

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #6
DALY, ROBERT (1948-) AM 1973**

At U of C: June 1971- September 1973

Interviewed: 2012 (1 session)

Interviewer: Ash Mayo

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

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Interview (November 2, 2012) in Chicago, IL.

[00:00:00]

A: So we have something of a script that I'll probably look at occasionally... the first question on it is, why the U of C?

RD: Why the U of C? Well, I went to undergraduate school in my hometown of Erie, Pennsylvania. It was a small Catholic college, and we used to call it the small Catholic college for small Catholic minds, and I graduated with a degree in English, came out to Chicago for a job, and after six months transferred to another job with the state of Illinois as a social worker, case worker, welfare case worker, and at the time, this was 1970, 1971, the State of Illinois would pay for a graduate degree in social work for people working for them. They would pay part of your tuition and a stipend and the only restriction was you had to work for them for two years after you graduated, so I said OK. You could go to three schools, you could go to Loyola in Chicago, you could go to Washington University in St. Louis, or you could go to the University of Chicago, and I said, what the hell, I'm going to go to the University of Chicago. It's the only place I applied and I got accepted, and I knew the school by reputation, I sort of wanted to get revenge for having gone to where I did for undergraduate school [laughter], and that's how I ended up here.

AM: Was it a good experience?

RD: Overall it was a very good experience. It was scary to me when I got accepted I thought maybe they made a mistake and it really was a whole different world than the one I had been used to, but overall a very positive experience.

AM: Could you talk about some of the ways it was different?

RD: It was different that... okay, I grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, which is a city of about a hundred thousand people, I actually grew up outside of Erie in a small town of four

thousand people, and I came to Chicago in 1969 so I was transformed from this small town, small city boy to a big city boy.

Also I was dealing with my sexuality at the time. Until I came to Chicago I didn't have any sexual experience of any sort whatsoever. I felt that I couldn't really express myself back in small town Pennsylvania in the late 1960s. I came out here and felt the freedom I had to really explore myself, my own life and my sexuality and then coming to the University of Chicago I really wanted that sort of academic challenge that I felt I had never had before, and I wanted that credential, you know, that was important to me too.

AM: What was the social life like as a graduate student?

RD: Very, very open. I really focused pretty much on the gay community at that time. I didn't socialize too much with people at the School of Social Service Administration where I went. I was there to get my degree, personally, socially I was more interested in the gay community as it existed at that time, and I use the word gay advisedly because in my experience it really was men, it was gay men. I was just thinking about that, I don't recall really socializing with any women at the time, probably some bisexual people, no transgendered people at the time, and the term we used at the time was Gay Liberation and that sort of how was we defined ourselves, you know, newly empowered gay people coming out. That was my social life, and this would have been the fall of 1971 when I started here.

The United Church of Christ had just opened its coffeehouse on Friday nights to gay men and Friday night was Gay Night, and you could go there and it was a unique experience at the time because it was probably one of the first places in Chicago where gay men could go and socialize that wasn't a bar. So this was something new, I had come out in November of '70, come out, you know had my first sexual experience and came out as a gay man and up to coming down here my whole experience socially, my social life had been meeting people in bars, which I really wasn't too keen on, I'm not a bar sort of person. I like intense, intimate conversations with one or two people and not running around in a bar, so I came down here and immediately felt very much at home with the community down here and going to the—well, I guess it's still called the Blue Gargoyle, that's what we knew it at the time as, the Blue Gargoyle coffeehouse.

AM: Where is that? Because I...

RD: 57th and University. The United Church of Christ. Right across from Reynolds Club. So it's in Hyde Park, right off campus, and it was amazing, you could go in and , you know, it was a big room, the lights were up, as opposed to a bar, you could meet people, undergraduates, and graduates, they served coffee and soda, cookies, but then there was somewhat of a bar scene after the Gargoyle closed a bunch of us would go to Jimmy's on 55th Street and there is a back room that sort of became a de facto gay bar on Friday nights after we had been to the Gargoyle.

AM: How big was the community here?

RD: Hard to give an estimate. I'd say I knew, knew or knew of, about a hundred people, probably more, that were open and active, you know, through all parts of the University, undergraduates, graduates, instructors, community residents who weren't necessarily affiliated with the University. It was a good-sized community.

AM: OK. Huh. What... did you have a concentration in the SSA?

RD: Yeah. My concentration was called Social Welfare Policy, which was focused on how do you run social programs. I found that more to my liking than doing one-on-one casework. SSA at the time was really changing their focus from very traditional social work with individuals and with families, they were getting into community work, advocacy-type things focusing onto minority groups and communities.

There really wasn't a focus at the time on any specifically, anything that had to do with lesbian, gay, transgender, whatever at SSA, that was more—well, there weren't any programs at all. What was happening was for the first time you could be a student or an instructor and just let it be known, or be known in the community as "I'm a gay person," but there weren't any programs at the time. But to get back to SSA they did have a social welfare policy sequence that I got into and found interesting and actually led me into a career in managing government programs with the state of Illinois and then I spent thirty, thirty-four years with the federal government in various capacities. The last twenty-five years I was with the program that runs the Medicaid and Medicare programs, so I found the education I got actually served me well in my career.

AM: Were there any professors there that particularly influenced you?

RD: There was, and I really don't remember their names, there was a woman who taught statistics and she did it with an understanding that most people in the social sciences hate numbers, and so she would, it was like statistics for people who couldn't deal with numbers, so she was very gentle with us. [laughter] I remember her.

I also had a chance to take a course in the history department, and I took a course from a professor who taught the history, the antecedents of the New Deal, you know, social programs in America, government programs in the 1920s and 30s and I found that very interesting. The social work courses I took, well, the first year you really did traditional social work and a field placement, and I didn't really find that all that engaging. I had been actively working as a welfare worker for over a year and a half when I came here and I found many of the other students had come straight from undergraduate school and really didn't have that work experience that I had, and I found there was sort of a disconnect between what the social work instructors were saying and what I had experienced in, working on the West Side of Chicago at that time we used to make home visits for people on public, well it was general assistance, aid to families with dependent children, you had to make a home visit, I was in the community knocking on doors and, you know, crawling around in housing projects and things like that, and I found that my experience didn't quite jibe with the theoretical aspect of the program.

AM: I've heard that a lot from people who...

RD: And at the time I wasn't too confident in my ability to go to an instructor and say well this is what I really experienced and it's different, I just sort of sat there and said well, I don't agree with this, but I didn't really know you could say anything, you know, I wasn't that sort of a student at the time.

AM: Fair. The next part, if you don't mind, is when, when exactly, did you start realizing you were gay?

RD: Oh, when I was about nine years old! I had gone, my parents sent me to a summer camp for a week, and it was like boys-only, and I was nine, and I realized, you know, hey! I feel that I'm attracted to these guys, and at first I found that very pleasurable to think about, I didn't take any action on anything, you know, and then as I grew older, I grew up in an environment where the concept of homosexuality was non-existent, it was not talked about. Growing up in a very strict Catholic environment, any sexuality at all, outside of marriage, was a sin, not to be thought of. The concept was, if you were a Catholic at that time, if you think about sexuality, you're committing a sin, you know, so I was very traumatized by that, and I really repressed it, all the way through my teen years and until I came to Chicago at the age of twenty-one. I really directed my, you know, you have all that psychic energy when you're a teenager, it has to come out somehow, sexual energy, psychosexual energy, and I really repressed that and focused that into my hobby, which is railroads, and I was very active in the local, not toy trains, big trains, local railroad club, I sort of led a movement to preserve the old depot in our hometown as a museum and a clubhouse and it's still there today, and I'm still a member after all these years, but I really didn't deal with sexuality at all. In my senior year in college I began to sort of feel that I needed to do something, and then I moved to Chicago and really still didn't do anything. My first job in Chicago was with General Electric in advertising, and that certainly was not an environment in 1969 where you would want to even hint that you were gay or lesbian or whatever. That only lasted seven months. I felt very, it wasn't the job for me, and I switched from corporate advertising into welfare work, which I immediately felt at home at, working for the State of Illinois, in Chicago, and I began to feel more free, more comfortable.

I sort of dated women, not, never had any relationships with a woman, but I would go out with a couple of women, one or two, and through one of the women, named Charmaine, I met her friend Charles who was very flamboyantly openly gay and he was the first openly gay man that I had met. This would have been like the fall of 1970 and I really then, I was at the point of saying I have to do something about this, and I can tell you the date, it was November 18, 1970, I went over and knocked on Charles' door, and he said "Hi," and I said "I think I'm gay, what do I do about it," and he said "Come here," and that was my first sexual experience and I felt this great sense of relief, you know, that this is who I really am, you know, this is OK. Having done that, then I had to deal with the gay community, which was a totally alien experience to me. I had not known any openly gay people growing up, certainly in Erie, Pennsylvania there wasn't any, even in terms of

the 1960s there wasn't a gay bar or anything like that, and I found that very alienating. I felt that I was in a play that everybody knew the script but me, because gay men then, as gay and lesbian people do now, have their own frame of reference, I didn't have that frame of reference, and I would meet people and start trying to talk with them, I had no idea what they were talking about. It turns out the language, the whole *gestalt*, I felt like a Martian. And it was very, after the initial experience of coming out, and saying okay, I'm a gay man, and getting a fair amount of acceptance from family members and friends, then I had to deal with this gay culture, which was really hard. It was sort of funny, after I came out I went back to Erie and met some friends from college, and I said "I have something to tell you..." and I said, "I'm gay," and they looked at me and said "Yeah, well we wondered when you were going to figure that out." [laughter] I said "Oh great," you know, so they were cool about it, but coming to Hyde Park, and being able to associate with people at the University, sort of, and then the coffeehouse, the [Blue] Gargoyle coffeehouse, it really was a very comfortable place for me to be in because it was gay but it was a gay community that I could identify with, these were people, you know, with some educational background, and whose life really wasn't focused on the bar scene so much. They were here for other purposes, we were all here together for another purpose, and so I really felt, that was like my second stage of coming out, to move to Hyde Park, attend the University, and then getting to meet this newly open and out gay community here in Hyde Park.

[15:17]

AM: Did the institution ever do anything that seemed to lean pro- or anti-gay at the time?

RD: Not... there was one thing that I remember. Certainly there was nobody running around saying "Oh, you know, gay people, you can't have gay people and all that," it was almost like knocking on an open door once we said "We're here," you know, like "oh... okay."

The one thing I do remember is I had to go to the University Health Clinic for something, and when I went back for a follow-up visit, I happened to see my chart on the doctor's table, and there was a big red H on it. [laughter], which meant H for homosexual, so I have this in memory. I'd be interested if anybody else validates that memory, but I very clearly remember that, that you were sort of branded that way. I'm sure that disappeared fairly shortly after that, but this would have been 1971 or '72 that at least in some parts of the medical profession they still felt necessary to identify you with a big red H [laughter].

AM: That's a pretty big marker.

RD: Yeah, you know, there it is on your medical record, and this was before privacy acts and everything else. Who knows who saw it. At the time I just remarked on it, it didn't really bother me, I thought, well if they want to know, and they know, that's fine with me, I didn't really care, you know, but just to have this on your medical record, in retrospect I look back and say "Oh my god, what were they doing?"

AM: So you said you came out to some friends, at what point did you come out to family, where in that progression?

RD: In the summer of '71, my favorite aunt and uncle came out to visit me and stayed with me, and they met some of my friends, my newfound gay friends, and went out to dinner, and [laughter], and they went back to Erie, and then I wrote Aunt Grace a letter about it later and said "Well, I'm glad you came out and visited me, by the way, you must know from my environment and my friends that I am a homosexual, and thank you for being so nice about it," and then I went home at Christmas to see them, and my uncle was sort of like "Well, okay," my Aunt Grace said "I didn't know you were a communist," and I said, "No, I'm not a communist, I'm a homosexual, I'm gay," I said "Why did you think I was a communist?" Well, God love her, two things, one is, when she stayed at my apartment I was reading a biography of Lenin, and second of all, when she was in nursing school in the 1930s, she had a friend who was a lesbian and a communist, so therefore, if you were an alternative, gay or lesbian, then you must be communist, so I had to explain to Aunt Grace that no, just because I'm gay didn't mean I was a red revolutionary.

Shortly after that I wrote a letter to my parents. I always felt more comfortable writing than speaking face-to-face, and my dad had an interesting reaction. I went home to see them, I said "Well, did you get the letter," and he said "Yeah," and he said, in the language of a middle-aged working class man of 1971, "Well, you're free, white, and 21. Do what you want." My mother, in her way, was like "Where did I go wrong, it's all my fault," you know, my mother...

Interestingly enough, after that, I found out my mother's older sister, my Aunt Elizabeth, who I loved and respected very much, she had died in her late 50s, and she was a very quiet, closeted lesbian. Never discussed with the family, but she never married, she had her lady friend that she would go on trips with and stuff like that. She, after she died we found poems that she had written about the blessed Virgin Mary visiting the dormitory at a girl's boarding school and patting the girls on the head, so all these like, lesbian images and things like that.

So you know, I came out to my parents, they accepted it sort of as I figured they would, I had a younger brother who said he didn't want to think about it, but now he's fine with it. I had sisters at the time who were ten years old, so they didn't process it, but now I have a very close relationship with my brother and my sisters, so.

AM: This is sort of veering away. The awkward question we have to ask is whether or not you ever had any romantic relationships at the U of C. You don't have to answer, but...

RD: I had lots of relationships. If people ask me what I remember most about Hyde Park it was the sex. It was really good! [laughter] And of course I was like, I'm twenty-two, I'm twenty-three, all this pent-up sexual energy is exploding in me. I had a lot of sex. I did have a sort of relationship, and that was with a guy from New York City who came out to visit a student here, and we met and hooked up and for about nine months carried on a long-distance relationship and then I realized it wasn't quite for me. Also at the time I

was really not comfortable, I sort of wanted to be in a relationship but I didn't realize what that meant in terms of a commitment. My idea of a relationship was, okay, we've defined ourselves as in a relationship now, we'll each go our separate way, and you know, I didn't realize the intimacy and the closeness that that meant, and frankly it took me years to figure that out.

I can't say I ever had too many good models of any sort of relationships in my family. My parents were the sort that got married because that's what people did in the 1940s, you got married and you had children, and that's what they were supposed to do, in terms of intimacy or how do you interact with each other, I never had too many good role models of that as a kid, so it took me a long time, and that was very hard to figure out for me.

[21:52]

AM: Did you meet the people at the Blue Gargoyle?

RD: Yeah, we would meet there, or we'd meet at the back room of Jimmy's or something like that, you know, and then go someplace, or whatever, and then through them met other people. There was, there was a, pre-Gay-Liberation, the way people met at the University was through the men's room at Harper Library, a very traditional way for gay men to meet each other. Are you familiar with the term tearoom? A tearoom is a men's bathroom, which was known to be a meeting place for men who wanted to have sex with each other, either in the bathroom or then they could set themselves, it's what a tearoom is. Never did that, I never, and there's this whole, you know, subculture of bathroom sex, which I never, that's not why I went to a bathroom [laughter], I don't want to have sex in the bathroom! But prior to something like the Gargoyle, I mean, literally that was probably the only place in this area where gay men could meet knowing that they would make approaches and find out if the other person was gay and have a sexual, you know, one-off sexual thing. I'm sure there were relationships between men, it's just not something that was discussed, you didn't bring your partner to a campus function or anything like that.

AM: Were there any active organizations that you found on campus that were queer or gay-related?

RD: No, okay, yeah, yeah, yeah! I'm trying to remember the date of this, it was probably sometime in '72 over at Ida Noyes Hall, and I forget how it got started, but we had a helpline. Up under the roof in Ida Noyes, we had a little room, about this size, and Friday nights there was a number that we published, and you could, a person could call and talk to somebody, an openly gay person about their sexuality. Probably one of the earliest gay helplines in the country, I'm talking 1972, 73 here.

It was pretty... there was no training, like, if you want to volunteer, sure, and then you were there, and then when the phone rang you picked it up and said "Hi," you know, and it was sanctioned by the University. This was a space rented to this group that wanted to provide a helpline for gay people, gay men. We were not sophisticated at all, if somebody

called up and said “I think I’m gay,” like, our response would be “Yay! Tell everybody, tell the world!” while not really realizing that maybe you were calling from downstate Illinois and couldn’t do that, but we actually had calls from all over the state, as I recall. So that was probably the first University-sanctioned sort of supportive thing down here, and thing other than the Gargoyle, which was church-supported.

AM: Did you come across a group called “Queers and Associates?”

RD: No, I don’t remember that.

A: Okay. We’re trying to find out when exactly it started, ‘cause it still runs, and we’ve heard it may be like thirty years old.

RD: Really. Well, I left Hyde Park in ‘73, so I’m talking antediluvian here, very old.

A: Not very old. Are you still in contact with any of the people that you met here?

RD: Not really, no. I came to Hyde Park to go to graduate school, and I’ve never been an educational hanger-on, I wanted to get my degree and then move on with life. Did not particularly enjoy living in Hyde Park at the time, there was a lot of crime, it was physically isolated from the rest of the city. If you didn’t take the Metra Electric...or the bus, and you didn’t have a car, as I did not, you were sort of stuck down here, and I really wanted to move back to the North Side, which I did in September of ‘73. So I was down here from June of ‘71 to September of ‘73. I still go to my dentist down here in the Hyde Park Bank building, I’ve been going to him for forty years, so that’s my only contact with Hyde Park [laughter].

[26:07]

AM: Do you think your experience here as a gay man was typical of the gay men you knew?

RD: That’s really hard to say. I have to look at that in the context of my own life and my own, other than being gay, how I related to people or how I socialized with people. I’m sure there were people like me down at the University of Chicago, you know. I certainly met people who were a lot more open, or comfortable with themselves, I met couples who were already in long-term relationships, I remember two guys named John and John who as far as I know are still living out on a farm in rural Wisconsin, they moved out there. They were probably the last people I had contact with from this community but then they moved up there in the late 80s. One of them was with the Field Museum of Natural History, they have I guess a professorship there, anyway, he was a well-known and respected person at the Field Museum there. But no, I haven’t really maintained contact with anybody else down here.

AM: So you went back to the North Side after Hyde Park. Did you go back to working with the government?

RD: ...As I said, I had a commitment to work for [the State of Illinois] for two years, and I actually, well, I graduated in June of '73, I worked with them through January of 1977 and then I became a federal employee. I was with the State of Illinois Department of Public Aid and did several different things for them. One of them was in the '70s the federal government implemented the title twenty block grant program for social services and I helped them write the first state regulations on that. I would commute down to Springfield to work on that and then come back, one of the reasons that I left the state was they wanted me to move to Springfield, and I said oh God in heaven, no, and I had a job offer from the federal government at the time, at the time it was called Health, Education, and Welfare, now it's Health and Human Services, and it was a program that dealt with services to the developmentally disabled, mental health, physically handicapped, and transportation for the elderly and handicapped, that was a whole new field at the time, and I sort of worked with more and more of those programs until 1981 when Ronald Reagan became president and he started cutting back on social programs.

That was, the seventies were really the apogee of federal funding of government programs for social services, transportation, anything in that human needs area, and in 1980 when Reagan came in that was the beginning, in my experience, of what led to the Tea Party movement, that the government shouldn't do this sort of thing, it was wrong, and Reagan came in in '81 and started cutting back programs. I actually was released in '82, I was fired by the federal government, as luck would have it, I got a job at social security, another branch of the federal government, and hung in there for eighteen months until I could get back in with another human services programming agency, and then I went to what was then health care financing, it's now called the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services, and that's the agency that runs the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and I stayed with them from '83 until I retired in 2008. So I had this long career with them.

[29:54]

AM: Did your social life sort of come from your workplace throughout all of that?

RD: A little bit from my workplace, more from people I met on the North Side, you know, neighbors, friends, people I met in bars, things like that, in the community. Somewhat at work, yeah.

AM: The last part—we're breezing through this, you're a great interviewee—do you think a lot of other people from SSA went on to do what you did, work in government, or was it more focused on direct service at the time?

RD: Well, I was in the social welfare policy sequence, and if you were in that sequence, you were probably headed either to the leadership of a private agency or a position in state or federal government. There was a guy I went to, who was in my class at SSA, Jesse, I can't remember his last name, but he ended up with a very high position in state of Illinois government, like working directly for the governor's. I think he ran DCFS for a while, Department of Children and Family Services, but I'm blocking out his name now.

But yeah, so people from my sequence did end up in a lot of government jobs or administrative type jobs.

AM: What has life since retiring been like? Broad strokes, I guess.

RD: It's been interesting—I've really, I had a great career, I really liked it, I enjoyed being in the Human Services field. Not something I trained in from undergraduate, because my undergraduate degree was in English literature, you know, what do you do with that, but anyway I sort of found this career after I came to Chicago, I found I liked it, I found I could read and understand a federal regulation, which gave me a leg up, and actually had some role in writing some regulations. We're a regional office here in Chicago, one of ten, and we interact, our headquarters are in Baltimore, so we would provide input to them as they were writing new rules and regulations and implementing programs, but it just got to a point where it was time to leave, I had done everything I could, and financially I just said, I'm going to work until my retirement income can equal my earnings income, and I reached that point four years ago through something that is disappearing, which is a very good pension. The federal government to this day has a very good pension system, that's something that's disappearing, unfortunately, and that, combined with some 401K type things I was able to do through the government, has given me a really solid financial basis for retirement.

I really haven't done too much with the community. In the '80s and '90s I was with Horizons Community Services on the North Side doing helpline work for them, sort of picking up what I had done at University down here, I did that for eleven or twelve years. Personally, I'm, it's really nice to wake up in the morning and say what am I going to do today. I've been doing a lot of photography. I've done photography ever since I was like fourteen, but mostly in conjunction with my railroading hobby, like this is the front end of the train, this is the back end of the train. About three years ago I took some pictures and I started to look at them and to say well there's more here than I'd been doing, and I began focusing on the juxtaposition of the man-made environment, like the railroad track, the railroad bridge, in nature, like line-side foliage, and trees and clouds and all that, so I've been doing a lot of that, really focusing on railroad bridges. I love railroad bridges, I just came back from Pittsburgh visiting my sister and took some pictures of railroad bridges that came out really nice, so a lot of that.

I've been in a relationship for twenty-one years, and that's a real adjustment, if you've been working, and then you're home all day, my partner is fourteen years younger than me, so he's still working, but again, we have a lot more time together, and that's a hard adjustment to make, especially in my, I like to be alone, is a real contradiction with me, I like, I want to be in a relationship, I need to be in one, but I also really, really like my solitude, and that's been a thing that I've had to negotiate over the years, like okay, well, I guess we're going to go do this. [Laughter] That makes it sound very negative, but it's been a real, you know, factor with me. We have a house with a garden so I spend the summers in the garden, working on that, and right now we're remodeling our upstairs bathroom, God help us, anyway, so overall my retirement experience has been very enjoyable. We are in a gay and lesbian gardening group called the Fairy Gardeners Guild,

it's up on the North Side, and we have monthly meetings and visit each others' homes and gardens and socialize and stuff like that, so that's a lot of fun.

[35:05]

AM: Is it okay if I ask how you and your partner met?

RD: We met... I was at the Jewel at Addison and Broadway, cruising, and he was at the Jewel at Addison and Broadway on his way home from work, and we saw each other, this was 1991, and I said "Can I have your phone number?" and he said "No," and, no, that's not it, I said "Can I give you a ride home," and he said "No, but here's my phone number," and then I went home and called him and we sort of dated for a year and a half and then in April of '93 he moved into my house and so we've been going together for twenty-one years now.

AM: Do you have children, or...

RD: No. That's something, I know that's a big thing in the community now. I never had any desire to have children, partly because I felt so miserable as a kid myself I said I don't want to inflict this on anybody else, but it's not, not a need with me, I feel no desire to do it. My partner's a little more, he would be interested in having kids, but I just really don't want to, so no.

AM: Okay. And we are actually to the last question, which is why did you decide to have us do the interview with you?

RD: Well, I've always been a history buff. I love history, and it's ironic that over the past few years I've thought to myself I wish there was somebody that I could relate my experiences in Hyde Park to because it was an interesting time, you know, it was a time of growth, of excitement in some ways, in many ways, to be a gay man, that you could actually come out and be yourself and be a public person, you know, be yourself in public, and I always thought it would be really nice to share this with somebody and then providentially I made contact with the LGBT alumni association and then this came up and I said "Oh my god, this is wonderful!"

Do you want to know the really, really deep psychological reason that I like memorializing myself? Okay. This is really deep. When I was six years old I had an older brother who passed away, and he had been living, he was disabled, he had been living in a state institution, which was what they did in the 1950s, and he died there, and when he died my parents couldn't afford a grave marker and that bothered me all through my childhood, that Jimmy was gone and that nobody would remember him, would not even know where he was buried, and I had this real need to let people know that I existed, so when I was eleven I started keeping a diary, which I kept for thirty years, and started doing photography so people could remember me that way, and I've always had this whole need in my life to let people know that I existed, and one of the things I loved about my government job is all throughout the six states of Region Five in the Midwest

there are thousands and thousands of letters in nursing homes and hospitals in their files with my signature on them, so this... you just filled a need for me! [Laughter]

AM: I'm glad we could fill a need!

RD: Yeah, I felt, this has been great, so I love it.

AM: Is there anything that you... so we're doing an exhibition, and we'll probably take parts of each of the interviews just and incorporate them. Is there anything you'd like to say that in an exhibition could be worthwhile for someone reading, or trying to get a better sense of Hyde Park, or you, your experience?

RD: Anything that I've said, feel free to use it, I mean there's, you know, that. If there's anything I would really say... not really, nothing special I would want to say, other than that my time at Hyde Park and in the University was certainly a time of growth for me, a time of learning. Like all learning, it wasn't all pleasant, there were some hard lessons to be learned, and some sadness and some loneliness at the time, but overall to me it was a very positive experience, just to be able to be a gay man in this environment at the time was just incredible.

[39: 31]

AM: I lied, I have one more question. I thought of it while you were talking. How has your experience being a gay man changed over the years, because obviously public perception of LGBT issues has changed dramatically.

RD: I think it changed in the '70s, we were at the point of "Here we are," you know, and people were like "Oh, he's a homosexual, oh, okay." By the '80s it was more accepted, by the '90s even more so. The AIDS crisis was the big thing that really, ironically, gave our community much more of a voice, made us much more serious, because frankly until the AIDS crisis I think a lot of gay openness and gay identification was all about the sex and with the AIDS crisis I think it forced the community to say wait a minute, we have some issues, we need to get serious here, we need to sober up and get serious.

In the '70s if you were a gay man it was expected that you would stay out all night, dance, drink and do drugs, and have all sorts of sexual experience, and that was life. And the AIDS crisis forced especially gay men to say wait a minute, we need to take better care of ourselves, we need to look after our health, we need to look after our community, and that was the profound catalyst I think led to a sense of maturity in the gay men's community that hadn't really existed, and as a result I think the community at large had to take us more seriously.

It's really changed. When I started working at General Electric in 1969 you had to take an oath that you were neither a communist nor a homosexual. And through the late '60s, if it was known that you were a homosexual or a lesbian, you would lose your job, ironically because you were a security risk, you were a security risk because if they found

out you were gay they would fire you. So you could be blackmailed. Well, if I just say I'm gay, then who cares, you know, and that took a while to sink through.

I think it's really interesting to me that what people are fighting for now is the right to be married and have a family and all that. Coming from an era when what we were fighting for was the right not to be beaten up by the police, not that that ever happened to me, I never had any negative experiences other than a cop calling me a faggot once, but you know, that sort of went with the territory back then, so it's been a real shift, and to look back at where we've come from and where we're going.

My partner and I have talked about getting an Illinois civil union. The thing is, this is the one, the federal government was actually pretty lenient and sort of in advance of things, and especially under Bill Clinton, the president signed executive orders that allowed gays and lesbians, like if your partner was sick you could take your own sick time off to care for them. Unfortunately we also had the Defense of Marriage Act, which means that I cannot make my partner, I can't put him on my health insurance as a federal employee, and I can't make him, give him a survivor's pension on my civil service pension. Ironically enough you can do that in the state of Illinois and most major companies now, but as a federal, the federal government right now is falling behind in recognizing the rights of gays and lesbians, and the current political environment, to say the least, is not conducive to furthering that. I think we've got a way to go with the federal government. Personally I always felt very comfortable as a federal employee and at work, you know, we have a function, and they would always say "Bring Eliot," and Eliot, my partner would come and he, when they arranged my retirement party at work, they insisted on including Eliot in the planning for it, so it was a very positive thing for me, but unfortunately on the legal level of what are my rights as an individual, I don't have the rights that a straight person would have to give their survivors', that federal pension or federal insurance, which would be great. My partner has to buy his own health insurance. The irony there is that if he could be on my health insurance the long-term benefit to society would be that he's insured. As it is now, if he ever couldn't afford his own health insurance and he went to the hospital, he'd be on Medicaid, paid for by the taxpayer, but I guess the right wing feels that it is better that the taxpayer pay than that somebody have health insurance. [laughter] I don't know! The logic there escapes me, you know.

AM: I think we're done.

RD: Great! This has been very enjoyable. I used to, one of the things I did at work was a lot of public speaking, which I always used to love to do, and I can get up and give a talk about government regulation, and so...

AM: I was a happy audience, so thank you.

RD: You're welcome, and feel free to use this however you want to use it.

[45:32]

End of Interview