

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

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW #54  
NASH, CARL (1977-) MA 2002 STAFF**

*At U of C:* 2000-2005, 2007-present

*Interviewed:* July 29, 2013

*Interviewer:* Kelsey Ganser

*Transcript by:* Skylar Liam

*Length:* 01:11:47

**Interview July 29, 2013 in Project Office in Wieboldt:**

[0:00:00]

KG: So with your time as a student here is that BA and MA, or is it...

CN: No, I was in a PhD program.

KG: Oh okay.

CN: And I didn't finish, and so partway through, I received my master's degree, and I spent five years in the program and decided to leave.

KG: Okay. So let's go back farther, then.

CN: Yeah.

KG: Where are you from?

CN: Sure. So I grew up in a suburb of Denver, Colorado, called Thornton, it's a northeast suburb, and I went to college in Colorado, at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

KG: Okay. What did you study in Colorado?

CN: Sure. So my undergraduate degree is in American Studies, and I have a minor in Political Science and I have a certificate in Lesbian and Gay Studies. And I was among the first class -- like I -- one of the first people, among the first to graduate with that certificate in Lesbian and Gay Studies.

KG: Okay. Like in the university that you went to?

CN: University of Colorado. Mm-hmm, it was a new program, and myself and I think three others were the first people to graduate with that certificate. It's sort of like a minor -- I don't know if they still have it, but it was sort of like a minor only a little more involved.

KG: So that would have been like the 90s?

CN: '99.

KG: Mm-hmm. And so were you out at -- at University in Colorado?

CN: I was, yes.

KG: Okay. And how did you find that environment?

CN: Yeah, so I -- you know I didn't really... I found it to be fine, but it was sort of, you know it's a very large school, there were 5000 people in my graduating class, and I feel like I "came out" as it were when I was in college my first year, although that's a complicated, like what does coming out mean, right? But I didn't really find the environment to be particularly hostile, I didn't really find the environment to be particularly open, in certain ways, it just kind of was there.

KG: Okay. So like kind of sort of neutral maybe?

CN: Yeah. I mean I think that the fact that there was like a formal -- I guess -- I guess the fact that there's a formal sort of subject or area or program that you could sort of major, or minor, in, sort of belies a certain openness.

KG: Okay.

CN: But it wasn't -- I haven't thought about these things in a long time -- it wasn't -- I don't remember any sort of open hostility necessarily, and sort of, you know, my group of friends all knew I was gay and were fine with it, and I attended some of the sort of -- there was a group on campus for openly gay students that I sometimes would attend, but I

knew a lot of other gay students from these classes that I would take, right, for the certificate, and so, you know, that was where a lot of my friends came from I guess.

KG: Mm-hmm. So which one of those—American Studies, Political Science, or Gay and Lesbian Studies—did you come to UChicago for a PhD in?

CN: So I was actually in the History Program. And, you know, I was mostly applying to graduate programs for American Studies, but my advisor -- who was Nan Boyd—who I think there was -- she came in May, right? [KG: Yes.] She strongly encouraged me to look at the University of Chicago because George Chauncey was here, and I did and I applied to the History program, and I only got into two places, one was here and one was the University of Kansas, and the University of Kansas didn't give me any funding so I ended up here, but I think it was really the best possible place for me to be, for a whole bunch of reasons for graduate school.

KG: Oh, so what are some of those reasons?

CN: Yeah, so I -- when I came here -- so I started in 2000, and you know I think that, with George being here, and the what at the time was called the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project existing and the sort of funding opportunities for graduate students who were working in lesbian and gay subjects were, I don't think, as available in a lot of other places and I think that the graduate program in History, you know -- I think George was such a seminal figure in gay and lesbian history, that the fact that he was here and that I was working with him was just sort of, you know, wouldn't have been available in a lot of -- or, you know, wouldn't have been as... just wouldn't have been as positive of an experience, I don't think, had I gone somewhere else. I think graduate school is very difficult, and I think still lesbian and gay history is sort of this thing that academics don't quite know what to do with, institutionally, and I don't think that was really the case here, you know, I think that everyone in my graduate class understood what I was doing and why it was important and was very supportive and it was really, it was a great experience.

KG: Yeah. Was George Chauncey your dissertation advisor?

CN: He was, yeah.

KG: What were you I guess working on, I guess, dissertating about?

CN: Yeah so, my project was, I guess, going to be sort of a political history of the gay and lesbian community in Chicago, sort of late 20th century, and I was interested in thinking about politics as a more expansive subject of activity, so, you know, in certain times, like

thinking about going to a gay bar as a political statement, which I think is a little complicated, right, like you don't really think about socialization as political activity, and sort of trying to think about, and maybe we do now, it's sort of commonly accepted, but I was just sort of interested in the ways that lesbian and gay men sort of engaged in non-traditional forms of political activity, and the way the gay community developed here and things like that.

KG: Okay. Did you come here intending to study Chicago or was it something you discovered once you got here?

CN: Did I come here intending -- no. I think it was something, for a variety of reasons, I discovered when I was here. I sort of fell in love with the city and ended up being a -- it's also sort of, the resources were here, I was here [KG: Right, of course, of course], and at the time I don't think a lot of work had been done on the lesbian and gay history of Chicago, I think that some of my colleagues are trying to correct that and there have been some more -- there's been some more done -- and, so, yeah.

KG: So you had to combine sort of all the things that you studied in undergrad, it sounds like?

CN: Yes.

KG: American Studies, gay and lesbian, and political science.

CN: Yeah, right, right, exactly.

KG: That sounds like a great fit, I guess.

CN: I mean -- yeah, I mean it was, you know, I had sort of -- yeah I'd sort of started to delve into the project somewhat, but I discovered over the course of my time in graduate school that I didn't love teaching, sort of hated it, and -- which was kind of a problem, and the job market was kind of rough for PhDs and I kind of for a variety of reasons fell out of love with the project and so I kind of, I decided not to finish and I'm okay with that.

KG: Speaking of teaching, Monica noted on your -- I don't know if you'd -- I guess the emails that she sent about you that you were a TA for George Chauncey?

CN: I was.

KG: So we -- I think we have some of his tapes that you were TAing the class for, right?

CN: Yeah. So all those tapes that you have that you can't really use for the project with the students, did interviews with subject? So I set up all those interviews.

KG: Oh okay. So did you just have like a big network of people that you could contact or...?

CN: I didn't... so, there have been several attempts in the past that -- and you might actually -- I don't know if you -- like, has Noel Salinger sat down for an interview?

KG: Not that I know of, but it could be.

CN: Yeah, you should really try to interview him, he would be a good person to talk to.

KG: Does he live in Chicago?

CN: I don't think so, I think he moved, but he was a student here, I think he might have gone to graduate school here, and he worked for the alumni association for a very, very, very long time, and he had tried at various points to organize a lesbian and gay alumni group, and it had sort of gotten steam, and had fallen apart, and then they were trying to sort of pick it up again in the early 2000s, and this class was sort of a piece of it. And there was this group that was kind of meeting, and so they had some contacts through those earlier iterations of that that they handed over to George, and I had done some work with that, and I called people and asked them if they could be -- you know, give me contacts of their friends from school, things like that, and then I -- you know, I cold called people, like, "Hi this is Carl, I'm a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I got your name from so-and-so, and I understand that, you know we're interested in the history of lesbian and gay alumni at the university" and so, you know I spent hours just calling people, just out of the blue, and so [laughing] that was a little...

KG: Stressful?

CN: A little bit, yeah [laughter], people were really -- everyone was really nice, it's just weird to get a call out of the blue.

KG: Yeah, surely. Oh my gosh I just totally lost my train of thought. It sounds like you got great people, though, I just transcribed your - the Esther Newton interview from that class. [Interview #35]

CN: Yeah, I think that students found the experience to be really rewarding and positive, and yeah I think we had a -- it was an interesting mix of people, for sure. I'm sort of sad they can't be used. I understand why but, we sort of were -- hold on, scraping around --

'cause I think that, the sort of institutional framework around human subjects is a little weird when it comes to oral history.

KG: Oh yeah. I was around when they were getting IRB approval for this project and they were like "Are you gonna out people?" and we were like "Why would we do that...?"

CN: Yeah, right, yeah, and like, what does that even mean, like I sort of feel -- right, so like me sitting down, with you, today, kind of feels like "I'm consenting to participating in this project," right, and so...

KG: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know a lot about IRB but it was pretty weird.

CN: Yeah. They're just trying to protect people.

KG: Yeah, surely. So what was the -- was the course about oral history or was it a broader history...

CN: It was a -- you know it's sort of this interesting, it was a lesbian and gay history class, that had this really funky title, you know like, "The Sexual History of American Subcultures" or something like that, but it was really lesbian and gay history, and the idea was that the students conducted these interviews, and then transcribed them in some way, I don't think they actually did -- had to do that. But then they sort of write a paper contextualizing the -- what they heard on the interview with what they learned in class. And, you know, it was an interesting exercise.

KG: Was that the only lesbian and gay class you TAed while you were here or were there more course offerings?

CN: That was the only one -- yeah, so that was the only one I TAed. I taught one time by myself and one time I co-taught with a staff person who used to work for the Center for Gender Studies, Stuart Michaels [Interview #33], the first half of the introductory sequence for Gender Studies, the one on sexuality.

KG: Oh okay, problems in the study of sexuality, or something?

CN: Yeah, 'cause there's the Problems in Sexuality 1 and 2, like 1 is sexuality 2 is feminism, right so I taught the sexuality course... twice.

KG: Okay.

CN: And then, and in terms of sort of lesbian and gay stuff, that was all, really, when I was in school here that I TAed for or taught or anything.

KG: How were the undergrads that you interacted with?

CN: I mean I remember them being very positive -- it's been so long. I mean I think that it was sort of an interesting mix, I think that they really enjoyed the experience, I think they really kind of felt good about sort of being able to talk to people who had some shared experiences with them, "Oh you lived in Shoreland? I lived in Shoreland!" I dunno, I wasn't an undergrad here [laughs], but I also think it was interesting to sort of hear from them the wide range of both positive and negative experiences that people had when they were here, I think there was this guy, I forget his name, that was here in the mid 80s who just had a terrible experience.

KG: There's more than one, actually.

CN: Yeah, but then you, like you hear the people from the 60s, and you -- their experience was kind of sort of neutral or, you know, in the mid 60s, right? And it just sort of -- I dunno, it was interesting I think for them to have their sort of linear progressive notions somewhat disrupted, which I think is really good and really helpful.

KG: That was like, the early 2000s right, that you were teaching these classes?

CN: Mm-hmm, I think it was 2003 or 4, so right.

KG: To go back to oral history briefly, did you use that in your own dissertation or was it mostly archival stuff that you were doing?

CN: The intention was it was going to be a combination, so for my first year seminar paper in graduate school I wrote a paper about gay men who owned gay bars in Chicago in the 50s and 60s, and I did my own -- I did a couple of my own interviews, for that -- and then I think the idea was that a dissertation would be some sort of a combination of oral history and archival work.

You know it's really hard... the archives are sort of haphazard when it comes to lesbian and gay history, like there's these, there was this really great archive at the Chicago History Museum, it was the Chicago Historical Society at the time, they changed their name which is really weird, of a man who was working on a project that was sort of similar to what I was interested in and passed away and he left his papers, so there's this really good archive there, and it's really well indexed and good to work with, whatever,

and then you sort of go to Gerber Hart, and it was just sort of like a room, like with boxes, and I think maybe, I hope that they've sort of organized things a little better, and it was weird too, like the Leather Archives had staff working to index their stuff actively, and it was interesting to see sort of the different levels of professionalization, but sort of, the archive is kind of a diffuse and goofed up kind of thing there.

KG: Yeah, I've been in the Leather Archives, it seems like sort of a specific archive.

CN: But it's well organized.

KG: Yeah.

CN: Yeah, and like --

KG: They have people who just work in the archives there

CN: Yeah.

KG: It's great.

CN: Which is great, yeah.

KG: For us.

CN: But then the flip side is you go to the Gerber Hart and I think they actually -- and it's been years since I was there, but you know it was hard to get in, and...

KG: My understanding of Gerber Hart is that it's largely volunteer run, or almost entirely volunteer run, like nobody's getting paid to work there -- which is like, I mean, community archives are interesting and necessary but sometimes you need to pay people to, I guess be there all the time.

CN: Right, sometimes you need a professional [laughs]. Right. And you know I think a lot of it has to do with money, like the guy that -- the leather archive I think has a lot to do with money.

KG: Right. So... how did you meet these bar owners that you talked to?

CN: So George, I think, gave me introductions. Some of them were people that I think he knew socially, and -- I think I did three interviews for that project, and I think I just sort



of called one out of the blue and George set up interviews, or made introductions for the other two. The people I interviewed were Art Johnston, who owned Side Track, and he was very nice -- and his timing was a little later than -- actually now that I think about it, he might have set up sort of some... some like 13 year or -- but I think he might have connected me to one of the other two. And I interviewed the -- I forget his name, I had it somewhere at home, but he owns, or owned the Baton, and he had done -- it was interesting -- this was fascinating to me as someone who was sort of interested in oral history -- and he had done an interview that was on tape that was in the collection at Chicago Historical Society that I listened to, then I interviewed him and both interviews were almost identical.

KG: Really?

CN: I mean, it was sort of uncanny. Like it was clear he had a story, like a narrative that he had constructed, and that was what he was sort of telling.

KG: Oh, so it was the guy who was doing research before you who had interviewed him.

CN: Mm-hmm, like 20 years before. And then I interviewed him, and they were-- it was like the same story, and I was like "oh--" I mean not like word for word, but the narrative structure was like -- it was very precise, and I was like "okay, you have your story", and it -- yeah. And you know there were other people that I interviewed or were interviewed for the project that George worked on with undergrads, who had been interviewed 20 years before, and it was clear that that time had changed their perspective. Like Bill Kelly, who was sort of an important figure in Chicago, the Mattachine Society, and continued -- like he had been interviewed for both projects, and they were very different stories, and so...

KG: Yeah that's interesting. So did your research sort of center around Boystown, or was it pretty diverse around the city -- or dispersed, rather, not diverse.

CN: I mean in the 50s and 60s Boystown wouldn't have been really where the bars were, they were a little bit further south, kind of around where the museum is, and so that paper was more on some bars in that neighborhood, and I think one of the things that had come out of that paper was their sort of... there weren't a lot of gay men in sort of the story that George tells about -- he doesn't kind of get to the 50s and 60s, but there's sort of just this idea of like, mafia owned gay bars, in the 50s and 60s, in certain cities, and there was a little more sort of... non-ma-- the bars in Chicago for some reason still had pay-offs to the police and mafia and whatever... to stay opened, but they were more owned by gay

men and so that was sort of an interesting difference and kind of thinking about why is that and what does that mean was part of the paper and part of the project.

KG: Yeah that is really interesting, why did you think that was?

CN: I never really got to that part. [laughs]. It was just sort of a question. And I don't know... it might have been somewhat circumstantial, like it just sort of happened... like who knows?

KG: Yeah. Maybe the mafia here just wasn't interested in gay bars or something. [laughs]

CN: Who knows. Yeah. It's funny 'cause out of that project -- like, what is... you're sort of like, "oh, the mafia were paid off" or whatever, and you don't really ever think about the logistics of that, like what does that actually mean, how does that look, but it was sort of... ice delivery was a big mafia thing, is they were like the ice delivery for the bars, so every time I see like an ice delivery truck I'm like "Oh, is that... the mafia?" I mean, I'm sure it's not true any more, but that was sort of part of the racket, I think, is they were like "Hey, we're going to be your ice delivery service."

KG: Whether you like it or not?

CN: Right, exactly. Like that was sort of something that people would talk about, like that, and it's just sort of this weird by-product of being a graduate student here and thinking about these things for too long.

KG: Carl I'm never gonna be able to look at ice the same way again [laughter]

CN: You're like "where did this ice come from?"

KG: "Somebody's gonna get whacked!"

CN: Yeah. It's ice delivery and trash service.

KG: Oh okay. I guess that makes sense, it's a fairly innocuous looking business.

CN: Right, that support bars that... yeah.

[00:23:10]

KG: So did you do graduate course work in lesbian and gay classes here or were you mostly on your own, or...?

CN: Yeah, so, I would say the... in our history program you do two years of coursework, and in the time that I was here there weren't a lot of, there were basically no courses in the history program that were specifically on the history of sexuality. I think in my fourth year George taught a history seminar on the history of sexuality and I sort of took that class as an advanced graduate student because it was relevant to my project, so no, but I think my first quarter of grad school George taught a 20th century US History survey course, and other than that I think part of the process of graduate school is trying to give you a more sort of general overview of a field and so it was sort of a lot of US History, writ large, and so, that kind of...

KG: Can I ask what George Chauncey was working on at the time you were here? I just know about *Gay New York* I don't really know any of his other research projects.

CN: So yeah, so the big thing that he has been working on for a long time is sort of a follow up to *Gay New York*, and so the idea is that it stops in the 40s I think, maybe like the 50s, and then he's sort of interested in the middle part of the 20th century, which is, you know, can be... is a much more complicated story because a) I think that the materials that you have access to are... there are just so many more, and so part of, one of the things that I did in grad school to make money, to live, is I transcribed a lot of George's interviews, which you understand, probably, I don't know what the technology looks like these days but there's those like peddle things, do you know what I'm talking about?

KG: For like stopping and starting?

CN: Right 'cause this was before this lovely device that's been invented, and it was all on tape, and so you had these transcription machines that had a pedal, and you would keep the pedal down as it was playing and you were typing, you were typing, and if you got behind you would let the pedal up, and you could set it so it would rewind two seconds or something like that, and so I transcribed a lot of the interviews that he had done and did in years following for that second book project.

One of the other things that he worked on while I was in grad school that I helped with was a book called *Why Marriage?* and it came out in a sort of ridiculously short period of time after the gay marriage decision in Massachusetts, and it's like... if you haven't read it, I highly encourage you to read it. I mean if you've done any work in gender studies it's something... all stuff you'd be really familiar with but it's this really nice, concise look at the history of marriage in the United States and sort of how gay marriage fits into

that longer narrative and he went and interviewed people waiting in line to be the first people to be married in Massachusetts, and I transcribed those interviews for him, and they were really moving, actually.

KG: Yeah that sounds really interesting, I didn't know about this book.

CN: Yeah, it was sort of designed to capture a moment, and it's more popular press kind of a book. It's really short, it's like tiny too... anyway, but it provides a sort of interesting look at the way that marriage... you know there's all these arguments about, 'oh, we're gonna force churches to marry gay people', and we've never forced churches to marry anyone, like a Catholic church does not have to marry people who are Jewish, like we've never dictated who churches have to marry, and he just sort of... he's just sort of a brilliant contextualist and he does that really nicely. And he also includes these really important stories about why people were excited to get married. From waiting in line. Like talking about their families, like women who had biological children who were really afraid of what would happen to their children if the biological mother passed away and how their rights were not secure, and marriage solved that for them.

KG: So it sounds like... so he was doing New York at the 50s and 60s and you were doing Chicago sort of at the same period?

CN: Yes. Which was one of the things that was a little complicated for me in thinking about my own career, but yeah, he had a lot of interest in my work and I had a lot of interest in his work, too.

KG: Yeah. Did you work with any other professors while you were here, too?

CN: Yeah, so the second person on my dissertation, and the person who I wrote my second year seminar paper was Amy Stanley, who was not a historian of either the 20th century, or... she works on more gender stuff, but she's just sort of really good at teaching, she's a great teacher, and provided really important feedback on my work, and then I worked with Cathy Cohen, in the political science department, and I did a third field with her on social history and it sort of gets back into my political science background and also my interest in thinking about politics more broadly, and so I really enjoyed working with her on -- and I had done...

So one of the things that, and this'll sort of open up a hole in your topic for discussion, but I was -- my work-study job when I was in grad school was, I was the administrator for the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project, so I kept up the website, which was separate... it was a different time, but there was a separate website for the Lesbian and Gay Studies

Project then, and we did conferences and we – there was like this move to try and organize all of the people working in Lesbian and Gay Studies in the city of Chicago, we had like a listhost to share information and things like that, and so I ran, administratively, all of those things, so I had organized a conference for Cathy Cohen, which is kind of how I got to know her, and then I did my third world reading field with her, so...

KG: So can you recap the Lesbian and Gay studies Project for me? I have heard about this but I could use the information. [KG laughs]

CN: Yeah, no, it's fine. So, the... what was then the Center for Gender Studies... and I think presents these interesting ways in which organizations evolve, but what was then the Center for Gender Studies had a couple of these various sub-projects, and one of them was the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project, and we had money every year that was used for putting on lectures and conferences and thinking, it sort of helped pay for me as an administrator to do work, and we provided some structure and space for some advanced graduate students to do research and to have dissertation fellowships and so it was kind of this interdisciplinary center focused on Lesbian and Gay Studies.

KG: Okay. So that was kind of based in the Center for Gender Studies but it had sort of reached out to different universities in Chicago?

CN: That was one of the things we did, is we had a listhost and a little sub-website that was designed to provide a communication tool to the various Universities within the city... so Northwestern, DePaul, UIC, Roosevelt, 'cause there are people working in Lesbian and Gay Studies at each of those institutions, and this was a way to confer the various programs to communicate with each other.

KG: Mm-hmm. Did you personally use that at all as a graduate student?

CN: Yeah, because I think it sort of... so for example if like Esther Newton is coming to Northwestern, she never did, but as a grad student here I would be interested in knowing that, and wanting to sort of go up there, and I think, there was a lot of exchange, particularly between Northwestern and the University of Chicago, where sometimes their students would come down and take classes with us, and vice versa, and so I think it was an important resource and kind of community building tool, in some ways, 'cause if...

KG: Um -- oh, no, go ahead.

CN: I mean 'cause I feel like at particular moments... there were sort of some early pioneers in a couple of fields working on lesbian and gay history, very few people in political

science, some people in some of the -- like English, for example, working on projects, and I think that, in the same ways that... you know, I just think it was sort of important... all of these fields, or sort of sub-fields of fields were sort of new at that moment, and I think connection to other people, maybe from your field, at another institution who can kind of understand where you're coming from was really important for academics at that particular moment.

[00:34:03]

KG: Were people socializing via the Gay and Lesbian Studies Project or was it more of a professional network?

CN: More academic. Yeah, it was more professional. That thing had a name. I don't remember what it is. I have it at home somewhere. 'Cause like the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project was more focused here on campus and like putting on academic conferences and then part of that was this support for a network of some sort.

KG: Was that newish at the time, like were other institutions doing similar projects or was that a very unique thing to do?

CN: I think it was somewhat unique for it to be so focused around the academic side of things, I think -- and for it to be... yeah I think it was somewhat... unique's not a good word, but uncommon. And it was good. And I think that different institutions were handling things, administratively, structurally, differently at this time. And I have no idea what it's like now. Like some schools, there were places that the solution was to create a major, right, or a department. And University of Chicago doesn't really do things like that necessarily, like we have a number of interdisciplinary centers that focus on a field, like Latin American studies. We don't have a department, we have people from departments who sort of group together and study, and I think different institutions handle these questions differently.

KG: Okay. So it was sort of emblematic of how UChicago would handle any smaller subset topic.

CN: New field, right, like... so even Center for Gender Studies is sort of structurally, it's not a department, it's an interdisciplinary center that faculty from departments and have a home department, and we handle, if you look at, or maybe you haven't thought about this as much as I do, 'cause I think about it a lot now because it's my job... so we have a Slavic Languages department, but then we have a Center for Eastern European and Russian Studies.

KG: CEERES, you mean?

CN: Yeah, and CEERES is made up of historians and people from Slavic and people from I think Sociology and Political Science and Anthropology, who all kind of work from that region of the world, and so that's kind of how the University has decided to handle some of these new fields.

KG: Yeah. I love CEERES.

CN: Yeah, they're wonderful.

KG: So did you -- do you wanna speak at all to any academic changes and such in the field of Gay and Lesbian studies over the course of -- what's maybe like nine years, I guess, including your undergraduate?

CN: I think that it's strange because I wanna say "Oh it's become a stronger field," or something like that, but I don't know that that's true, I think I'm not as familiar with where things sit today, but I... I don't know. I don't... I think it's a really difficult time to think about those questions because all this weirdness around anything that's not science or math, so I think that all these things that my parents were telling me in the late 90s when I was going through college and getting a degree in American Studies with a minor in Lesbian and Gay Studies, basically, are the things that people are telling kids now, like, "you're never gonna get a job if you study these things," and "you should get a business degree," and I don't think any of that has changed, but I think that it's encouraging that more people that I know who have come through the history program who work on lesbian and gay history have tenure track jobs, I think that's encouraging, speaks to a sort of strengthening of the field... I dunno, it's a complicated question.

KG: Yeah.

CN: Sorry that wasn't a more interesting answer.

KG: No, that's okay. Just whatever you think is fine. Let's see. So I've talked to a couple of graduate students and sometimes people have different ideas about this question but did you have any gay social life on campus while you were here or was that not something that you felt was available to grad students?

CN: Yeah I would say that my social life when I was on campus was centered more around my colleagues in the History department and then I had a boyfriend for most of the time

that I was in graduate school who -- and I lived in Hyde Park for one year, and then I had to get out, so I lived for most of my time in grad school on the north side, in Lincoln Square and Lakeview for a period of time -- very typical, yeah -- but I feel that my social life was more sort of centered around my friends in the History department, and then sort of non-academic friends up on the north side, and so it's like I know that things like Q&A exist, but that certainly wasn't a really strong part of my experience here. And I don't know that I felt like it was available or unavailable to me, I just don't know that I was so interested, right? I think as a grad student that potentially is teaching undergrads, you kind of want to -- at least for me -- keep some sort of a separation between -- it's not like I was all that interested in going to undergrad parties, so I kind of shied away from... yeah.

KG: So you had a different social group on the North Side that you participated in.

CN: Yeah.

KG: Did you do any social or political stuff with this -- like was this social group around gay stuff or just people that you liked...?

CN: A little bit on the political side... like fundraisers for GLSEN, things like that, GLSEN was sort of a new thing then, I had sort of an friend who worked for a long time at the National GLSEN headquarters, and so connected with that, but it was more just social, for me. And my ex-boyfriend had grown up here and had friends from high school and his fraternity brothers, and we would socialize with them quite a bit. Different life then from what I lead now, it's sort of strange to think back on all these things.

KG: Wait, what do you mean?

CN: I just -- as I think back a lot of my friends from grad school have finished grad school and gotten jobs and very few of them got jobs in Chicago, you know, so they've moved to other places, and a lot of the people who I was socializing with then, with the person who I was dating, were his friends from high school and/or college, so as I think back to my life then and my life now, it just is almost a completely separate cast of characters, and so I think that ... yeah. And it's funny to me because I've been here in Chicago for almost 13 years and a student for the first half of that and a staff person for the last half of it, but these buildings have been a constant, and it's sort of like, I'm still here, these buildings are still here, but the people keep changing.

KG: Yeah, people are fairly transient at the university.



CN: Yeah, you would be surprised at, certainly students come through and leave, but I still see the same sort of people, like the woman who used to cut my hair in the salon on 57th street still cuts hair there, I don't go to her any more, whatever, but she still cuts hair there, she still has kind of the same hair, and she's still in the same chair, and I'm like 'oh, this place never changes,' and then, yet it does, Hyde Park is so different now than when I lived here, and -- I mean I come down all the time, but it is sort of all the things that you would think about as nice amenities here, there were so few of them back then...

KG: Like nice restaurants, and things to do?

CN: Restaurants, things to do, grocery stores... I mean there was a grocery store -- so Treasure Island was the Co-op then, it was sort of this terrible, terrible grocery store that was really terrible food, over-priced, you know if you didn't have a car it was... just terrible, and then it became Treasure Island, and it sort of is okay, they have some better stuff but it's still very expensive, but there were three bars in Hyde Park when I was a student here, it was like the Pub, Jimmy's, and the Cove

KG: But that's still kind of --

CN: Well but you can get, I mean you couldn't drink at restaurants, right?

KG: Oh, yeah, I guess that...

CN: And like it just sort of was like... there just was nothing to do here, unless you were socializing in the way that undergrads socialize, right, and it just... yeah.

KG: So you moved to the north side.

CN: I did, I was like 'I gotta get out.'

[00:45:47]

KG: I guess we could transition into talking about your becoming staff here...

CN: Sure!

KG: So when you left your PhD program what did you do, or what did you intend to do, or both?

CN: So I left my PhD, I did not leave graduate school in the most graceful way, I kind of had some... lots of big changes in my life, and just kind of dropped out of life for a while, and was just kind of doing some weird odd jobs and went home to live with my mom for a little while, and decided to come back to Chicago... So I wasn't really doing a whole lot, I had some odd jobs, and so I was temping for a while here in Hyde Park, randomly, at the toaster buildings in the IM Pei buildings on 55th street, the big tall ones.

KG: Yeah.

CN: You've never heard the toaster buildings before?

KG: I've never heard them called the toaster buildings... but I don't know anyone who's ever worked or lived in them, so that might be why.

CN: People call them the toaster buildings

KG: I've always said "the inconvenient buildings that I have to bike around." [laughs]

CN: So I temped for the property management company for like six months, and was looking for a permanent job there, and while I was doing that I rode the train and one morning this woman struck up a conversation with me about my breakfast, and she worked here in the Division of the Humanities as their director of events, and she mentioned that she actually was leaving, because she was pregnant, and I was like "Oh, I could do that job," because it was an event planning job on campus, and I had planned events as a grad student for the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project and knew the campus, and so I ended up getting -- and it turned out that someone who worked in the Dean's Office who was the director of communications had been my advisor when I was in the history program and -- my non-academic advisor, right, the staff person -- and so I got that job and worked there for about three years and, it just kind of helps, I think, that having been a grad student here I kind of understand the faculty's needs and perspectives, which is really good, and then I spent about 18 months after that in the President's Office, I planned the graduation ceremonies, Convocation, we call it, which is interesting, and then I took the opportunity, when it came up, and went back to the division of the humanities, and I work as a senior director of programming and that means that I work on communication and events at a sort of high level in the division.

KG: So do you work with undergraduates or mostly faculty events?

CN: Mostly faculty, yeah. I don't see the undergraduates -- like I mean, I see the undergraduates from a window, but -- so all of the undergraduate activity is sort of through the College, and the Divisions are for graduate students and faculty.

KG: Oh okay. I had never really thought about that before.

CN: Right, so the graduate divisions are where the faculty get hired and then it's sort of where their research is structured and the PhDs and MA students are administrated through the divisions, and then all of the undergrads are all through the college. It's much different than most any other place, which either has a school of arts and sciences, or a grad school and an undergraduate, and so the divisions are kind of this unique structure that is both really good at times and really... more decentralization, right?

KG: But you didn't move back to Hyde Park when you came back from Colorado, did you? Do you still live on the North Side?

CN: I do. I live in Rogers Park, so I'm as far north in the city as one can get and still be considered Chicago. My partner, now, teaches at Northwestern in Evanston.

KG: Oh, okay

CN: So he bikes to work and I drive a lot. [laughs]

KG: How did you meet your partner?

CN: We met through friends.

KG: Oh okay.

CN: Yeah.

KG: I was wondering if it was your network that you had been working on.

CN: He doesn't teach anything connected to lesbian and gay anything, he teaches Chemistry.

KG: Oh okay. [laughs]

CN: Yeah, which has kind of been really nice, because on the one hand I understand his work life fairly well, like the structure of it, like I get that there are times where he's really busy, and there are times where he has like, a month in the summer where he doesn't

have to go to campus, and our schedules are very synced, they're on the quarter system, and our spring breaks are usually the same, and all that's great, right? Not that I get a spring break as a staff person, but were I to take a vacation in the middle of winter, sometime, spring break's probably most ideal time for both him and for me, because that's just the way things work, but at the same time I know almost nothing about chemistry, so there's no needing to engage with intellectual -- well, I get what he does, but don't really have any interest in chemistry.

KG: Yeah, that can be nice in a relationship.

CN: Yeah.

KG: Did -- aside from knowing the structure of the school, does your graduate work play into your director of programming job in other ways than that?

CN: Not really, not the academic side of things, I think that it helps that -- the content that I studied in grad school really has no relevance to my work, I think the understanding of what it means to be an academic helps tremendously.

KG: Yeah. I'm just gonna kind of flip through this sheet of questions very quickly because I didn't look at it at all...

[00:52:43]

CN: I mean I think that the interesting thing for me about this project, and thinking about my own experience is that I feel like it was so, sort of -- it'll be interesting to sort of see what the undergraduate breakdown... I don't know how many people you're talking to who went to graduate school, how many people -- probably more undergrads, I would guess -- although that's interesting because the university has more graduate alumni than undergrad alumni, just a fact, right? But it's a very different experience, right, and so I think it's good to think about questions of socialization and the connection between those two and you know when you come for graduate school you come with much different purposes, and so your focus is so different and... you know, I think it would be interesting to sort of see, when this project is done, if there's sort of... things that one could conclude from looking at those different pathways or... you know what I'm saying.

KG: Yeah. I think there definitely are differences in the interviews I've been conducting, 'cause I've done at least five graduate students, and just without any prior consideration on my part I would say that graduate students tend to talk a lot more about their academic professional life, which makes a lot of sense, and undergrads tend to be the ones that

you'll talk to and they'll have like, you know the anecdotes that they've been telling among their friends for the past ten years since they've been graduated or whatever and it's sort of maybe a -- I don't want to say a mythologized understanding of the university but a little bit more narrative, in a way...

CN: Yeah, and if this were a different sort of project, I could talk to you about what it was like to be an undergrad and be gay at the University of Colorado, but I'm not sure how germane that is to what you're trying to get at in this project... and also in that my own professional academic training deals so heavily with what you're doing in this project that it's kind of different [laughs], like I come at some of these things with a little more context than some of the other people I think you're talking to.

KG: Yeah, this interview is very different than the one I did with like a medical student a couple of months ago.

CN: Yeah, I would think so. I'd be interested -- I would be curious to look at those.

KG: They'll be in the Special Collections eventually, and then we're having an exhibition in 2015, so...

CN: Great, yeah! That's cool.

KG: Yeah, and Lauren, did you meet any of the graduate coordinators of the project or have you just been talking to me?

CN: No, I mean I think I met them, like Monica and Lauren? [KG: Mm-hmm] Yeah, so I know Monica, well I've known of Monica for a long time, because she's in the History program, and I met her formally at alumni weekend a couple years ago, and I met Lauren at, I think, Nan's, talk.

KG: Oh, right.

CN: Right, and I've known Gina the entire time that I've been in grad school, like she used to sign my timecard, right?

KG: Back when you signed a piece of paper.

CN: Yeah, right, it's not that long ago since they switched over, it's only been three years since they switched over to electronic.

KG: Oh really?

CN: Think about that!

KG: I guess I did use a time sheet when I first started working at the library...

CN: Right? Four years ago.

KG: Yeah I just blocked it out I guess. [laughter]

CN: So anyway, you were saying?

KG: Oh, right, I was just saying that Lauren recently -- like in the last week or so -- emailed about possibly having a mini exhibition, like in the upcoming year so that people know that this is going on and like get excited for the big exhibition.

CN: Oh, yeah.

KG: And so that people who haven't talked to us yet will come talk to us.

CN: Are you guys having trouble finding subjects?

KG: I don't think.... we are having trouble finding subjects of specific... I don't wanna say types, 'cause they're human beings, but we've had a lot of gay men --

CN: It's hard to find women?

KG: Yeah.

CN: Yeah we really struggled with that when I was working on the project for that class, it was like, you know, and it was very important to George to have a better representation of women, and they just -- we couldn't find them, and I know that the -- so there's a Lesbian Gay Alumni affinity group, which you can be part of, if -- making an assumption here...

KG: Yes, that's true... I am queer, yes, that's true.

CN: Right? That's an interesting shift, I mean that's sort of an interesting thing that probably comes up is sort of like... gay, queer... anyway. But I know that they have real problems getting women to come to their events... I think some of them are structural,

like some of the spaces that they have events at just are less appealing, I think, to lesbians or queer women, and I don't know, I think some of it is... my sense from talking to people is that there was a much more highly organized gay male sub-culture on this campus and that it just wasn't the same for women.

KG: Yeah, it seems to me that in the recent past the lesbian community has been much more of like a community.

CN: But the longer sort of... and I think part of it was there were these two male professors who would have these parties for a long time and kind of was like they always would invite sort of the new students and then the new students would invite the new students and it just became this network of gay men who had all been to these parties. I think they... so they had that apartment that they have the alumni party in every year now, which I still have not been to.

KG: I actually went this year.

CN: How was it?

KG: It was actually really interesting because I sort of went and then talked to everyone about this project so I sort of felt like I was at work.

CN: You could have just logged in and logged out

KG: Right.

CN: So I was gonna go this year for the first time... so in the past I either was kind of disaffected from being a university alumni for a while, and now I'm less so but I've always had to work at alumni weekend, or the spring is just an incredibly busy time for me, and so it's just like "Do I really want to come down to campus another weekend," and this year I was gonna come down and go and I was just -- we did this really big event for my job and I had travelled internationally and been there for a week and came back and I still had -- so the division has its own... each of the divisions have their own graduation ceremony, and I'm in charge of the humanities one, it's the next weekend, so I just was like "I can't do it this year." But I really wanna go sometime.

KG: Yeah. It was nice. It was nicer I think because I had met a lot of people through this project than if I had just come...

CN: Had just been, right... But I think, right, so like that's one of the things that the alumni affinity group kind of works on and -- but you know they'll do like a theater night, which is good but I think can be more appealing to gay men than lesbians, men than women, and I think that they're aware of the issue and they're like "If you can come up with programming that would be appealing to lesbians, or queer women who are open to it," and I'm like "I'm not really an expert on that." They said that they've done some picnics, like they did a picnic in the past in Millennium Park, and that seemed to attract more women...

KG: Yeah, I haven't joined the alumni group yet, but...

CN: They do some really cool stuff, like -- I don't think they did it this year, which was weird -- or maybe I just missed it, I don't know, I had a very busy year, professionally -- but they always do like an Anti-Valentine's Day event, and two years ago, it was really, it was amazing, it was Lauren Berlant and it was in this little space and she made us all write about our feelings. And then she talked but it was actually amazing...

KG: That sounds like a thing lesbians would like to do.

CN: Right, yeah? It was actually -- I forget what they call it, but it was really cool.

KG: I think my girlfriend is in the alumni group, maybe I'll have to ask her if she's been to an Anti-Valentine's Day -- or any event.

CN: Yeah I forget what they call 'em, they have a clever name for it. And so I guess you had asked earlier about "Have I seen any changes from now to then," I think the fact that there is a very active, publicly acknowledged, organized by the alumni association, staffed by an alumni association member who -- I don't know who it is now, but once upon a time was an openly gay man... I feel like would have been impossible ten years ago, just not even something that would have happened. For a whole host of reasons. And when you look at other places that have long-standing lesbian and gay, queer, etc. alumni organizations, they tend to be non-institutional, like Harvard's was organized outside of the Harvard structure, and now is affiliated with them, but isn't actually a part of the university, and so I think that change is interesting to me.

KG: Yeah. What do you think the reasons are that we have this now and we couldn't before?

CN: So I think some of them are changes in the thinking of the alumni association, and sort of thinking about better ways to engage their alumni, so I'm not sure -- you probably haven't started getting all the emails from the alumni association yet, you know I think



they have some interesting programming that speaks to a fair number of alumni, so they have this thing called the Harper Lectures and they send faculty to various cities and they give a lecture and alumni are invited and it costs like \$15 or \$10 if you're a recent alum, okay, like I'm not sure I would pay \$15 to go hear—part of it is I can go hear faculty for free, so maybe if I lived in Houston I would have a different... but I still don't know that that's necessarily, maybe if it was someone I really wanted to see, but something I would be interested in. I have certainly paid good money to engage with programming with the alumni association, the Lesbian and Gay Affinity Group, because I want to engage with both the content and the people, like it's a better way of reaching me as an alumni, right?

KG: Like a social element and a content element.

CN: Right.

KG: Yeah that's true I guess, as someone who hasn't done any alumni stuff.

CN: So like if you got an email from the alumni association that was like "Hey, come back for your five year reunion," you know, depending on who may or may not be coming back, you might feel inclined to or not inclined to, I don't know how like... "Ra-Ra UofC" you are, but if you got an email from a Lesbian and Gay alumni association saying "Come back to alumni weekend and there's going to be this party where other lesbian and gay alumni will be attending and we also are doing an uncommon core with Lauren Berlant," like that probably would be a lot more appealing to you than --

KG: Right, 'cause then I know it's a program that I'll be interested in, and it's a social group that I -- maybe they're not my best friends, but at least I'll know people who'll be there, rather than like my class of something like, what, 1500 people, or something.

CN: Yeah and I just think it provides like a comfort level for people, like "Oh, I at least will have something to talk about."

KG: Are you on the board of the alumni group or anything?

CN: No.

KG: You just like it?

CN: I do, yeah. I thought about that. I think that their board is... I think they're okay for now. I might do that someday.

KG: Yeah. I'm just gonna quickly flip through this again.

CN: Yup.

KG: Let's see... so do you think your experience in graduate school was typical of gay graduate students in the time that you were here?

CN: I don't know. I think that... I don't know. I guess, what does typical mean, right? If you're talking about a graduate student who has come to the university to work on lesbian and gay studies, whatever, sure? There weren't a whole lot of us, right? But if... I mean I think something that would be somewhat different were if I don't know, these questions of outing people, you know for the IRB or whatever, if I have come to the University of Chicago to study lesbian and gay history at a cocktail party, you know, "What do you work on?" you know it's there, right? And so I think maybe if I had been an MBA student, thinking about what my experience would have been, could have been very different, but it wasn't... and I don't know that I have a lot of context to really compare my experience versus someone in a professional school or...

KG: Yeah, 'cause you were saying most of your friends here were history, rather than gay-based.

CN: Yeah, so most of the people that -- my really good friends and the people that I'm still in touch with were other students working in the history department, and I think that, yeah, my experience was typical for that group, yeah.

KG: Right. Has your perception of your time at UChicago changed since you've not been a grad student any more?

CN: Yeah I think so. Sort of a complicated question where I moved here for graduate school and I left the program and had certain feelings about that and my time here, and now I think back and about what a really good experience it was and how much I learned and how -- I don't think that I would be in this position or as successful in my job had I not had the graduate training that I had, and so I have very positive feelings about the institution, and I may not have always had those -- grad school's very difficult -- and it's a really hard process, and I think I was a little... didn't have as fond of memories of my time here, not because of anything relating to being gay, but just that it's a really painful process, and I've sort of forgotten that pain and think about all the good stuff now, so... [laughs]

KG: Is there anything else you wanna talk about while we're still here, or...?

CN: I don't think so, I think... no. I think this is a great project...

KG: Oh, thanks.

CN: Oh yeah, I mean I think it's a really great project, and... I'm glad you guys are doing it, and I'm not sure how interesting my experience necessarily is for the project for a whole list of reasons but I'm happy to be part of it, I'm really glad you guys contacted me.

KG: Yeah, thank you so much for talking to us -- I'm just gonna... turn it off.

CN: Yep.

[01:11:47]

***End of Interview.***