

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #39
RABE, DANIEL (1984-) AB 2007 STAFF**

At U of C: 2003-2007, 2011-present

Interviewed: June 11th, 2013

Interviewer: Molly Liu

Transcript by: Molly Liu

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Interview (June 11th, 2013) with Daniel Rabe in Wieboldt, University of Chicago:

[00:00:00]

ML: First question: can you tell me how you came to the University of Chicago?

DR: Okay. So I didn't really know much about the University of Chicago until probably my junior or senior year of high school. A professor, one of my lit professors in high school, was the one who told me about the U of C and got me more interested. And they came to some of our college fairs. So that's really how I got interested in the U of C. I think I was definitely attracted by the quirky nature of the U of C. It reminded me of the good parts of my high school, that were challenging and intellectually stimulating and interesting. That was mostly what attracted me here.

ML: Where did you go for high school?

DR: I went to the Oklahoma School for Science and Math for the last two years, and before that I was in a rural high school in Oklahoma.

ML: Can you tell me about your experience when you got to the University of Chicago? Like, did it meet your expectations?

DR: Yes. It was definitely very different. I grew up in the country. My last two years of high school, we were in Oklahoma City, but we had to stay on campus, so it was still fairly isolated. You just out with your—the only time that you could leave campus was to go home on the weekends to go visit your family.

ML: Oh, so you lived in—so it was a boarding school?

DR: Yeah.

ML: Was the transition to college a little bit easier because you already had--?

DR: Yeah, I think so. That definitely helped, since I was, you know, 800 miles away from my family. That was a little hard first year, but I think being in a boarding school for the last two years helped, since I got used to being away from my family for a slightly more extended period. But I definitely liked that we seemed to have more freedom here. Since I was going from a state-run school, so they had very strict rules about being on certain areas of the dorm, you couldn't go on the girls' side of the dorm, things like that.

ML: Right. What was it like to go from Oklahoma to Chicago?

DR: It was a big transition. Going from... So the high school, in the place where I went to, was like 500 students, kindergarten through 12th grade. Then I moved to the third largest city in the country. So I think it was good being in Hyde Park. I know some of the professors in high school shied students away from NYU, where there's not as much of a campus, they're directly in the city, because I think that makes it an easier transition. Having an actual campus that students are concentrated on, because then you stay focused on what you're doing, and it's not quite as much of a culture shock, coming from a small area like Oklahoma to a big place.

ML: Did you enjoy the—you mention the kind of separation between Hyde Park and the city of Chicago. Did you enjoy that separation?

DR: It's good and bad. It's good because it keeps you focused on what you're doing in school. I think our house was pretty good about going out and seeing different parts of the city, so I feel like I saw enough of the city that I wanted to. But as an undergrad I think it's less annoying than it is as a grad student.

ML: Where did you live when you were an undergrad?

DR: I lived in Burton-Judson, in Dodd-Mead house.

ML: Oh, really? I was in that exact same house, my first two years of college!

DR: Were Tim and Thelma still there?

ML: Yes! They left the year that I left, which is too bad. They were amazing.

DR: That was their 12th year in the house, I'm pretty sure. They'd been there for a while.

ML: Yeah, I think so. Long time. So, how did you like living in the house?

DR: I actually liked it a lot. So I ended up staying there all four years.

ML: What was the social experience like for you as an undergrad here?

- DR: I think it was pretty good actually. [ML: You won U of C! Nobody says that!] I never liked those “Where Fun Comes to Die” shirts, because we...just have a different kind of fun. I liked it when students sort of understood that we're making fun of ourselves, but we don't actually think that. I knew students here who actually thought that—oh, nobody has any fun here, I don't have any fun. It's like, no, we just have fun in a different way. We don't go to raging parties and get drunk. At least, not often.
- ML: What were the ways that you had fun when you were here?
- DR: We'd go on outings into the city, people would just sit and talk, make jokes over the dinner table, watch movie marathons on the weekend. Little things like that. We had a movie night every week in the house, which was a lot of fun. A lot of the people here enjoy just more quiet interactions with a few people, just talking, more than they enjoy larger social situations. So that's why I think it's not necessarily where fun comes to die, just a different kind of fun. U of C students have fun discussing random topics that most people would not be interested in discussing.
- ML: That's true. But yeah—were you out before you came to college?
- DR: No, I didn't come out until between my second and third year of college.
- ML: What was the process like for you?
- DR: So, it was—I think it was somewhat difficult when I was younger. I didn't really want to admit it to myself. But as soon as I admitted it to myself, I told my family and my friends here. It was just a matter of me accepting it. I think growing up in Oklahoma, people don't really talk about it a whole lot. And you just have this pressure of, oh, if I'm gay, I won't be able to have the same opportunities, I won't be able to have a family, my life will be so different. So you just don't want to admit it. And this was even coming from an accepting family, where my mom had two close friends from college that were both gay, and who lived with their partners and we would visit them fairly frequently. I knew it was not something that was unacceptable to my family, but the general atmosphere there is that it's not a good thing to be out, or not many people are comfortable with it. I really didn't know anybody in high school that was out. And even some of my friends that still live there, maybe they're out to their gay friends, but if they're out to everybody it's a little different.
- ML: They're not out publicly, or it's not a place where you can be publicly out, in a way?
- DR: Yeah. Some people are more, but...you know, you just don't—it's hard to say.
- ML: What was the process like for coming out when you were on campus? Were people pretty accepting?
- DR: Oh yeah. I didn't have any issues with it. I actually was frankly pretty lucky when it comes to that. All of my family was pretty fine with it, and all my friends here were fine

with it. I think the only biggest shock was that I had been dating a girl in the house, the spring before I came out. We broke up that summer and I came out within a few months during summer. So everyone knew by the time I came back to the house. That was the only awkward thing—wait, they were dating last quarter, then he came out. But it really wasn't that awkward.

ML: I don't remember if you've mentioned this before, but what do you identify as?

DR: As gay.

ML: Okay. Yeah, I guess going from dating a girl to coming out as gay...

DR: Well, at least via Facebook, I had identified as bi. So it was sort of out there but not entirely. But that point I had accepted that I was attracted to men, but not necessarily fully accepting it.

ML: Yeah, it's funny, the process of Facebook coming out.

DR: Yeah, especially since that was when it was brand new. [ML: Oh yeah, that's true!] It literally was when it first came out.

ML: Did it change a lot of things? Like, to be around when social media first took off?

DR: I don't know. I don't think it changed much for us then. It itself has changed in a lot of ways. Like a lot of it at first was about—because, you know, you could list your classes. You were friends with other people in your classes, and you put your class schedule on your Facebook page. It was really for U of C students, for the most part. You really didn't—I think you could friend students on other campuses, but mostly it was U of C students friending each other.

ML: Did it make the process of coming out a little easier? That you could on Facebook just be “Interested In: Men and Women” or what have you?

DR: It does make it easier. Nobody really said anything when I checked those boxes, because I didn't really talk to anybody about who I was attracted to or anything like that. It definitely made it easier to tell people when I came out as being gay. And that was pretty much how people in my house noticed. Even then, early on, within—well, that would have been a year or two of Facebook being around.

ML: Wait, so did your phase of—well, not phase—of being Facebook-bisexual, did that come before you came out as gay?

DR: Yeah, it did.

ML: Okay. Why did you feel like you went through that before you “officially” came out?

DR: I think part of it was I just didn't quite know, or I wasn't...mentally I was more willing to accept maybe I'm attracted to men and women before I realized no, I'm just attracted to men. I think a lot—well, not a lot, but some guys go through that transition, which is partly why a lot of gay guys quote-unquote “don't believe” in bi men, because they just assume, “Oh, I used to claim that I was bi before I came out, which means that any guy who says they're bi is the exactly same thing.” Which is kind of funny, but is true. There've been a lot of guys I've met who have said that.

ML: It's kind of a harmful stereotype, right? It makes things harder for the guys out there who are actually bi. [DR: Yeah.] But I guess it makes sense, with the transition, as you mention.

DR: I think... Definitely a lot of people who have grown up in a similar situation to me, being more rural area, or in a more conservative area, it's an easier transition to make, because you're still holding onto that idea of being straight in some way by being bi.

ML: Right. Like, you still have that opportunity for a family and that normal—

DR: Exactly. It's like, oh, I'm attracted to men, but I could still have a family and marry a woman, lead a quote-unquote “normal” life.

ML: Did you know any other gay people when you were at the U of C as an undergrad?

DR: There were a few other gay people in my house, actually.

[12:37]

ML: I remember for a couple of years—I came at the tail end, but Dodd-Mead was known as the “Out House” for a long time, because for whatever reason there were a ton of gay people in the house. Was that true when you—?

DR: Yeah, we always had a couple of people that were—at least a couple people per year that were usually out. Including myself, there were three guys my year, when I started. And then there's another friend of mine, Stephen, who was out. And then, who else was out? There were quite a few people. I feel there are at least two or three every year. It was definitely a very gay-friendly house.

ML: That's true. Were you involved in any sorts of gay-related organizations?

DR: Yeah. So I started going to Q&A meetings then, my third year. Then I was the LGBTQ programming intern my fourth year. So I kind of went all-out, and became super-active. [ML: Totally out!] Exactly! Then I think I backed off after college, like, “Okay, now I've done too much, I can relax and focus on school and work and that kind of stuff again.” Or just because there weren't the same kinds of opportunities as there were here to be politically active in the same way.

ML: Were you really politically active as an undergrad here? What sorts of things did you involve yourself in?

DR: So I was a member of UC Dems, and Q&A. I know there were others, but I can't think of them right now.

ML: Yeah, I mean, undergrad RSOs, right? What sorts of things did you do as a part of Q&A and as the LGBTQ programming intern?

DR: So Q&A...it was not that active, the two last years that I was here. There were a couple of friends from my class who were more active in their first year or two, and then they just burned out and started focusing on school or classes again and didn't really keep coming to meetings. We had open board meetings every week, but it's not like it is now, because it seems they have a lot of people going to meetings now. We had maybe 5 or 10 people, at most, every week. Some of the things were still around then, like Genderfuck was around, but it was pretty sad, the last couple of years. [ML: Oh really? That's so sad!] But I think we were just going through a phase where students were less interested. It can be hard. It can be really hard, as a student leader here, to get people to do stuff, because a lot of people say, "Oh, I'm too busy to do anything." And they just get into that mentality because the classes here are hard. You get afraid of overcommitting yourself, and then you just don't do anything. It can be hard to get people out to do stuff.

As the programming intern, we tried to do a few things. I guess the grad council was doing a speed dating that was not inclusive of gay people. Because we asked them and I believe their answer was, sadly, still the same answer that it is now, that they would do a group for gay people if they get enough people to show up. But they made no effort to say that it was inclusive of gay people. And that's still their policy. [ML: Wow, that's unfortunate.] We tried to do our own speed-dating thing and it sort of worked, but I think we went—we kept discussing how we were going to do it, 'cause we were afraid that, well, if we don't get enough people, how are you going to split people up? Because if you think about the whole spectrum of LGTBQ people, it's hard to be like, how are you going to split people up? Because like, if you did it by gender, what about trans people, what about bi people? So what we ended up doing was everyone talked to everyone else. And then you had categories for if you were interested in the person as a friend or as a potential date. And then matched them up that way. [ML: That seems like it would work pretty well.] So we did have a few friend-matches and couple of date-matches, and hopefully—well, at least I know that some people had coffee afterwards. But as to whether anything came out of that or if any friendships formed, who knows. And we tried to do a little Valentine's Day thing. So we were trying to do a little bit more social stuff. Definitely at the programming office, it was less about politics, because Q&A does a lot of stuff—like, they go to the Matthew Shepherd rally, and do a few other things like that. So we were mostly focused on doing social activities for the students. We tried to do a Valentine's Day thing, because partly we were focusing on the traditional romantic events that people might feel excluded from, being gay. Sadly the Valentine's Day thing was not much of a hit. A few people came.

ML: Was it like a dance, or—what was the Valentine's Day thing?

DR: Yeah, that was the question...That was the problem.

ML: “Valentine's Day Event! Come!”

DR: It was supposed to be a mixer. There was music. We didn't expect people to dance, necessarily, it was sort of like, the idea was a pre-date cocktail hour minus the cocktails. [laughs] Because serving alcohol doesn't really work. But that was the idea. A few people came. But that's the problem. When you're trying something new, it's hard to get people to come. When you have an event that has some tradition to it, upperclassmen will tell new students about it, or talk to their friends about it, talk about whether they had fun last year, and that's what drives people to it.

ML: Kind of a word-of-mouth establishment that has to go on?

DR: Yeah, and even now, that's what you have to do. We would send out emails and post fliers and put stuff on Facebook, so people would have heard about it. The question was, did they know that somebody else was coming?

ML: Yeah. And that's always important, right? Do I know people who are going to be there? Otherwise I'm too scared.

DR: Gay men seem to be worse about that than other people. They have to know that certain people will be there, and then they'll come. I would have a few of my friends who would send me an email or text being like, “Oh, so do you know who's coming?”

ML: It's like the entire gay posse or nothing.

DR: Exactly! Exactly. You have to reach this threshold point at which people will start actually coming.

[19:55]

ML: Yeah. Can you talk a little bit more about the intersection about queer stuff and politics while you were here? You mention working mostly with social planning for Q&A and LGBTQ stuff. But did you also work in queer advocacy or politics?

DR: So a few of the things that were going on here while I was here: We were working on getting gender-neutral housing. That was definitely something that my co-intern Amanda was really trying to spearhead. I know that a lot of the trans community was trying to get that going, and so we were trying to do what we could do, and we were trying to talk to the housing people. We could tell that they were responsive, and happy—or, it seemed like they were going to be okay with doing it, but things are just slow and bureaucratic here. So we knew that it wasn't going to happen any time soon, and it was going to be a slow stepwise fashion first, and then they would slowly transition into doing it. Because

they're definitely very careful about doing that here.

ML: How far along is that? I remember two of my friends got gender-neutral housing and were able to room together—a gay man and a bi woman.

DR: I don't know if first-years can come in and do it. When they first implemented it, which was right after I graduated, it was a lottery, where students could select to room with anybody else regardless of their gender. But I don't know if they opened it up to first-year students. They were worried about whether straight couples would start abusing that. Our point was, does that really matter? Because there's not any rules about things, and now, if there's a couple, they usually sleep over in somebody's room anyway, so is that the end of the world?

ML: Yeah. And I know a lesbian couple who arguably “abused” the system or whatever and ended up rooming together their first year too.

DR: But I don't really think that's a bad thing. And that was part of the good thing about the U of C, is that they don't really care. It doesn't become an issue unless you have a roommate who you're, like, kicking out of the room all the time or, you know, just making them not feel comfortable in their own space because the couple is taking over the space, and the roommate doesn't have any privacy.

ML: In a way, I guess that's how the U of C works: It doesn't really care, but it also doesn't like changing, institutionally.

DR: Exactly. They're like, well, this works, sort of, so why do we have to change anything?

ML: We can't change! It's an institution!

DR: Exactly. We need to have about ten committees and many discussions before anything will change. And I feel like that's what happened with 5710. But it actually happened. My only question is, it's hard to say... I almost feel like the students now don't appreciate having it as much.

ML: Like, in what sense?

DR: Well, I think a lot of the undergrads seem really focused on Q&A and don't really seem that interested in what's going on at 5710 through the office. It's hard to say because I don't know the undergrads personally as much. But that's the sentiment that I got. I remember there was one thing where there was an anniversary event going on at 5710, and Q&A was sending out an email about having a meeting at the same time. I was like, “Hey guys, why are you doing this?” And the president—whoever emailed me back—seemed kind of defensive about it.

ML: It seems weird that there wasn't more cooperation between them.

- DR: The thing is that when I was here, there usually was, because whoever was head of Q&A was usually the programming intern. It was true my fourth year. My year there were two interns, myself, and Amanda, who is a grad student. And then after I left, Sarah Bouchat, she was the head of Q&A and also the programming intern. There was tons of overlap. But now I feel like since there isn't overlap and it actually is a separate position, there actually might be some friction? I don't know.
- ML: Do you think there's a reason why that changed?
- DR: Probably it's the fact that there is just less connection than there used to be. But it completely depends on the students. Once you cycle through a couple of years and the students have changed, it depends on what their needs and wants are.
- ML: That's definitely true. What was your academic experience at UChicago like? I imagine that you majored in biology?
- DR: Biochem.
- ML: Oh, biochem is a hardcore major!
- DR: Yeah, because you have 19 requirements? You don't have free space for anything extra. But I did take other fun classes besides. I took a couple classes through Gender Studies, or they were cross-listed as Gender Studies too. So I wasn't purely doing that all the time. That was more in third and fourth year when I was done with all of my requirements.
- ML: Right. What classes did you take that had to do with queer sexuality?
- DR: So I took Tim Stewart-Winter's class my third year, I think. [Interview #2] That was Gender, Sexuality, and Warfare in 20th-century America. That was actually a great class. He was being mentored by George Chauncey while he was still here. That year was when Chauncey had left already, and Tim was still finishing up his dissertation, so he was teaching a class that year. That class was a lot of fun. And I took a class in my fourth year that was Sexuality in the Classical World. That class was not as much fun. It was like a lot of interesting topics, but the discussion just ended up being really dry. I don't know whether that was more from the classics perspective, but somehow—we were going to talk about—one of the topics for discussion one class was prostitution, and it ended up being one of the most boring discussions ever. [ML: How is that possible?] You wouldn't think that was possible, but somehow it was. [ML: Classics majors, who knows?] I think partly it was because of the teacher. His discussion style. But yeah, it does depend a lot on what the other students in the class are like.
- ML: What did you do after graduation? You mention working at the NIH.
- DR: The first year out of college, I was doing an MD/PhD program at Ohio State, and then I ended up leaving that program after the first year. I moved to Bethesda to work at the National Cancer Institute for three years. I worked in a lab there for three years, and I

reapplied to grad school.

ML: Did you think you were going to be a clinician researcher at first?

DR: I did. Coming out of high school and coming here, I always thought that I was going to be a doctor. As I got more experience with research, I realized that I wanted to do research as well, which is why I went the MD/PhD route and thought that I was going to do both. Through that program, and partly being at Ohio State in Columbus, I just was not happy. The program was making me miserable, so I ended up leaving after the first year. After working in a lab for three years, realized that I don't actually want to work with patients, necessarily. I realized that the style of learning and style of thought between medical school and graduate school is completely different. [ML: That's definitely true.] Partly I was realizing what med school is like is completely different from the U of C, so I would be going away from what I really enjoy, the types of questions I like thinking about. And the style of questions that I like thinking about, the style of questions that the U of C does, is more like graduate school. Or doing research.

ML: What made you decide to come back to the U of C for grad school?

DR: So I was looking at here and Hopkins. I think I decided to come back here because I was familiar with the area. But if I had gone to Hopkins, I would have stayed with a lab at the NCI. So I was going to be familiar with either area. I think it was more that I got the sense that the professors here were very much invested in their students and paid more attention to their students and were going to make sure that they were doing well.

ML: What attracts you specifically to cancer research or biomedical research?

[29:30]

DR: As a kid, I always liked biology and I always liked genetics. So I think that was why I was attracted to medicine at first. As I did more research and got more exposed to science in high school, I started leaning towards biochem, which is why I did that as my major here. What I liked about cancer biology when I took a class here was that you get to ask the same type of questions that you do in different fields. So you get to use genetics, you get to use biochemistry, you get to use cell biology. And being here as a grad student. I've been introduced to doing a lot more bioinformatic kind of work. So you get to look at cancer from lots of different angles, and that's something that interested me. It's less that you learn one technique and you learn to ask one specific kind of question, and that's all you do. You learn to think about a question from a lot of different angles, if you're looking at cancer biology. There's a lot of different collaborations between different areas. And part of it is the idea of cancer research by itself. Because you're thinking about how a normal system, or a normal cell, goes awry. Normal developmental pathways are turned on that shouldn't be. It's a disease that's developing from our own normal cells. As opposed to, if you think about a virus or bacteria, something from the outside that's coming in to attack our body, it's how our body, which normally should be regulated well, becomes unregulated, and how these cells start proliferating and growing and invading.

ML: You're right—it is so fascinating. And cancer is so big that you have to go in at many angles to attack it.

DR: Exactly.

ML: What has it been like, coming here for undergrad and then coming back for graduate school? What has the experience been—

DR: It's very different. I feel like undergrads get more support from the university.

ML: That's interesting. Because I feel like U of C is often thought of as a graduate institution.

DR: There are more grad students here. But I think... Trying to think of both why they do it and why it's true. I can say from experience that there's definitely more events for undergrads. There's less events for grad students. If you look at post-docs, the post-docs get almost no support. If you look at the support that we get, we get a fair amount of support, but it's a question of what type of support we're getting. Undergrads I think get more social support than the grad students do, although we still have social activities. Part of it as you're getting older, you're growing up, you have your own friends, you don't really rely on campus and social activities on campus for building your friendships. I think grad students are more likely to be meeting people outside university, going out to the city. But they do a lot—they definitely have a lot of career support and development for grad students. That might be somewhat what's missing for undergrads, although frankly we still go through career advancement, which is better? Than it used to be, maybe. Questionably? I don't know? I think it's gotten better than what it used to be. But is it great? I don't know.

ML: The differences you describe seem pretty related to just undergrads and grads being at different stages in their lives, right? Do you think the university could do better in the way that it provides supports to undergrads or the way that it provides support to grads?

DR: I don't know. I think for the overall population, it's okay, but specifically for LGBTQ students, it's a little bit more disproportionate. Because grad students can easily meet other grad students for dating or anything on campus because there's a lot of other grad students, but if you think about the LGBTQ population of grad students, there's fewer, maybe you're less likely to meet them. It would actually be good if there were a little bit more social activities for gay grad students on campus than there are.

ML: What are the social events for gay grad students?

DR: Right now there's a little happy hour that they have for grad students two times a quarter. It's not bad. But it just sort depends on who comes and how busy it is.

ML: Did you pursue relationships at all in undergrad?

DR: I really did not date in undergrad. And I sort of did when I was in Columbus? I don't think I really started trying to date more until I was in Bethesda. But I'd say that I would blame that on, you know, coming out in my twenties. That's not entirely true. A lot of it is being the socially awkward U of C type. If you think about it, my two older brothers—one has dated two people, and the other has dated one person, his ex-wife. So it's not like any of us are actually that good about getting out and meeting people and dating. And I feel like my philosophy on dating is that I'm looking for something potentially more serious, so I don't feel like there's a great connection, I'm not going to go out of my way to date casually in between.

ML: Which makes sense. And I guess being gay is even harder. You don't have that many models to begin with.

DR: Exactly. And I would say that Mom is never the best person to go to for relationship advice.

ML: Is anybody's mom?

DR: I was about to say... But growing up, we always went to her for advice. So, you know, the same was sort of true in college. You'd say, "Oh, I was interested in this person, but then things didn't work out," and her advice would be, "Oh, you know, just focus on school."

ML: "Just...just don't worry about that right now!"

DR: Which—you understand where she's coming from, but it's not the most helpful advice. And I often have focused on school or work, and don't get out as much.

ML: Do you get a chance to go out into the city at all?

DR: Sometimes. Not that often though. I hardly actually even go out more now than I did in college. I do go out a little bit more now.

ML: I mean, grad school is so busy, right?

DR: Right, but part of it is that I'm still living in Hyde Park now. Which is the death to any social life, pretty much.

ML: Do you enjoy living in Hyde Park? Are you thinking of moving?

DR: I do and don't. I still feel conflicted about moving, but I'm moving this summer.

ML: Oh, where to?

DR: Either South Loop, because that's a more convenient commute, or potentially further north. It kind of depends on what's available and what my roommate is thinking about. Both of us work in biology labs, so we don't necessarily want to be too far away.

- ML: Right—riding the Blue Line at 2am to get back or wherever.
- DR: Yeah, exactly. Well, I mean, I don't ever work that late. I don't work crazy hours like some people do. I try to keep it as 9 to 5 as possible. Sometimes stuff runs late and stuff needs to get done, but you can work around it, usually. If you plan well enough, you can still get stuff done in a normal period of time.
- ML: And that's usually better, right? Than just saying, oh, I can stay in lab for another couple of hours.
- DR: Exactly. I was thinking about it this last weekend. And this was something that people told me before, and I would sort of wave it off. But they would say, “Well, you know, I'm not necessarily going to get on a train for an hour to go out, but I have to go to work, so I'll take the train for an hour to go to work.” Because you have to. If you have an hour-block between you and going out on the weekend, it's much easier to have that lazy, homebody mentality kick in and say, “Oh, well, I have to go out an hour. Why would I want to do that?”
- ML: That's a really good point, actually. If you actually live in a place where you have to commute an hour to work but not an hour to go out.
- DR: Exactly. And I feel that that's very good advice for U of C students because I feel like we are generally the type where we're happy with just a quiet afternoon at home or hanging out with one other person, so we're not likely to feel driven to go out. But we should, because you might hit a spot where things aren't working in lab or things aren't working in work or school, so it's good to have some social life to fall back on.
- ML: Are you involved in the wider Chicago gay community at all?
- DR: Kind of. When I first moved here I was playing for the Dragons, which is a gay rugby team on the North Side. [ML: That's such a great name for a gay rugby team.] But last quarter, or last fall, I was too busy making changes to my prelim exams, and this season I had a lot of classes and a couple of evening classes, so it wasn't going to work out schedule-wise. But theoretically, if I'm living on the North Side next year, I might think about playing again. So I have some friends on the North Side and I go out every so often, but not a lot.
- ML: Going back to when you were in Q&A, you mentioned that there were 5-10 people who consistently showed up. What were the demographics of those people? Which letters?
- DR: It was literally pretty much just the board members. Let's see... I think it was mostly lesbians? There were a couple gay guys including myself, quite a few lesbians. I'm trying to think if there were any trans people who consistently came. And there were a couple of bi people who came sometimes. But yeah, it wasn't...it wasn't super diverse. But when I was there, there were always a few super-active lesbians who were gender studies majors

and that were very active in Q&A.

ML: I guess, as a cancer biologist, your work pretty much has nothing to do with gender and sexuality at all, right? Do you think it's a different experience for a gender studies major whose academic/work life is also centered around gender and sexuality kind of the same way that their personal life is?

DR: I mean, it's going to be somewhat different, but you're always going to have to separate your personal life from your professional life to some degree, and it's not good if you let them get too intermingled. I dunno, I think it's actually nice having it more separated?

ML: Why is that?

DR: It's nice, or that it just doesn't matter that much. Work is work, and going out is going out. It does make it—I feel like it does make it hard meeting people. I feel like it's specific to gay men, but it really isn't. It's probably specific to everyone. When you tell people that you're a grad student, people tend to get kind of intimidated. It was the same when I was in the NIH. I would meet people and tell them what I was doing, and you'd get the, “Oh my god, you must be so smart” reaction.

ML: I mean, if you are a grad student at the U of C, you probably are pretty smart!

DR: Yeah, but you know, I've had this discussion with my friends. What bothers me about that reaction is that implicit in someone saying that, it's them thinking that they themselves are not that smart.

ML: Right. And automatically it becomes harder to become friends with them if they already think you're...too smart or what have you.

DR: I feel like being an undergrad at the U of C really changes your expectations for who you're friends with. Not completely. Even thinking about the people I was friends with growing up, I was lucky to have a few other very smart people that I hung out with. But then again, thinking about my close friends from the U of C, you get this expectation for people that are driven and really smart and have a lot of interests and can talk about a lot of things. You can have a great stimulating conversation about politics because you don't just talk about politics, you talk about political philosophy and why certain people think things and where certain ideas are coming from, what underpins certain theories and ideas. People are more interested in why you think something, rather than “what is this belief that you have.” Whereas you talk to other people, it's more about “well, I believe X,” and that's the end of the conversation. How do you talk about somebody that has X belief if it's different from yours?

ML: Right. And if you have the same belief, then it's like, “Well. I also have X.”

DR: Well, I think that then people start joking about people who say stupid things or believe something different from them, but then that's not necessarily that interesting of a

conversation either.

ML: Is it a difficult transition to make from more U of C type conversations to those types of conversations? Speaking as someone who's about to graduate and is terrified. [laughs]

DR: You get used to it. You get used to functioning in the normal world again. [ML: That sounds terrible!] But even grad students here are not the same. I can't have the same kind of nerdy conversations about politics with grad students. Because they're very smart when it comes to biology, but they're not in the same way that undergrads here are smart in a spectrum of areas and are able to have interesting conversations even in areas where they maybe don't know as much. Even the grad students, not all of them, you can talk about a lot of stuff with. But that's not true of people elsewhere. Being at the NCI, actually, ended up being very good for me, because you end up getting a lot of other really highly-educated people. A lot of them are of that U of C types, where you can talk about politics or something other than science, and you'll end up having a fairly interesting conversation about it.

ML: Although I imagine U of C grad students are also very highly educated too, right? I guess grad school attracts people who are monomaniacally focused.

DR: They are, but—that is the thing. A lot of people don't have the same kind of well-rounded education that the U of C pushes. They had a lot of biology. Maybe they didn't take as many history or philosophy classes. Or maybe they just weren't around those kinds of students that had those kinds of conversations.

ML: I guess you've been, or witnessed campus for a long period of time. Do you think that things have changed for LGBTQ people in your time that you've been here?

DR: I think there's definitely more support than there used to be. Having 5710 is definitely a great thing. And having a full-time staff person. I feel like the day-to-day life is not that different. It was fairly open and accepting then. I just think maybe having the administration more directly supporting LGBT students is better. And it's not even like—I would say that might attract more students and let them know that this is a gay-friendly campus, but that never seemed to be an issue here. [ML: Like, gay people want to come anyway.] Yeah. For whatever reason. I didn't even know it was a gay-friendly campus coming here, but it just turned out to be.

[47:51]

ML: Something that other people mentioned is that people come here because of the intellectual environment, not because of the gay environment, necessarily. But intellectuals are also gay, so it ends up working out.

DR: That's what's particularly different—hanging out with this intellectual gay community compared to average gay community. That I think is where the biggest divide in having friends or conversations changes.

ML: Looking back, what place do you think the U of C has had in the course of your life?

DR: I would say it's a pretty big place. It's where I moved away from being close to my family and started becoming my own person. Figuring out what I wanted to do with my life, more. Because it wasn't until I came here that I was fully interested in doing research. So I feel like without that, and this was also where I figured out I wanted to do cancer research. Coming out of the U of C, that was really what I was set on doing. Going to Ohio State, I was focused on probably doing oncology and cancer research. I had already decided it then. And that was very different than maybe what I thought I would do coming out of high school.

ML: Were there specific experiences at UChicago that made you really ping to cancer research?

DR: My current boss taught a cancer biology class. That was really the first formal training I got with it. But a lot of the other classes sort of transiently talked about cancer, a little bit. Like, our cell and molecular biology class that we took did. And I loved taking organic chemistry. Which I feel like in a lot of places you can't admit, but here it's okay. [ML: Yeah. I actually really enjoyed taking o chem.] And bonding over how terrible physical chemistry is. I think that sadly has not improved. That is still one of the worst classes, for whatever reason. They just don't make it exciting. Not in the same way organic chemistry is. Maybe that's just partly because certain people are interested in that field as opposed to physical chemistry. They do seem to be polar opposites. The two departments usually make jokes at each others' expense. Well, at least the organic chemists make jokes about the physical chemists, I know that much is true. But that's sort of like the U of C having a rivalry with Northwestern.

ML: Where U of C is like, "*Northwestern!!*" and Northwestern is like, [shrugs].

DR: "We're rivals? I didn't realize."

ML: Do you think your experience was typical for a gay person coming into U of C at the time?

DR: Fairly. Actually a lot of the other people I knew had come out in high school. So it kind of depended on where students were coming from. So students who came from the Chicago area, who came from the East Coast, a larger city, or even a mid-sized city on the East Coast, were more likely to have been out. Or people from the coasts. But if someone was from a more rural area, or from the Midwest somewhere, they were more likely to come out here. So, a mixture of the two.

ML: Yeah. Different backgrounds.

DR: Yeah. And there were some people who were sort of out, but not really. They hadn't figured it out by graduation. But that was less common. Because I think by the time they

got here, they realized that they were in an environment where no one really cares. It's not a big deal.

ML: So we're always looking around for memorabilia or other people to interview. Do you have any artifacts from when you were an undergrad? Or other people that we could interview?

DR: I might have some programs or fliers, that kind of stuff. I probably actually should have fliers that we printed out and are still on my computer somewhere. I can check over the summer and find anything. I know other people that would probably be good for you to interview, but the only thing is that they're not around here.

ML: We've started doing phone interviews, because we've kind of saturated the Chicago-area people here. So even if they live far away, if they're willing to be interviewed, we can totally do that.

DR: Okay. So maybe my friend Stephen, who's in the DC area, and Carl, who's in the Baltimore area. Those were two people who were really active, at least for part of their college career. And Carl is still very active now.

ML: Oh, Carl Streed? We actually—[DR: Oh, have you interviewed him already?] I didn't, but one of our other interns did, when he came back. He seems like a cool guy. I read the transcript. [Interview #5]

DR: And then, Stephen [redacted]... I don't know if somebody has yet. Somebody definitely should.

ML: I don't think so. Yeah, if you give me his contact information, we can contact him and that would be awesome.

DR: Yeah, I think his email is [redacted]. Maybe. Can probably... I have a smartphone, I should be able to look this up easily.

[ML, DR talk briefly about how they can no longer remember phone numbers]

[54:30]

DR: His gmail is [redacted]. I don't know if he still checks his U of C one.

ML: Yeah, thank you!

DR: And has someone talked to Sarah Bouchat? [ML: I don't think so.] I don't know if I have Sarah's... Sarah was the other programming intern after me. I do have it. The wonders of Facebook connecting contact information. I should actually spell it out. [redacted] And then, Amanda Armstrong, who was the co-intern my year. [searching for information, can't find it] I'm sure I can find other people who were more active when I was here.

ML: If you give us their names, we can track them down, probably, in the online directory.

DR: Okay. So Amanda Armstrong was at the Divinity School. She was doing a masters in divinity. And she is—I can tell you where she is from Facebook. I think she's at UC Berkeley. I know she's living in Berkeley, I don't know if she's still at UC Berkeley. And that's about it, that I can think of right now.

ML: Okay. Why did you decide to be interviewed for this project?

DR: I don't know. Frankly. Because you asked, pretty much.

ML: We're glad that you did!

DR: I mean, no, I don't mind.

ML: That's pretty much all of the questions I can think of. Is there anything you want to say?

DR: No, not that I can think of. I think we covered pretty much all the U of C stuff.

ML: Okay. Thanks so much for coming to talk to us!

[57:37]

End of Interview