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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #28
LI, NEBULA (1989-) **JD 2011**

At U of C: 2008-2011

Interviewed: May 2, 2013
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Transcript by: Molly Liu
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Interview (May 2nd, 2013) at the University of Chicago:

[00:00:00]

AB: [*Filling out narrator data form*.] So, organizations.

NL: Okay. I'm Nebula Li, so you know who this is for. So, Invisible to Invincible: Asian and Pacific Islander Pride of Chicago. Invisible to Invincible: API Pride of Chicago. That's the most important one. The other two that are really important to me are the National Lawyers Guild, and... I guess NAPAWF, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. So those are the three that I'm most involved in now.

AB: Okay. Awesome. Now we can do the interesting questions. Okay. So, why did you decide to come to the University of Chicago?

NL: So for law school, I wasn't entirely sure if I was going to do public interest or not. I got into three schools: Georgetown, UNC, and UChicago. I applied really late, actually. I really wanted to go to do LGBT stuff, but I hadn't come out to my parents yet. It took me a long time to write a personal statement that had something else, that was a different reason, you know? I applied, I got into UChicago off the waitlist. I picked it because I didn't know if I wanted to do corporate or not, you know? So I figured that I should go to the best, quote-unquote "best," school that I got into. Also, I thought that it would be kind of nice to live away from my family and find myself.

AB: Where are you from?

NL: North Carolina.

AB: Oh right, you mentioned that.

NL: Yeah. And so, that's why I chose UChicago. It ended up being kind of…it was harder than

I realized to be away from my family, but it was also good for other reason.

AB: Awesome. So...did you live in Hyde Park while you were here?

NL: Yeah. I still live in Hyde Park. I lived on 61st and Kimbark, and then I lived on 51st and Woodlawn, and now I'm living on 51st and Kimbark. So all over Hyde Park.

AB: And how was your academic experience at U of C?

NL: The academic experience? I wasn't a very good student. My first year I kind of treated it like undergrad, like a typical college undergrad.

AB: Where did you go for undergrad?

NL: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. But I went really young. I actually did an early college program first. I started college when I was 13, at Mary Baldwin. Yeah. I went there for two years, transferred to Carolina for the last two years, then took a gap year, where I did SAT prep teaching, living at home. I was really ready to leave home, that's part of why I came to UChicago.

Academically, I was about 18, 19 my first year. So I treated my first year—actually, 17, 18, my first year of law school. And so I treated that—I partied a lot. Yeah, I partied a lot. And then my second year I buckled down, because I had a really good experience working at Immigration Equality, this summer. Immigration and LGBT stuff in New York. I was like, "That's why I came to law school! Yes!" I came back and I kind of had more focus with my career, you know? So I studied a lot more my second year and got much better grades.

The summer after second year, I was still really burnt out, because it had been so long since I volunteered or done any community stuff. Which was so new to me at the time, but I didn't quite realize why I was feeling unsatisfied. Now that I look back, I see that I should have been more organized—rather, more organizing, at the time. My grades went—I met these older attorneys, who are fantastic…I worked at Harvard Immigrant Refugee Clinic / Greater Boston Legal Services. Basically, during the school year, it's a legal clinic where law students work at, or volunteer at. But during the summer, it's generally just a legal aid group that has an immigration department. That's the place where I was. And so, these attorneys, they were in their 40s, 50s, and they knew what they were going to do with their life and they did it. And they're successful. You know? They're not rolling in money, but they're doing really amazing work and they're teaching students and they're helping people. That kind of got me back on the path of law school.

I was kind of thinking about taking a break, I was just so burnt out from that. So I did that, I had a really great experience—I actually got to write, I helped to write this document that ended up going to appellate court—I got really good writing experience, and ended up getting really good results for our client. Yeah. Meeting older attorneys, especially older gay attorneys—there was a woman there who is super butch, you know?

And actually there are a lot of gay attorneys in this particular nonprofit, because it's Massachusetts, I guess.

AB: Yeah, I'm from Massachusetts.

NL: Yeah, so you know what it's like! You turn around and there's gay people everywhere! I did work with her—I was going to work with her but then realized that the legal experience that she did wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to do something a bit different. But I did talk to her a lot. And she had started off in family law, in the same nonprofit, and then moved to immigration law, I guess based off of what she wanted to do. So at that time, my question—I'm going to get back to academics in a second.

AB: No, this is great!

NL: Okay. So at the time, I was kind of struggling with, so, I have all these identities, I'm really passionate about LGBT stuff right now, but how do I funnel that into legal aid work? Because not many legal aid—it's all based on income level. It's not necessarily based on identity—who you serve. And she was a lesbian lawyer, and she was doing immigration. So I asked her, "How did you decide to do immigration?" Because I don't think she was actually an immigrant. I wanted to know more about her career choices. She said that her focus was helping the needy, helping low-income folks, and her background was family, and then immigration. Sometimes she helps gay people with asylum cases. Sometimes she helps undocumented queer people with their case, whatever it is.

But a lot of the LGBT groups do impact litigation, or do policy work. And so that's—when you do those kinds of cases, where you're either doing—handpicking one type of case that has a really sympathetic case and has a really good legal strategy, and then you take it on—you probably know this from taking law school classes. But I don't know—for the benefit of the recorder. Impact litigation means that you take one case, and you try and make sure it helps a lot of people by having an effect. And it actually works sometimes. You never know when you're going to find an impact litigation case. But if you want to help a particular crowd of folks, that's one way of doing it. Because then you pick exactly the sorts of case you want. Policy, you do research, and you try to make laws change. And sometimes—there is some interaction with people, but at least early on, it's a lot of research and not as much advocacy. At least right now, most LGBT groups do those two things. There's the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which does a lot of policy, and there's Lambda Legal, which is impact litigation.

If you want to do direct legal stuff that helps LGBTs, one way is through helping HIV+ people, which is what I did. That was my first job out of law school. Because—yeah. So, she decided to help needy people, and for her, her background was immigration and family, so that's what she decided to do. Even though her identity's still important to her, her professional life's a different—she works with people who are sensitive to her needs as a gay person, and she's personally supported, but professionally she does different stuff. Which was, you know, interesting to hear, that you don't always have to have

everything in one position. So that was really helpful to hear about.

I came back to school and was a little bit oriented, as always energized from having my volunteer experiences. And I...what did I do? My grades dropped this year because I was looking for a job. And the public service market is constant. There's fellowship deadlines in the early fall, and then there's a lot of deadlines on November 15th, October 15th, December, January, and February.

AB: Oh my goodness!

NL: So it's ridiculous, trying to—and I was still a little bit unfocused, with what I wanted to do, so I applied to everything. That was a terrible idea! At the time I knew that I still wanted to do LGBT stuff, and I kind of focused on immigration, but I just knew that I needed to get a job, it was a bad economy. So my grades went down because of that. I felt like at UChicago... I don't know. It's a bit intimidating. And I think for a lot of my peer group—they were older, some of them. I mean, they were all older than me. And so when they didn't get good grades, they just realized, "oh, my skill set's something else." Or "oh, I just needed to work on this one skill set, I'm weak in that, but I know that I'm good at all these other things." For me, it was like, "I just must be really dumb." And so it took me a long time to kind of build confidence to talk to my professors. But once I did, they were fantastic, they were really accessible! Once I got over the shame of having terrible grades with them, I started talking with them, and they saw how interested I was in all of—niche subjects, I guess? My experience was a lot better. For me, the most positive experience was the professors, especially the clinical professors. They were fantastic…I would not have survived without them. But academically it was hard in class.

Especially since I dress—not always, but I rotate a bit…about half the week, maybe four or five days, I dress fairly soft butch. And then two days a week, I dress maybe, like, a queer woman. Just like a lazy femme. [AB: Yeah, I'm from Massachusetts—I know!] Or a crunchy femme. I don't know. Not make-up, usually. I remember, I went all [first] year—I was 17! And I'd wear...what would I wear? Like a wifebeater. A men's tank top. And baggy jeans. And sometimes a bandanna. I'd go to class like that, because whatever. That's how I dressed in college. And it was just—a lot of people at the law school dressed almost business-casual every day. It's not as bad as the business school, which you've seen—it's a little different. But it's very heteronormative.

Just very, very heteronormative. Sometimes I still get a little self-conscious when I dress this way—actually, I still get a little self-conscious on the CTA or in public or something, but I remember in the law school, just feeling very—like other people were looking at me, and I didn't know why. I also didn't know if I was being paranoid, paranoid because of being young. But you've seen, it's also not that diverse.

AB: Yeah, it's not. It's—

NL: Undergrad is crazy diverse!

AB: Yeah, it's really different. Walking across the Midway, the law school—it's really different.

NL: It's so different! I remember one year—so, I started this pro bono program, with the black law students. It was OutLaw and the Black Law Students' Association. We worked with AIDS Legal Council. We started this pro bono program, that was kind of my brainchild, and the [Executive Director] of AIDS Legal's brainchild. It was really exciting for me. Because I was like—that was my first big thing. I organized events a lot, but that was my first event that I was incredibly proud of. It was this program where any student could sit in the Core Center, which is this STI research center / clinic, off the Blue Line, in the UIC neighborhood. AIDS Legal has a part-time office there. Unfortunately though people don't know that they're there all the time. I wanted to raise visibility of the office. And I wanted to have a way for law students to volunteer and get more experience with quote-unquote "clients." It's really just people, but clients for what they're doing. So we were going to table. Students could come up and table once every month, whatever they wanted to do, whenever. We went to their part-time office. "We" being AIDS Legal, which was "they" at the time because I was a student. Actually, 24 people came to our first training.

AB: Wow!

NL: Yeah, it was really—I was so proud of it.

AB: That's awesome, yeah!

NL: It was 24, 27 [people], I can't exactly remember now. But I was like, oh, I really want to work with this group. I met Ann, their ED, through—I went to a Chicago Bar Association pro bono event. They had all these nonprofits sitting there tabling. And so students, lawyers, anyone could go, and folks could go see what volunteer opportunities there were. And at that time, UChicago Law School didn't have a pro bono law program at all. They had clinics. They had clinics, and that was it. My 3L year though, they instituted this pro bono pledge you could sign. So you could—legal volunteering basically, where you would volunteer 50 hours before you graduate. That's—not that long. But still, it's something.

AB: Not much at all. But still more than nothing.

NL: Yeah. So you do that, you get some recognition when you graduate. I was like, "oh great." I went to the first—let me go chronologically. We had the first OutLaw meeting of the year. It was really well-attended, it was really exciting. It was really diverse, which usually doesn't happen.

AB: Were you organizing that too?

NL: Yeah, I was a co-chair. I headed a lot of groups. Co-chair for OutLaw, program manager for ACLU 2L, president of the National Lawyers Guild. Usually I just used National

Lawyers Guild as my funnel. Actually I was a part of the LGBT student advisory board for the law school. So I got to hang out—that was actually really great, because I got to meet other folks across the Midway. During 3L, we had the first OutLaw meeting, and it was really well-attended.

Then they announced, at some point they announced the pro bono pledge. That was new, that was exciting. Because we also had a public interest department, which had never had before. There was one woman, so she was like her own department. But she's fantastic. I went to the pro bono week, and I met—I looked at the organizations there, and I saw Lambda Legal, and I saw AIDS Legal Council. I was like, OK, cool, I'm going to go talk to them. I don't know why, I just wanted to talk to them. Oh, I was looking for a job, and I just wanted to meet up with them. I talked to Lambda, but they had official student volunteer stuff, they had a very formalized system. That was really cool, to talk to them, but the guy tabling wasn't part of that, he was just there.

For AIDS Legal, it's such a small nonprofit, the head of the entire nonprofit tables for these kinds of events. I didn't even realize it then, but looking back, that's so cool! That really shows your commitment to helping folks find volunteer opportunities. And I mean, it's self-interested, you want more people helping your group, but—yeah, that's really cool. So I talked to her and I was like, "Oh, it's the gays!" Something outlandish like that. And she said, "Yes! We are the gay group!" She lifted her arms up. She's like this 40, 50-year-old older woman with, like, short curly gray hair. She's not actually gay. She's married to a man, so I'm not sure if she's queer. I never asked. But I'm pretty sure she's straight. That was—owning up the gayness of her group was exciting. I talked to her about how big the turnout was. I think I even said that I was looking for a job, but I also just wanted to volunteer with your group. We talked on email, I got another co-chair of OutLaw to sit in on a conference call to figure out what we could do that would be some sort of program, and we came up with the idea of the program. They planned a training, and then we had the training.

Unfortunately the program kind of tapered off, because next year there were more pro bono opportunities, but 3L that was the first thing that was student-run.

I reached out to BLSA because I knew some students there who wanted to work in the clinic with me. They said, "Yeah, we'll co-sponsor, we'll help you with this." And they were fantastic. There's a 2L, no, 1L, who basically just did a lot of—I don't know. I like to—I don't know. I can be kind of bossy. She was really nice at kind of helping me achieve the vision that I had, and lending a lot of support, and listening... It was a really great partnership that formed. I don't know why I told you that story, but that was one of the biggest activism-y thing I did my third year, that led to the downfall of my grades.

AB: It sounds like it was worth it.

NL: Yeah. And eventually the law school offered these fellowships, these—a very small stipend to work for a nonprofit, because no one had jobs when we graduated. Because I started this program with ALCC, even though it was kind of unsuccessful—it was far

away from UChicago so people couldn't go. A few people did go, and at least we created the structure of it. Then I was like, “Oh, I have this money, I'd love to work with you next year.” She said, “Oh, let me check with the board.” A week later: “You can work for us!” And that's how I got my first job. It was totally just gay networking.

AB: Did you take any classes that had to do with gay legal stuff at all?

NL: After Immigration Equality, my 1L summer, I was like, “That's what I want to do. I want to do immigration law, and I want to do it for gay people.” So I took—I actually took all the classes you would want to take to do something like that. I took Sexual Orientation and the Law, I took Marriage and the Law. I took Anthro—actually that's not, but I took Anthropology Law. I took Immigration, I took Administrative Law, because that's the kind of law immigration is. I took Asylum Law. But for LGBT stuff, there's very few—slim pickings. I didn't know at the time that I could take—I wanted to make sure I learned as much law as possible first, then branch out to LGBT studies or gender and women's studies. I think I did take some classes—I took two classes across the midway. I took an SSA class, it was International—I can't remember the title of it. But it was about social movements internationally, and that was really cool. The other class that I took was human rights—it was like an indigenous rights class, which was guest lectured by the UN Special Chair for Indigenous Rights, which was super cool. That was a really good class. I think that was all the LGBT—yeah, that was it.

There weren't a lot of—the younger professors, like the writing teachers, the way that UChicago, the way that the law school does it, the writing professors are usually people trying to launch their professor careers. So they're very new. Which is not necessarily the best idea, because writing is something incredibly important to the law. And to have professors who are very new teach you writing is not necessarily the best idea. My professor was actually really good. He was fantastic. He was very organized. He had a syllabus, he talked to us about our papers. He was a really good teacher. But I know some other folk—you should have more experience with teaching people, or there should be a lot more oversight.

[0:22:05]

There was one—they're called Bigelow lectures, or Bigelow professors. There was a Bigelow professor focused on women's studies, before and after law school. When she taught us—she guest taught, I think it was The Social Meaning of Crime, something like that. Some of it focused on prostitution, on abortion, and on a lot of women's issues, and she made sure to incorporate LGBT stuff into it. Yeah. But now I think we have an openly gay professor, which is new.

AB: Seems a little surprising, since it's pretty big, the law school.

NL: Actually, the law school department is very small. It's like—I know, I had the same thought too. That's one of the big campaigns that Nick Tarasen, my classmate of mine, he was also part of OutLaw. He really wanted us to hire an openly gay professor. I think we

have an openly gay clinical professor. Actually, I'm pretty sure that she was gay the whole time and just didn't realize that she should come out. I don't know if she was as in tune with what was going on in the other part of the law school, since the clinic is—it's right next to the law school, so she may not have known what was going on in the classrooms. I believe that there's an openly gay professor who's a clinical professor now, which is different, unfortunately. But yeah, it's not diverse either. It's like 30 or 40 professors, I think, which is pretty small. We're kind of insular, we don't reach out as much as we should.

AB: Can you tell me more about OutLaw? Your involvement, but also what you know about the organization. Do you know any of its history?

NL: OutLaw? I'm thinking... I don't know how old it is. I don't think it's that old. Actually, it might be kind of old.

AB: I think my supervisor said that it might have started in the '80s.

NL: That's probably true then. When I, when I went to school—I was a 1L from 2008-2009. I remember when I was applying to law school, I emailed—I looked up the contact information for OutLaw and emailed them. And asked them, "How gay-friendly is it?" Especially since I wasn't out yet, and I wanted to be in a place where I could be comfortably out. And explore that more. So I emailed, and Alex Kolod, who was the current chair, emailed back. I said something along the lines of, "I really want to be an advocate for LGBT rights, do you think that this is a good place? I hear UChicago's so conservative." It does actually have a reputation for being one of the more conservative top law schools. Yeah. The law school's just different from the university, the rest of it. Because I know the university is really progressive.

It's not really conservative, it's just really fiscally conservative, or—it's very ivory tower. Which is kind of the University too. She said that she wasn't sure if it was great—she kind of dodged the question said her real passion was Shakespeare, and she really likes working with Martha Nussbaum. She was Professor Nussbaum's research assistant, and really close with Martha Nussbaum. And so she really thought it was a good place to get a good education, no matter where you're from or what your interests are.

When I came to UChicago, I went to the first OutLaw meeting. It was pretty small. It's always been pretty small, because our class is like 200 people at most, for each class. It's a small class. I remember there was...let's see, one bisexual girl—two bisexual women. Let's see. There's one lesbian, gay man, and there's one gay woman...there was definitely less than 10, maybe 8-ish. I'm going to be generous, I can only think of 5 to 6, but I'm going to say maybe 8? Because I'm probably forgetting someone. Queer people. In the law school. Which is small, but—think about that! Just think about that!

AB: Typically there should be more.

NL: No, it's okay if there aren't that many there, but as someone coming to a new city, that

was strange. And someone—I'm sure you've seen this. They're very clique-y. Some queer groups, especially student groups, can be very clique-y. And if you're not friends with the chairs, you're not really asked to do anything. You're just not given the opportunity to participate. Which kind of makes sense, but is at the same time crappy. Because if you're going to be a representative organization, you know? That was my class. There were more people outside of us, the 2Ls and the 3Ls.

Yeah. I don't know, it was—so I joined OutLaw, I went to the first meeting. They were pretty fun, but like a lot of gay groups there was a lot of drinking and partying and I wasn't yet 21, so I couldn't go out. I could sometimes get around that, but I didn't want to push that onto people I didn't know very well. We organized some events. As a 1L I was a 1L rep. That was, I don't know, slang term for the people who do all the bitch work. Misogynist term to use, but bitch work, you know? I did that. During 2L and 3L, I worked more with the other folks. Who were—there was another woman who was actually pretty radical, but she and I just did not get along. That happened a decent amount. You know the alpha gays? We were all—a lot of us were alpha gays. Don't work well in groups, sometimes. I can work well in groups, but not this group.

So, I don't know, there was a little bit of organization drama, but I think that generally—I think well of the other folks, I just think that we couldn't work well together. One of them, Nick Tarasen, he fixed our website, he created a better presence for us online. Because we have a really pretty website now, I think. I think it's under construction, but it's still really nice. We put on events. They created a rule where you have to have one event per quarter to continue being a student group. I thought that was good—so that your money doesn't go to waste. So one they instituted that rule, we put on a lot of events.

I basically just—it would get kind of dicey when I would want to do events that were important to me, but I was doing it for National Lawyers Guild, and a group like OutLaw would not necessarily want to do any work, but since it's an LGBT event—because I put it together and I wanted it to be LGBT—they would want co-sponsorship, because it was an LGBT event, even though they didn't do any work. Even though I was technically part of OutLaw, my real heart in law school was National Lawyers Guild. They were just a group, a small group of radical lawyers, and I had more flexibility in what I could do. The people there were more similar-minded, and we all—I don't know, that was more my fit during law school.

So I don't know, we put on a lot of events. We started this pro bono program, which I did. They helped a bit. What else? I don't know. We were fairly active. I think that a lot of the difficulty with a lot of identity student groups was the focus. Should it be just all queer people? Should we do social events? Should we raise visibility to other students? Should we do activism, should we go to Springfield and lobby for marriage equality? What should we do? Because there are only eight of us. We clearly all have to agree on something. And so—I don't know. It had the same social drama that a lot of student groups have, especially LGBT student groups. Luckily, for me at least, there wasn't any hooking-up drama. Like, that wasn't my—yeah. I had a partner. Actually, I hooked up a lot, but not within OutLaw. That would have just been way too close for comfort. I don't

know, there was that clique, there was a small clique of people—I was a bit younger, and I didn't drink as much. So I didn't really hang out with them as much. Actually I liked the student board a lot more, because that was representative about how I felt about things. Just people who didn't just see all things through the law. People who are more interdisciplinary, people who have other perspectives and ideas.

AB: I don't know about that group, actually.

[0:31:25]

NL: Really?

AB: The Office of LGBTQ Life, they have a student advisory board?

NL: Yeah. Yes. They try to get one person from every school, and also from groups. For me, I was OutLaw co-chair 2L, and then co-chair emeritus. They created a name for me. Co-chair emeritus / University Chair. My main job was outreach to the University, and that was why I was on the student advisory board. And so—yeah. They had monthly meetings. I think when I was a 3L, we worked a little bit on Lavender Graduation. We were talking about having awards. I don't know if we did that or not, but that was one of the ideas we were tossing around for next year.

AB: Yeah. We now have Rainbow Graduation.

NL: Oh, yeah, sorry. Lavender Graduation is the name of the UNC one. This one is Rainbow Graduation. Actually, I have a story about that. When I was at UNC—it's okay that I'm completely talking because that's what this is for, right?

AB: Exactly.

NL: Okay, good. Yeah, usually there would be more back and forth.

AB: No, go ahead.

NL: Okay. So at UNC, there's this thing called Lavender Graduation. UNC actually has a pretty old LGBT sector. But it's also a huge-ass public university, you know? They have this beautiful LGBT center, it's colorful and everything, inside, it's colorful and everything. In 2007—actually, let's just go to my coming-out story. Let's just do that. So when I was—when I was at UNC. When I was at Mary Baldwin, my first college, my first crush was on someone who wasn't a straight cis guy; a trans guy who was questioning at the time. He was super cute. He was—before that, one more thing, my best friend in high school had come out to me as bisexual. And my response was actually, "Are you kidding?" Because I had never met a gay person or queer person who had come out to me before. That was a really dumb response. But what was I supposed to know? We never had romantic anything, but we were incredibly close, she was my best friend. Then I went to early college, 13, 14. Was really involved with the queer group there,

which was SOULS: Sisters Out Understanding and Loving Sisters. Which was a really weird name.

AB: Was it a girls' college?

NL: Yeah, it was a women's college. Yeah.

AB: Women's. Sorry. I was applying to Wellesley and they were like, “It's not a girls' college, we're a women's college.”

NL: Yeah, there was a big to-do about that. Actually, strangely enough, women's colleges are usually very trans-friendly. Usually. Almost always. So Mary Baldwin was like that too. SOULS was led by a trans guy, a trans guy and his partner. So I was at SOULS. Hung out. Volunteered—just helped them with events and stuff. Then I went to UNC, transferred. Big co-ed college. And I decided to march in the Pride Parade. You know, it's fun. There's a small Pride—there's a triangle, the Triangle is Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh. That's this area of North Carolina. The Pride Parade is in Duke University. And so you marched—you start at the campus and you come back to the campus.

I'm the youngest of four. Three older siblings. I had watched *Queer as Folk* a lot, this was big then. I feel old, trying to figure out which year this happened. 2006, this was summer of 2006. I met—I went to my first GBLTSA—G B L T, so people called it GBLTSA. I went to a GBLTSA, and it was actually led by an Indian-American women who's bisexual. I was like, cool! I didn't have the same race-consciousness then as I do now. Back then, I didn't—the Asian groups were very heteronormative for me. I think it's more distressing sometimes in a place where you feel like you should feel welcome, or feel like it should be your place, but it isn't. I actually hung out with the gays instead. And I didn't have the same—I didn't see myself as Asian American the same way I do now.

So I got involved, helped with a lot of the events, and I was like, *Queer as Folk*, right? There's this one scene where Michael wants to march in the Pride Parade with his mom. His mom is like PFLAG-central. She's so positive and so proud of her son. But her son works at a grocery store and is not—he's 30-something, so he's been there for a long time. And he's not out to his coworkers, which is ridiculous when you know how *Queer as Folk*—which is ridiculous, right? But a lot of people are like that. So he decides for the first time that he's going to march. But he doesn't tell his mom, and he finds a way around it. He did it in drag. He did it in really good drag. He even kissed one of his co-workers, who was hollering at him for being such a hot girl.

So that was the *Queer as Folk* story. It is a little—16-year-old Nebula was like, “If it works on TV, it works in real life!” This was little 16-year-old Nebula did. I—and I've done drag before. So I did really bad drag. I had a full, pirate-y looking-ass beard, which a friend of mine who does drag helped me put on. I was wearing male pants, a t-shirt because I didn't have a lot of button-ups at the time, with like a sports bra and a bandanna around my head. I didn't actually think that it would work, I thought I would—I just felt more protected doing that. I told everyone on the float truck thing that I wasn't out, and

don't tag me on Facebook. I marched in the parade, I was there with my super drag king soft butch friend…she's really cool. And I marched, and some of the slogans were like, "We're here! We're queer! Our parents think we're studying!" Which is just—ridiculous shit, you know? Very student-y. There were a bunch of community groups along with us. I had the most amazing weekend. There was all-female spin the bottle, all these amazing things.

I spent it in all in Durham, not actually close to campus. So I didn't check a computer until Sunday, or Monday, maybe, and Pride was on Saturday. So I went about 24 hours without checking a computer. Well...guess what happened in this day and age? People posted pictures of me on Facebook in drag marching in a Pride Parade. Tagged me…I haven't told this story so slowly before. I usually kind of rush through it, since everyone kind of tells their coming out story. I'm kind of back there now, thinking about it. A family member sent pictures to my mom.

AB: Without talking to you first?

[0:39:38]

NL: This was—I've come to accept it more, as so many years have gone by. But he sent pictures to my mom, because I was at Duke University, and he hadn't known why I hadn't talked to him or said hi, since he goes to school there. UNC is about 15, 20 minutes away from Duke and I didn't have a car. So, you know, it's nice if I'm actually there to say hi. That's his completely straight, doesn't understand coming out perspective. You were on campus, why didn't you say hi? And what is this thing? I'm going to send pictures to my mom, because I don't know what this thing is, I'm concerned for my baby sister.

That launched, like, so many issues. You would not believe how many issues that launched. That was so incredibly traumatic for such a long-ass time. Like, a really long time. So he sent her pictures. She called me but I didn't pick it up. And that's always been a weird thing with my family and I. They get really annoyed when I don't pick up the phone. And it's usually when I'm out doing stuff. I went to the LGBT center bawling. Like, totally bawling. Just like, I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do—I'd done stuff before then, you know? I'd probably maybe kissed a girl before then. I had gone to LGBT events. I think at the time I was not sure. I was pretty sure I wasn't—and as more years passed, the more months passed, the more I was like, "ok, clear, this is something that is an issue. I don't know what it is, but it's clearly something I need to think about." There's always that pressure to put on a label, you know? Even if it's helpful and empowering, it's also stressful at first.

So I was crying, and Terri Phoenix, who's this amazing trans guy—trangender-queer person who uses T as a pronoun. T at the time was this assistant director for the LGBT center. T lived a poor white southern life and had a lot of really interesting life experiences, which I didn't appreciate until now, I guess. But T was like—we were trying to figure out what to do. At first I cried and told him my feelings, like "I don't even know if this is who I am! I just—I don't know what to do! I'm"—how old was I? 16—"I don't

want to go live back home, but I also rely on my parents for money, and I can't just—I don't know what to do, I just don't know what they're going to do." You remember that time, when you don't know what they're going to do. It's not even like they're going to—you just don't know what they're going to do.

So T helped me realize, T helped me come up with the story that I was out there supporting my friends. Kind of talk about it like civil rights. This is the big civil rights issue of our time, and I wanted to support my friends. T was like, "Well, it doesn't sound like you can come out. If you're really worried that they're going to take you out of school, it doesn't sound like you can come out right now." That was T responding to my need. Not saying "you can't do this," but responding to the actuality of the time. So I did, that's what I told my mom.

That started many years of passive-aggression. Just, ridiculous passive-aggression. Like, my parents would always want to know where I was, which wasn't a big change, but it was different this time. They would say a lot of really shitty things to me. The one that I say a lot is that my mom said to me, "We raised you to be a good Chinese girl. Why did you do this to us?" They would say, like—man it's been so long, but I can still kind of remember them. My mom would say that she wanted to put a sign on my forehead that said "straight" because I hang out with so many gay people. She would say, like, "Why do you hang out with these weird people? You should get different friends. You should get a large—basically, you should get different friends."

I knew what she meant was "You should get more straight friends." But when I tell that to some people who aren't queer, they don't see that. They don't see how coded it is. They don't see—that's what my mom meant, even if she wasn't saying that necessarily explicitly. Even to jump forward to the future just for a second, a week or two ago—so I have a male partner. And I've come out. But I'll get to that later. I was mentioning to my mom, "Oh, my cousin is in town. I'm going to take her out and we're going to do stuff. She's gonna come visit." And my mom said, "Oh, make sure that she doesn't meet any of your weird friends." And so this time, I was like, "What do you mean by weird friends?" She said, "Oh, she looks up to you, you know you're a role model." I said, "No, but what do you mean by weird friends?" She said, "Oh, you know, just don't take her to any gay bars." I said, "Okay, this conversation is over," and I hung up. 'Cause that's how I've learned to deal with it. Now that I've confirmed it, back in the day, that's what she meant.

There was a lot of crying, there was a lot of everything. Eventually—there was a lot of threatening to pull me out so that I could do college at home. Continue to do community college while at home. So I'd get the right influences. There was also a lot of "You're too young, these people have brainwashed you!" Or, "We overeducated you." Or—my dad was the one who actually called me to say, "Your mom is crying—your mom is crying at me, or with me. My role is to make money. My role is to support us financially. Your mom's role is to raise kids. If she's so upset that she has to come to me for your issues, it is a problem."

AB: Wow.

NL: Yeah, if you talk to any Asian person, or any…any kind of family, but I see this a lot in immigrant families, having these specified roles is not that strange. But these roles are like—it's not that weird. It's weird to me as radical hippie second-generation person, but you know. Okay, so, a lot of really hurtful things were said, especially as I talked about my career. I was in college, I didn't come out. Then for a year I lived at home, and that was really shitty. I'd go out—I'd drive to campus and go out and have fun, then I'd go back home and it'd be a really repressive environment. Then I got to question, when I was living at home, because I wasn't having a lot of sex—and at the time I wasn't having a lot of sex—like, how relevant is that part of my identity to me? Does that even matter? If I'm not doing this, why does it even matter? Why am I making such a big to-do about it, especially when I do love men? And it's not like a fake love, I do genuinely love men.

So I went to law school, I had a lot of aforementioned partying. That was 1L. Then over the summer, yeah. I worked at Immigration Equality. It wasn't actually—it was a pretty good experience, but I wasn't that together in my personal life.

AB: That was in New York City?

NL: Yeah. And that was—that led to me not having the best experience professionally because I just wasn't together—my mom, we were fighting a lot. Eventually, 2L year, I—I had a really—I had a really bad experience with a partner I was with. A really—like it wasn't exactly—sometimes I think about it as abusive, and sometimes I think about it as just a bad relationship. Or non-relationship. Extended hookup period with someone who was, like, my closest friend at law school who was also a man. Who like—definitely abused my trust. Even if some folks might not consider it abusive, the lasting effects that it had on me are—valid.

So that led to me eventually getting kind of sick. My mom came and visited me when I was sick, and that's when I came out to her. I came out to her eventually. That was in 2011. 2010. So not that long ago. Since then it's been an uphill battle. Like I told you about that one conversation. Since I haven't bought a girl home, I don't know if it'll ever be real for them, but I'm so out and active now, that it's not—I don't know. It's not something that I will stop talking about with them. I'll continue to push it. I don't know, it's a complicated situation with my family.

[AB and NL briefly check the time]

NL: So, is this just to take histories? I would like to talk about... I don't know. So this will—tell me a little bit again about where this is publicized?

AB: So the short-term goal is an exhibition at Special Collections at the Regenstein about the history of queer life at UChicago.

NL: Is it online as well and everything?

AB: Yeah, hopefully. It's going up in 2015.

NL: Okay. Is the text of the story online as well?

AB: I think it's just the exhibition. And all of the transcripts of the interviews are going to be in Special Collections forever.

[0:50:00]

NL: Okay. Then I'll tell you the thing that I was going to tell you. Because I'm more comfortable with that. Especially since it's kind of in some places but not everywhere. So, to go back to my coming-out story, so—I attempted suicide. That's when I came out. I'm going to need a second. Just so you know.

AB: It's okay. Take as much time as you need.

NL: Okay. So. I had a really short non-relationship with this guy. I guess, I'm going to use a pseudonym because I don't think he would appreciate it. I guess I'll say, I don't know, Paul. That's a pretty normal name. This guy Paul. And he, um. He was in love with another short curvy Asian girl that he had known since university. He also went to the college, and that's where he met this girl. He and I started hooking up, and he was my closest friend at the law school. He was the only other person who got angry about politics. Like, actually got angry about politics. Not just, "Oh, this sad thing's happening in Uganda" or whatever, not this ridiculous caring about stuff. It was actually someone who got emotionally involved. I really liked that about him, even though I thought he was pretentious and not that attractive. I liked that about him. So we started hooking up, and it was really bad for me though, because I knew he was in love with someone else. Who was—I don't know why it makes a difference in my head, but it made a difference that she was like me. In some ways. And that she was also queer. Although she didn't self-identify that way, she had had girlfriends before. That was 2L. And that was, maybe, fall winter spring, winter quarter.

AB: The bad stuff always happens winter quarter.

NL: Yeah, I know! It was depressing. It was terrible. I don't know what I was doing. No, this was 1L year. This was 1L year. So I was very new to Chicago, and this was my first friend. I knew him because another friend of mine from my early college program knew him too, so—just kind of casually knew him. So okay, this person thinks you're okay, so you're probably okay. This was during the 1L year of just hooking up everywhere. And he, I don't know. It just got to be really bad and poisonous, and eventually I met someone else who I dated for a long time, and that was much better. But even throughout my second—my next relationship, a long time into it, my partner mentioned to me, "Do you realize that you've mentioned Paul's name every week of our relationship? Do you realize that?" I said, "Wow, I did not realize that." Because many times when we'd have sex, I'd get triggered. And it was bad.

I was just dealing with a lot of mental health issues, because I wasn't yet diagnosed, but I'm bipolar. And you know, around that age range is when all that stuff happens. And so, I was bipolar, and I didn't know what it was, I had huge mood swings, I was crazy depressed, and people—I remember one of the people in my circle of friends said, “You don't have much homework. How come you don't get it done?” But I just spent hours in bed staring at the ceiling. Just not able to do work. Part of this was this terrible relationship, part of this was being away from my family and having conflicted issues about that because of the closeted issues, and the Chicago winter. All that together just made for not—a terrible—I just wasn't with it. So I didn't learn that much my first year. But I was in a healthy relationship for about a year and a half. And that was during 2L. Yeah, that was during 2L and 3L, I think. I started dating him over the 1L summer, so yeah.

Around 2L year, before Boston, before my summer internship, I...I got really depressed because my partner was living with me, and we weren't ready for that. He was not working, and he was just depressed from that, and I was not used to living with someone in my room, as opposed to another room. So I was really depressed, and I took a lot—I was starting to see a therapist, which was good. That was one good thing out of the really bad relationship before. And I tried to take all my pills in one day. I called the ambulance immediately afterward. It was a really juvenile thing in some ways. So I took all the pills, and I was actually on the phone with my partner. It was a really—shit move to do. In some ways, I can see myself kind of embodying a kind of cycle of violence, which I don't want to, but back then that was mildly emotionally abusive for sure. And he told me later that he felt that way. Which is shitty. Because I was the survivor and now I'm the abuser. And I think that has a lot to do with being queer. The power dynamic between you and your partner can be so fluctuating, can be so fluid, when you date someone who's the same gender, or—just a very egalitarian relationship.

Anyhow, so I attempted—so I was on the phone with him. I went to the hospital. It was a terrifying experience. They put me on the general floor for the mental health, for the mental hospital. I was there with legitimate people who could not communicate with other people, who would just talk and talk and talk. Or folks who—I don't know. Weren't sane. And that was the first time my mom came to visit me in Chicago, actually. I didn't even want her to come, I didn't even want to tell her. But my nurse was like, “do you want to call your mom, do you want to call your mom,” and I said, “no, I don't want to call her.” I vomited everything up, so they didn't have to get my stomach pumped. I went to the UChicago hospital, then the ambulance took me to Lakeshore, and then that's where my mom came, when I was in Lakeshore.

This is really the coming out story. This is the scene. The scene is I had gotten there, and it was after visiting hours but the lady was really nice and let my mom come in, since she had flown in. We're in the room, this visit room. I can't wear certain things on this floor. When I attempted, I was just lying in bed—I was probably just wearing underwear, since I had just taken a shower. So I quickly put on a hoodie and jeans. But on this floor you can't wear a hoodie because it had strings, and you're a risk to yourself. So I was wearing a fucking, like—you know those hospital gowns? I was wearing a backwards hospital

gown and jeans. Yeah. So she came into this very small room, about half the size of this place, with a flat bench on the floor, shaped like this but lower. And I think there may have been a window, a really crappy little window. It was really dirty and gross. So she sits next to me and I say "hey."

I don't know, I don't remember the exact parts of the conversation, but some parts I remember are...well, I mostly remember the sensation of my face falling off. There's this Chinese concept, it's called "saving face," you've probably heard of the movie *Saving Face*, about two Chinese lesbians. There's concept that you have to put on this face to the world, which is a concept that translates easily. But—and actually, my roommate, who's Chinese, says that I have the concept wrong, but this is how I think about it. How I envision it. There's this idea that you have to put on this face to the world. For example, a lot of issues with Asian women and domestic violence, they can't tell that family stuff to the world, because you have to save face. You have to keep your personal life personal, it has to stay in the house. You can't bring this dirty laundry—you can't air your dirty laundry in public.

And I remember feeling at the time, my face was—gone. I had no face to save. I was there with my mom. I showed her the cuts on my thighs. I showed her—I talked to her about this relationship with this guy. I don't know if I told all of it then, but I mentioned that was why I was so unhappy. Even though it was in the past at that point. And I—there was no face left to save. She saw me in a fucking mental health hospital, might as well say that I'm bisexual too. Because she ended so many conversations with, "Is there anything else you want to tell me?" Because she knew after the Pride stuff, she knew there was something else. But she was kind of—I felt like she was using it as a weapon, and I felt like I had it as a weapon too. Like, I used to think, if we get into too bad of an argument, I can just tell her that I'm gay! If it gets that bad, I can hurt her this badly back. And I remember being scared that she wouldn't love me. Or even worse, what if I came out and she loved me? That meant that I'd have to work on the relationship. That meant that—there's no more reason for it to be a bad relationship. I'd have to confront my problems. So that was me confronting the problem. That was me coming out to her. She told my dad at some point. I just didn't feel that there was a point.

[1:00:12]

AB: I never came out to my dad explicitly either.

NL: Yeah, right? He knows, but—I don't know. And I came out to my brothers before then, actually, to varied responses.

That's when I came out to her. It was a process after then. Like, I talk a lot—I've done an "It Gets Better" video, and I've talked about it before to other people, but...it just really—it was tough. Coming out was not the end, and I think it's ridiculous when people think it is. Because I come out constantly. I feel like I come out constantly so that other people don't have to. I feel like in our society, it's a very individualistic thing to come out. Like, "I am gay, listen to me, hear me roar" or whatever. But in a lot of societies, that isn't—

that isn't valued. It's not like the individual isn't valued, it's just that the community is valued more.

And so, a lot of—for my work in Invisible to Invincible, we're very clear in being confidential with who's out and who's not out, and how out you are. For example, on our Facebook page, we never tag people. You can repost it and tag yourself, but we never tag people because so many people can't come out. We have a new group called Transcend, which is co-sponsored with a South Asian, Desi queer group. It's for trans people. This whole idea that coming out is the end—it is very very difficult, and it was very very hard for me, but some people just can't for safety reasons. You come out as trans, you're just exposing yourself to a fuck ton of problems. And you already experience so much discrimination. My pet issue now is—I've been coming out a lot in the last month or two to Asian American groups. A lot of the people in my group are adopted, so they haven't had the same experience I have had. That came out so wrong. What I mean to say, they're finding their own Asian-American identity, just like I am, just like I'm coming back into the fold after having been with the queers for a while.

It's been kind of scary, but also very positive so far. I've come out to a giant freaking group, just yesterday, at the Asian-American Heritage Week kick-off. There was all these government officials, all these people coming from these big nonprofits. We were announcing an event that we were having. And it's been amazing, how receptive people are. They were like, "Oh, what should we do to be more gay-friendly? What should we do to be more gay-friendly?" Or like, hug! It's mostly been younger people asking that. Older people have been like, "Oh, you look like my daughter." And that's all they say. But it starts a conversation. And it's so fucking terrifying. Because these people look like my family, and I'm not used to coming out to people who look like my family. And there's also language difficulties, because I don't speak Cantonese that well. I mostly speak Spanish because I'm an immigration attorney. But, I don't know.

The whole—something that I find interesting is the words people use to describe why they immigrate. Like "sacrifice," "family," "opportunity." That's also how people describe coming out, sometimes, and why they choose to come out. And so, a friend—a lot of us queer Asian people, because I'm pretty well-connected nationally now, there's a lot—we're tight. We've been discussing trying to use that narrative to connect with our families more, for those of us who are connected to our birth families or adopted families, wherever we are. But it's really difficult. Some adopted folks, like my best friend in Chicago, she's adopted, she's Korean, she's bisexual. When she came out, her family disowned her. Luckily, she's legalized, as an adoptee, as a little baby. But some other folks who legalize, and they come out as gay, they're screwed, because they're undocumented. They are disowned by their family and that's their means of becoming a citizen in this country. And so, there's actually a lot of Korean and Chinese adoptees. Let's say you come out to your families, and you don't have legal status yet. Well, because of the way immigration laws exist now—they're changing, but the way they are right now, there isn't a path to citizenship. The Dream Act hasn't passed. You then have to basically work somewhere for a really long time. And if you're a teenager, because that's when a lot of people are coming out now, you're just, you're really screwed. You have to

find some way of getting adopted, or find an asylum case maybe—actually an asylum case is what I would suggest to someone coming to me with that problem. I don't know. There's a lot of things that—there are a lot of things that people don't think about when they think about LGBT issues. Or when they think about how LGBT people are affected. My passion is how LGBT Asian-American people are affected, and/or immigration. Because they're so interconnected for a lot of people's identities, it's not a single issue. I don't know, I've run out of things for now.

AB: Well, I'll ask you things then. So at U of C, not that you have to say U of C in your response, did you find institutional support for all of the LGBT stuff?

NL: I can be frank, right? I can be totally frank, right?

AB: Yeah, be totally honest.

NL: Because—no. No. I mean, okay. So again, I had a really—I had a lot of other things going on that did lead to me not having the best experience with the University. Okay. So this student—the LGBT center is all right. They're pretty cool. But they could stand to be more diverse. At least when I went there.

AB: Is this the one based in the College?

NL: No, it's the University LGBT center [5710], because the law school doesn't have something like that. They could stand to be more diverse. And being diverse is not just having people of color at the table. It's also making sure that the events that they want to hold don't—or the events you want to hold, don't—like, simplest things! Aren't at the same time as people of color events! Which is hard since there are a lot of groups, but just a little bit of due diligence, a little bit of asking around first. I don't know. It's interesting. I think outwardly, looking out, it can be a very positive experience, but for actual folks who are actually working within, it can be little bit more difficult. And that has more to do with power dynamics, power structures, and how to be not just a—not just a diverse workforce, but one that actually celebrates other cultures. And is receptive to being—and just fluid, essentially, in a way that makes the work environment just more subject to change, and more subject to listening.

Even me, becoming a documented ally, because I'm not undocumented, I had to learn all these things. Because I used to just think of myself—I'm an immigrant. My family came here, and I was born here, so I'm a first-generation immigrant. First-generation American, second-generation immigrant. I used to think, "Oh, we're all the same, we're all immigrants," you know, this is my struggle. And then I realized, "Oh no, I'm an ally," which I realized through my LGBT things what an ally meant. You are not this thing, but you can still be a really great support for this thing while still knowing your place, while knowing you are there to support others and not yourself. I think UChicago, some of the centers could use a little bit more of that, just knowing your privilege, basically. To put it in a few words, just knowing your privilege.

At the law school, when I said I wanted to do LGBT activism, no one wanted to help me. I had to do it on my own. I just Googled stuff. Actually, University of Michigan has this really great LGBT resource website at their law school, and I just googled all these places. I wouldn't say that it was just a circumstance of not being, of being biased, per se, but it definitely was an instance of being ignorant for sure. It's exhausting, turning ignorance into acceptance and all that stuff.

There was a queer student, a queer female student friend of mine. She has leg issues, and she recently—not recently, back then, during 3L, she collapsed one day. Not during the law school, during a break. And she emailed—trying to be more anonymous-ish. She emailed a member of the administration, asking, "Are there free wheelchairs? Can I rent one? Is the law school wheelchair accessible?" When I went there, there was a student in a wheelchair, so I knew that it was wheelchair-accessible. But anyhow, so she sent that to the administrator. On Facebook, she posted, "Can you call me right now?" So I called her, and she said, "I collapsed," and I said, "Oh my god, are you okay?" And she told me about this email that the administrator sent to her, being just like, "Um, I don't know if we'll be able to get that in time. Maybe you can Google if there are free wheelchairs around Chicago?" It was just a really not in touch response. It wasn't directly like "fuck you, you can't walk again!" or "I don't know what to do!" It was just like, uhh, you know, just not paying attention to what was going on. And my friend [redacted], she was furious. Actually no, she wasn't furious, she was shell-shocked when she called me. She wrote me an email that was fucking furious, like, "what the hell??" We talked some more, like, no, one of my friends who I know through the board, the LGBT board, I think he works at disability services at the university, maybe you can talk to him. I said, "Yeah, it's okay for you to be angry." She said, "Thanks." Because she sees that I get involved in a lot of things, and I get passionate about a lot of things, and—moments like that are what I cherish the most, telling someone that they can be angry, and that's a legitimate response. It may not look to other people that, like, it's biased in any way, but your anger is legitimate, and your response is legitimate. That's one example of the university not knowing what's going on and it just coming across terribly. She happened to be queer, it was about disability stuff.

[1:11:41]

For me, oh my god, when I was with the Federalist Society, when I was there, they're like—they're a group that's kind of, not exactly—so they're conservative. They're neo-cons. But they're supposed to be open to a wide range of ideas. So they hold these bullshit debates between prominent people in different fields. In the same fields who disagree. They were going to have a debate between Mary Anne Case, who's this amazing feminist law professor, and…one of the heads of this National Organization For Marriage, which is a national anti-gay marriage group. [Their speaker had] a BA in religious studies and no law credentials, but is part of this lobbying group. We were all angry about that. A lot of law people. We were all angry about this. We were like, what? Like, she's a, she's a bigoted person, an incredibly bigoted person. She's one of the old-school anti-gay people. Not, like—not even like a rational one. Our colleagues, our classmates were inviting her to give this talk along an incredibly esteemed, incredible radical amazing law professor

who's fantastic and such an amazing person. Apparently it didn't actually happen, because [her] flight got messed up.

But one of the administrators kept on—I don't know. I sent an email, from a personal perspective, publicizing this to the LGBT students. The student group, the student advisory board, where I said, if you feel like protesting this, you should feel free to. Something like that. An hour or so after I sent that email, an administrator, law school administrator, emailed me saying that she wanted to meet me in her office. I actually didn't connect the two in my head at all, and I didn't actually know why I was meeting with her. But I was like, "uh, okay," and set a meeting time for her after class. But one of the heads of the Federalist Society came out before I came in, and I was like, huh.

So we talked, and she was like, "Well, at least they're presenting both sides of the issue." I said, "No, one of them is a bigoted"—what's the word I'm trying to think of? "A bigot. An anti-gay bigot who hates, and the other person is a scholar." And she was just like—she had the gall to compare this event to an event that OutLaw had earlier, where an attorney talked about Lawrence v. Texas, and talked about advocating for gay rights. It was just this one speaker talking. And she said, "Well, you didn't present the other side. At least they presented the other side, the Federalist Society." And I wasn't—I could tell that my instincts on this might be different from the other board members—again, we didn't work together that well. So I refrained from saying, "This is what OutLaw thinks," but I said, "Well, I don't think—I'm not okay with this event, and I think"—what did she tell me? "Oh, the Federalist Society has offered to co-sponsor this with OutLaw," and I said, "I don't think we're interested." Yeah. That was a thing that happened. That actually—that was much more heated at the time.

AB: Yeah. And the only thing that stopped it was her flight.

NL: Yeah. I talked to the head of the LGBT student center, and he was—oh, so, apparently about protests. If you're going to do any sort of destructive behavior, you need to have—like something that would actually disrupt the speaker of any event at UChicago, you need to give some notice before that event. If you're going to have a protest, like, holding a big sign that will disrupt something, you need to give advanced notice. And so for that reason, UChicago—I don't know, I think that can be a good or a bad thing. I mean, I wasn't a fan of that. The thing that annoyed me is that they only announced the event a day or two before it was supposed to happen, so there was no way to plan a protest. Because of that UChicago rule. I brought it to Jeff Howard [at 5710], and he said, "Well, we can go in and ask questions, at least see what happens." He at least was going to go to the event, and some other folks were interested in going. But the event didn't happen. I don't know what the question was that you asked, but that was something that happened.

But that's the sort of environment when you're at the law school. People are like, these fucking people, there's this guy who thinks that the solution to gay people is to just be celibate. I asked him—that's not what he said, but I asked him—

AB: This is a student?

NL: A student. Part of the Fed Soc, part of the Fed Soc. I asked him, “So what do you think gay people should do? Should we get married so we can keep it in—what do you think?” I might have phrased it differently from that, but it wasn't pointed. He said, “Well, I think that if you're gay, and you're born that way,” and he thinks that you're born that way, generally speaking, that's what all research shows, “you should just be celibate, and you shouldn't sin.” I had this event for undocumented youth, where we had a college scholarship thing. I was really proud of this event. That was my other big thing that was proud of in that 3L year. It was 80 to 100 people came, students, families, all these people, ah. And I planned it in like a month. It was really exciting. It's one of my proudest achievements so far. I had asked him about it, because we were planning this thing, and we were both really active on Facebook. That was when I got into a lot of Facebook wars. It was exhausting, I'm done with them now. You know. Where it's just—you know. So I asked him about this event. He said, well, he thinks that for undocumented people, they should just go back to their home countries because they broke the law, he thought this civil disobedience action—which is what he called my college scholarship informational session! I actually thought it was kind of cool, because it was like a civil disobedient session! I hadn't really thought about it that way, but that was actually cool.

So there's that guy. And there's another woman who's neo-con, crazy neo-con, bisexual, closeted bisexual. Kind of closeted bisexual. Also part of Fed Soc. There are these people who you wouldn't think exist, but they're in my law school, and they're arguing with me in class, and that was exhausting. That was a large part of why I didn't hang out much in law school, because there were these people in classes, and that's why the student advisory board was really nice. To have these queer people who were not in the law school, who I could just hang out with and not talk about law stuff.

AB: Did you go to a lot of the events at 5710?

NL: Yeah.

AB: Did you go to any of the Q groups at all?

NL: I went, but they weren't well-attended. They're never well-attended. There are too many things to go to. But I did hang out with—I think they changed the name. But there was the one for the people of color. I went to that once. I went to the bisexual one once. I went to the—the weird thing about going to the events done by the university in general was that the undergrads didn't give me the time of day. When I was a law student—what time is it?

AB: It's 3:22.

NL: Well, I'll just finish this one thought. The undergrads, I was their age, you know? I'm 23. So at the time I was 21, 20—I'm their age. But going to UChicago undergrad parties was weird. I went to a lot of them, because my roommate was one of them, at the time. But especially the queer women, they just wouldn't give me the time of day. I was single then,

for part of it, and I was like, what is this? And I don't have the confidence that I have now. I have so much more confidence now. But back then, I was just trying to get laid and not succeeding. I would go to the events, but because I wasn't in the college and I couldn't talk about my professors—I don't know. It wasn't optimal. Yeah. But that's it.

AB: Okay, cool. I'll turn this off.

[01:20:33]

End of Interview