

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #53
DETLOFF, MADELYN (1965 -) AB 1987**

At U of C: 1983 - 1987

Interviewed: July 28th, 2013 (1 session)

Interviewer: Molly Liu

Transcript by: Molly Liu

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Interview (July 28th, 2013) in Hyde Park, Chicago, IL.

[0:00:08]

ML: Let's start off with, how did you come to the University of Chicago?

MD: Ooh, okay. Well, I—I was going to school in Fenton High School, which is in Bensenville, right next to the airport, O'Hare airport. I had gotten lots of materials from lots of universities, including University of Illinois, Northwestern. I did get the materials from the University of Chicago, was intrigued, so I came down for a visit. And on my visit, just by happenstance, I was with the admission counselor at the time, I think she's now the dean or associate dean of the law school. Her name is Ann Harvilla and she happens to be a former softball player for a state championship University of Chicago team. She was a really good pitcher back in the '70s. I happened to be a softball player, a catcher. And so we got to talking a little about sports, and it was nice because it seemed like at the University of Chicago I could do all the geeky things I wanted to do and still maybe try out for some sports teams. So I filled out all these applications, and I wound up getting an honors scholarship, which was important at the time because we couldn't afford college. My mom and my stepfather were unemployed at the time; it was during a recession. It was a recession for working people in Illinois in the '80s, at the time. Reagan was good for rich people but not so good for working people. So that helped me, getting a scholarship, but also I really loved the atmosphere here. I liked everything Chicago was about. I came in 1983. And I would say it changed my life. It changed the trajectory of my career, because it made the thinking life, the contemplative life, a possibility for me.

ML: Was it not so much a possibility for you growing up? I don't know too much about what Bensenville was like.

MD: Well, it was kind of a working-class—I would say lower-middle-class suburb. There were some upper-class people there, but not on our side of the train tracks. It didn't seem like an academic life was possible there. I mean, that was just not something people from that

neighborhood did. I was born in Chicago, I lived on the North Side when I was little. But my mom divorced when I was 5, and then was a single mom for a long time. So we...we lived in basically a lower-middle class, or working class, lifestyle for a long time, until I went to college.

ML: But yeah, were your expectations of UChicago that you formed during your visit, do you think they were met when you went there?

MD: Yes, they were! I really enjoyed the place. Now, I wasn't out when I first came, although I was a big athlete—which may or may not mean anything, given what we know about sexual orientation. But I felt like this was the place for me, where you could be a geek, you could be really into poetry and philosophy and history at a very high level. It's a beautiful place; it's a really beautiful place.

ML: Yeah. How did you get involved with softball, and did you continue it when you were here?

MD: Yes, I did. I wound up playing three sports, actually. I played basketball, I tried out for the basketball team. And eventually, as part of that I would up getting what's called the Ann Wilson scholarship [Ed.: for female scholar-athletes, now discontinued]. It's a college honors scholarship, and I didn't originally receive it, I originally received an honors scholarship, but they gave me this named one for a female athlete. Probably the person they gave it to didn't come. So I tried out for the basketball team, and then I tried out for the softball team. Later in my junior year I kind of—when I tried out for the field hockey team, that was in the last year, so that turned into soccer. So I played soccer. I was a big jock at the time.

The community was very supportive. I know athletics was not a big deal at the University of Chicago at the time but it was a place for female athletes especially to get together and build a community. There were queer girls there, there were straight girls there. We were already quote-unquote “queer” because we were female, and we were athletes, and we were at the University of Chicago where athletics are sort of frowned on. So we were already misfits in a certain way.

ML: Jocks are the misfits here!

MD: Yeah, which was nice. A lot of us were—if you go through the list of people I was teammates with, a lot of them are fairly well-known doctors and lawyers. There are quite good academics as well. So anyway, we had this nice community, and supportive each other. We were funny. Did a lot of pranks.

There was a lot of community there, and I think that really helped me survive some of the challenges of growing up and coming out and living in an urban space, all sorts of the challenges that people go through when they come to college.

ML: You mention that you weren't out when you first came here. If you don't mind me asking,

when did you first become aware of your lesbian sexuality?

MD: Well. So I fell in love with identical twins. I don't even know—I fell in love with one of them, I suppose. I was on the softball team with one and the other was on the track team. They were kind of notorious, the twins were—I didn't know this. I think one of them took a fancy to me, and I wound out going out with them, which was called “going up north.” Going up north meant that you would go out to the gay bars on Broadway. It's called Boystown now but we just called it up north. I shouldn't reveal any other details, because it was before I was 21. That was before—[ML: They'll track you down and arrest you!] I think the statute of limitations has run out. But this was the only place to go.

And that's an important historical thing for people to understand. During that time, it was the '80s, which doesn't seem as horrific as the '50s, but on the other hand, political campaigns were made on our backs by the moral majority, and the Reagans, you know. There was a whole homophobic backlash against the gay liberation movement of the '70s. We were basically pariahs. It was the sort of thing where you didn't really come out to anyone, because you were afraid. It limited the way people saw you, your opportunities. I thought, “I'm never going to be able to have a career in public life.” Right?

Because anyone could find out I'm a lesbian, and I could get fired. Which is actually still true today in places like Ohio, but then it was really true. There were very few places to just be. I'm saying that because now I think there are places for young gay and lesbian, or queer or bi, or trans folks to find community without necessarily going to this bar and drinking and being underage and so on. But those were the only places we were able to gather as a community.

So we went up north. There was one place called the Swan Club, and another place called The Ladybug that we used to go to.

ML: Were they both gay bars? Or lesbian bars?

MD: Lesbian bars. There were more lesbian bars at the time.

ML: Yeah, they've all migrated further north. Or shut down.

[0:10:00]

MD: Yeah—we're victims of our own success in some sense, because we can go out and be in the world without having a special space. So there tend to be fewer lesbian bars or just plain gay bars around, although men tend to make more money than women even now so they have more disposable income. So there are more gay bars and lesbian bars still.

So we'd go up there. I think—the short answer to how I sort of came to grips with being a lesbian is that I fell in love, and woke up one day after a night out in bed with one of the twins. And was like, “oh.” It was an interesting revelation in some ways because I had thought that maybe I just didn't have the capacity to love other people. Not love, as in

agape love, or friendly love, but romantic—[ML: Romantic, sexual love.] Yeah—because I wasn't attracted to men. I liked men but I wasn't attracted to them sexually. I wound up thinking, “Oh, that's what it is. I just like girls.” And that was a really comforting feeling. I think I'm not the only person who has had that feeling.

I was only 18 at the time. It was my freshman year. And I think being in the university setting let me break away a little bit. I had been very Catholic, growing up, so was able to break away a little bit, and I came out. And then—I know the person who interviewed me wrote about this in her paper for Monica's class.

ML: Is this the rookie story?

MD: Yeah. I walked into the fieldhouse—I was playing softball—I walked into the fieldhouse maybe a week later and one of the teammates looked at me and just said, “rookie,” and just started laughing at me. The word had gotten out that I had started dating one of the twins. So it was kind of funny. But also that was a way of accepting me into the community. So that was fun. And that's how I came out.

Now, you know, it took a much longer time to come to grips with the political and ethical, social justice aspects of being a queer person in the United States in the '80s and '90s and 2000s. And that was a long journey that really was through grad school—I was in Santa Barbara, UC Santa Barbara—and I had faced some discrimination that I didn't know about, that somebody had told me about. And I thought, “Well, screw this. If I'm going to be discriminated against just because of who I am, I might as well be out.” I also heard Barbara Smith, founder of Kitchen Table: Queer Women of Color Press, give a talk at Santa Barbara, and I remember asking her a question, “Well, if you have these other aims in mind, do you think coming out will, you know...be deleterious to other political aims that you have, like doing stuff for women of color, and such,” and she said, “You know, I can't be anyone other than who I am. I can't lie about myself, about who I am, I can only come from who I am.” That was really inspiring to me, and I thought, “well, okay.”

I started studying queer theory in 1991—and that was right when the term was coined—doing gay and lesbian studies, and being very active. And I just thought, what Audre Lourde said was true. Your silence will not protect you. I just said, “screw it.”

And that's been the trajectory of my career ever since. A lot of people have said, “don't do this.” I started the first queer theory class at Miami University, although there was a class—Linda Singer was there before me—there was a class on gay and lesbian experience, so there were precedents. We have a curriculum now, some of which I've started, the whole sequence. I was hired basically to do that. And I was told, “Miami's very conservative,” and I was told, “maybe no students will take this, people won't want it on their transcripts,” and I was like, “we're going to do it.” And it turns out that it's a very popular curriculum. And it's, people are taking—straight people, people from all across the spectrum both in terms of their sexuality and gender, but also in terms of their political views, are taking our courses. And the people said, that have said, “don't do this” or “you'll never be able to do this,” have been wrong. Over and over and over again.

Which I take as an inspiration.

ML: Yeah, that's fantastic!

MD: Yeah, it's kind of fun.

ML: So, to kind of go back to the beginning of that, were you only out to your fellow female athletes? What was—what were—

MD: Pretty much my friends. It was kind of an open secret. Everyone knew who was gay, but we didn't come out. It was what we called an open secret...You sort of knew who was in the “family” or not. I did come out later—my mom knew. She was not a fool. My mom was a second-wave feminist too, so she was pretty good and supportive. But I wasn't out to my family for a long time, although everyone knew. It was kind of funny. I don't think that's a good thing. I'm really glad that students today, young people nowadays, are just coming out. I think that's a product of all the gay liberation and a lot of the gay and lesbian and GLTF movements. I mean, I tend to be a little more skeptical of some of the neoliberal impulses of the gay marriage movement and things like that, but still, I think that even that movement has opened up a wider variety of discourses on ways to be in the mainstream community, and I think that's really important. At the time I was kind of out to friends. The athletes knew, we all knew. But not to a whole lot of people.

Not even to professors or anything like that, although I certainly wrote about, in some cases, lesbian things. In my papers, you know. I do remember I took Self, Culture, and Society. [ML: I remember, I took that class!] Or Self-Torture and Anxiety, which is what we called it back then. [ML: That's a good name for it! We've lost that over the years!] Self-Torture and Anxiety, now you can remember it. It was taught by someone in anthropology...and I remember basically writing about the return of the repressed in Alice James. That was my freshman year, and that was my first piece of I guess proto-queer theory, back in 1984. So I was able to write about it in certain ways, but it was still very dangerous to be out. People would be like, “Oh, this is irrelevant, why are you talking about yourself?”

ML: What was the overall campus atmosphere like for queer people?

MD: Not good. On the one hand, it was, you know, the liberal and geeky University of Chicago. It wasn't like being at a rural or conservative university. On the other hand, we had some very serious homophobic incidents that took place when I was at the University of Chicago. The big one was during my junior and senior year. AIDS had just been discovered. They didn't even have a name for it during my freshman year. They just knew it by Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, GRID. But then by '86, '87, it was more well-known. There was a virulence of homophobia and AIDS-phobia. I did go to a few, not too many, which I'm sad about, the gay and lesbian meetings. I think it was called GLAD, but I'm not sure.

[0:20:09]

ML: No one's too sure about what exactly it was called.

MD: I think it might have been called—

ML: GALA? Was it not GALA yet?

MD: Maybe might have been GALA, but for some reason GLAD comes up. The gay and lesbian association. I went to a few of those meetings. First of all, you didn't put the meeting location on the posters. You would put information to get more information. And if you put your name on the answering machine, they would tell you where the meeting was. This was in '86, '87. So that was not that long ago. Because if you did put the meeting location on the poster... I've been in some of those meetings where jerks would just come in and say, "get out fags die!" And some of us would run after them. But it was still scary.

And there was this guy who was a student, and he started putting ads in *The Chicago Reader*. He also was writing, probably with friends and accomplices, writing these really nasty anti-gay things in a publication called, I believe, *The Midway Review*. You'll have to check that out. But there were these review magazines that were based on *The Dartmouth Review*, and they were supported by William F. Buckley and these right-wing organizations. So he would write these screeds on there, really homophobic. Ugh. And if there was a poster out, they would deface it with anti-AIDS stuff, and put up their own posters and flyers on telephone poles, bulletin boards, naming the leaders of the organizations and saying that they had AIDS, blah blah blah. It was really, really awful. [ML: That's so horrible.] So anyway, this guy, he took it even further. And you know, today, this would go on and you would think that the university would do something about it. But they were just, "oh well." People just had to deal with it, the students did.

ML: Was there no support at all?

MD: There was no support whatsoever. It was just like, "oh, that's going on, whatever." So, yeah. I mean, I'm surprised now because people still do those things, but usually there's a swift response or swifter response to those kinds of pamphleting, and they get torn down. Things aren't perfect right now, but they're somewhat better right now at universities. Anyway this guy, he had taken out ads in *The Chicago Reader*, which was the independent newspaper where they had a lot of men seeking men ads, and he would get people to respond to them. He would find out where they worked, their parents' address, and he would write these letters to their parents, their bosses, saying "So-and-so is a homosexual and has AIDS," you know, these really homophobic and AIDS-phobic letters, and also harassing. In those days people usually weren't out to their parents, you could get fired, and so it was really awful. He was caught, and he was not allowed to graduate. I don't know if he subsequently graduated—sometimes they sneak people through the following year—but I'm pretty sure he didn't graduate and was suspended. That all happened in my senior year. It was pretty rough. It felt like there was no defense. What were you going to do? If you were afraid of being outed, that you would never get a

job if you were outed, you couldn't go to the police and complain about it because you were outing yourself anyway. So that was part of the politics of the closet, I would say, that I suppose we were dealing with.

There was no university programming around it. There wasn't even women's studies at the time. I mean, Lauren Berlant was hired during my senior year, and she was brand new. Now she's Lauren Berlant. But she was a brand-new professor and it felt like she was the first feminist theorist. I know that's not true, there were probably other people who were there before, but for us, at the time, it was like, wow! I never got to take a class because you had to camp out. [ML: Oh yeah!] They don't do that anymore. You had to camp out. [ML: Yeah, in front of the administration building.] Yeah, yeah. And it was freezing, it was cold, it was snowing. I just couldn't do that. I couldn't—I had basketball practice, I couldn't stay out all night in a tent. So I didn't camp out for it.

ML: You mention that there was no administrative support for these harassment incidents, but was there student support? Or was the student body also not—

MD: There was no student support. No. No. I'm sure—well, no. It was like, a small group of people who were fighting against this stuff, and that was it. That was it. There was no perceivable student support.

ML: Yeah. That's really, really rough. What was your academic experience at UChicago like? What did you major in?

MD: Majored in English. I was very interested in history and culture and English seemed to give me the wide breadth to go back into the historical and contextual times. And I still teach English now, so I did it all the way through. I also did a lot of Russian and Russian civ. So that was my other thing. I was—I got a really good general liberal arts education. For which I'm eternally grateful. And I still go back to some of the things I read. Kant or Nietzsche, in my humanities sequence, Form, Problem, Event. I still remember that. I go back and I teach some of those things. I had a great experience. Okay, it was rough because it was intense, and I'm assuming it's still very intense now. I had a great time. Worked with James Chandler, who I think is still here in the English department. He was my BA thesis advisor. Everyone in English, I think in the humanities, had to do a thesis. I don't know if they still—do they still do that?

ML: It's not required anymore, which is sort of strange. But a lot of English majors will write a BA.

MD: Yeah. It was required. Some people, you know, finished years afterward, like four or five years afterward.

ML: Aww. It's like a mini-PhD.

MD: It wasn't a mini-PhD. Mini-masters. I really enjoyed it. I think I wasn't the ideal student in that I was also busy living my life and learning to be an adult. I often did things at the last

minute. So I can't say that I was the ideal student. Nowadays I realize that as a professor I should have showed up for class more, blah blah blah. But it gives me good insight into what students need today too. Part of the college experience, a lot of it is growing up and individuating, and forming your own person, your own personality, and that certainly was a big part of my experience here.

ML: And it sounds like you were really busy, with three sports.

MD: Yeah. I was also the sports editor of the newspaper one year because I was pissed off, because they kept only focusing—well, first of all, they never focused on sports anyway, which was fine. But occasionally they would, but only men's sports. I was a high school newspaper editor before I came to the University of Chicago. So I took over, I was sports editor, and I insisted that we say “men's basketball,” “women's basketball.” We put the gender next to everyone or no one. That was really cool. I thought that was really good. I was involved in sports, a lot. I was a fairly decent student, I should say that. I got honors.

ML: I'm sure you were, if you went onto academia.

MD: Yeah. And I really, really enjoyed the argument portion of the seminars. Like, having an intellectual argument with others, that was really important to me. Yeah. That was pretty much my experience, yeah.

[0:30:13]

ML: What was the social experience like? You mentioned hanging out a lot with the queer-ish female athletes. Can you talk more about that community? And if you had friends from other communities?

MD: I did have friends from other communities. Although mostly we hung out with WAA [Women's Athletic Association] folks. Really, who you dated was not really the main thing—whether you liked men or women or both. So... Most of the things that we did were at other people's houses, right? We'd get together, someone would get Harold's chicken. One year the Chicago Bears won the Superbowl—the only time—and we were the only ones with a TV. I lived with my brother actually at the time, because he was getting his PhD here, and we had the only TV in our living room, so people would just show up on Sunday morning, or Sunday afternoon, with Harold's, or bagels, or something.

We traveled a lot. This was before we were in the UAA, so we traveled a lot to De Pere, Wisconsin, or Appleton, Wisconsin, or Valparaiso, Indiana. So we spent a lot of time on the road. Some of my more memorable experiences were taking a chartered bus, a Greyhound-style bus to Florida every spring break—the female softball team and the male baseball team together, on these overnight trips, in a bus, filled with all these stinky 19-year-olds, basically. Or 20-year-olds. We'd go down to Florida, and that was basically our spring break. We spent it in these little dump hotels. I think it was in the panhandle of Florida, Pensacola, Florida. And then playing softball twice a day or doing training twice

a day, and the men doing baseball. That was a memorable bonding experience. I had a lot of bonding experiences like that.

We went out, we did some dancing. They didn't have food service on Saturdays, I don't know if they still do that here.

ML: They do have food, thankfully. But not on Saturday night.

MD: No, not on Saturday night. You had to go out. And that's good, actually. This would be with anyone, not just the athletes. We'd take the IC train downtown, and go out to eat there, or hang out. None of us had much money, so it was mostly walking around, or eating Thai food. There was a really good Thai restaurant down here called Thai 55. I don't know if it's still around.

ML: Yeah! It's still around. Along with, like, three Thai restaurants.

MD: Yeah. But that one was the best, at least in our time.

ML: It is still the best. Thai 55.

MD: Excellent. I might have to go there. We'd do things like in freshman year, the first person who ate their meal with a fork instead of chopsticks would have to pay for the meal. So we learned how to use chopsticks. By force. And things like that. We did a lot of that. I think we'd go out to see movies a lot up north.

We actually spent some time up north. Played flag football with these old lesbians. They're not old; they're probably younger than me now. [ML: That's kind of great.] Yeah. I used to hang out with them. Go play flag football up north in these all-lesbian leagues. All-lesbian softball leagues, all-lesbian soccer leagues. It was the only way to find community then. It really was. There was a bar, or there was a softball or flag-football team. Or rugby. Which I did eventually start playing after I graduated. Those were the places to hang out. You were either a fan or a player. Then the politics, ACT UP started when I moved to California, but then there started to be a more political or cultural way to get together. That was my experience, more around the sports.

And the bars. Going up and hanging out. Let me think, there was another bar called Paris, and that would be a really interesting one to look at. It was the dance bar, and it was up on Montrose Street. There's a sort of graveyard up there, off of Western, but there's a huge cemetery up there. If you keep on going out towards, a little west, it was on the Montrose L line, you'd get up there. This was during my senior year, and that was the first place you could really dance. The dance floor at the ladybug was about as big as this table. You know, six by six. No one danced. Or if they danced, they did slow dance, which was a way to, you know [ML: "I guess we have no space..."] grope and grind, yeah! Way to grope and grind with someone that you liked. And Swan Club didn't have a dance floor. This was a place where they played Bronski Beat, and all the sort of disco—it was not quite disco, it was kind of, I always think of it as gay nightclub music. But

Bronski Beat type stuff. Gloria Gaynor stuff. So they played that there, and we'd dance all night there. Occasionally would see people who worked at the university there, but they would have to deny our existence, and say no more about that.

ML: Initiated into the queer secret.

MD: Yes, yes. The big open secret.

ML: It seems that you were at least a little involved in the wider lesbian community in Chicago, right? Being involved in sports.

MD: Yeah, yeah. I was. I got to know them more. And during my senior year I started doing peace and justice work. Sort of liberation theology. I had stopped being a Catholic but I was really drawn to peace and justice liberation theology through the Catholic church, but not mainstream. They were more lefty. Actually, after my senior year I went to El Salvador. This was when they were having a civil war down there. Was involved with peace and justice in Central American movements. That was really important to me, because I think—the one thing about being a university student is that you're still so very, very privileged. And then you graduate and you realize that there are other things that are less controlled, you know? You're in very much a controlled atmosphere in a classroom or in a university. There are rules and ways of treating each other. When I graduated, and I had been working with peace and justice, I really started getting around. When I went to El Salvador, I realized how very important it was to educate people. You know, I thought that when I came back from El Salvador, “there are plenty of good people in the US who would be horrified if they found out what their government and their tax money and their people were doing in the name of the United States.” That's true now. So the question is, “how do you get through to those people?” Which I think is why I became an academic.

That was a big learning experience. So I started doing that sort of stuff too in my senior year, and started getting more interested in feminist theory. Again, that was like Elaine Showalter's work, things like that were coming out, really during the '80s. There were earlier, there were earlier political feminists, but this was more feminist literary theory, which was more my area. I didn't start being taught that until my senior year of college. I think I kind of latched onto that, and that's what propelled me to go onto grad school.

So, I'm trying to think. I did march in the gay pride parade my senior year, the gay pride parade in Chicago. I didn't get involved, really—ACT UP wasn't around then. The big rumor was that Harold Washington was gay. Which I'm sure he was. [ML: He was certainly very flamboyant!] Yes. And that would be an interesting history for someone to do, what Harold Washington did for Chicago. That was really important. I think he did start opening things up for gay people in Chicago. And for people of color. There's a lot of things that are still messed up about Chicago, but he made a lot of strides. Yeah. So that was it, yeah.

[0:41:05]

ML: Can you talk more about your peace and justice work? What sort of stuff did you guys do in El Salvador, and how long did you stay there?

MD: We paid for it ourselves. It was just for a week. We were part of this group that was affiliated with St. Clements. My girlfriend at the time was a youth minister at a Catholic youth—Catholic youth ministry place somewhere in Logan Square. I'm forgetting the name of the parish there. And so she was really into it. We would listen to, like, Holly Near concerts and shit like that. You know, if you know anything about women's music—Cris Williamson, things like that. A lot of the women's music scene at the time also was very much involved in peace and justice.

[0:42:07 – 0:48:18: MD talks about the political situation in El Salvador, about meeting people repatriated from Guatemala, and building a preschool]

That was really formative for me in terms of thinking of, why go about educating people? It's of a piece with my other peace and justice, social justice sort of work and thinking and thought, which is how I think about GLBTQ rights issues—from a very deeply intersectional standpoint. Right? It's not about just gaining entrance into an exclusive club, it's about how do we make the system that we live in more fair for everyone. Who cares what they are. Whether they're straight or gay. [ML: Wanna get married or don't wanna get married.] Yeah. I think everyone should have healthcare. They shouldn't have to get married to someone in order to have benefits. That was very formative for me, actually. Right after my senior year is right when I went. It started during my senior year. I'm not sure it was connected except that probably a lot of the critical thinking skills and the questioning and evidence skills, and the historical-contextual reasoning that I had been taught allowed me to pursue this, to continue. Once I became a critical thinker there was no way—[ML: You can't go back.] You can't go back. Once you start questioning, you can't stop. So that would be a strong connection to basically the common core, I think. Led me there. Yeah.

[0:50:05]

ML: Yeah. I'm trying to think of other—what I might have missed about your time at UChicago. You mentioned that you lived with your brother, right? Where did you live when you lived on-campus, and when did you move off?

MD: I moved to the Shoreland my first year. I lived in Shoreland on the third floor. I really liked that place. My second year—I moved somewhere different every year. I lived in a little apartment actually right up there [pointing north to the lake and 50th St]. It was called the Herbert apartments, the twin towers. It was on 50th St and this drive here. Not the Regency, it wasn't Regents Park. It was the cheapo, kind of [ML: The shabbier Regents Park.] Yes. So I lived there. And my third year was when I lived with my brother. He was at the University of Illinois before he graduated. He used to come visit me; he's a couple of years older than me. He got a job as a lab tech in a lab up here that was doing work on cystic fibrosis, so I got an apartment with my brother and two of my friends from the softball team. It was this really interesting apartment right up on Greenwood

Street. You know where Pierce is? [ML: Yeah, yeah.] That's still there. It's across 55th St from Pierce. There's Jimmy's there, and you go back one more street, that's Greenwood. So we lived there. That was the year the Bears won the Superbowl and everyone came over to our house. Our house was kind of the hang-out place. People just showed up.

ML: Did it work, with your brother and—?

MD: Yeah, it was fine. It was interesting because again—first of all—so there was one person who was not gay, there was me, and then there was another person, a lesbian teammate, and my brother, who's not gay. We had all of us, but we just didn't really talk about anything. Eventually he found out that I was dating a woman but it was a while there when it was just sort of an open secret. Because we all went elsewhere when we wanted to have dates. Nobody brought their lovers home. But it was a really good time. I was fairly well-supported. My brother and I helped each other. He helped me a lot; I helped him a lot. He was in between college and graduate school. The final year, my final year, he did get into graduate school in molecular genetics at Chicago. We wound up then getting studio apartments, again in the Herbert apartments.

This one was on 47th St and the drive. And we had apartments that were like—not across from each other, but in the same building complex. Which was better because by that time I was wanting my own space, and him too. We're still close. We kind of helped each other out. We had financial difficulties, my family's not very well-off, blah blah blah. So we helped watch each others' backs, both emotionally and materially.

Yeah, that was it. The only time I lived on campus was at the Shoreland and that was not really on-campus. [ML: Yeah. Basically off-campus.] It was a great place though.

ML: They closed it my first year that I was here. I was sad—I heard stories about how great it was.

MD: It was fun. There were some older people, in their 70s and 80s, who lived there. It was an old ballroom hotel. And so—it was tacky, too. The walls were like puke green and this Pepto-Bismol color, I can't even describe it. [ML: Sounds beautiful.] Yeah. But it had this really old sort of feel to it. The hard thing is that you had to—unless you were an early bird, which I was not, and caught these buses that ran back and forth—usually I had to run to school. I could make it from the Shoreland to Cobb Hall where most of my classes were in a remarkably short 10 minutes. [ML: That's impressive!] Yeah. Probably what made me a good athlete. [ML: Training!] Yeah! In the snow. I kid you not. I did have shoes though, and it was not uphill. Yeah. But it was good, it was nice, it was nice to live close to the Point.

There were other things too that I didn't mention. There was always the threat of sexual violence. Most of the women I knew had dealt with it at one point or another. I don't know if that's changed much. [ML: Eh.] There were some darker sides to living here. Probably living at any university, because I don't think it's very safe of women, young women, in a university setting. That too. I don't want to give the impression that it was all

[ML: Sunshine. And snow.] Sunshine and snow, yeah. We took care of each other, but still, that was kind of rough for everyone. And I don't think that's changed much. I don't think it has. I don't think it has.

ML: What did you right after undergrad? Did you go straight to UC Santa Barbara?

MD: No. I went—so I moved up to Rogers Park, and I worked for a publishing firm doing data entry. It was Longman Financial Publishing. And I did data entry and then I wrote sports articles—I was a stringer for the Herald. It wasn't the Herald, it was...jeez. A bunch of neighborhood publications [Ed.: Lerner Newspapers]. I covered a lot of women's sports, and men's sports, including high school football at the time. As a stringer I got 20 bucks for every story. So I made sort of pin money there. And I played rugby, which was my big deal then. It was a pretty high-level team.

That's a whole other community that someone should do a history of. Anywhere you went in the nation, in a big city you could find a women's rugby team, and then find a community, right? A very eclectic community. So I played rugby, and I then moved to Oakland, California, because I kind of knew that I wanted to live in the California Bay Area. But the girls usually lived in Oakland and the boys lived in San Francisco. I don't know if it's still that way, but it was a lot cheaper to live in Oakland and Berkeley. So I got a job, first as a temp, answering phones and shit, and then working for UPS, loading UPS trucks in the middle of the night. And I applied for grad school there. So I lived in California, I lived in Oakland for about a year and a half, before I got into grad school in Santa Barbara and moved down there. So in between, I mostly played rugby and tried to write. I did sports writing. I tried to write other things. I wanted to be a poet, so I wrote a lot of poems. Then went back in English, and I wound up doing nothing in that but becoming a professor. Yeah. Just did kind of more odd jobby things.

[0:59:21]

That's the thing about being a lesbian. I was pretty non-conforming in terms of my gender presentation. I wasn't super-butch—I wasn't as butch as I look now. But I wasn't not. And so it was hard to get jobs then. You could just get blown off. Even with a degree from the University of Chicago.

ML: Even in the Bay Area? I thought that was supposed to be more open...

MD: Even in the Bay Area. I got a job—I mean, I got a job at UPS. I did get a job. But not office-type jobs. And so...I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't gone to grad school. I don't know what I would have done. At the time, if you were a lesbian, and part of the lesbian community, you know, you had more kind of working-class style jobs. Or you did bartending or something like that. You could maybe write for the newspaper or something like that. And I did. It didn't pay very much. [ML: 20 bucks an article, like you said.] 20 bucks an article, yeah! I know lots of people who—I know someone who graduated from the University of Chicago, became a house painter. I mean, there were—there's a whole study to be done about the aspirations that one has, and how sexuality, out

sexuality might have limited them. That I don't think—thankfully I don't think it's as much true as it was then. But it was. It just felt like you were a freak, and you couldn't—you could get jobs, but they were usually because somebody knew someone that you knew, or it was the place like UPS where the lesbians worked, or FedEx. Is that the stereotype any more? I don't know.

ML: I've never heard of that stereotype, actually. [MD: Okay, so it's not.] It could be that I'm not up on my lesbian stereotypes. Also, I hope that the sun comes back out soon.

MD: Yeah, it's getting cold. Anything else?

ML: Yeah. So what was it like to be a graduate student at UC Santa Barbara?

MD: I liked it.

ML: You mention that it was where you politically fully came out, right?

MD: Yeah, I really fully politically came out then. Grad school was hard, and it's hard now, because you work really hard and the pay is really low. I don't want to complain because I got through it and stuff like that. But you know, we were living, those of us who were living in grad school, we were living in Southern California in a very expensive place on \$10,000 a year. And paying fees and such. I know it hasn't gotten much better. And the market in humanities is not great. Most academic jobs, if there's no sort of market, private component for what you can do, the market is hard, right? Like if you go into biotech, you can always go into biotech. Or if you go into business, you can always go into business. [ML: But if you go into English...] Yeah. You could do a lot of things, but you have to scrape and pine. I know a lot of people who went into non-academic careers, but they really had to scrape. So that was hard.

I was part of a union organizing effort. I did a lot of activism on campus around gender and sexuality and feminism. So I was pretty outspoken. I helped form—we had the multicultural queer grad student alliance—I helped form that. I was a delegate from UC Santa Barbara to the president of the University of California system to argue for domestic partnership benefits. We didn't get them in my year, nor did we get a union in my year, but it came subsequently. And we got both. So I was pretty out, I was pretty active. Probably more active than was good for my academic career. I spent more time organizing than I did—[ML: The activism is important.] Yeah, I know. And I got involved with women's studies as well, so I did a women's studies certificate at the same time that I was doing my PhD in English. That's really been the trajectory ever since. I'm a joint appointment in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and in English right now.

ML: You seem pretty cold. Do you want to move inside? Or something like that? [MD: Yeah, how much more time?] We can also try to wrap up.

MD: Yeah, we should probably try to wrap up. I have to go pick up my niece in a few minutes, yeah.

ML: So quickly, what did you do after graduate school?

MD: So I got a post-doc at UC HRI, which is the Humanities Research Institute, in interdisciplinary queer studies. I had been scraping things together—I was teaching a little here and there. I really learned how to teach, and now I quite enjoy it, but you learn by necessity in graduate school. They just throw you into the fire, and then you either burn or rise, like a phoenix. Then I got a job at Cal State Los Angeles, in east LA. I taught English there, I also did a lot of work on gender and sexuality, and I taught there for three years. I really liked it, it was—so Cal State LA is in east Los Angeles, it draws from Compton and from South Central, which in 1991 was where the Rodney King beating verdict uprising were. And East LA is basically the barrio. So most of the students were working poor. Most of the students are of color, first generation. It was a really good teaching gig, teaching experience. It was pretty hard to do research experience there though, because of the teaching load.

Which is why I wound up applying to the job at Miami, because they had a joint appointment in women's studies and English, and I wound up moving there specifically to do gay and lesbian, queer studies. I got a joint appointment, and I also study modernism and 20th-century Virginia Woolf. I've got my Virginia Woolf bag here. Sort of a big Virginia Woolf scholar now. And we—we've developed a curriculum there. I think, to be honest, moving to a smaller town—and Cincinnati is a city but Oxford is a town, where the university is—and working in a less cosmopolitan atmosphere has really meant doing a lot of work on helping to change people's minds and attitudes about queer people and trans people and social justice issues. I would have to say that teaching—that kind of work is really important. I don't regret it at all, moving from an urban area to a non-urban area, because that is the belly of the beast. That is really the belly of the beast. [ML: Southern Ohio: belly of the beast.] Yeah, quite literally.

Southern Ohio is the belly of the beast. So I've done a lot of work there, both activism work and teaching. I see them folded together. And that's where I'm at right now.

ML: I guess you probably have an interesting perspective because you are in a more rural college. But what differences do you see between your generation of college students, going to college, and today's generation? In terms of attitudes towards GLBT folk.

MD: Oh, the younger generation is so much better than we were. So the young generation of queer people, or the people who might be LGBTQ, trans [ML: Alphabet soup.] Yeah. They expect to be treated with dignity and respect. We did not expect that as a right or as an expectation. Which is really sad; I've reflected a lot on that. We fought back against mistreatment, but it was sort of like, “oh, here we go again,” you know. So I think that. I think about the opportunities to just be yourself and not waste energy hiding yourself from your loved ones. That's an incredible emotional resource that is open to younger generation of people that was not open to us. It was a struggle. I think there are more political fights to be won, more cultural fights to be won. But there's a better sense of community. And a better sense of ally-ship. I would say that most people who are 19 and

20—the majority now support gay and lesbian rights. They might not support some of the more queer and radical and trans things that we're also fighting for, but they at least realize that if they're homophobic, then it's a problem. That was not the case then. It was really—you didn't even really say “gay.” You just didn't talk about it. So I think that's been a really important change for the better among all the younger generation. I think there's more support. There's curriculum now. Back then there was nothing, nothing, zero zero zero. If anything came up if it was Freud and talking about homosexuality as pathology. [ML: The inverts...] Yeah. Yeah. So I think that really matters. Having language with which to talk about issues is really important. And organizations are no longer, you know, these little sheltered semi-secret organizations. You can put it on your vita or your resume. So there's been a lot of change since then. I don't know as much about the student culture here at UChicago vis-a-vis back then, but I suspect that it hasn't changed that much. [ML: Still a bunch of geeks.] A bunch of geeks. That's what I sort of thought. But it seems like the university is a lot more supportive, or at least less obstructive.

[1:11:32]

ML: Do you think that your experience was pretty typical?

MD: Yes. With the exception of being a jock. But even that was pretty typical. I don't think I was unusual at all.

ML: Yeah. But yeah, how has your perception of UChicago changed over time?

MD: Hm. Well, I have much more of a sense of the resources that a private university has, having working in public institutions and gone to school in one. So I'm very grateful for the scholarship to come here. I appreciate though now—and this has more to do with my work on liberal education and the humanities now—I really appreciate the high premium that Chicago puts on the life of the mind, and thinking, thinking critically, and not on instrumentalized forms of knowledge. I think that other places, other universities, have gone way too far in the area of training people. [ML: Practicality.] Yeah. Instrumentalized education. I tell my students all the time, “Look, if you can think, you can be prepared for the things you can't even anticipate is going to happen in the next four years.” You know, there was no internet when I was in college. We didn't even have computers. I'm not a hundred years old, but we had typewriters. We wrote our papers on typewriters. We couldn't have been trained for how to deal with blogs, or internet commerce, or any of these other technological things. But yeah, you know, if you have a good sense of argument and thinking critically, and the power of rhetoric, then you can deal with a blog. Or a digital presentation. If you know economics, then you can deal with e-commerce. Even though you could not have been trained in something that did not exist back in 1984. So I'm really pleased and happy that the university had taken a stand on that, and continues to take a stand on that, and continues to be a leader in that. That's what I've appreciated most about my experience, and try to replicate for others where I'm at now.

ML: Sure. Yeah, so we're always looking—and this is the last question, thanks for catching

hypothermia for us. [MD: No, it's okay.] So we're always on the lookout for more people to interview or memorabilia from your time at UChicago. Do you have anything that might be of interest or anyone—?

MD: Memorabilia? I might have some stuff, I can send it to you. I do have some stuff. People to interview... You should interview [redacted]. She is now I believe an obstetrician in the Bay Area. I have not been in touch with her for a very long time. But she has had a very interesting life—she was an investment banker in Japan, then came back and [ML: Became an obstetrician. Wow!] Yeah. So she would be a really interesting person to interview, I think. If you email me, I can get you her contact information. I think she would probably be really good. And her sisters all went to the University of Chicago too, so it would be interesting to interview all three of them.

ML: Are they all queer?

MD: No, I think just [redacted]. I'm not sure about her older sister, and I know probably not with her younger sister.

ML: Whatever happened with the twins?

MD: I'm not sure I should tell you. You can interview them. I'll give you their names, but off the record...

[1:16:30 – 1:17:18: MD talks about the twins]

ML: Thank you! Is there anything else that you wanted to tell us?

MD: No. Just tell me how—keep me up to date with how the project is going and stuff.

ML: Yeah, come to see our exhibit in 2015!

MD: 2015? I'll come back. It was great meeting you!

ML: Same!

MD: And I am going to go back in the car now, because I am freezing.

[01:17:46]

End of Interview