

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

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW #56  
KELLER, IRWIN (1960-) J.D. '88**

*At U of C:* 1981-1988

*Interviewed:* July 26, 2013

*Interviewer:* Lauren Stokes

*Transcript by:* Lauren Stokes

*Length:* 01:38:30

**Interview at Irwin's home, Penngrove, CA on July 26, 2013.**

[00:00]

LS: Hi, this is Lauren Stokes, and I'm interviewing Irwin Keller in his home on July 25<sup>th</sup> [IK: 26<sup>th</sup>.] 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Alright. So we actually like to start these interviews by asking how you ended up at the University of Chicago.

IK: I grew up in Chicago, in a Chicago suburb. [LS: OK.] I grew up in Niles. I went to undergrad at University of Illinois and Hebrew University in Jerusalem and I did my undergrad kind of fast so that I was kind of young and trying to figure out what to do next, and I felt like I hadn't quite gotten my education yet, my undergrad education yet, so I applied to graduate schools in linguistics in a variety of places, and I don't remember why Chicago. I guess I had come up for CLS once, or something, so I had a sense of the linguistics department, and it gave me a chance to sort of establish myself in Chicago like a grownup in my family, because my family had all been Chicagoans [LS: OK] for a number of generations. So that's how.

LS: So you actually first came there in order to work on a linguistics degree.

IK: Yeah, yeah. I was in the linguistics department for a few years before I went to law school.

LS: OK. So how was your linguistics—how was your experience in that department?

IK: Ha-ha! You know, I wasn't cut out to be a graduate student in the humanities, I really [laughter], you know, I look back—I used to joke that, I used to joke that I had so many incompletes my Grade Point Average was i. [Laughter] I just, you know, I loved learning, but I was really so young, in a way, and I didn't come from a family of educated people, so I didn't have a sense of what academic life would be like, and what to make of it, and how to sort of become somebody sort of thinking independently and writing [LS: Sure]

and all of that kind of stuff. So it was, so I loved everything I learned over those years, and I wasn't, I didn't have my heart in trying to turn it into something professional. [LS: Sure.]

I also then made the decision to go to law, I made the decision to go to law school for a couple of reasons. One was that, you know, I was now out of the closet, and I was looking at, I was specializing in Near Eastern languages, so I had Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic and that kind of stuff, and I thought "The only job I'm gonna get is teaching Biblical Hebrew in some Southern Baptist college somewhere in the Bible Belt, and I can't have that job." And at the same time I was starting to do, it was the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic and I was doing a lot of gay and lesbian activism and also AIDS activism at the time, and I was finding suddenly a lot of purpose in that, and I thought "I want something that can help me keep doing this in my life." [LS: OK.] And so that's what made me decide to go to law school.

LS: Sure. Did you take any classes while you were there that were like involved with sexuality or gender issues at all?

IK: Well, there were almost none. [LS: Yeah.] There was nothing being offered involving issues of sexual orientation. [LS: Sure.] There were some, there were gender things happening in the Humanities. At the Law School while I was there Catharine MacKinnon came and did a semester, which was marvelous. I mean, she's so rigid and dogmatic and she's so wonderful and just a brilliant teacher and it was like—it was my best time in law school [LS: Sure], getting a chance to do that and being able to talk about queer issues in the context of that class too.

LS: What was the class?

IK: It was, I think just a Gender and the Law. [LS: OK.] It was I think just Gender and the Law, but it was, it had this incredible intensity because I think it was everything I had wanted to be learning and everything I wanted to be talking about, and it was really, you know, capital-F feminism, and how does this work with law, and what are we doing, and what do we do next and how do we see things differently?

You know, and I remember my first year of law school taking Criminal Law with Alschuler, I don't remember his first name, and—was that his name? [Ed.: Albert Alschuler] Anyway. I was taking Criminal Law, and I remember that in the casebook they had a section on diminished capacity defense, which is where—which is akin to insanity defense [LS: OK], where somebody says in that moment, I was like, insane for a moment. [LS: Right.] Right. I wasn't in control, I didn't have the proper state of mind to be accused of murder. So the diminished capacity defense was being put out in the casebook, and they talked about the Dan White case in San Francisco. [LS: Right.] And it was part of the reading, and the professor was going through the reading, was like "Uh-huh. State vs. Dan White, does anyone have any questions about that? OK," and he went on, and that was, that was the closest we ever came to any discussion of anything related to sexual orientation in a law school, in my law school class when I started, and I

remember I was so upset by this, that there was so much real world that went into that story, so much real world homophobia that went into that story, and that it needed to be talked about and pointed out, and I remember going to his office and saying—it was the first time I actually went and talked to a professor—and I was like “You have to go back and talk about this more,” and he said “Well, why don’t you do it?” So the next class he said “Mr. Keller would like to begin by saying something about the State vs. Dan White,” you know, and I was like, shaking with fear [LS: Yeah] and said my thing. And I was glad to have done it, but that’s also, you know, that’s the nature of law school [LS: Yeah], that it’s abstracted away from so much of life, and that’s I think what I really appreciated about MacKinnon’s course, was it was really much about what do we know about people, and how people think, and what does that say about what the law is and what it should be.

That said, the night before our first day of law school, I met Jim Hormel. [Interview #52] [LS: Oh, really?] They were wooing him at the time to be part of the visiting committee [LS: OK] for the Law School, and so I was at this dinner, it was a banquet that they throw the night before, and I was there with my lover, cause that was the language we used at the time, I was there with my lover, and—who was Jonathan Katz [LS: OK], that you’ll be talking to—and Jim noticed us as like the only obviously gay couple at the event, and so he came over to introduce himself to us, and you know, we’ve been friendly ever since, but what Jim did then over the course of the time they were wooing him, is he asked for a meeting of the gay and lesbian law students [LS: Oh wow] so he could talk to them and see what life was like for us at University of Chicago law school, and I don’t remember if we had an—I don’t think we had an organization, and so the administration was scrambling to try to find the gay students and get them together into a room with Jim Hormel. And it was great. And we talked to him about a loan forgiveness program for people going into non-profit work, and that’s how he started, was by funding that, or funding that in part. [LS: OK] So that had a sort of immediate effect, that was, by the time I was done with law school that program was running. But what was great is that it sent a message to the administration that OK, so someone here is watching to see how you treat the gay students [LS: Yeah], you know, what they get to learn, what they get to do.

LS: Huh. That’s so interesting. And so that’s, and so then you kind of all came together as gay and lesbian students...

IK: So he didn’t talk that way at all about it?

LS: He talked mostly about his time, kind of the first time he was there.

IK: The first time around.

LS: And then he had talked a little bit about how good it had been to see gay and lesbian law students later, but it’s interesting that you were kind of... scrounged up together.

IK: [Laughter] Yeah, we didn't really have an organization or anything, they pulled us together for this, it was very, it was very cool.

LS: So was that the impetus for then founding a regular organization?

IK: Yeah... and I can't say this with confidence, because I really, I don't—ask Eric Webber. [LS: OK.] Because he was the president of it before me, or I think Jenny Devine was, and then Eric was, and then I was. [LS: Sure.] Or something, I don't know if you've heard of Jenny Devine... [LS: No.] So they would know how loosely or non-loosely organized they were before Hormel demanded a meeting. [Laughter]

But by 1987, we were able to pull together a national conference on sexual orientation and the law, that we called the Chicago Conference on Sexual Orientation and the Law, and we brought in all the heavy-hitters from everywhere, and some of our professors spoke, Jeff Stone spoke, and Cass Sunstein spoke. Mary—oh my gosh, what's her name [Ed.: Becker], from the Law School, professor in the Law School, she's probably not, I don't know if she's there anymore. Anyway, somewhere I've got the materials. [LS: Sure.] But that was, that was a big coup for us, to put sort of—and for Chicago—it was just at the time that Lambda Legal Defense was trying to open an office in Chicago [LS: OK], really it served so many functions, and it ended up happening right at the time of the anti-gay harassment on campus.

[10:44]

LS: Right. We're probably jumping ahead a little bit if we get to the harassment, cause I guess we haven't [IK: OK], cause you had mentioned coming out at some point, which you must have done, I guess. [Laughter] [IK: Well, shhh!] [Laughter] So we should probably jump back there. [Laughter] I guess we should probably jump back there before we get to the harassment, right? [IK: Sure, sure, sure. Yeah!] So did you come out while you were on campus, had you already been out?

IK: I did. I had started coming out to friends in my last year of undergrad. [LS: OK.] I had kooky coming out stories, you know, of the ways that I was trying to explore being gay without letting anybody know...

LS: When do you remember? [IK: I'm sorry?] Oh—when do you remember first sort of being aware of it?

IK: Oh, when I was a kid. [LS: Yeah, OK.] Yeah, the kid story. The typical—of my generation, at least—kid story of, you know, yeah, I used to, you know, I liked to dress up in mom's clothes and all [LS: Sure], you know, very typical story. [LS: OK.]

And then my sister was out as a lesbian, came out when I was in high school, my older sister, and it was really rough with my parents, and it was the 1970s and there wasn't really any support, and you know, it wasn't a good scene, and so then when I finally realized I can't pretend and I came out to my sister, she and I agreed, you know, Mom

and Dad can never know, because it will kill them. And it really is interesting to me how many people, of my generation at least, walked around with exactly that fear, not just that it would hurt them, but it would kill them. I mean, I think people, I think we literally thought that. I mean, we thought that would literally be the case.

But then when I started at University of Chicago I almost immediately met Jonathan [LS: OK] and then after our first year at Chicago we decided to take a year off of studies and we moved to Washington, DC. We ended up back in Hyde Park within three months or something—the trip didn't, the move didn't quite work out. But after, after we moved in together he was, he really pushed hard, he was like "I don't want to be your roommate. I don't want you telling anyone I'm your roommate." And he was right, I mean, he was absolutely right, and so I came out to my parents in August of '82 [LS: OK] and came out to them with my arms full of PFLAG literature and stuff, and you know, it was hard for them also, but they ended up joining PFLAG and then they were asked to create a PFLAG chapter that's still running, you know, almost—is it thirty years now? Yeah. [LS: Yeah.] And like thirty years later it's, you know, it's the most, it's now the Deerfield chapter of PFLAG [LS: OK] so it's like the most active PFLAG chapter in Chicago. [LS: That's great.] My father's not living anymore but my mother is still sort of the grand dame, you know [LS: Of PFLAG?], people kind of pay court to her at PFLAG. [LS: That's great.]

So yeah, I came out then, and once I was out, I was out, there was no—I don't think I was ever in the closet at University of Chicago. [LS: OK.] The—here's one little University of Chicago coming out story for you, cause I would like this on the, I would like this on the record somewhere in the world. [LS: Sure.] So I met Jonathan and we, you know, we thought we were a perfect couple cause we met each other's checklist, you know, as to what I'm looking for in somebody, and we were too young to know all the things that you must avoid in someone else. [Laughter] But we definitely knew, and we were both very Jewishly involved, and we said, and sort of as his way of like asking for a date, kind of, was "We should talk about starting a gay Jewish group on campus," and I said "That's great, because I have a whole file full of materials and articles and essays and stuff, you know, that I've been reading the past few years. I'm ready for this."

So we went to the Hillel Foundation, and we went to—Danny Leifer was the rabbi at the Hillel Foundation for like thirty-five years, and we went to Danny, and I was already working for Danny. I was in the closet until that moment. [LS: At Hillel.] I was, I guess—yeah, at Hillel, or at the University, I don't know, but I was working for him, he had hired me, I was doing graphics and I was teaching Israeli folk dancing, stuff like this, and so he was my boss [LS: OK], and I said, you know, "This guy Jonathan and I want to see you." We got together and we said "We want to have, start a gay Jewish discussion group through Hillel." And Danny just sort of leaned back in his chair and said "Good. How shall we do this?" [Laughter] And he circumvented his board. [LS: Oh wow.] He had me put it—I was the designer, I created the materials—he had me put it right into the schedule and everything, and got it out to the world, and we started, our group started meeting every week and we would read articles and discuss, and only third-hand, second-hand, did I find out that he had taken so much shit for it. [LS: From higher up?] From

higher up, from his board, from the Hillel board, which was students and faculty, that they thought it was so controversial that it needed to be discussed, and I realized in retrospect, that was exactly why he didn't do it, like he knew it was the right thing to do. He knew having the group was the right thing [LS: Right] and he knew that if he brought it to his board, it could be a year or two or three before he could get them to agree to it. Whereas once it was done, it was done, and none of them were gonna say "Tell those students they can't meet at Hillel."

LS: Were there a lot of students who joined the group right away?

IK: We had like a dozen, a dozen students showing up right off the bat. [LS: That's pretty good.] Yeah. It was great. We went for a year...

LS: Mostly graduates, undergraduates?

IK: Mix. [LS: OK.] A mix. We went for about a year or so, and you know. But it was a great moment, and Danny, to me, has always been a hero for doing that. So that's the coming out piece.

LS: That's great, that's great. Did you ever—at the beginning, did that cause any problems for you? Did anyone react negatively?

IK: Not at the University. I mean, and Danny, you know, Danny loved me, and he, you know, after this he brought me on, hired me also to be his daughter's bat mitzvah tutor and stuff, so it was really this vote of confidence that, you know, I trust you in my home with my kid, whatever, stuff that you know, now obviously, but at the time, you know, because I also at some point in there started teaching at KAM, at the synagogue by Obama's house. [LS: Yes.] Right. And I had some problems there for being out. But on campus, with Hillel, or with any of my classes, no.

LS: So how did you meet Jonathan, and kind of other gay and lesbian students at that point?

IK: So the way I met Jonathan was that in November of 1981 I was teaching Israeli folk dancing on Thursday nights at Ida Noyes, and one night nobody—what was it?—nobody came... Oh! I was never able to go to the GALA meetings!

LS: Oh, because you were teaching Israeli folk dancing!

IK: Cause I was teaching Israeli folk dancing. [LS: Oh no!] So one night nobody showed up for folk dancing cause it was the night of the Latke-Hamantash debate. [LS: Oh yeah.] And so I closed up shop and I went over to GALA, and that's when I, and I met Jonathan that night. I had seen him once before at an event, at a big gay student event, or a big gay consciousness-raising-something-something event at Northwestern, I had seen him, but we met that night.

LS: That's kind of a beautiful story about the Latke-Hamantash debate, like making...  
[Laughter]

IK: I always meet my husbands through Jewish ritual! It is the story of my life.

LS: That's kind of wonderful.

IK: Cause my husband now, of nineteen years, he and I met at a seder at Jonathan's house.  
[LS: Oh really?] After Jonathan and I were no longer a couple, we would still do seder together every year, and he fixed us up. [Laughter]

LS: That's beautiful.

IK: Yeah, it's kind of a nice story.

[20:10]

LS: So GALA then. What was GALA like in the early 80s?

IK: It was—I'm trying to think—so then I guess I started going after that—oh, cause what happened was this, was that Jonathan was sort of running GALA somehow, and then the next year we moved to Washington. [LS: OK.] But then we came back and sort of resumed leadership in GALA, but at that point I wasn't teaching folk dancing anymore and we would have the meetings in our house. Yeah...

LS: Had you gone to Washington to do something specific there, or was it just a...?

IK: Jonathan wanted to—had an offer to work at a student lobby, and I was able to get a Jew job, and it seemed like it would be fun to be real people in the real world and stuff. [LS: Sure.] So we got back... yeah, GALA used to meet every week in our house, the house we were renting.

LS: Where was that?

IK: On Kimbark. [LS: OK.] And then... and then what? I remember there was a period of time that GALA met at the Friends house [LS: OK] but a lot of the time GALA met at our apartment through those years, through '88. It was in GALA's nature, I think, to meet in people's apartments.

LS: Was there an office in Ida Noyes still?

IK: There was an office in Ida Noyes.

LS: But people just preferred meeting...

IK: Well, the office was really just an office just big enough for a desk. [LS: OK.] And at the time, you know, you were really concerned about making it as confidential [LS: private], yeah, as private as possible. So we had access to campus buildings if we had wanted it, but it remained for quite some time the preference of the group to meet off-campus.

LS: Sure, sure. Who was in the group? I mean, like what was the gender breakdown, for instance?

IK: It was more men than women, but there were a fair number of women. [LS: OK.] There were always a fair number of women. I would say it was always like a 60-40 or 65-35. Mostly undergrad, and then there would be, you know, Eric from the Law School, there were some people from the Business School that I'm still in touch with, there would be some, there were over time some—over time some of the new professors would come. There was an art history professor named Michael Camille who started coming and... who else? Have you ever spoken to Wayne Johnson? [LS: No.] Wayne Johnson might be an interesting person for you to talk to. He was—to my eyes he was an old man. He wasn't a student. He worked at the Business School, he was the, he ran development at the B-School, I think. Oh, Tim Childs used to come, and he was a grad student at the time, you know Tim? [LS: No.] Oh he's at the alumni, he I think runs the alumni association. [LS: Oh, OK, OK.]

But Wayne! Wayne was one of these guys that shows up when there are a bunch of young students around, you know? It's like it's his... you know, he, to the students I think he felt kind of like a dirty old man [LS: Yeah], that would show up, but he was also brilliant and poetic and you know, he was, I think he had been a Jesuit and studied for the priesthood and then blah-blah-blah and ended up, you know, working in the B-School at the University of Chicago somehow. He still lives—he's retired, long retired—he still lives in Hyde Park on a high-rise on 55<sup>th</sup> Street. And he was just so in love with what we were doing. He was so in love with the fact that there were these young people who were gay, and they could be out and they were building something new, and they were making new lives for themselves, and he loved this and he loved supporting it. [LS: Yeah.] And he always had like, you know, a good metaphor or a good analogy or a good story, and he had so much more experience, and when people would get into a fight or wrangle, he could always like, tell a story that would sort of move everybody out of it. So he was this great facilitator of our process in a certain way. [LS: That's kind of nice, yeah.] And he stayed really close with a lot of the GALA leadership over the years. I mean, he sends me a Christmas Report every year, I know he's in close touch with Steve Homer and many other people. And I think that he would have... his, I think his memory would be a catalogue. I mean, I think it would be encyclopedic of who and when.

LS: Yeah... and he still lives in Hyde Park?

IK: He still lives in Hyde Park. [LS: OK.] Wayne Johnson, and you can ask me, I'll give you his e-mail address.

LS: That would be great, yeah.

IK: GALA, so... and we used to do, it was such a fun and creative group, and we did also good, during at least my era in GALA, there was all sorts of good coalition building with, you know, there was a Progressive Student Union that formed and we would do things together and there was a student of color group that I can't remember what it was called, and we did stuff with them.

But we would also, we had a good sense of irony, we had a good tongue-in-cheek sense of humor, so as a fundraiser we would sell pansies, we would have pansy sales on the Quads outside of Mandel Hall and it would... you know, and it was hilarious. [Laughter] It was hilarious! We would march in Gay Pride Parade [LS: Sure], we would write, you know, new parody lyrics to all of these songs, so we would march singing, and they would all be disparaging things about being a University of Chicago student, you know. That was our little world. [LS: Yeah.] But we would do other things, like there was, the year that it was the fortieth anniversary of the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima, we did a guerilla action where we covered the, you know, the Henry Moore? [LS: Yeah.] We covered that with mesh and for weeks we had been folding, we put a thousand origami cranes. [LS: OK.] And we covered it with peace cranes. [LS: That's great.] And stuff like that, that wasn't specifically queer activism, but it was our activism, it was sort of who we saw ourselves as, that we were going to change the world, and once you started, why stop with...

LS: Sure. The cranes...what were students in general concerned about, politically, at that time? What were the kind of big issues?

IK: Apartheid was a big issue, divestment.... I'm trying to remember in the 80s. I mean, there was also, you know, it was also the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic, I remember. There was a doctor at Student Health named Tom Jones who was the head of Student Health, and he was gay, and I remember he came to a GALA meeting in 1983. [LS: Wow.] He came to a GALA meeting—was it '83? I think it was—to warn us. He came to a meeting and said “You need to start using condoms when you have sex.” And people laughed, I mean it was the insanest idea, that why would gay people ever need condoms? [LS: Yeah.] He's like “We don't know what this is. We don't know how it's transmitted.”

LS: Could it be—that's before it's even necessarily called AIDS, right, '83?

IK: Right, '83... cause I remember my friend Steve starting to use condoms in '83 and we laughed. Maybe it was '84 that he came, I mean, but it was really very early.

LS: No, it's very impressively early either way.

IK: I mean, it was before there were—there were no education programs, there was no prevention, there was no anything. There was no test. And he came to us and said “This is going on and you need to know about it.” It was really a big moment. And we ended up losing a lot of people too. [LS: Yeah.] Joseph Smalley... I don't know if any of these names have come up. David—I'm going to struggle to remember his name while we're

talking today—who was, he lived at the Hillel Foundation, he was the caretaker at Hillel but he was a graduate student at the Oriental Institute. And I'll remember his name in a while.

LS: Do you remember kind of when it dawned on you that, like, that was happening? Sometime after this meeting, I guess...

IK: I think in some ways we were a little bit sheltered, you know? So... [LS: In Hyde Park?] Yeah, yeah, I think we were a little bit sheltered. But when you think about that by, you know, '86, there was full-on activism, activist groups, you know, ACT UP in New York, on the coasts, and Chicago had something else at the time, and Jonathan and I were running a guerilla clinic out of our house, we were cooking up, we were cooking up a chemical that people were using to fight Kaposi's sarcoma. I mean, it was already, there was already like the guerilla research was going on. [LS: Right.] There was no Internet, I don't even know how we got this information. I don't know, I don't remember anymore what it was like not to have [LS: the Internet] all of that at our fingertips, but there were people writing, things were appearing in the gay magazines, and then people were creating lists of activists with their phone numbers, you know, all over the country, and then people who were doing research on this chemical, DNCB, and then people who would prepare it, and then people would get referred to me and I would cook it up for them and send it to them. It was crazy! In Hyde Park. You know?

LS: So you just had like a chemical lab going, getting this stuff for these people?

IK: I had a lab going, I had equipment, I went and bought, I went and bought equipment. [LS: Right.] And learned how to do this, you know, and did it. So the ramp-up from say 1983 to 1985 and 1986 was huge. [LS: Right.] Was huge, so that by, you know, by '85, '86, you know, it was huge and people were dying and we were finding out people at University of Chicago who had HIV—which wasn't even called HIV yet, it was HTLV-III—and it was a political issue already, it was already a, you know, fighting the Reagan administration over this, and fighting pharmaceutical companies and this kind of thing. So there was already politics and activism in full swing.

[32:43]

LS: I think I've also seen pictures of—were you involved with putting together the AIDS Quilt Memorial Square for the people who died?

IK: David Wilmot is his name.

LS: David Wilmot, OK.

IK: Thank you. The square, I'm picturing the square. [LS: The square, yeah.] That got it back for me. Yeah. Well, for some, yeah, I did a square for David Wilmot.

LS: I know there's just like this one square that has like the gate, you know, the UofC gate, and it has several names on it...

IK: Oh right, and we wrote people's names on it. Oh, I'd love to see that picture.

LS: Yeah, I can send it to you.

IK: I always worry that I forget people.

LS: I can send it to you.

IK: Yeah, I'd love that.

LS: I'd be happy to do that, cause yeah, I just have that as one of the stories I've had... yeah, so it sounds like the ramp-up was really abrupt... I guess that also kind of maybe leads into this question of how connected or not connected you were to communities outside of—in the rest of Chicago.

IK: We were actually quite connected. First of all we, while I was there we created an Illinois Gay and Lesbian Student Caucus or something like that, it was called. [LS: OK.] And it was mostly just, you know, sort of us and Circle and Northwestern, I think. [LS: OK.] And we would do programming together. We would come to each other's stuff. [LS: OK.] So that started, so there was this student network already there, and then it happened at the same time that, you know, I don't know how much you know about the push for the Human Rights Ordinance in Chicago. [LS: Some stuff.] So there had been a Gay Rights Ordinance, what they called the Gay Rights Ordinance, that had been an amendment of the city's, whatever the non-discrimination law was, it would amend it to include sexual orientation, and it had been sitting, languishing with the City Council for years and years and years, and you know, and the political force in the gay community in Chicago were bar owners, I mean there were sort of the bar owners and the newspaper owners. There wasn't a political force that wasn't the, sort of the money. [LS: Right.] You're giving sort of a knowing smile.

LS: No, I'm just thinking about what I do know about how this finally gets passed, and yeah, it makes sense, what you're saying...

IK: So what happened was that no one was willing to push it forward. No one was willing to put it up for a vote. And then Harold Washington was elected. [LS: Right, in like '83.] He was elected in '83. [LS: Yeah, '83.] And then at a Gay Pride rally, Sarah Craig, she should rest in peace, brilliant woman, brilliant politician, she, I mean she wasn't a politician, she was one of the, she did layout at one of the gay papers, that was what she did [LS: OK], and she got up, somehow she got up and made a speech sort of condemning the gay leadership of Chicago for not pushing this, and Harold Washington was not at Gay Pride, and she challenged him to come, for everyone to come back to Lincoln Park a week later. [LS: OK.] And so there was this scramble, could they get Lincoln Park, people came back, thousands of people came back the next week, Harold

Washington showed up. And it was all about get these ordinances, get this ordinance passed. [LS: OK.]

And so the push began to you know, get the ordinance passed, the ordinance was eventually brought up, you know, the sort of coalition that was built, which was called the Gay and Lesbian Town Meeting, that was run by, at the beginning by Sarah Craig, by Bill Williams who writes for the Reader [LS: OK], Sarah, Bill, representing Harold Washington was Kit Duffy [LS: OK, yeah], and Jonathan, my Jonathan [LS: Jonathan Katz, yeah.] was sort of the original group that formed that, and anyway, eventually the push was enough to get the ordinance voted on and it lost, which was great for the politics of it, because it was not a meaningful piece of law anyway, and finally gay Chicagoans began to realize that they needed to act and so the Town Meeting became active then and it would hold a meeting every month, and in each month it would be in a different neighborhood, it moved all around Chicago.

And so a certain amount of leadership in Town Meeting was students. So Jonathan was sort of a face of it a lot, and then I was in law school by that point, so I worked with my professors, with the support of my professors, and I wrote the new law. [LS: OK.] And that's the law that eventually passed in '89. But the truth was that all of this was kind of happening at once, right? So there was the push, there was the push for the law [LS: OK], there was again the harassment starting to happen [LS: Right], there was the Conference where sort of the national gay legal community came to Chicago [LS: Oh right], that didn't have an equal rights law [LS: Yeah], and all of this kept dovetailing so that there was this huge swell of activity and of, you know, the Chicago activists felt really buoyed up by sort of the national attention. The harassment ended up having the effect of you know, we were able to go to City Council and say "Here's how this would have played out differently if there had been non-discrimination laws in the city." [LS: OK.] You know. So we'll come back to that, I guess, but [LS: Sure] yeah, it was a huge time.

LS: Yeah, it sounds very busy.

IK: It was a huge time. It was also, there was also a group that, there was a Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club that formed, and there was also a push to elect Ron Sable to be the first gay alderman. [LS: OK.] I don't think he ever won. And there was, there became bitter, bitter tension between Town Meeting and that group [LS: OK] because Town Meeting was about the law and the other group was about this person, get a person, and both were important but the agendas didn't always align. Because we were willing—ah! Because the Town Meeting was willing to work with Bernie Hansen, who was already the alderman [LS: OK] in that Ward, in the 44<sup>th</sup> Ward.

LS: And then the other group said, "No, this guy has to be the alderman."

IK: Right, and they were like "You shouldn't be working with Hansen because we should be getting [LS: this gay alderman] this gay alderman in," you know, whereas we were like "The law is important, we will work with anyone who is willing, you know, and yeah,

he's afraid, yeah, sure he's afraid for his job and that's why he's doing it! And you know, and so what?" [LS: Right. We want the law in place.] We want the law in place.

LS: So you actually wrote the first draft of that, the law that eventually got passed. [IK: Yeah.] When did it get passed eventually?

IK: I think January of '89. I had just moved here. [LS: OK, that sounds about right.] I'd been here for less than a month and I got a phone call that it had passed.

LS: That must have been nice.

IK: It was so nice. [Laughter]

LS: That it happened, finally!

IK: And ultimately the Ordinance push has been documented [LS: Yeah], and the names of the people involved, cause there were, you know, Rick Garcia and Lori Dittmann and all these really wonderful powerhouse people.

[41:00]

LS: Yeah. So it sounds like you were extremely active in terms of people all across the city. Did you live in Hyde Park?

IK: Yeah. I mean, my academics suffered for it. [LS: OK.] But yeah, we, Jonathan and I were very plugged in city-wide, and really GALA was, you know, GALA was very mobilizable [LS: OK] in city-wide stuff.

LS: So I guess you must have often been organizing a bunch of U of C people to travel up to Lincoln Park, to travel up to wherever there was a Town Meeting going on or something like that. [IK: Yeah, yeah.] How big was GALA? I mean, how many people could you mobilize to something like a march...

IK: I don't know—for something important, we could probably mobilize quickly twenty-five people or something, which at the time [LS: That's pretty good, yeah.], you know, we would have dances that were huge.

LS: Where did you have dances?

IK: At Ida Noyes, we used to have, GALA used to have dances. Right, we used to have dances! And they were huge. [LS: Yeah.] Hundreds of people at the dances. And we could get, you know, our contingents in the pride parade would be thirty, forty people, more, and we could do, we could mobilize quickly...

I remember there was a time in 1984 or 5 when the people that lived in Dubuque, Iowa had their first gay pride march [LS: OK] and it was just three people, and everybody else

stood on the sidelines jeering, and people threw rocks at them, and they had to flee. And a call was put out around the Midwest, and yeah, one week, come back next week, we'll do this again, and we, I don't know, we had maybe twenty, twenty-five people from GALA that got in, piled into cars and drove to Dubuque and we marched.

LS: That's great. Those three people must have felt so supported.

IK: Well, the hard part was the end of the day when we all went home. [LS: Yeah, yeah.] You know? And they remained the three brave out people in Dubuque.

LS: Dubuque, yeah... so it sounds like you could really mobilize. Were you living in Hyde Park the whole time, then? [IK: Yeah, yeah.] Did you like living in Hyde Park?

IK: Loved it. I still love Hyde Park, I get... I tear up when I visit Hyde Park.

LS: Yeah. What's your favorite thing about Hyde Park? What do you miss the most?

IK: Oh, I don't know, I miss the bookstores, I love the campus, you know, and... [Laughter] I was just there in the fall, I have a twelve-year old, and I brought him, I wanted him to see the University of Chicago, and we went to the Medici on 57<sup>th</sup> Street, and I walked in, I'm like "Wow, you did a great job moving from the old place, because you know, it looks so much like the old place, when did you move?" [Laughter] They were like "1989." [Laughter] But you know, I keep my Seminary Co-op membership up...

LS: Yeah. They moved too! I don't know if you've seen their new space yet.

IK: Oh right! I haven't seen the new space yet.

LS: It's different. [IK: Yeah?] There's light. [IK: Oh.] Natural light. [IK: Ohhh.] It's weird. But the books are still there, you'll like it.

IK: I like going to the Oriental Institute, I used to sit and do my work up in the Library at the Oriental Institute, you know, and I loved... and there were so many lovely, lovely people. Have people talked to you about Howard and Roger?

[44:30]

LS: They have, and I'd love to hear your take on that.

IK: Lovely people. I mean, you know, lovely, smart, catty, you know, they were not always the nicest people, but you know, they opened up their house for a party what, three times a year or something, and hundreds of people would go through, would trample up their beautiful, beautiful house. You know, you probably have heard more than I know, I mean I only knew stories in a certain way, I mean, I knew them, but things like, you know how there are always the stories about the academic spouses, right? [LS: Yeah.] And that the story was that you know, Howard was much sought after, and that he only agreed to

come if there was a job for Roger. [LS: Right.] And that was the story. [LS: Right.] And I hope it's true, not for Roger's sake, but I hope it's true in that the University of Chicago was having to make accommodations for gay couples way back. [Laughter] Anyway, they were lovely. They would, they used to come over to our house for dinner, we used to come over to their house for dinner...

LS: How did you sort of find out about this secret Howard and Roger...

IK: Well, in GALA everybody knew. There was a Howard and Roger party Saturday night, everybody would know, everybody would know. There was a guy named Tom [redacted] who lived with them, you know, I don't know if he was sort of their boy or if he was just sort of like their caretaker or their friend, you know, the house caretaker. I don't really know, but they had a room to rent and he rented it, he was a student, and he used to often kind of be their representative, he would show up at GALA things.

Now it was tricky when—with some of the activism, you know, there were a couple of times the University used Roger to try to calm the gay students. [LS: Oh really?] Yeah. Where Roger would call me up on the phone or call Jonathan up on the phone, and say “We can get, you know, we can get,” I don't know if it was in response to the harassment or if it was about getting the change in the University by-laws, “We can get that to happen quietly.” You know? And we were both kind of loud activists, we liked the loudness, we thought it had value of its own, that the value wasn't just in getting the thing passed, the value was in public education and in community building. And so there were times that they seemed to have sent him to us. And I remember there was some protest—I'm trying to remember what it was—and he wanted us to cancel the protest, I remember he was very angry at us that we didn't. And that said, you know, he was of one generation and we were of another, and we were going to, we were going to leave University of Chicago, and he wasn't. You know, he was going to have to live with the consequences of whatever we did. [Laughter]

LS: Were the parties at that point—they were still all male, right? Or were there women?

IK: Not all. There were women there. [LS: There were a few?] Yeah, you know, yeah. I remember Hannah Frisch was always at those parties. [LS: OK, yeah.] Have you spoken to Hannah?

LS: I have spoken to Hannah, yeah, she's great. [Interview #24]

IK: Is she still around?

LS: She's still in Hyde Park, yeah.

IK: Ahhhh! She was my therapist. [LS: Oh yeah?] She can't tell you that, but I can. [Laughter]

LS: So wait, how did you—cause she would have been a sympathetic person for you to talk to...

IK: How did I find her?

LS: Yeah. Cause I've just—I've heard so many stories of people going to terrible therapists.

IK: Well, I eventually decided I had to come out because of a terrible therapist at University of Illinois, a woman I went to see at Student Health, who told me that I needed to buy Playboy magazines and start thinking of women as sexual objects. [LS: Oh my god.] She used the phrase sexual objects, and I was already, you know, such a, you know, *fervent* feminist that I was so shocked. I was so shocked. I was so *beyond* shocked that I walked out of her office shaking with fury and deciding "That's it, I'm coming out." [LS: Oh my god.]

Yes. But at University of Chicago, how did I find Hannah? I'm really not certain, it might have been through Tom Jones at Student Health. He always used to, even before the AIDS thing he would always come to talk to GALA every year, like he wanted those gay students to know that the head of Student Health was gay, that they would be sensitive, you could come and talk to us about anything.

LS: So did people have good experiences with Student Health for the most part while he was there?

IK: I think so. We all went to Tom. We all went to Tom. [LS: Huh.] I mean, we would all just call and say "I want an appointment with Tom." You know?

LS: OK. That's so interesting, I had never heard his name before, but it's kind of cool that... I mean, there's a lot of horror stories [IK: Oh yeah?] about Student Health from other periods, right? So that's interesting.

IK: I'm sure that he was not the end of horror stories. [LS: Oh, no.] I mean, I'm sure that bad things continued thereafter, but you know, it was this moment—again, before Internet—but it was this moment of you know, sort of gay liberation activism was happening in the world, but it was coming later to campus. [LS: Right.] And so we were still a little bit in an earlier era, where there was still a lot about who knows who and we all know that we don't say it, but we all know, you know, everybody knows about Howard and Roger. Everybody knows that Tom is at Student Health. Which is kind of a funny regime in the 1980s, you know?

LS: All these kind of codes you have to know...you kind of have to be in [IK: Yeah, the quiet networking] to a certain extent, to get it. So Tom Jones, Student Health... there was something I had wanted to ask about what you had just said...

IK: I don't even know if he's still alive, I have no idea. [LS: Yeah.] Wayne Johnson might know. Wayne Johnson will be [LS: OK, I have to talk to Wayne Johnson], yeah, Wayne

Johnson will know who's around. He'll know who's dead. [LS: It sounds like he'll encyclopedic, yeah.] Yeah.

[51:08]

LS: Student Health... I guess maybe we should go to... the non-discrimination statement at the University is before the harassment. Or is it after? [IK: I think it's after. I think...] OK, so whichever of those comes first, I guess we could talk about that.

IK: Well truthfully, until you said "I wanted to interview you about the..." [LS: You'd forgotten about it?] I forgot about it. [LS: Yeah.] Although once I remembered—I remember meeting with Hanna Gray, I remember she agreed to a meeting. It was something around that. [LS: OK.] It was, maybe it was during, maybe it was the same—I remember we met with her during the harassment. You know, it might have been simultaneous, it might have been we met with her during the harassment and one of the things we said to her was "In the University's response, the University needs to have a non-discrimination policy. That is an appropriate response to this." [LS: Right. That makes sense.] It feels to me like it was all in the same era. You'll have to look at the Maroons or something. [LS: I will have to go and look back at the Maroons, yeah.] And I think Roger Weiss was at one of those meetings, I think Hanna Gray invited Roger Weiss, I think that's why I then... [LS: To meet with you...] To sort of be there as the, you know, as the gay academic, as the gay administration kind of person. And I think that's when I first realized that "Oh, OK, so she... they're gonna be using him for this purpose." [LS: Yeah.] Which made me sad, but... Yeah, I actually, I honestly don't remember so much about that. What I do remember...

LS: Yeah, I don't want to retraumatize you or anything!

IK: Well, I remember more about the harassment stuff. I don't remember so much about the by-law thing. Cause I remember we were... this was happening on a bunch of...

LS: I have a copy of a petition that you circulated with Jon and Michele, Jonathan and Michelle, and you've got all these signatures [IK: Oh wow!], and it was published in the Maroon.

IK: [Clapping] Oh, I wanna see this stuff! [Laughter]

LS: Yeah, I can send you, I'll send you this...

IK: I'm sure it's in a box in the storage, but...

LS: Yeah, and then—I'll send this to you, I have it all as PDFs on my computer.

IK: And the Maroon was, those kids at the Maroon were so great, they were like the progressive force.

- LS: There was like this Grey City Journal, and they would [IK: Grey City Journal] just always publish the ads about divestment and supporting gay students.
- IK: Well, they did the arts stuff too! [LS: Yeah.] Yeah, but we were all close, and so if Michele wanted to write something for the Grey City Journal about this, or whatever [LS: Right], it would go in, if I wanted to write something, it would go in. [LS: Right.] And they were wonderful people. They were like the [LS: That's great], the straight hipsters, although some of them were not straight, many of them were not straight, but at the time they were the ones who were not yet... but they weren't like homophobes, they were hip. [LS: They were like cool with that.] They were so hip, yeah. [LS: That's interesting.] Brian somebody... oh gosh, then there was the gorgeous one, I don't remember his name. [Laughter] It was Winnaker, Whittaker, Winnaker, anyway, yeah, Grey City Journal... [Ed.: "I mixed two people up here. The GCJ editors were Brian Mahoney and Jesse something—the name actually refers to Ken Wissoker. Stephanie Bacon was also key."]
- LS: Yeah. I have them all somewhere, but yeah, no, you [IK: That'll give you, you'll get the timeline off of that] did this whole petition, and you wrote this letter in, and you said "While we were asking people to sign the petition many people were afraid to sign the petition," and that that was proof of why we need the non-discrimination ordinance...
- IK: Yeah, that's how you make an unsuccessful petition successful.
- LS: [Laughter] Very law-student-like.
- IK: Yeah, well, but it's also true [LS: It's very true], cause it's coming right out of the harassment, and anyone who had been in the Grey City Journal saying something favorable about gay people [LS: would have been scared to have been targeted], well, some of them were targeted by the harassment, it wasn't just the gay activists, it was also like people whose names appeared in the Grey City Journal.
- LS: Right. So how did the harassment start?
- IK: Oh, but one other thing I just wanted to say [LS: Sure] about the simultaneity of things happening, was also going on was we were doing work, I remember we were working with—the activism going on was so much fun—I was working, I was twenty-six or whatever, twenty-seven, I was working with all these people at the ACLU because we were trying to get University of Illinois to include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination [LS: OK] and that required a state-wide change [LS: Right.] through their Board of Regents or whatever their Board of Trustees was called. And I think we succeeded. [LS: OK] but it was happening at the same time that we were doing this at University of Chicago. We were working on all these fronts at once to create this whole, like city-wide, state-wide change, and it was feeling like that, like this moment that everything was changing. [LS: Right.]
- So the harassment. How did I... I found out... I was the one that would check the GALA answering machine. [LS: OK] And I checked the answering machine and there was a call

from somebody who was a Hyde Parker, not a student. He had answered an ad in the Reader and now his employer got this letter with a skull and crossbones [LS: OK] saying that he was gay and a probable carrier of AIDS, and he should be fired and this kind of stuff. And then I think there might have even been a second call on the answering machine from somebody else, the same story. And then I got home from there, to my apartment, to my place on—what street did I live on? Same as Obama, next block down, on Greenwood. Got back to my place at Greenwood and 52<sup>nd</sup> and I think there was a message from my parents saying “Call us immediately.” [LS: OK.] And that’s when I first heard that my parents had gotten this letter. About me. And then my next-door neighbor in the building knocked on my door with one. And Danny Leifer. [LS: Your employer.] I don’t even think I was, I don’t know if I was working for Danny or what anymore, but somehow there was some public connection. [LS: Yeah.] Danny called me, he had gotten one. [LS: Wow.] He was so upset. Is that right? Is it Danny? Yeah, I think Danny got one about me—yeah, I was still working for Hillel, I was still doing their graphics, and—although how they knew I worked for Hillel I’m not certain, but anyway... so I remember that all of a sudden, and then we started hearing from other people. Michele wasn’t—Michele was not targeted, oddly. She was always angry about that. She was always bitter about that.

LS: Was it because she was a woman, or...

IK: No, cause they targeted other women. [LS: Cause they did target other women.] They targeted Pam someone, who was a bisexual activist and wrote for the Maroon, or wrote for Grey City. Jonathan was targeted as well, although I don’t remember who—his parents got a letter also. A bunch of people’s parents got letters, there were a lot of parents who got letters. There were a lot of people who came out to their parents because their parents got these letters. We called an emergency, we had an emergency meeting, GALA meeting, and also called, I called those people who had reached out to us who were non-students [LS: OK] and we all got together in a room, but I don’t remember exactly how it played out, Jonathan might remember. Because first we just had to share the stories, because it seemed like two different things, right, there were the activists, and a bunch of us, our names had appeared on some petition [LS: Right] for something. [LS: Yeah.] And then there were these, there were these guys who were unrelated, and it took us a while to piece together, I think it might have taken us a little bit to piece together that they had answered an ad [LS: OK] in the Reader. Now anything I say I would be making up, cause I really don’t remember quite what happened next. Did we call the police, did we—I think we decided to call, start with campus security. I think we might have... [LS: That sounds right.] Yeah, I think we might have started with campus security. Have other people talked to you about this, or is this from Maroon articles, or?

LS: No, I have some stuff, I have the stuff that was published in the Maroon about it, but that’s really all we have for like a paper trail. And there’s some stuff that ended up in the ACT UP files. [IK: OK.] We also have, but... so I might have to go back to the Maroon article and then write you back and say, “Irwin, it says this, is this true?”

IK: “What really did happen?” But I remember we brought in...

LS: But definitely security gets involved...

IK: Security got involved, and they brought in...

LS: The cops eventually got involved as well.

IK: The cops, and the University—the University lawyers were the ones, I think, who got... was it their lawyers? How did, you know, the Reader gave over the information eventually. [LS: Of the people... who had placed the ad?] Who had placed the ad. Because it was obvious that there was a criminal investigation or something going on, so they did, they turned it over to the University, which they might or might not have been authorized to do, but that's what happened, everybody cooperated and the University got the names. But at the time, you know, we didn't know... and the threats in it, and the name of the organization, and it was like "Is this a big organization?" you know, "Who knew? Is this lots of people? Who are they?" [LS: Right.] You know, we were afraid to walk around at night. Like in GALA, like we made this sort of group decision, no one walks around alone at night. I remember we got Larry Bloom involved. He was the alderman at the time. [LS: OK.] I remember we wanted, you know, we were agitating to get the University involved, I don't know, faster, deeper, I don't know what the University was doing that—we wanted the University to condemn it quickly and to take action, and the University, I think, had a slight hiccup of hemming and hawing over whether harm had been done. [LS: OK.] That caused a bit of outrage, and then they did their job. [LS: Right.] And once they did it, they did it fast. [LS: OK.] You know, and those guys were expelled so fast, you know, suspended so fast. [LS: Right, right.] And it was just all so creepy. It was so creepy and so frightening, and then it was like "Who are these..."

LS: Had anyone, like, known those guys? Were they—cause they were publishing this crazy newspaper.

IK: They were publishing the...

LS: The Midway—it went through a couple of different names.

IK: The Midway Review. [LS: The Midway Review.] And they were funded by the Dartmouth Review. They were getting funding from whoever funds the Dartmouth Review. [LS: Oh really?] Right. So they were getting funded to create a University of Chicago version of the Dartmouth Review. [LS: OK.] To create a conservative vehicle on campus. Yeah.

LS: Cause the Midway Review just publishes all of these, like, really hateful things about not just gay people, but... [IK: Hateful, hateful.] I mean, they really hate everybody, but definitely gay people they hate a lot from the Midway Review that I've, which I've read. So it turns out to be those guys, and they get suspended... and then nothing else happened, I guess, after they were suspended, or?

[01:04:30]

IK: Right. I think...

LS: There's a hiccup after you leave.

IK: There's a hiccup after I leave when Russell Miller is supposed to graduate. [LS: Right.] And students then start, you know, doing activism, that he shouldn't get a diploma, he shouldn't graduate. You know, and I'm—I'm agnostic about that. You know, whatever agreement was made with him was made two years earlier, I wouldn't expect the University to change their mind and say [LS: Right] you know, "Now we think it's actually more heinous." [LS: Than we did two years ago.] Than we did, not because anything new has turned up, but because our opinion, our sensibility has changed. [LS: Right.] You know, it might have been nice, but I don't know if they had the grounds to do that. [LS: Right.] And if I remember, they didn't actually—they suspended them for lying during the investigation rather than for harassing us. Cause that they could prove.

LS: Yeah, they briefly, like, wrote these letters accusing the Maroon editors of fabricating the whole thing and it's really—it's hard to follow in the Maroon, cause there are just all these letters.

IK: Oh, they write something saying it was like an agent provocateur or something?

LS: Yeah, that it's actually the Grey City Journal editors who are like the—you know, the unmoved mover here, who's actually coming up with everything, and everybody, they kind of keep changing their stories in the Maroon, which is why it's hard to establish what happened.

IK: I wanted to ask you if it ever occurred to you or one of your colleagues to seek one of these guys out to interview.

LS: We've thought about it, I found... one of them has a Twitter presence, so I know how to get in touch with him. [IK: You could get in touch with him.] Yeah, theoretically... I think we're going to at least send them an e-mail [IK: Reach out], I don't know if it will...

IK: "A Chance to Clear Your Name." [LS: Yeah.] "Come Tell Your Story." [LS: Yeah.] I would find that very interesting.

LS: Yeah, we'll let you know if they ever...

IK: Yeah. I would love to know. I would love to know. [LS: Yeah.] I went to Law School with a wonderful guy named Ken Cmiel who's no longer living, who went to Law School for just one year, and then quit and went back, he was an academic, he taught history at University of Iowa, but he had a category of people he called his hate-brothers. I said

“What is that?” There would be somebody in our Law School class and he’d say, “That’s my hate-brother,” “What is that,” he said “Someone you know you’re going to keep track of through your life—you hate them so much they’re like family.” [Laughter] So like, you know, in this weird way, it’s like knowing you were coming today I went online just to see, cause I’ve never done this [LS: Yeah], like what is Russell Miller doing now? You know, and of course there are a million Russell Millers, you know.

LS: We don’t know exactly where he is, cause there are too many of them.

IK: Right. I remember his father was a chemist at University of Maryland, was a professor at University of Maryland. [LS: Right.] I saw that in an article today, I didn’t remember that, but yeah, it’s sort of like oh yeah, if there’s interesting news about him, I would feel absolutely compelled to know. [LS: Yeah.] You know? In that weird way. [LS: Of course.] Well, I mean, I’m not certain I should. [Laughter] I’m not certain it’s good for me to know.

LS: But you would feel compelled, yeah.

IK: But I would feel a compulsion around that.

LS: No, I didn’t have that term, but I have those people too [IK: Oh yeah?], so I’m going to start using it now! [Laughter]

IK: You hate them so much they’re like family! [Laughter]

LS: So that’s—I’ve learned a new term for that.

[1:08:20]

IK: There was another thing that happened, which was we filed a lawsuit. [LS: Right.] Did you hear about that?

LS: I know that you filed a lawsuit.

IK: So we filed a lawsuit against these guys. [LS: What happened?] And that’s a sad story. That’s such a sad story because it was—I don’t know, it was nine of us or thirteen of us, people who had, who had been harassed, and my parents joined the suit too. [LS: OK.] You know, for intentional infliction of emotional distress, which is what it was. It was nothing but that. [Laughter] It served no function but that. So it was pretty much a no-brainer, and we worked with a brand-new lawyer that I knew from the Town Meeting, and we filed the lawsuit for multiple millions of dollars, cause we figured out sort of what the damage was worth for each of those letters, and how many people and how many letters and that kind of thing. And we did it, you know, we did it as a statement, I mean we did it, we wanted—we wanted to empower Chicagoans, you know? And so much of the news had been, you know, the Ordinance didn’t pass, and then all these gay people are victimized and stuff, and we really wanted, we wanted to turn that around, you know,

we wanted to sort of take authorship. And then I moved here, and then at some point we realized that our attorney hadn't filed motions or anything and the case was dismissed for lack of prosecution. It was like oh, OK, well, whatever we did, you know, we had that splash about it, even if, you know, no one's wondering what happened to the case but everyone remembers that we filed a lawsuit against those guys [LS: Yeah.] and that would be empowering to people.

And then all of a sudden my parents were served with papers for a lawsuit for frivolous—filing a frivolous lawsuit. [LS: Oh no. OK.] What was it? They had—no, no, no, it wasn't that. Our attorney had sort of dropped doing anything, I don't know, she had a nervous breakdown, I don't know what happened, I don't remember what happened to her, she didn't file anything, the case was dismissed. A case was filed against her for frivolous lawsuit. She didn't respond. They got a judgment against her—I guess against all of us—and you know, it was the lawyer, the lawyer wanted to be paid, you know, I don't think Russell Miller had anything to do with this, it was just this horrible lawyer wanted to get paid, and so we got a judgment for, you know, tons of, I think thousands of, many thousands of dollars of attorney's fees. And the only people who had assets were my parents. And all of a sudden my parents get served with something that their house is gonna get attached, you know, they got called in for some kind of interview about all their assets and stuff, and it was—I have never felt so humiliated and low in my life as watching my parents pay Russell Miller's lawyer. And my parents had to pay, you know. They had to pay, and some of the other plaintiffs, you know, kicked in some money, but nobody had much [LS: Right], you know, and this lawyer was out of business and she wasn't practicing anymore and she said she would pay my parents back over time, and she made one payment or something, that was it. So my parents ended up paying Russell Miller's lawyer for his efforts, and that's I think one of the saddest things that I carry with me from the whole experience. [LS: Yeah.] That my parents, who had been so, you know, they had been so shaken by getting—thinking someone was trying to kill me, and it was such an awful thing for them, and then for them to really sort of like pull through and really stand behind me and step up, “Yes, we'll be part of the lawsuit too,” and then they get punished for it.

LS: Yeah. Yeah, that's awful.

IK: It was awful.

LS: Kind of like this—it's not like the lawyer has a *malice* in the same way that Russell Miller did, but it's just kind of tragic.

IK: But he was the lawyer also for the Midway Review [LS: Yeah?], whoever this lawyer was, I mean he wasn't a lawyer without ideology. [LS: OK. Yeah, so he was a...] He wasn't some nice guy who got bamboozled by Russell Miller into representing him. [LS: Fair enough, fair enough.] This crazy student and this funny thing, you know, I mean, he was...

LS: He was, he had taken that case on for a reason, yeah.

IK: Yeah, right. There was malice. [LS: Yeah.] There was malice.

LS: So there was malice. OK.

IK: Of course. He didn't spend much time. Do you know what I mean? [LS: Yeah.] He didn't spend much time on the case. Obviously he couldn't collect from Russell. [LS: Right.] So.

LS: That is sad.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

LS: And just—I don't know, after the climax of having things happen...

IK: It was horrible. I mean, I want to cry just sitting and thinking about it now. Just awful.

[1:13:50]

LS: Yeah. So that's the, I guess that's the harassment piece we've kind of talked about and I'll fill you in, when we find out more [laughter], if you want, if we find anything interesting out...

IK: When we sat down I had noted some things...

LS: Yeah, you had made some notes.

IK: I wanted to tell you about Danny Leifer [LS: You did], wanted to tell you about GALA, wanted to tell you about the law student conference, I mean the Conference on Sexual Orientation and the Law, and I did, enough. [LS: Yeah, it sounds like that was pretty...] Howard and Roger, Jim Hormel, and the Ordinance.

LS: Good. That's... [Laughter]

IK: My needs for posterity have been met.

LS: [Laughing] Your needs for posterity have been, have been done. I guess one thing we kind of like to ask is kind of what the relationships were between the Ls and the Gs and the Bs at the kind of time while you were, while you were there. [IK: Um...] It sounds like there were both lesbians and gay men in GALA at all times. [IK: Yeah, yeah, you know, there weren't...] Was bisexuality a thing [IK: Yes] which you were concerned about or that was creating tensions?

IK: Yes. I remember that there were some women that came to GALA who were bisexual [LS: OK], there were a couple... I think it was kind of mixed, you know, I remember that the bisexual women were very much, like, respected for that, like they were like "Yeah!

We need to have a bisexual department,” cool, and then a couple of bisexual men were like “Oh, really.” [Laughter] You know, like they were doubted, that you couldn’t possibly be bisexual, or if you were in fact bisexual, why would you choose to like be—like we didn’t have the word queer yet. [LS: Right.] Right, so we couldn’t even ask the question, kind of like what is, you know...

So I remember different kinds of reactions, seeing different kinds of reactions to different people, but it was a very political group and a very smart group, and very engaged. I would have to say that that group was more sort of engaged with, you know, the way they thought about politics, I guess since then I’ve been in, like, ACT UP and Queer Nation [LS: Right], who are even, much more so about having a political analysis of everything, but that group also.

Now, there were also some, like, gay Republicans that used to come to GALA. I remember when Reagan was re-elected we had an Election Night party, at my house, I think, for GALA, and I remember there were two gay Republicans, and they showed up with a victory cake or something like that, and people almost assaulted them. [LS: Yeah.] I mean, we were so angry because it was so awful in that moment in history [LS: Yeah], and for them to like come in with this University-of-Chicago-conservative lord-it-over-us kind of thing was so outrageous and so insulting. I remember Hannah Frisch getting into—Hannah Frisch screaming at them [laughter] and storming out, actually. She wouldn’t be in the room with them. [LS: Wow.] She wouldn’t be in the house with them. None of us wanted to be in the house with them! [LS: Yeah.] It was my house, I couldn’t not be there, but anyway...

But your question was about how the men and the women got along with each other?

LS: I guess the men and the women and just whether bisexual issues and... I don’t know if trans or gender identity issues would have been thematized at all.

IK: There were not... so backing up, there were a lot more men who were out than women who were out. [LS: Right.] The women who were out and the men who were out worked really well together from my perspective, I thought, you know, I thought we did great activism together [LS: That’s great], and had fun together, and you know, Michele will have maybe a different view, but I think she also will have experienced, will have experienced it as a positive—but she’ll have been more aware of when it wasn’t positive [LS: Yeah.] than I might. So yeah... and I loved, I always loved doing activism with the women, there was less kind of bullshit involved. [Laughter] And I don’t know, there was just more, I don’t know, more bravery. I can’t quite put my finger on it. [LS: Yeah.] Or there was more—somehow their activism, there was something more compelling, like the fact... you know, the gay men at University of Chicago were a pretty privileged bunch in some ways. They were all really smart, and they could have all found their ways to be, you know, the quieted gay man in any academic department or whatever, and I think there was something about sort of the bigger obstacles ahead for the women that made them really determined in their activism, and that was something that I really responded

to. [LS: Sure.] Something that really always moved me, and that I responded to pretty immediately.

There, at that time, in that era, there was nobody out as trans. [LS: OK.] At all. You know, there was one person that came out to me as—came out to me as FTM in like my first year at University of Chicago because she, and I say she only because she never actually transitioned and continues to live as a woman and thinks of herself in an ambiguous way, but she, she still is a she for public purposes and even for private purposes. But I was the first person she had ever confided in about that, and I had never heard of such a thing before, and it was... it's like one of those moments that I wish I could relive. [LS: Sure.] You know, that I could go back and visit and tell my twenty-one year old self what to say in response. [LS: Yeah.] You know, cause all I could do was, you know, I could listen, I listened, said "Wow. That must be hard." [LS: Yeah, yeah.] You know, but it was so brand-new to me I wasn't certain I believed it.

LS: Yeah, it was very early, right?

IK: Well, it was this, it was that she came out to me as someone who was FTM and gay, so she was attracted to men, and so like, I had, you know, of course I knew that there were MTFs and I imagined that there must be FTMs but I also—but I hadn't heard yet about people, you know, people who were FTM and were gay. [LS: Right.] And so I thought "Well that's weird, why do you, so just, you know, you already have access to all the straight men!" [Laughter] And I didn't... you know, there was a wonderful graduate student that I confided this in because I was uncertain about how my reaction was. [LS: Right.] Ward somebody. I want to say Ward Keeler, I don't know [LS: Ward Keeler, OK.], but I want to say that, and I told him, and his immediate response was "Ahh, so she needs a very special kind of bisexual partner." And he immediately [LS: He got it, yeah.] saw right through to the problem-solving and the—not the "Is this for real?" [LS: Right.] But the "What does she need?" You know, "What is she gonna need to look for in her life [LS: Right], and how can she find it?" And he was, just that comment just opened me up in a brand new way [LS: OK], where I was like "Oh, right. It's not up to me to wonder if this is real or not, it's not up to me to..."

LS: Yeah. She doesn't actually have access to all the straight men, yeah.

IK: She doesn't. Right! And that's not who she wants, and that's not who she's attracted to, and that's not who she is. [LS: Right, right.] And... I remember Ward. Ward Keeler, anthropology. Did things with Gamelans, I think.

LS: Oh, cool. [Laughter]

IK: And he said that to me, and it was like "Wow, right. That's how you respond, that's how you listen, and that's how you are of use," so that was a big moment for me. But no, even when I left there was, you know, we had our whole Sexual Orientation and the Law Conference, there wasn't a thing about transgender. [LS: OK.] It wasn't on anybody's radar screen.

LS: That makes sense, yeah. No, it's interesting [IK: It is so interesting] to figure out exactly when this kind of becomes something that people think about.

IK: Yeah, yeah. Huge change over these years.

[01:22:40]

LS: For sure, for sure. Yeah. So I think those are—I think we've covered a lot. What did you do after you graduated? You moved out here in '89...

IK: I moved out here to practice law.

LS: OK. Out *here* here, or San Francisco?

IK: San Francisco, to practice law. I had wanted to do activism with law. But I started out at a law firm, it was horrible and soul-crushing and I was doing Queer Nation at the same time and getting arrested in civil disobedience, and the law firm was like pretending not to notice, and then I was, then the law firm, then I was doing activism within the bar association in San Francisco, and then the law firm had a downsize and they laid off like all of the queer associates and all of the associates of color. It was outrageous. [LS: Oh my God, really?] Yeah. And it made the news, we made it make the news.

LS: They really just laid off all the queer associates...

IK: Except for me. Why?

LS: Wait, how did you get spared?

IK: Except for me and then they laid me off six months later. [LS: Oh.] They did not me, because I think they were afraid of me, because they knew I was an activist. The other queers that were all fired were not activists. [LS: Wow.] They were sort of the quieter ones.

So anyway, so then I was unemployed, which was great, I was doing at that point a lot of Queer Nation and then I was doing a lot of ACT UP, then I started working eventually, started working at and then was executive director of the AIDS Legal Referral Panel [LS: OK] of the San Francisco Bay Area, so it was legal services for people with HIV in seven counties and it was wonderful people, wonderful work, I loved it, loved it, loved it. Meanwhile, another...

LS: So that's—sorry, just to clarify—so that's people who have HIV, getting them in touch with lawyers who can help them with whatever they might need to do.

IK: Yeah, we had a roster of a couple hundred lawyers who would do pro bono services for people with HIV. [LS: OK.] They're having their thirtieth anniversary this year. It started

out as a group of lawyers because these guys were dying and people, they didn't even know why, what it was, but they were all like, you know, thirty-somethings and twenty-somethings dying and they didn't have, their lovers couldn't get into the hospital room, and they didn't have wills, and everything was gonna go back to families of origin that they had run away from and so this, these lawyers started, they got a group together to start running to the hospital and doing wills and powers of attorney for all these guys. And that's how it started, and it became much bigger, and many more legal issues over time. During my era, during my administration, we moved, we started actually also doing legal representation in-house in areas of HIV law where we had special expertise. [LS: OK.] So we would refer out for bankruptcies and wills and trusts [LS: Sure], but, you know, insurance benefits we would start doing. [LS: OK.] Anyway, so I was with them until 2000. The other thing that was going on in my life was that—professionally—was that with a few friends I started a group called the Kinsey Sicks. Do you know about this piece already?

LS: I've read the profile the alumni magazine did, I think. [Laughter]

IK: So in this group, you know, it was started by, there were four of us, and one of the others was also an HIV legal professional. [LS: OK.] And we had pretty intense work and had to be, you know, very respectable, we were lawyers and policy people, but the group really let us blow off steam, and it became surprisingly popular surprisingly quickly, and we kept it going, we're about to have our twentieth anniversary concert at the Castro Theater.

But we got an offer to open a show off Broadway in 2000, and so I couldn't—so that was hard, cause I wasn't done with the AIDS Legal Referral Panel, I loved that work, but I, you know, thought “OK, will I regret not having given, you know, will I regret having given this a try or not having given this a try?” And so the regret test said I've gotta leave and do this. So they hired Bill Hirsh, who's still the Executive Director this many years later [LS: OK], I'm sorry, I'm pointing to you as if you know people in San Francisco, but no, you know the University of Chicago people. [Laughter] Anyway, so in 2001 we finally went to open in New York, we moved to New York September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001 [LS: Oh, OK], the towers came down five days later, we were there, we had raised the money, we opened the show, we closed within two months cause no one came to New York [LS: Yeah], no one went out, you know, everything off Broadway closed. [LS: OK.] Except Puppetry of the Penis. [Laughter] So anyway, I've been doing the Kinsey Sicks for twenty years, and...

LS: So you guys are a travelling act?

IK: Yeah. I'm the only one left in the Bay Area. [LS: OK.] We'll be in Chicago [LS: Oh really?] on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August. Will you be back in Chicago?

LS: Whereabouts? I will be back in Chicago.

IK: We'll be at Mayne Stage.

LS: Oh my gosh, in Rogers Park!

IK: Yeah.

LS: I live in Rogers Park.

IK: Oh really?

LS: I'm totally going to come.

IK: Oh great, yeah, August 16th at Mayne Stage.

LS: August 16<sup>th</sup> at Mayne Stage, OK. That'll be fun, alright.

IK: Where do you live? Where exactly?

LS: I live kind of right behind Clark and Devon.

IK: Oh, uh-huh. By Loyola?

LS: Pretty close to Loyola, yeah, at the Loyola Red, at Loyola L Stop, so...

IK: Yeah. They didn't have colors yet when I lived there, so Red doesn't mean anything to me, but... [Laughter]

LS: OK, yeah, but near the Loyola campus, so yeah... near the Leather Archives and Museum, as well, but, yeah, so...

IK: And then seven years ago we moved up here, my partner and I, my husband and I, now-husband and I, and another couple that we're sort of family with and raise children with, and since I've been up here, we joined a synagogue that was kind of shrinking, and the rabbi was quitting, and it was kind of a mess, and I really wanted to have a synagogue close by and I wasn't willing to let them implode, so I kind of stepped in and started doing some leadership and they sort of pushed me up to just be, to be rabbi. [LS: OK.] So I've been acting there as rabbi since 2008.

LS: OK, great! So are you still working as a lawyer?

IK: Not at all.

LS: Not at all.

IK: Not since the AIDS Legal Referral Panel. I haven't been a lawyer for fourteen years now.

LS: OK. But you've kept being a Kinsey Sicks.

IK: Yeah, well, if you had the choice, what would you do?

LS: [Laughing] I guess I would, I guess I would also, yeah, that sounds great.

IK: Yeah, it's a ridiculously fun way to make a living.

LS: I bet. That's awesome that you can do that and then be a rabbi... and then you mentioned you have kids?

IK: Yeah, we have a twelve-year old and a sixteen-year old.

LS: OK. That's great.

IK: Yeah, so, knock wood. [Knocks on wood.] All of these things have come together in these remarkable ways.

LS: Yeah, yeah... I think that none of these questions exactly fit your life, so... [Laughter]

IK: There aren't many questions that fit my life.

LS: Yeah, so what else should I ask? So you mentioned that you met your current, your husband, how long have you been married for?

IK: We got... well, we met in 1994. [LS: Met in 1994 at Jonathan's house.] The spring of '94 at Jonathan's house. [LS: In San Francisco?] In San Francisco. And then the first time we got married... [LS: At a seder?] We met at a seder. The first time we got married was 2004. [LS: OK.] City Hall in San Francisco. Tom Ammiano married us, if you know who he is. [LS: No, but...] He's a, he was a teacher and then he was a comedian for many years, and he was Harvey Milk's right hand. [LS: OK.] And he's now a state representative in California. So Tommy married us in 2004, but of course that didn't last, and—I mean those were annulled. [LS: Right.] As they should have been from a legal perspective, we don't want mayors making up the law, cause more often that will work against us than for us. [LS: Than for us, that's true.] But still it was a bummer when it was annulled. [LS: Yeah.] And then we, and then during the Prop 8, pre-Prop 8, post-California Supreme Court decision window in California in 2008, we got married here on the deck. [LS: Oh, beautiful.] Yeah, it was at sunset, it was gorgeous... yeah, and so we've been married for almost five years.

[1:31:50]

LS: Would you—this has been interesting to talk to with some people as well—like when you were in your twenties at Chicago, would you ever have imagined being married?

IK: Never. Not ever. And even when people started talking about marriage, I thought “That's a bad idea,” I'm like “We don't want, you know, why are we subscribing to this institution?” [LS: OK.] You know, and I had a very, you know, sort of my feminist view

on marriage was just so... you know, I just couldn't find what was redeeming in it. [LS: Yeah.] You know, it's just an institution to repress women and then of course, you know, the marriage fight, in a certain way, did a lot to redeem marriage, I think. It raised its value in the culture. I think the whole gay marriage struggle has raised the value of marriage. [LS: OK.] Right? It makes marriage really desirable for everybody. And there have been some recent statistics that places that have gay marriage now have—that heterosexual marriage has gone up, which is very interesting to me. [LS: That is interesting.] And also I really, I actually kind of love the idea that, you know, straight people now are gonna be able to look at the model of same-sex couples and say “Well, if that's marriage, then why do I have to have this role in my marriage?” [LS: Right, right.] You know, and I like that, you know, we might, just by joining the institution, we might in fact be destroying heterosexual marriage. [Laughter] And maybe putting something a little bit better in its place. [LS: Yeah.] But no, I never would have, never would have imagined being able to actually say married without quotation marks.

LS: Was it something that people were talking about during the 80s?

IK: No. I think, I mean, not other than in jest, I mean, I think we would, you know... I mean, I did a conference on Sexual Orientation and the Law in 1987. [LS: Right, right.] It never even occurred to us to have something like that as a topic. [LS: That was not a panel, yeah.] And if someone in the room—and someone might have—gotten up and said something about “Well, what about marriage?” people would have thought “Oh, there's the wacko in the back of the room,” you know, whatever. It was such a fringe idea. I'm so glad I was wrong. [LS: Yeah.] Really, I'm so glad I was wrong. [LS: Yeah.] We were all wrong about it.

LS: Yeah. And I'm also thinking about your work as a lawyer for people with HIV, and like—cause one of the big problems there was that all of these people who died didn't have legal arrangements [IK: Right] that allowed them to leave things to their partners, right?

IK: Lots of nightmare stories. Lots and lots.

LS: And I feel like that, I don't know, also, I don't know, was an argument for marriage just in terms of making that...

IK: Well, already by then, you know, already in the 1990s doing that work, already marriage was on the table. [LS: OK.] And certainly domestic partnership was. [LS: Right.] Sort of recreating the bundle of rights even without the institution. [LS: Right.] That was within the realm of possibility. [LS: By the 90s.] By the 90s, yeah, yeah.

LS: OK. That makes sense... well, congratulations on your marriage, your non-quotation-marked marriage [IK: Why thank you!] [Laughter] and I think I'm...

IK: Well, call me if anything else occurs to you.

LS: Can I ask—I have one more question. [IK: Sure.] You do drag professionally now. Did you do it before you did it professionally, or it just started?

IK: No. It's so funny. I mean, as a kid I did, you know, until oddly enough once, you know, oddly enough it comes very naturally to me and I, you know, I can move in dresses and high heels with great ease. And one of the things I love about what we do with the Kinsey Sicks is that, you know, we're really so much about, or I would like to think that we are so much about, questioning gender roles, etcetera, you know, I mean, there's so much drag that I hate. I mean, I can't, I actually can't go see drag shows. [LS: Oh really?] I get angry so quickly, I get angry at the misogyny in them, and you know, and I'm always bummed when I tell someone what I do and they're like "Oh, you should come to the drag bar in my town," you know, it's like "I don't want to see what I'm going to see at the drag bar in your town." [LS: And you don't want to, yeah.] Probably. Although there are more and more people performing in drag doing, you know, interesting and political things. [LS: Yeah.]

But we're like very political, and our characters are just, you know, so interestingly ambiguous. I mean, none of, there's no one in our group that's, there's no caricatures of women, you know. We do have these four quirky characters, but they're not types in a gendered type way [LS: Right...] and certainly, well, arguably one of them is, there's one that's sort of the glamorous one [LS: OK], you know, that you can't really see her without her being gendered. [LS: Sure.] But my character? You know, I don't even quite know how people see her. But, I mean, I think in many ways she's just who I would be as a woman, you know, in a certain way, like she's not... [LS: She's a complex character, yeah.] Yeah, she's got all of her quirks, she's got all of her foibles, her foibles are funny, and you know, and I love that she's both, you know, she's kind of graceful and she's kind of awkward, and she's the lesbian of the group too. [LS: Oh really?] Yeah. [LS: You play the lesbian in the group? That's great!] Yeah. But she's also, you know, she's a lesbian in high heels, you know, and so she's a really interesting mix of stuff.

LS: Right, she's not a stereotype, as you say.

IK: Yeah, you have to put in a little bit of work to get who she is.

LS: Yeah, that's great. Well, now I'm even more excited about seeing... [Laughter] seeing you do your professional stuff. Alright then!

IK: So I have to pre-warn you, forewarn you that I'm not good with faces, so when you come to the show you're going to have to come up to me and say "Lauren Stokes!"

LS: I'll have to introduce myself, OK. But I should introduce myself. I will do that, then.

IK: And then I'll be like "Oh God," and then I'll remember everything about today and everything about you, I just will connect your face with it again.

LS: That's totally fine. Alright. And I'll send you some e-mails. I guess I'll turn this off, unless there's anything else for posterity... [IK: No.] Alright.

[1:38:30]

*End of Interview*