you living in San Francisco throughout the whole 80s?

KB: Sort of. I had… Do you want me to go back to the storyline about how I got to where I got, or do you want to just—well, I met a man, and I collaborated, actually, this I just wrote about this, was in Lesbian and Gay Review, Harvard Lesbian Gay Review about founding the Fairy movement. I met Greg in 1975 at this conference of lefties called Faggots and Class Struggle and it was at Wolf Creek and I met Greg at a workshop called "Like Father, Like Son," and our fathers had just died almost to the day. My father had finally succumbed to cancer. His father had killed himself.

I really liked him, and we were both a part of this group, this overarching political movement. I identified as a Marxist-Leninist, he identified as an eco-feminist. It was sort of like, you know, like could there be a mixed marriage like between a Lutheran and a Catholic, and our study group said "No, you can't have sex yet. You have to struggle with your stuff." So we didn't have sex for six months. We wrote love letters quoting Lenin. It was like—I still have them, I can't believe I did this—so like after six months, they said "OK, you can have sex," and we did, and it was really like [Sigh], like really? But I really loved him and it didn't matter. So he moved to San Francisco to be with me, he lived in LA, he was teaching at CalArts, California Institute of the Arts, and we were together, we were really pretty happy, and we homesteaded.

This was like the next gay migration going up to the north coast and homesteading. And we did, and we homesteaded this beautiful mountain where I still live, on top of a mountain overlooking the ocean. Built the roads, built the house, did everything. And the mountain was gay, I mean, that's why we moved up there. There were all these gay men who were about as far from political as you could imagine. I mean, there wasn't a political bone in their bodies, but they were really nice and they were really helpful and it was sort of this community we moved into.

So I would go back and forth to San Francisco. Along the way my study groups demanded that I join the working class or get out because [laughter], and I still believed this, said "OK, what working class jobs can I do," they said "How about a gay bar?' so I became a janitor at a gay bar and renounced my bourgeoisie privilege and thought "Oh, this is like shitty, this is so bad, I don't, I'm not gonna," so, but I really, this was my group, you know, so I decided, well, I'll become a bartender and that was still the working class, and I made more money being a bartender than I've ever made in my life, and that's how we got the money to buy the homestead, to buy the land and move up to Mendocino. So I was still going down to the city a couple of days a week to tend bar at the gay bar.

LS: How long did you do that for?

KB: Three to four years, 76 to 79, three years. And we built the house, and I really wanted to live there and there were no jobs, I mean it's wilderness, so we don't, we still don't have electricity, or I don't have electricity. And I got a job—this is when my anthro degree came in, it was helpful—I got a job with the state health department doing cancer epidemiology for rural northern California, and I could live there, and I only had to go down to Berkeley like every few weeks, turn in paperwork and get new assignments. It was pretty cool. So Greg was a carpenter and I was a health worker. Then he got AIDS and died. That was just a really awful time. Everybody got AIDS and died. I didn't, but everybody else did.

LS: Both on the mountain and in San Francisco.

KB: The mountain was decimated more than the city. I mean, the city was bad enough but on the mountain there were only two of us left from that time. There are only two and it's really—they're all dead. Not just moved away, they're dead.

So anyway, there were some contradictions about living on the mountain, like you didn't have anybody to talk to, there was nothing to do, you went nuts, you had each other, and a friend of mine down in Ukiah, which is the only town of any size in the county—she's a social worker—said "We're organizing to get Sacramento State to come up and do a program, a distance program in social work, you could get an MSW, it's a really marketable degree." I said, "Oh, well, I don't like social workers," she said "Well just come to the organizing meeting because we need twelve bodies or they won't come and talk to us," I said "OK, I'll do that," so I come and—it's all women mainly, one other guy—they were all really nice, they were incredibly nice, and we sort of spoke the same language, and at the end I said "Oh. I'll do this," people to talk to, you get a marketable degree, it's cheap, I said "Oh, I'm in for it," and we were the second distance education program in the country, approved, and we bonded, there were, we grew to like 18 people but it was forty units, it was one weekend every month, ten hour days, they would send people from Sacramento and teach us.

And it was during that period Greg died and it was also during that period that I became an AIDS social worker. And I was a social worker at the AIDS outpatient clinic at the General in San Francisco. And it was also during that period Greg died and I totally burned out on it. I did my Master's thesis on AIDS and psychic trauma and burned out.

People said "Well, why don't you go back to school," I said where would I go, what would I do, I was at a social work conference and SSA from the University of Chicago was there, I looked at their catalog and said "Well, do you think I could do this?" They said "Oh yeah," they said, "and we have money," well, they said "what did you do for your Master's," and I told them, they said "Oh, there's money for that" and they gave me a full NMIH fellowship, they gave me scads of money to come back and go to school so I came back. And Jim and Kevin who live here were incredibly supportive, and everybody

was dead, and they weren't, they didn't have AIDS either, so I thought, oh, I might as well start over, go back to Chicago. And I did. I was, I had a great time, my second time. It was great.

LS: Where did you live that time around?

[01:04:48]

KB: Here? Oh, 58th and Blackstone. I bought an apartment.

LS: Back to Hyde Park. So it was a good time the second time around…

KB: Well, what was weird was the homophobia at SSA. SSA was incredibly homophobic even though there were lesbians in charge, closeted lesbians. They didn't allow gay papers in the lobby. [LS: Not at all.] Not at all. And I said "Why is this?" And Margaret Rosenheim, the former dean, explained that there were naked men in it, and they couldn't, and I said, "Well, all gay papers have naked men, you know? So it goes with the territory," and they took them out and said "Yes, we don't allow them." I just, like, blew up. You know, this is gay culture, for better or worse. I just found SSA incredibly difficult.

LS: Were people… could you study anything that had to do with gay life?

KB: If you went across the Midway. [LS: OK. But not at SSA.] I ended up going to Divinity. I ended up doing most of my coursework in the Divinity School. With this homophobic pig who's brilliant, Don Browning, pastoral—oh, he's really good, but he hated, he told me he prayed for me every night. This was the 90s, you know?

LS: What were you studying at the Divinity School?

KB: Critical theory of the family. He's like the best in the country. He was incredibly good. But I didn't, I mean, I had been immersed in this gay environment, where [LS: Everyone was gay.] everyone was gay. San Francisco, New York, and it was accepted. And I come back to this world-class school that is, I couldn't believe the homophobia. It was so bad, and when you would point it out to them, they would say, oh, we don't think so. And it didn't get any better. Finally SSA was in danger of losing its accreditation because of its lack of diversity in its curriculum, CSWE, and they just poo-poohed the whole idea, said like "We don't need to be accredited by them," and indeed they did.

LS: What did lack of diversity in the curriculum mean?

KB: There was, if you wanted to read about anything gay, it wasn't there. If you wanted to read about anything about the oppression of women, it wasn't there. They were getting better on black people but not too good. [LS: I mean, given where they are…] This was the 90s. [LS: So no wonder you took all of your coursework elsewhere.] Well, one of the attractive things about SSA's doctoral program, you were required to do a third of your

coursework in another professional school, so you could do law, business, most of them did some other social science, but I just happened on divinity. I was looking for family courses and SSA didn't have any. They had one expert Fredmore Walsh, you did her once and you were done, but the Divinity school had amazing courses on critical theory of the family, so I went over there and I had a, it was a really interesting time.

LS: Were there other gay and lesbian students in SSA while you were there?

KB: Oh yeah, and this was the other—the advisor for the gay group was Elsie Kingston, who just recently died, and for every positive speaker on homosexuality, we had to have a speaker who was negative, and she was [LS: For the gay group?] For the gay group.

LS: The gay and lesbian SSA students? [KB: Exactly.] That's crazy. [KB: It was beyond crazy.] In 1990.

KB: It was beyond crazy. For a while they couldn't get any faculty person to co-sponsor it. The assistant dean was well-known to be gay. She's incredibly homophobic, a nice person… you know, I wasn't ready for it. But my faculty advisor was gay, but not, people sort of knew, I mean, I think they knew, they assigned me to him because they thought he would be the best, but it wasn't, I mean, he was like fairly closeted, and I just wasn't ready for this. So it wasn't what I expected. Although academically it was superb.

LS: Yeah. In the Divinity school, were there…

KB: There were more gay people. There was an openly gay Divinity school group but these were mainly twenty-somethings who talked about theory that I didn't know what they were talking about, and it was cute, but it was like, I don't know what they're talking about, they're twenty years younger than I…

LS: Did you almost feel like the Divinity school was a more welcoming place than SSA at that point?

KB: I didn't think anything was too welcoming. [LS: Nothing seemed too welcoming.] No, and Stuart's group was just getting off the ground then, but they were talking modern language talk, and again I didn't know what they were talking about. It was very academic, it was far removed from experience. George Chauncey was here, he was interesting. Gil Herdt was here, he was interesting. You had these openly gay academics but they were so academic. Gil Herdt… has he come up in your [LS: Gil Herdt hasn't, Chauncey has.] Gil Herdt will come up, he was in the 80s and the 90s.

LS: What did he teach?

KB: He was the Chair of Human Development, as I recall. The Committee on Human Development, and he made his name in the 70s by doing anthropological studies of the sexual behavior in the South Seas. He was sort of like Margaret Mead updated but there

were openly gay components. He's a trip, anyway, you'll run into him. He's at San Francisco State now.

And then I found this niche over at the Center for Clinical and Medical Ethics at Billings. I fell in there. They were great, I had a fabulous time. The University was like a minefield even in the 90s for gay stuff. It shouldn't have been that way, it was just like a minefield. Nobody guided me, how did I find it? Oh, I know, Bernice Neugarten. Has she come up at all?

LS: I am vaguely aware…

KB: She's sort of like the mother of modern gerontology. She took so many gay men under her wing, never as like "You poor oppressed gay man," but like "Of course what you're saying is valid, and here's where you belong." Sort of this problem solver, and she's the one who steered me over to the Center for Clinical and Medical Ethics.

LS: What were they doing at that Center at that point?

KB: It was people from around the world they would invite to hang out for a week and finish up book chapters or write articles, and you basically got a thousand bucks a month for bullshitting and having a really good time and editing other people's work in a really collegial, I mean, this is the best that the U of C can do. It was amazing, all these people from around the world who were brilliant and you edited each other, you talked. This was the high point of my academic career, I knew it would go downhill from there, but it was great.

LS: You said earlier that you were here for ten years, right, the second time, 89 to 99, so what was your thesis on, do you write a thesis in [KB: Oh yeah.], okay, what did you write on?

KB: I started out doing AIDS, that's what I got the NMIH fellowship to do, and I'd written it up, and I was literally on a plane to the San Francisco Department of Public Health to present it, and I said "I really hate this work," and I did, and I went through "I don't want to do this," it was, I was looking at case management practices for managing HIV infection, and it's like "Oh god, I don't want to do this."

LS: Was it like an emotional burnout at that point?

KB: What it was, I was sick of AIDS. It was also a sort of clinical thing, it was like a statistical thing that didn't come easy, statistics don't come easy to me but I can do it, it was uninteresting, it would guarantee me a bureaucratic job at like a mid-level wage… I'm thinking "I don't think so," and I was burnt out. And Bernice Neugarten is sort of there at this point saying "Old people are where it's at, [laughter] Old people!" She took me to a GSA conference, the Gerontological Society of America, she's sort of like a god figure, and sheperded me around, I said, "Oh, these people are so nice," and she said "I told you," and she just took me under her wing and mentored me in gerontology, which was like the furthest thing from what I wanted to do.

And it all came together in the 80s, sort of as my memorial to Greg, I wrote a rural case management plan that was, I didn't think it would be adopted but it was, in California, and it became the model for California's rural case management, and the agency I wrote it under, in Ukiah, had all the aging contracts for all the counties up there, and I approached my old boss, who liked me, because I wrote her this grant that got her gazillions of dollars, said "You know, can I do my doctoral research here on your old program?" What I wanted to do was religion and spirituality and mental health because when I was at the AIDS clinic I just noticed that people who had religious and spiritual practices reacted really differently to their diagnoses and their health. She said "Oh sure, that sounds great." So I did.

So I wrote—Bernice said, "You know, this isn't going to help your career, you don't talk about God and get advanced." This is like early, mid 90s. I said, "Yeah, but it's what I really want to do, I know it's true," and I had trouble getting it through the IRB at the U of C. It took six months. They really did not want to approve it because it was looking at spirituality and they kept trying to reduce it to psychological needs, but I was like no, it's not that. Finally I found this standardized normed instrument that had been used and they said OK, you can use that. And you know, I didn't expect this. Now it's sort of like a hot topic to do religion, spirituality, mental health but then it wasn't. So I did it, I did a large-scale quantitative study of poor, fragile people and how religion and spirituality influenced their health. It was a great dissertation and it sailed through my committee. I mean, once I did it it just sailed through. But I didn't really want to finish it because I knew that then I would have to get into the whole academic—which I wasn't suited for.

LS: Right. So you stuck around as long as you could?

KB: No, what had happened in 1994—I had finished all my coursework, I was fellowing—a friend at the University of Minnesota who taught me here, who was a good mentor, Helen Kivnick—said the University just got this grant for distance education, and you're ideal because you have all this experience. What I was working my way, part of my grant from the NMIH was the assistant field director at SSA, so I went all over Chicago setting up clinical internships, and I did it well. Minnesota wanted to do it in five states. Plus I had a degree in distance education, my Master's, they hired me on the spot to start their program so I moved to Minneapolis while I was still technically a doctoral student here and started their program.

LS: So you were there from like 95 to 99…

KB: From 94 to—I'm still there. From 94 on I taught full time and was the field director at Minnesota but would come here often enough to keep my committee at bay. Finally I said, this is approaching ten years…

LS: Yeah, they like to kick people out around that…

KB: Well, the other thing I had, and the reason I got away with it, the chairs on my committee were either not given tenure and left, just outright… I had five chairs and they would, so they didn't blame me for it so much, but I sort of picked these marginal people cause they were interesting and indeed they were marginal, they didn't stick around. So I finally finished up, I graduated in December of 99, ten years after I came.

LS: And that brings us almost up to the present. What did you do after you… you stuck around in Minnesota?

KB: About the time I graduated they eliminated my program. [LS: In Minnesota.] In Minnesota. It was very successful, so successful they started nodes in the cities we used to do interactive television out of, and they stuck me in regular faculty, which I'm really not suited for. After three years of complete boredom I quit. I just took an early buyout and left, it was really, it wasn't bad, but it was so boring, the pay was so bad, the students were less than stellar. I had found that at Minnesota I could teach in the Honors College basically for free, they gave you three thousand bucks a year for professional development, but I had these brilliant students, like U of C students, and I could teach whatever I wanted to. And then they eliminated that program. So I just quit, and I went back to my homestead.

LS: In Mendocino. And now you split your time between there and Wisconsin?

KB: Yeah. Well, the other thing is that two years after I quit, another university recruited me to start a social work program, and I did, and it was great. After two years they realized they couldn't make money off of it so they fired the entire faculty, and then I moved back to the ranch for good, so that's where…

LS: And that's where you are now.

KB: Yeah, except I still live in Minneapolis in the winter.

LS: OK. Minneapolis in the winter?

KB: The part of California I live in gets more snow than Minneapolis, a lot more. It's not as cold, but…

LS: I guess cause you're in northern, rural California. And you said, you still don't have electricity, so better to winter elsewhere. Alright.

So… wow, I feel like I've had so much information, thank you so much. Is there anything I've forgotten to ask about that you would want to say, want people to know? It sounds like you still keep in touch with a lot of the people who were in your undergrad experience at the U of C, I mean, Murray, certainly Murray…

KB: Oh, and part of the reason I stay in Minneapolis are three people I went to the College with who were among my closest friends. Joan, who would only date black men, who

doesn't remember it, who now has an endowed chair at Minnesota. Brian, who's the curator of the state history museum, and his wife Amy, who met the same week I met my first love, Orientation Week, and they're together, forty-some years later, and they have two gay kids. [Laughter] So it's really interesting. It's also interesting to see how my peers react to their gay children, so much different than—oh, and Joan has a gay daughter, I forgot about Rebecca. Yeah, a lot of gay kids.

LS: What do you think are the differences between your generation and then, how you're seeing them react to their kids now?

KB: Support, just support. The other weird thing, that I don't get, is how important it is to my peers to have their kids married off to same-gender persons. It's like, I don't get that, but gay marriage is extremely important to my peers. I mean, I can take it or leave it, but it seems pretty important to straight people that their gay kids get married.

LS: Interesting. So it's never, you never recall it as being something that was important to you.

KB: Marriage? Oh, we wrote a paper about it! [LS: Against marriage?] Oh yeah, I found it, I said "Murray, do you remember this paper we wrote? I found it, about how marriage is the worst thing in the world and how we as gay people have found better ways." I sort of remember that, and…

LS: Was this one of your position papers?

KB: Yeah, and I've been really ambivalent about gay marriage. I certainly wouldn't oppose it, but… and then last week I had this revelation. I have a 97-year-old uncle, whose 99-year-old wife died last year. He was totally devoted to her. He was like—he was 96—since she died, he has no reason to live, he's going to die now, so I'm thinking, you know, marriage is a social good. It really is, and whatever you think about it, it's OK. Just to see how rapidly he has disintegrated not having her to care and love…

I don't know, it's sort of like this catharsis when I quit being a Marxist, which was like going into a Costco and seeing these mounds of consumer goods, you think "There's never going to be a revolution."

LS: When did you quit being a Marxist?

KB: October of 84. I remember. It was the Redwood City Costco, I was like oh my god, there's not going to be a revolution. It was like mounds of cheap, high-quality consumer goods. What a fool you've been. No revolution.

And it was sort of the same catharsis I had last week about gay marriage, like it's pretty, it's fine, you know… but we did have these position papers about how it was a patriarchal institution, it oppressed women, and anyway, they're quite self-righteous.

LS: We need to move beyond it, and stuff… do you think, that's interesting, because of course your generation's parents never would have thought oh, we want our kids to get married off to same gender partners, and now you do see it, like I know my friends' parents, same thing, like "Oh, well you'll get married to your lesbian partner, that's great," and it is kind of an interesting thing, a very recent development.

KB: It's really bizarre. And Joan, Joan has become very religious, too, and it was very important that her daughter's partner convert to Judaism. [LS: Oh wow.] And she is, she's going to court, and then it set off these contradictions cause Joan and Michael are part of a conservative congregation that doesn't really support that, so they had to change their Jewish identity to accommodate their family, it's like really interesting. But getting married, being a Jew is really important to them, and they'll find a congregation that accepts their new gay daughter-in-law.

[01:25:39]

LS: I know you mentioned a long time ago that you were raised Roman Catholic. Do you, are you still Catholic, or?

KB: You know, it's hard-wired. One of the things I found in my research, by the time you're three it's hard-wired, it's not going away. So no, I don't go to church, but when I think about how I make moral decisions, it's pure Catholic, and it's not going away. The morning Greg died I found myself at my local parish church that I had no consciousness of existing, but I, when he died I immediately knew how to get there, and I went there. About halfway through I'm thinking, "This is a really bad idea," [laughter], but then it was really important.

LS: Yeah, it was a space you gravitated to.

KB: Yeah, plus my family, who I really love, my extended family are heavy-duty Catholic, like liberal, left-wing Catholics, but Catholic, and it pains them I don't go to church. We don't talk about it anymore.

LS: Do I have any other questions? Anything else?

KB: I didn't think it would turn out this way. I didn't think I would have gay sisters, I didn't think my peers would have gay children that they're incredibly supportive of, I didn't think everybody'd be dead. I thought I would be poor. It just didn't…

LS: If 22-year-old Kevin could see…

KB: Oh, it just didn't turn out, you know, I'm thinking… I would have no idea what's going to happen.

LS: Yeah. Thank you.

KB: You're welcome. Thank you. Oh, you know one thing I should say? The University of Chicago has been incredibly important to me and how I figured everything out, how I first figured out I wasn't gay, to go into Harper and book after book telling me I was sick.

LS: So you just sort of checked out the books that said Homosexuality and opened them and said, "That's not me."

KB: And I trusted the University so much and I knew they would never steer me wrong, so I'm like, "Oh, I'm straight!" You know, really accepting authority, that's a Catholic thing. When I came back in 89 the first thing I went to was Regenstein and looked at books on homosexuality. It was fine. I went to the SSA, it was about half and half. They still had all the stuff that every library in the country has thrown out as total nonsense, unscientific. They had that stuff. I asked them to take it out. [LS: Did they ever while you were there?] They refused. [LS: I'll have to go over and see if it's still there.] Oh, I removed them. [LS: You removed them.] I just stole them, just stole them, burned them. [LS: And they weren't gonna buy them again.] You know? And they knew it, and I got demerit points I bet, but I'm thinking this is totally debunked stuff, it's Socarides and Bieber from the 60s and 50s. It was like I couldn't…

LS: Was it Murray who did this early action where he ran onto David Ruben's TV show?

KB: Yes. And I did that too. [LS: Oh, were you also there?] Hannah, Murray and I took all the books. We asked the University bookstore to remove them and they said no. [LS: This was, David Ruben's book was being sold in the University bookstore.] Not only sold, it was like the corner display looking out on the street [LS: in the window], yeah, and we nicely asked them, they said no, so we stole them, we just took them, and they said "Oh, you're going to get in trouble for this," but anyway, back to my thing about the University. It's been incredibly supportive without meaning to be so, just figuring out stuff. The people I've met here are among my best friends. Jim I've known for over forty years. We agree on very little politically but all my closest friends are from the U of C. They're all around the world. And I still have my apartment on 58th and Blackstone, I still think I'm going to move back into it, but I'm not.

LS: Are you subletting it?

KB: I'm letting it go. It's stupid for me to think I'm moving back. The Dean of Curriculum at SSA was a really close friend of mine, not really close, but a good friend, and said whenever you want to come back and teach, you know, we can't get you on the faculty, but you can teach whatever you want to, and last year I decided I did, and I went back, and her retirement party was the day before, and I'm thinking, well, that bridge is burned too. So I'm done, I'm done with U of C in its current iteration. But it's been incredibly, sort of like an anchor for me to measure stuff, to know that really smart people can do really stupid things over and over again, and that it attracts people who are incredibly interesting.

LS: Thank you. Thank you so much.

KB: Thank you.

[1:30:47]
End of Interview.