

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #93
LEINER, ALICE (1950-) AB 1974**

At U of C: 1968-1970, 1972-1974

Interviewed: December 22, 2014 (1 session)

Interviewer: Lauren Stokes

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

Length: 59:17

[00:00]

[00:00 to 02:40: LS explaining interview protocol and demographic questions]

LS: We like to start these interviews by asking, how did you end up at the University of Chicago?

AL: Oh, OK. My brother went there, and at the time it had quite a few selling points. One was it had no dress code. You wouldn't believe how many dress codes were in effect at other universities back then. [LS: Oh, wow.] I had friends from high school who, the colleges they went to, they had to wear skirts or dresses. This is what was important to me! [Laughter] Also it was a good eight or nine hundred miles away from home, and that was an attraction, and it had a reputation for—well, actually its reputation on the East Coast was it had no reputation, nobody had ever heard of it where I went to school, which was in a suburb of New York City. Typical East Coast myopia. But what I learned from my brother was that it was a place with a lot of non-conformists. That appealed to me.

LS: And so were your expectations of the University fulfilled when you got there? Was it indeed a place of a lot of non-conformists?

AL: Yes, it was, and it was very academically demanding and intimidating, I'll add. On the one hand, I really liked the intellectual rigor and got very involved in some of my classes, and on the other hand I was really pulled away from academics by the excitement of all of the political and social change of the sixties or early seventies.

LS: So you had come there, if you came in fall of 68 that was like right after the convention and everything.

AL: The Democratic Convention, yes, that was right after the Democratic Convention and the police beating protestors and that, you know, what happened right after that, shortly after,

was the trial of the Chicago Eight, soon it was the Chicago Seven, and Chicago was a hotbed of political activism. [AL laughs] And that was fun!

LS: So what kinds of activism were people involved in?

AL: Well, the anti-war demonstrations were the biggest one. [LS: OK.] But there also was a women's liberation movement on campus, and you know, then came the Gay Liberation movement, and there were certainly demonstrations for civil rights. I remember personally being mostly involved in women's liberation and gay liberation.

LS: What was the, what were the issues that the women's liberation were particularly concerned with?

AL: My first introduction was a speech given by Naomi Weisstein—I don't know if you have her name or if you're familiar with her? [LS: I don't...] OK, let me spell it. W-E-I-S-S-T-E-I-N, and if you'll Google you'll see that she had quite a few disputes with the University, I believe, but she gave a speech or lecture entitled—I believe—"I Am Furious Female." There had shortly before been a movie, "I Am Curious Female," and I think it was a porn movie [laughter], I'm not sure, or it was just—that was the impression I had, I never saw it, but that's where she got the title for her lecture "I Am Furious Female," and she was really the first person I had ever gone to hear talking about feminist issues and she talked about difficulties getting a job even if you graduated at the top of your class at an Ivy League school, if you were female they wanted to know could you type? I mean, nowadays that seems quaint, but that was reality back then, and I have to credit her with making me realize how much unfairness there was in society at the time.

LS: So was she a professor at the University, or?

AL: You know, I'm pretty sure she was a graduate student, and I don't recall if she taught at all. I didn't know her personally, I just Googled her about a year ago and was surprised about a lot of the things that I read about her. She was quite active in the women's movement, I hadn't realized that. I mean, I knew she was active in it, I just hadn't realized the full extent.

LS: So then was there like a Women's Lib group on campus that you were a part of?

AL: I didn't join a women's liberation group, but I had the impression there were such groups. There was at least one such group. I just became more active in Gay Liberation.

[08:45]

LS: So how did that happen?

AL: I remember at some point, somebody put, I think an ad in the Maroon about starting a group, and I responded to the ad, and he and I never figured out what to do, but shortly after that, Henry Wiemhoff, who's mentioned in one of those articles... [LS: Yeah, I

definitely know who Henry is.] OK, so Henry put, this is my recollection, and I apologize, because let me tell you, I find when I'm comparing notes with people about long ago, recollections are not always accurate, but my recollection is, Henry put an ad in the paper for a roommate, and he asked for a gay roommate, and so we got in touch with him, you know, I did, or this other person—whose name I'm not giving you because I don't know if he is currently out or not [LS: Sure]—but we got in touch with Henry and talked about starting a Gay Liberation, and he decided to hold a meeting at his apartment, and he knew some people, including Murray, Murray Edelman [Interview #83], and there's a woman, Shelly Brody—have you come across her name? [LS: That does sound really familiar.] Yeah, I think her name is Michelle, actually. [LS: Yes, Michelle Brody I have heard of.]

She became a roommate of Henry's and I was there, and I don't know exactly who else was there the first meeting, there were only like five or six of us, but then at a second meeting there were more, and a third meeting, and then finally there was a meeting at a visiting—I believe he was a visiting professor, Randy Trumbach, T-R-U-M-B-A-C-H [LS: OK]—and I believe he was a visiting professor at the University, that was my impression at the time, and he lived over on Cornell, I think, and he hosted one of the meetings, and easily fifty, sixty, seventy people showed up, it was just a mob scene. [LS: Oh wow.] Yeah, it was wonderful, it was wonderful. Most of the people were not from the University. So when the organization got off the ground initially it wasn't entirely students. But we formed a student organization because there were a lot of benefits to that. Free use of the copying machines, office space, phone line, there were a lot of things like that. We could use dormitories' cafeterias for dances and things like that. So there were kind of two groups moving in parallel with overlapping membership. But we made great use of the University and I would even say we mis-used the University. [Laughter]

[12:10]

LS: So what had, when you saw that initial ad in the Maroon, like what inspired you to call about it? Had you been thinking, like, "I would love to see a Gay Liberation group start up," or did you see it and you thought "That sounds like something I'm interested in"?

AL: Well, I don't know, I was just interested in becoming politically active, and that's about all the specificity I can recall at this time. [LS: Sure.] You know, at the time, to just meet another gay person was an astonishing event, because everybody was in the closet, and so honestly just calling somebody who identified as gay was an event. It's a wonderful event. It's hard to describe what that was like. [LS: Yeah.] But you felt like you were meeting a long-lost relative in a way.

LS: Were most of those people who showed up at those initial meetings men or women?

AL: The first handful of meetings might have been mixed pretty half and half, but by the time there were twenty or thirty people showing up, it was mostly men. Now on campus it was a little different because the campus organization was never that large, or at least while I was there, but you know, I dropped out after winter quarter of 1970, so that was pretty

early on in terms of being active in the campus organization, but the city-wide organization really grew tremendously, and that was mostly men.

LS: Right, at some point they kind of moved meetings up to the north side? Is that right?

AL: Yes. We tried to form a gay women's group and our efforts didn't get off the ground. Later on groups were formed on the north side, but ours petered out.

LS: Why do you think that was?

AL: To be honest, I think it was because we ended up wanting to have more fun than just do politics. [LS: OK.] [Laughter] We did some crazy things, like we spray-painted the signs outside the Playboy Theater. I don't know if the Playboy Theater is still in Chicago or not, but there used to be a Playboy Building and a Playboy Theater, and so our idea of political activism was to spray slogans on the theater, and that kind of stuff was a little bit—there was a lot of hijinks in it, and not necessarily serious political activity, and I'm afraid that was the mood that overtook us, so our political ambitions petered out [LS: Yeah...], and we just went to lots of parties and the bars.

LS: Were the gay women's and gay men's scenes overlapping at that point? Like where would women hang out and go to parties?

AL: OK. Initially, and this I would say in the fall of '69 and early '70, I think there may have been two women's bars in the whole city. One of them was way way way north called Chez Ron, C-H-E-Z-R-O-N, and I only went a couple of times. There were these intimidating men at the door that seemed like they were kind of mafia types, and they would check your IDs and then lock the door behind you once you came in. We were allowed to dance, there was no dancing allowed in any of the men's bars, but in the women's bars we were allowed to fast-dance. We weren't allowed to slow dance. [LS: OK.] I don't remember the second bar, but I do think there might have been a second women's bar. My recollection is that there were dozens, you know, of men's bars. Maybe thirty, forty? I don't know, but a lot, because at one point we went around to the men's bars trying to drum up support for the organization, and there were quite a few of them. They were called "meat racks" by most of the people.

LS: Meat racks? [AL: Yeah.] OK, huh.

AL: Meaning you, if you were a gay guy, you went in and looked around for somebody you found attractive, there might be two minutes of conversation, there might not be, and you would leave together. You might never share names [laughs], there would be these anonymous sexual encounters. People were very ashamed.

LS: Were any of the men's bars like in Hyde Park or did you mostly have to kind of go north, or...

AL: Yeah, I don't think there were any in Hyde Park, or if there were I wasn't aware of them. I remember one called the Normandy, and I'm sure Murray or other men you talk to will remember it.

LS: I think I have heard that name before, yeah.

AL: And it was a little different in that it was a very large bar, and the time I went in people were talking animatedly. It was more a social scene than a meat rack. Once Gay Liberation got off the ground women started throwing parties, so there were a lot of parties.

LS: Like house parties?

AL: Yeah, at people's homes. And I don't know if you've run across the name Vernita Gray? [LS: I have.] OK, I believe she passed away last spring.

LS: Yeah, recently, but actually they just recently came out with a kind of biography of her, and so I have actually just finished reading that.

AL: Oh really? Well, I read a little bit about her on the Internet, and all I can say is she knew who was having the best parties, and she had the best dance tapes. [Laughter] And there was a real frivolous side to all of us back then [LS: Yeah], so there was a lot of pot smoking going on, a lot of drinking.

[19:45]

LS: Yeah, because she was—where were you living when you were at the University? I assume you started in the dorms, but...

AL: Yeah, I started in Woodward Court.

LS: Oh, interesting. What house were you in?

AL: I started in Rickert. [LS: OK] And then I moved to—I don't remember the name of it, what were the other... not Flint, what was the other one? [LS laughs] It's opposite Flint. Rickert was in the middle.

LS: I can picture what you mean. OK, so from Woodward to the one opposite Flint, I can look that up.

AL: Yeah, and then my second year before I dropped out I was in Snell.

LS: Oh, OK. Yeah, Snell or Snell-Hitchcock.

AL: Yeah, it used to be the girls' wing was Snell, the boys' wing was Hitchcock.

LS: OK. Was the social life, was your social life mostly in this kind of Gay Liberation world, or did you have, like were the dorms also a place that was social for you?

AL: Not for me, no, though Snell had a number of us who, had a number of women who were gay or came out that year, and most of us left the dorm [LS: OK] and moved into apartments.

LS: Do you think those things were connected, or?

AL: Yeah. We wanted to be among other gay people because we were at that point such a minority as far as we could tell. Honestly, if you went to college in those days, and you knew you were gay, you wouldn't tell anybody, you wouldn't tell your roommate, you'd keep it a secret, and if finally at some point you became close friends with another gay person and you divulged the fact to each other... I don't know, it was an amazing thing, it was you were afraid to do it, but you finally went ahead and did it, and once you did it you were so relieved that somebody else knew you were gay, and they were gay, and it was OK, and then that might be the only gay person you might know for a year. Men had an advantage in the sense that there were two professors, a gay couple, Roger Weiss and Harold Brown, I want to say? [LS: Yeah, I think Howard Brown.] Howard Brown, OK. They used to have parties all the time. And everybody on campus knew they were gay. So men could go and meet other gay people, but to my, in my recollection women didn't go to those parties.

[22:45]

LS: OK. Had you known you were gay before you went to the University, or?

AL: No.

LS: No. That was something that came out of, like, your experience there.

AL: It came out of meeting someone who was gay, and she told me about herself, and I began to think about myself, and then decided I was gay.

LS: Yeah... that's funny, I've talked to a lot of people at this point, and that's like a very typical story for women and less so for men, like a lot more women have said something to me kind of along those lines. [AL: Yeah.] That it kind of came out of interactions with other people, and so I find that just kind of interesting. Not that I can make a total generalization, but...

AL: Well, you know, back in those days you were considered a freak. [LS: Right.] You would be considered a freak, and it's very difficult to imagine yourself a freak, so you find some other way to analyze yourself, you know, and to identify yourself. I don't know what would be comparable nowadays, but by identifying yourself as gay or thinking of yourself as gay, you were saying "I'm a freak, I'm weird, I'm strange, I'm ridiculous, I'm

an embarrassment.” Those are hard things to want to accept, and so you can just tell yourself you haven’t met the right man, you know?

LS: Yeah. But so then meeting other gay women kind of changes that.

AL: Yes. And you realize that gay women aren’t freaks.

LS: Right. Right... so you said earlier that it was never something you would tell really your roommate or anyone. When you started kind of going to these parties and being political in these ways, were you ever kind of worried that other people outside of the community would find out or anything like that?

AL: Well, let me first backtrack. [LS: Sure.] My first year roommate was Nancy Garwood. [LS: Oh, no way! OK.] Yeah. And she and I were not friends. We didn’t get along as roommates, actually, and I ended up moving out of that room and moving into that other dorm we can’t remember. Was it Wallace?

LS: Is it Wallace? Let me pull up a map, I have one right here... it’s across from Flint, right?

AL: Yeah, Rickerts in the middle.

LS: Right... I’ve only been here as a graduate student, right, so I haven’t lived in the dorms. [Laughter] [AL: Oh, that’s OK.] So I don’t remember them. But so your first year roommate was Nancy, and then you moved...

AL: Right, and I didn’t know that she was gay, but my sophomore year, my second year when I was in Snell, that was a—I’m trying to remember, it was before that point that I began to self-identify as gay. And then she, Nancy brought a friend out from New Jersey, where she was from, and that woman was openly gay, or openly for the time. She’s no longer alive. Her name was Sandi. And she was not a student. [LS: OK.] And I don’t know if Nancy Garwood is amenable to being interviewed, but... I’m not in touch with her.

LS: Yeah, I definitely—somebody has definitely either interviewed her or... I’m definitely aware, she’s come across my radar before, so...

AL: But anyway—I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten your question.

LS: Oh, we were talking about whether you were afraid of say, being outed to other people.

AL: Once I decided to come out at the University I was very comfortable in Hyde Park. I would not in a million years have told my parents, but they were back in the New York area, and I wasn’t worried about the information getting back to them although as it says in one of those articles [Ed.: *Maroon* article LS had sent prior to the interview] and I remember it, both Nancy and Step May, their parents got anonymous mail, and I remember, I remember that. But I wasn’t, I mean, it had not occurred to me to be afraid of that happening. So I was very relaxed about being out in Chicago.

[28:25]

LS: So you said in Hyde Park you were pretty relaxed about being out. Did—where was I on the question list? So did it cause any negative interactions with you with other students or faculty or anything like that?

AL: Not at all, not at all. In fact, at one point I was one of the people who participated in an interview at WHPK [LS: OK] and a lot of students heard it and came up to me and congratulated me. [LS: Oh wow.] Yeah. I didn't run into anything negative on the campus in all my years there except [laughs] one of our early dances was at, I think it was at Pierce Tower.

LS: Yes, yeah, the first dance is Pierce Tower.

AL: OK. I mean, the very first dance was at Eleanor Club, and there were only like seven of us at that.

LS: Oh, what was the Eleanor Club?

AL: OK, now it's called Breckenridge. [LS: Oh! OK, OK.] But it used to be called Eleanor Club. And that was the very first advertised dance, and honestly there were seven of us there. [LS: Not much of a dance.] No, and a bunch of people, a bunch of students came and stood around the sides of the room watching us dance. Because it had never been seen before. I'm serious. I know, it feels like we were in a zoo, and that's what it felt like, but we felt like we were educating people.

LS: So they'd just kind of be standing around and gawking at men and men and women and women dancing together? [AL: Yes.] Wow.

AL: Yes. Hard to believe.

LS: That's hard to imagine.

AL: Yes. But honestly, one of the most important things we did was become visible.

LS: Right. So were you saying something about the Pierce Tower dance, or?

AL: Oh yeah, that's right. The Pierce Tower dance, my recollection is a bunch of drunk frat boys showed up to kind of—I don't know what their intention was [laughs], whether it was to throw things or beat someone up or just yell, I have no idea, but security threw them out. So it was a non-incident, but that really is the sum total of any negative feedback I can recall on campus.

LS: OK. If I can backtrack a little... [AL: Sure.] I kind of failed to ask you about your academic experience at the university. Can you say anything about that?

[31:40]

AL: Let me think. I found it, my first year, fascinating. I had a wonderful professor, Wayne Booth, and he taught this experimental class at the time, it was called Liberal Arts One, and it combined the humanities and social studies requirement, first-year requirement, and it was a wonderful class and he was a wonderful professor. Socially I had a hard time and I didn't understand why, and that later became obvious when I realized I was gay. [Laughter] And I'm trying to think, but by my second year I was struggling, and I think also I was torn in that I didn't necessarily want to be in school, but I also found myself very frustrated with some of the professors and some of the classes. So when I took a leave of absence after winter quarter, it was a great relief to me.

LS: What was your frustration with some of the classes you were taking?

AL: Well, I took this class by Richard McKeon, who was a very famous Aristotle scholar. [LS: OK.] And I found the classes, his lectures, incomprehensible. [AL laughs] And then I went to talk to the TAs afterwards, and they told me nobody understood him, but not to worry about it. So that was quite frustrating. [LS: Yeah. Oh dear...] But I also ran into just—it's a very intellectually demanding place, and I was struggling with certain ideas, and I found it upsetting to me, in the sense that I was feeling inadequate. I guess that's the best way of—I felt intellectually inadequate. I doubt I'm the first person who felt that, but at the time I probably did think I was.

LS: Yeah. So when you took a leave of absence, that was in the middle of your second year, it sounds like?

AL: Right. I finished winter quarter, but I think I got incompletes in about half my classes.

LS: OK. And then what did you do while you were kind of on that leave of absence?

AL: I had a lot of part-time jobs.

LS: In Chicago, still?

AL: Some were in Chicago, some were in Massachusetts, I traveled a little.

LS: Were you from Massachusetts originally?

AL: No, no, I had friends who moved there.

[35:00]

LS: OK. So then you said you came back after a year or two?

AL: Yeah, I came back in January of 72.

LS: And so how was that experience coming back after the leave of absence?

AL: It was great. I was older, more mature, and I found the academics—I put less of a burden on myself to excel. [LS: OK.] A lot of undergraduates at the university feel they have to be brilliant, and I came back not needing to be brilliant, just needing to work hard, wanting to work hard and do, you know, do my best.

LS: How did you end up with the biology major?

AL: Now you're getting into some embarrassing questions. [Laughter] I changed majors every third day, and I became a biology major primarily because I decided I wanted to write fiction [LS: OK] and I wanted a part-time job that paid enough to support me, so I thought being a lab technician would do that. And also I got tired of writing papers, and when you get a science degree you can just take exams. So that's how I became a biology major.

LS: OK. Did you have any professors you particularly liked the second time around, or that were very influential?

AL: Yes. Oh, I had some wonderful professors. I remember Karl Weintraub, who taught Western Civilization.

LS: OK, yeah, he's kind of a legend still.

AL: Yes, he was excellent. He was excellent. I remember Herman Sinaiko, S-I-N-A-I-K-O, he taught I believe literature classes. Oh yeah, Richard Lewontin, L-E-W-O-N-T-I-N, he taught biology, he was brilliant, he was wonderful.

LS: Did any of your classes at that point discuss gender issues or sexuality issues?

AL: Not that I recall.

LS: Do you recall—what percentage of the student body was female at that point?

AL: I don't remember.

LS: [laughing] Yeah, I don't need an exact number.

AL: But I, on the one hand, I had the impression there were more males than females, on the other hand it wasn't as though the school had just become co-ed, you know? [LS: Right.] There was a substantial number of women.

[38:25]

LS: When you came back in '72, was the kind of Gay Liberation and gay women's community still kind of going, and were you involved in that?

AL: I don't remember being active in the campus group or in any political group at that point. [LS: OK.] But I knew a lot of other gay women, and so there wasn't this sense of isolation that I had felt years before.

LS: Where did you live when you returned?

AL: I think that I started out in Little Pierce [LS: Little Pierce? OK] and then I moved to apartments, I lived in easily a dozen apartments. But I stayed in Hyde Park until 1981, so.

LS: What did you do after you graduated?

AL: I worked part time in a lab, in a number of different labs, I had a number of different lab jobs, and I hung out in the gay community, I shot a lot of pool. When they legalized pinball I played a lot of pinball. At some point I started writing, but that was many years later.

LS: Was pool like a thing that lots of gay people did, or?

AL: A lot of women did.

LS: OK, cool! Where were those pool halls?

AL: Well, usually it was in the—most of the women's bars had pool tables. [LS: OK, huh.] It would be rare for there to be a gay women's bar that didn't have a pool table. But Ida Noyes also—not Ida Noyes, the Reynolds Club also had a pool table.

LS: They still do.

AL: All right, some things don't change. [Laughter]

[40:30]

LS: And so, did you, could you hang out in the gay community in Hyde Park a lot, or did you have to leave to kind of hang out with other gay women?

AL: I knew a number of other gay women in Hyde Park. But if you wanted to go to—if we wanted to go dancing or shoot pool, or just do anything socially out in the world, we would go to the bars on the north side, there was no place to go in Hyde Park.

LS: Were women's bars already in the kind of Andersonville space at that time, or is that something that only happens later?

AL: I'm sorry, I didn't understand.

LS: Oh—where were the women’s bars on the north side?

AL: I don’t remember. [LS: OK.] I’m blanking, I mean, I remember one bar that opened up actually on the west side, oh, I want to say around California or Western, a little south of the Loop. I’m not sure if it was in the Bridgeport area or where. [LS: OK.] But we used to go to that bar, I think it was called JoJo’s but I’m not positive. But I don’t remember—oh, I know there was a north side bar, I think it was called CK’s. I think it was on Diversey, but I’m not going to swear to it. [LS: Sure.] But I used to go to a number of bars on the north side, and in fact there was a lesbian writers’ group that would have annual conferences.

LS: Oh, did you go to those conferences?

AL: I went to some of the conferences.

LS: Can you talk a little bit about those?

AL: Not really, because I don’t remember, but I can give you the name of somebody who was instrumental, unless you already have it.

LS: That would be great.

AL: Marie Kuda?

LS: OK, yeah, yeah! Cause they—I do have her name—they were held in Hyde Park, right?

AL: Well see, I don’t remember that, I remember it on the north side.

LS: OK, interesting... but they were annual?

AL: That’s what I think. I was not an organizer, but I did go to a couple. The one—one of them I remember, I thought it was like, oh, in a Shriners building or something on the near north.

LS: Interesting. I actually just talked to a gay man who talked about using the Shriners building in the near north for something in the late 70s, so maybe that was like a...

AL: Maybe they rented it out cheap.

LS: Yeah, maybe they rented it out cheap!

AL: Yeah, I would guess so. [Laughter]

LS: OK, so the lesbian writers’ conference—cause then you said you also started writing at some point, right?

AL: Yeah, but that was actually a number of years later. [LS: OK.] And at that point probably I self-identified as bisexual, I'm guessing.

LS: OK. Did you—was that like a specific shift for you, when you were like “I'm not identifying as a gay woman anymore, I'm identifying as bisexual”?

AL: No. I just began seeing a man; I didn't think about a label.

[45:20]

LS: Let's see, so gay women, the 1970s... was the women's bar culture very, you mentioned that every women's bar would have pool tables, like in terms of personal style were people very butch-femme kind of at that point, or were there particular cultural styles that you associated with those spaces?

AL: I think that the butch-femme culture pretty much disappeared by '71. [LS: OK.] It certainly was very obvious in '69 and '70 but I'd say by '71 that kind of rigid defining of type was on the way out.

LS: I've seen some documentation of like women's music coffeehouses and things like that, did you ever go to any of those?

AL: Not that I recall. [LS: OK.]

[Re-dialing noise]

LS: I think that's the phone... Are you there?

AL: Yeah, my phone was doing some weird things, so I switched phones.

LS: OK, they do that. Just let me know when you have a...

AL: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't—did you ask me something when I was?

LS: Do you have a new phone by now?

AL: Yeah, I'm with a new phone.

[47:25]

LS: OK, great. I think—is there anything that I should be asking you that I am not? Do you think that your experience was typical for a gay woman in Chicago in the 1970s? Late sixties?

AL: I don't know. Did you—I don't know when you spoke with, if you spoke with Murray, if you learned the whole sequence of kind of the university's role in getting dancing in the gay bars in Chicago?

LS: I would love to hear your take on that.

AL: OK. Because this is my recollection, and I recognize recollections are faulty, but...

LS: That's why it's good to get lots of them, so you can triangulate. [Laughter]

AL: Well, what I remember is, you know, most of the bars were men's bars. And there were probably on any given night several thousand men would go to the gay bars in Chicago, and most of them were gloomy places and they would just stand around and not make conversation and look for hoping to meet somebody, and being scared to death. And one of the things we believed was that if they would allow dancing in the bars, and people could suddenly start relaxing and feeling comfortable, that a lot of the shame would go away. And it would be a wonderful experience, and people would start coming out and being braver. So we went around to a lot of the bars and asked them to allow dancing. At the time there was some big pay-off system, I don't know whether the bars had to pay off the Vice Squad or syndicate, or... I have no idea, but at a certain point we were actually threatened by the manager of one place, never set foot in his bar again, because we were pestering him too much.

And so we decided let's hold dances at the University, that's at least a safe place where people can come and dance. And so we started with the Eleanor Club with seven people, then we did the one at Pierce Tower that got a few more, but because these were at the University, they were only open to students, and students could bring one guest. That wasn't a lot of people, you know, there might have been thirty students at most who were willing to come out to a dance, so great, sixty people! [LS: Right.] And so now we tried renting a hall downtown, I think we rented the Coliseum, and had a dance there, but then you had to pay money for the rental, and probably a lot of other stuff, it was a nuisance and we didn't have the money for that. And so out of frustration, we hatched this plan, and again this is my recollection, that we would have a dance at Woodward Court, because their cafeteria was really big [LS: OK], and we would sneak in people who weren't students. And the way we did that, because they didn't have student IDs, was we got these—you know how you hand stamp somebody when they go in to an event so they can leave and come back? [LS: Yes.] We took the hand stamps outside and collected the money outside and sent in—that was the dance that had, it said in *The Maroon*, what, twelve hundred people? [LS: Something like that.] Yeah, well it was more like fourteen hundred, but we stopped—we started letting people go in for free the last hour. We didn't collect money from them.

LS: But so, you would basically take the stamp outside and stamp these people, and then they would say "Oh, I'm already a guest, or a student, I have this stamp."

AL: Yes, and there was a security guard assigned to look, but you know, what could he do? These people had stamped hands, and so I'm sure he knew they were new, you know, they hadn't come in before, and so we had—honestly fourteen hundred people show up. [LS: Wow.] And we were out on Kimbark I think it was, stamping the hands. The university kind of—they were very upset about it, because they knew these fourteen hundred people weren't students, and we had a meeting afterwards, and I don't recall whether I went to the meeting or someone else did and reported back, but I believe the position we took was that—"Don't blame us, blame the guard!" Which, you know, was not fair to the guard, you know, looking back on this in retrospect. But I'm sure they didn't blame him, or I would like to think they didn't blame him. But the consequence of these fourteen hundred people coming to this dance was that the bars on the north side allowed dancing the following week.

LS: And that was because they realized that there was...

AL: That they were empty. There was nobody there. They lost maybe tens of thousands of dollars. They were, we had people come into the dance and say "The north side bars are empty" and so the next week, suddenly there were signs in the windows, "Dancing." So that was the last dance that I recall us having at the University, we no longer needed to use the University, but the University gets the credit for dancing in the gay bars in my book.

LS: That's great. [AL: Yeah.] That thing about the hand stamp sounds totally plausible, I had never heard it before but it makes a lot of sense, so...

AL: Yeah, we thought we were quite clever.

LS: Yeah, well it sounds like it worked, so that's great. What—I don't think I had asked you this, but do you remember the names of any of the kind of groups that you were affiliated with at that point? I know the main one was the Gay Liberation Front. Was there a name for any of the women's groups that were...

AL: Not that I remember. [LS: OK.] I mean, if you suggested one, maybe I'd say oh yes, but I don't, I can't recall...

[54:15]

LS: Is South Side Dykes, does that ring any bells?

AL: No, but it certainly sounds plausible.

LS: OK. [laughter] Like dykes is a term that people might have used to describe themselves?

AL: Oh for sure, we would have used a term like that.

LS: OK, yeah, I saw I think a listing, like a listed number for South Side Dykes. I was like “Oh I wonder if that’s...” [LS laughs] Obviously that’s gay women, no one else is going to use that, so...

AL: Yeah, we would have used a term like that, that wouldn’t surprise me at all. [LS: OK, OK, great.] I remember there was a women’s group, I believe there was a women’s group called WITCH, W-I-T-C-H.

LS: I’ve seen, yeah, I’ve seen that mentioned, what was there, were they...

AL: They weren’t a lesbian group, they were straight women, or just women, gay or straight, because I know that at one point when we thought of starting a gay women’s group we were gonna call it BITCH. [AL laughs]

LS: Really! What was that going to stand for?

AL: It didn’t stand for anything.

LS: Just BITCH! [Laughter]

AL: We just thought it would be a clever name, kind of an offshoot of WITCH, right? But as I say, other than spray-painting the Playboy building I don’t think we did anything, that was the end of that group.

LS: Do you remember what kind of slogans you were spray-painting on the theater?

AL: No, no. But I’m pretty sure Michelle Brody was driving a cab at that point, and I think she was the, she was the getaway car, I think we cowered in her taxi cab, and she drove around and let us out, and we spray-painted and jumped back in her cab. [LS: That’s great.] Looking back on it I think it was more hijinks than serious political action, though at the time we did feel serious about it, but I think we also enjoyed the cloak-and-dagger aspects.

LS: Yeah. With names like WITCH and BITCH there’s a... [AL: and South Side Dykes!] definitely an element of absurdism and fun there. OK... something that comes up a lot when I talk to people about this period is this fact that a lot of the people who were calling the group or were showing up at dances and stuff were not students, obviously, and were from outside of the university—were there any kind of, I don’t know, like town-gown type tensions that you experienced, or?

AL: Any what, I’m sorry?

LS: Kind of tensions between the university community and the outside community, besides in this dance event?

AL: Not that I recall. [LS: OK.] You know, my impression of the university was that it was very laid-back and very accepting, and you know, kind of following in, or consistent with Ed Levy's reaction to the big sit-in in the administration buildings in '69, and people urged him to call in the police, and he didn't do that, wisely, he just kind of ignored the protesters, eventually they all moved out. It was very much a live-and-let-live place.

LS: You mentioned that you left Hyde Park in 1981, where did you go after that?

AL: I moved out to Seattle.

LS: OK. Is that where you are now, still?

AL: Yeah, that's where I am now. I had a career as an attorney for, oh, fifteen to twenty years. [LS: OK.] I now have returned to writing unpublished novels.

LS: And you mentioned that you're married now, where did you meet your husband?

AL: He's actually a UofC alumnus. [LS: Oh!] Yeah. So we met in Hyde Park.

LS: OK—anything else that I should, that you want to share?

[59:17]

End of Interview.

Appendix I

Additional memories shared in a February 9, 2015 e-mail from Alice Leiner to Lauren Stokes:

“I recall talking to a gay associate professor (this would have been some time between 1972-75) who was looking ahead to the tenure decision his department would make in another year or two. He was in one of the biological sciences. I had mentioned that I hadn't encountered discrimination based on sexual orientation at the university, and he said it came in subtle forms. In his small department, the professors and associate professors often socialized with their spouses—dinners, cocktail parties, etc. He would go by himself, not feeling comfortable bringing a man. “When the professors have to pick among us to award a single tenure position, are they going to pick an associate professor who fits in easily with their heterosexual, paired-up clique or one who doesn't?”

This is obviously a paraphrase—I can't remember his exact words. Even if he'd brought a significant-other to department gatherings, however, a gay couple would not have meshed easily in the social cliques among the generation of professors then deciding tenure. Granted, a similar barrier to tenure probably existed with female tenure candidates, African-American candidates, and single candidates.

(The idea of gay marriage being accepted was inconceivable to us in those days; we would have ridiculed anyone who suggested it would become common within our lifetime.)

Here's one other memory that may interest you. I mentioned Richard Lewontin, a biology professor I took a course from—probably genetics. He gave an example in class, and I don't remember the specifics, so I'm inventing them here, but it went something like this:

“Imagine you are enrolled in a study of fraternal twins, one boy and one girl. And imagine that the investigator asks whether your brother ...”

This simple statement gave me a buoyant feeling, and at the time I tried to understand why. I realized that it was the first time I could recall a professor addressing the females in the classroom as the generic “you.” Every other time a professor gave an example, it would be along the lines of “Your wife says X” or “You choose to play football in high school”—some scenario where we have to assume we are male to follow the line of reasoning. For the first time I no longer felt like an interloper in a class intended primarily for males, with females simply being permitted to tag along. He was addressing me and others like me!

This may sound trivial, but the sense of inclusion and legitimacy Professor Lewontin gave this female student has stayed with her.”