

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #59
RUBINSTEIN, BETSY (1986-) AM 2010**

At U of C: 2008-2010

Interviewed: August 14, 2013

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Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

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Interview with Betsy Rubinstein at Betsy's apartment in Chicago, August 14, 2013.

[00:00]

KG: OK, we're good to go.

BR: Cool.

KG: So let's see. So you did your MA at UChicago, but you did your undergrad somewhere else? [BR: Correct.] OK, so do you want to talk about how you got to the college or university that you went to and what it was like there?

BR: Yeah. For undergrad? [KG: Yeah.] So I went to Washington University in St. Louis, and I decided to go, both of my folks went to WashU and so they were very, you know, encouraging for me to go there, and when I went and visited the campus, it was really beautiful, very green, it felt very campus-y, you know? In the sense that it was all kind of on one piece of land, there weren't a lot of intertwining streets around, it felt like you were on this real campus. And I liked that. And it was just, it had really good, it was ranked well and it was a great school for liberal arts. I didn't know what I wanted to study necessarily, and I ended up studying philosophy when I went there.

And I ended up going to social work school after that because I was really interested in women's issues, LGBT issues, social justice, and I ended up taking a social work class at WashU, they have a really great school for social work there as well, and then, but I knew that I wanted to move back to Chicago, and so I had applied to the University of Chicago and that's how I ended up there. [KG: Oh, OK.] And so I went straight to graduate school from undergrad.

KG: OK. Were you involved in any sort of gay life at Washington University in St. Louis?

BR: Yeah, I was, my senior year I was a part of what's called Safe Zones. I don't know if that happens, if there is such a group at University of Chicago, but essentially what it is is, students go through some kind of LGBT training, like a kind of cultural competency training, and then they go around the campus and train other, they do workshops and different trainings around the campus. So within different dorms or within classes or things like that. So I kind of got involved with that at the very tail end of my experience at WashU, and then I was kind of peripherally involved in other groups. One of them was called Keshet, which is a Jewish and LGBT group, and so Keshet means rainbow in Hebrew. So I was kind of involved with them a little bit, but I don't really, I'm not really super into the Jewish thing, so I wasn't really super into it, but... and then a lot of my friends were just queer people. So I was, you know, I would go to events and parties and things that were run by the LGBT student groups.

KG: Were you out in college? Did you come out in college, or before?

BR: I came out before, in my, in between my junior and senior year of high school.

KG: So did any of the involvements in groups like Safe Zone influence your desire to go to social service school?

BR: Yeah. I mean, I think that it solidified my interest in LGBT issues and sort of realizing kind of issues of inequality and discrimination, how that impacts people. And I think that when I went, when I had ended up taking, so the class that I took at Wash U in their social work school was this Human Diversity class, and so they'd go over kind of all the -isms, if you will. So we learned about LGBT communities, but we also talked about racism and sexism and homophobia and all these other things, and so it really just made me much more aware of all of the different inequalities and how they manifest. I grew up in a kind of, a pretty wealthy suburb, growing up, and so I think that I didn't have a whole lot of exposure to different people, and then all of the different kinds of ways that people can be discriminated against and be experiencing inequality. And so it was really an eye-opening experience, the LGBT group, you know, kind of helped solidify my own identity, but I had already kind of, I already at that point was, you know, had been out for like four or five years, so I think I already kind of knew who I was, but it helped me be able to teach others about it and solidify my interest in it.

KG: Oh, OK. I've heard that Safe Zone is quite effective in the places where they have it.

BR: Yeah, yeah. And then you're able to hang up that kind of sticker, right? So if someone gets trained, they're able to have this Safe Zone sticker, and then it's kind of an indication that they're a safe place for you to talk about being LGBT. I don't know how often the schools do it now, if they still do it, but I feel like the culture around LGBT is changing even in the time that I was in college, which was 2004 to 2008, I feel like, yeah, it's getting much more, it's becoming much more OK, it seems like, to be queer, more than it was, you know, even when I was in school.

KG: Yeah. So we don't have that at UChicago. Were you involved in any other, when you came to do your Master's, did you get involved in gay life at UChicago at all?

BR: Not really. I kind of was in to do my, you know, in to do my work, I wasn't really very involved in student groups when I was there.

KG: Did you live in Hyde Park?

BR: Nope. I lived in Lakeview, so yeah.

KG: I don't think anyone will blame you for that.

BR: No. [Laughter] I would have, but it felt like it was kind of far away from everything else, you know, I loved Hyde Park, it was great, I liked being there and I liked the culture there, but you know, I wanted to be kind of closer to the rest of the things in the city that I love to do, so.

[06:20]

KG: So I'm not totally sure how the SSA works, but did you focus in a specific area of social work, and then what was that and how did you decide on it?

BR: So the way that the social work school works is you have to choose a track, and so you have to decide if you want to be a clinical social worker or an administrative social worker. And so my track was the admin track, which basically means more macro social work. So it's working with social policy, community organizing, you know, program management, which is basically what I'm doing now, so managing social service programs, working in government jobs, things like that. Whereas a clinical social worker would be more what you would traditionally think of as a social worker, working one-on-one with clients, or in groups, in client groups and things. And so I think I knew pretty early on that I wanted to do the administrative side versus clinical, and there's more kind of focuses that you can have at UofC within the social work school, for example people who wanted to become school social workers could do that, or there was a GPHAP program, that stands for Graduate Program in Health Administration and Policy, so people who wanted to do health-related work. There was a violence prevention focus. I didn't have a special focus really for my track, mine was much more kind of management, so I took classes that were a little bit more business-y, if you will, and more about like non-profit management rather than a specific focus in clinical work.

KG: OK. So when you were doing this administrative path, did you take any classes in gender or sexuality or, I guess I don't really know a lot about what types of classes are offered at the SSA.

BR: Yeah. I'm trying to think, I think... I believe I took a class on LGBT youth, although maybe it was at-risk, it was focused on at-risk youth and I think LGBT was one of the, one of the classes that we had, so one of the curricula was focused on LGBT youth. But I don't believe any of my classes were LGBT exclusively. [KG: Right.]

However, I did take a class in the sociology department with Kristen Schilt [KG: Oh, OK] which was amazing, it was a gender theory class, and so it was cool, like that was an opportunity for me to, at the time I was really interested in the kind of concept of genderqueer, I think it was still kind of a new term at the time and I think people were kind of more readily embracing that term for themselves, this is when like the group Genderqueer Chicago kind of first started, and so I did a lot of my papers and stuff on genderqueer identities and so I was able to sort of explore that a little bit more. And I actually wrote about genderqueer also when I was at UofC. I don't remember why, but I was able to somehow focus my paper on it.

[09:55]

KG: So did you have, when you went at the SSA, did you, I guess, plan to go into LGBT administration, or was that, did that come after you got your Master's degree? Cause now you work at Howard Brown, right?

BR: Right, right. Not specifically. I knew that I was interested, well, what happened, OK, so the other thing to know about SSA is, each year you have what's called a field placement. So it's essentially an internship. So my first year I was, you were required to do a clinical internship your first year, so I was working at La Casa Norte, which is on the West side, it's a housing organization where I helped folks, people who were at risk of homelessness or currently homeless, find housing options, affordable housing options.

And then my second year—that was interesting, but it wasn't really necessarily my interest area, I was much more interested in health, and women's health in particular—so I ended up, my second year field placement was at Chicago Foundation for Women, and I was their advocacy intern, and part of my work was kind of coming up with health events, and doing health research around health disparities that, you know, women of color experience, for example. And so my first job out of school was at Heartland Alliance, which is a, kind of a human rights organization, and I ended up kind of moving to different roles within Heartland and eventually ended up in their Wellness and Prevention division, so I was doing a lot of grant writing and kind of program development around health and wellness issues for minority populations, and then that's kind of how I ended up at Howard Brown, cause now I'm managing their Lesbian Community Care Project, so their women's health program here, so it was not... so to answer your question in this very long-winded way, I didn't necessarily know that I wanted to do LGBT stuff in particular, but that was one of my interest areas, and so I knew I wanted to eventually, after having this job at CFW, at Chicago Foundation for Women, and then at Heartland, my interest was kind of, it was kind of becoming more clear that it was around health

and wellness, and that's where I wanted to focus, and so I've just kind of ended up in this position.

KG: Yeah, that makes sense. Did you find that other people at the SSA were interested in LGBT or genderqueer, or similar things that you were talking about, for their concentrations at all?

BR: Yeah! I would say that there were a few other people that were interested in LGBT issues, and I think actually as I've gone, I was actually just speaking with a friend of mine who's also an alumna, and she was saying that the year after us at SSA was very queer, there was just so many more people that were out, and LGBT, and wanted to focus on that, and in my year, I think that there was a handful, but it wasn't a whole lot of people, but the culture was very welcoming and really liberal and everything like that. So I think that it was not unusual to be interested in that and want to focus on that.

KG: OK. Did you do any socializing that was based in SSA or was your social life mostly in Lakeview?

BR: A little bit, yeah. There was a handful of people that I became friendly with, but yeah, a lot of them were on the North side.

KG: I didn't know about the internship part of SSA, that's really interesting. I don't have a question about it, I just didn't know.

BR: Yeah, I mean part of it, the reason why they do that is because it's really important to get work in the field and exposure to the fieldwork because, you know, and I think at University of Chicago in particular, sometimes we can get so academic that we don't necessarily learn how to utilize these skills and some practical skills for when we actually get out into the field and need to use them. So they really put a lot of emphasis on our field placements so that you actually get some work experience while you're in school. So it was a huge, it was hugely valuable for that, and also just, you build connections, and so it becomes easier, you have more connections for when you have to find a job after school, and so I definitely think it was a good, a good part of the program.

KG: Yeah. How did you get placed? Did you choose where you wanted to go, or did they find something for you?

BR: So the first year they choose for you, because I think that they intentionally kind of want to put you out of your comfort zone a little bit. [KG: Yeah.] And so I, you know, like I said, I was working at La Casa Norte, and it was with a predominantly Puerto Rican population. I don't speak Spanish, I don't know a whole lot about Puerto Rican culture, but it was awesome. It was super cool for me, and I was working on the West Side, so, you know, this is an area that there's a lot of poverty and there's gang violence, and there's things that I didn't have exposure to before that. And so I think

that as a character builder, it was really good for me and really important to have that experience.

And then the second year, you end up kind of picking some organizations that you're interested in working for, and then you do interviews and then they select you. So that's kind of how that happens, so the second year you have a little bit more say.

[15:35]

KG: Do you find the experiences you had at your internship informing your professional life now?

BR: Yeah, I think that for sure, like I said, with Chicago Foundation for Women, my role was really focused on women's health and health disparities and research, and that really, that experience... oh, and the other part of it, working at the Foundation which I didn't mention is, I was able to review grant proposals. So Chicago Foundation for Women is a big funder for women's programs in Chicago, and so part of my role in addition to doing this research was, when grant proposals came in, I was able to read and evaluate them and be part of the, you know, sit at the table when the decisions were made ultimately about where the funding was gonna go. So that was really valuable, and I learned a lot about how foundations work and what the grant process looks like, and what are all the steps in applying for a grant.

And then in my next job, after my initial—so I had a kind of, my first job out of grad school was sort of a job I wasn't that thrilled about—it was, I was basically auditing for a workforce development program, but I ultimately ended up going to the Wellness and Prevention division, where I was writing grants, and I was developing programs myself, so I was on the other side of it. But they were all focused on health and wellness, and health disparities, and so I think that the issue of health disparities, how certain populations experience health problems disproportionately to other groups, and it's not because they're kind of genetically predisposed to that, it's because of the social conditions in which they're living that makes it harder to access quality care or take care of themselves or get fresh food or exercise, or you know, all these different barriers, or they don't have access to health insurance, all these different kind of barriers that make it hard to take care of yourself and get the care that you need, and so when the funding for that position, the Wellness and Prevention position was kind of going away, so I had to find a new job, and I was really always interested in Howard Brown, and the manager of the Lesbian Community Care Project seemed like a perfect job for me because, you know, I was really interested in women's health, I was, I had experience with program development, and this program really needed some visioning and help with kind of building programs, and I was also really interested in LGBT, and particularly the queer women's piece of it. So it just kind of seemed like a perfect kind of marriage between my interests, and so I would really say that like each job has really built upon ultimately, you know, what my field placements were.

[18:15]

KG: That's really great. Did you find any mentorship through either professors or through your internships?

BR: Yeah, I think I did. There was one, my supervisor at Chicago Foundation for Women ended up being a good mentor for me, and I ended up actually volunteering for this other program for a very short time called the Women's Initiative for Self-Employment, and it was basically like a program that trains women on how to be entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, which was really cool. And so I connected with her after my internship. And then, there was also some professors, like Kristen Schilt, for example, that I kept in touch with a little bit after school, a career counselor at Chicago Foundation, or at UofC, Michael Jogerst is great, and I still keep in touch with him now, so there was a little bit, you know? But I always continue to seek it out, I think that mentorship is really super-important.

KG: Yeah, Kristen Schilt is sort of a celebrity around here, I think. [Laughter]

BR: Do people mention her a lot?

KG: Oh yeah, and she won, I want to say she won the Quantrell Award recently.

BR: Yes! I saw her in one of the newsletters.

KG: Yeah, yeah, so that's great for her. [BR: Yeah.] People seem to be really, that seems to be a really valuable teaching award that people...

BR: Yeah, she's incredible. Her research has been really, I don't know if you're familiar with some of her research, but one of, I don't know what her, I think most recently she's working with doing something else, but for a while she was doing research on trans men in the workplace, so she wrote this book, I read most of it, around the challenges of transitioning in the workplace and it's just very interesting from a gender perspective, because you basically, she kind of recounts these stories of people who were born female who transition at work, and so the differences in how they're treated at work, and how much they're paid and how much their opinions are respected or listened to, before their transition, after transition, and whether people know that they're trans or if they go into a job as a trans person and they pass, right? So it's just, it was fascinating research.

KG: Yeah, that sounds really interesting. Do you want to talk a little bit about your sort of day-to-day work at Howard Brown?

BR: Sure. So as the manager of the Lesbian Community Care Project, I kind of wear a lot of hats, because this program is very small. It's me and one other staff person and sometimes we have an intern, who actually just finished her internship yesterday, our intern, so it really depends, each day is a little bit different depending on

different projects that I'm working on. I do a lot of kind of program coordinating, so making sure that the events that we're holding, or the programs that we're holding, are running smoothly, making sure that attendees know where to go, planning events themselves, getting, you know, speakers for events, you know, food set-up, I do a lot of outreach on Facebook, through e-mail, creating flyers and things like that to promote our work, I do some grant writing periodically when there's funding opportunities, I go to a lot of meetings. [Laughter] It really varies.

I sit on a bunch of committees here too, so something that Howard Brown is really focused on right now is affordable care for the Affordable Care Act and how it'll impact our patients, and so come October 1st, I don't know how familiar you are with this, but come October 1st people are gonna have an opportunity to enroll in health insurance through the health insurance marketplace, and so we as a health center are really trying very hard to be prepared for that, for when our patients are now eligible. Some people who have never had health insurance in their life are now for maybe the first time are going to be able to enroll in health insurance. So it's really amazing, and so we're trying to make sure that we're ready, that we are prepared to take on a lot of new patients that are now covered, that we have people who can help folks enroll in the marketplace, and so I've been part of some of those conversations about readiness around Affordable Care.

I'm interested in Communications, so I also sit on a committee that focuses on communications within Howard Brown, so how our staff are communicating with each other and sharing information and things like that. So we're focusing on that, and I've sat on strategic planning committees, so I've been focused on, a lot of my energy lately has been going towards strategic planning for my program in particular and making some plans for the next year for my program, but also strategic planning for Howard Brown as a whole, thinking about where we want to go, what our kind of strategic direction and vision and goals and objectives are for the next few years. So I've been sitting on, sitting at the table for that as well. So it really just kind of varies, day-to-day.

KG: Yeah, that's a ton of stuff. [KG laughs] It sounds like you're everything except like an actual doctor at this health center.

BR: Yeah, I don't actually provide medical care, so. [Laughter]

KG: Let's see. Usually, I don't know, usually I ask about, like, academic experience and employment, like the connection there, but it seems pretty clear what you would learn in SSA is pretty practical and directly applied. [BR: Yeah.] SSA seems actually, to me, sort of different from the rest of UChicago in that sense. [BR: Oh yeah?] I guess the Business School too is sort of more practical, but the University takes such a sort of pride in being theoretical rather than practical.

BR: Yeah, yeah, that's interesting. I think that, you know, I think that even at SSA, you do learn some practical skills, for sure, but I think at the end of the day really where

you learn your skills is working. I mean, I think that SSA really helped me sort of have a lens for how I do my work and how I treat people and interact with clients and just with co-workers, really, it teaches you some skills about interaction, human interaction. But I think that, yeah, I think a lot of it is, and a lot of it's kind of intuitive to an extent, too. So yeah, I do think that it's a little bit more practical than maybe most programs, so that's helpful.

[25:25]

KG: Yeah. I'm just looking over these questions. It's a little different when I interview people who did their Master's because you tend to have spent less time on campus than PhD and undergrad students. Do you think—am I asking you the right questions? Is there stuff you want to talk about that I'm not asking you about?

BR: No, I mean, if there's something else that you want to hit at... what are you hoping to get out of the interview?

KG: I think you're the first person I've interviewed from SSA [BR: Oh, OK], so this is like kind of an important perspective, I think. [BR: OK.] But I don't really... hmm.

BR: Yeah, I would imagine most of the undergrads probably had a lot more to say about the campus life, the crazy campus life you have.

KG: Yeah, lots of stuff about social life, lots of stuff about professors who like really changed their life, cause that's such a formative time for a lot of people. [BR: Totally.] Lots more, like, activities on campus, stuff like that. Oh, here's, I guess here's something that I can ask you. So it sounded like you found the environment at SSA pretty welcoming to be open about your sexuality. Did you ever encounter problems with that or was it pretty much smooth sailing?

BR: Yeah. I would say pretty smooth sailing. I mean, again, I mean SSA was really liberal, and so I don't know, I mean, I hear that sometimes other schools, other graduate schools tend to be maybe a little bit more conservative at University of Chicago, but it was very, it was super-liberal, and so I think that if there were ever people... sometimes there was differences in knowledge about LGBT issues, of course, but that's to be expected, and so people would sometimes ask questions about it, but I was never, I never experienced anything kind of like derogatory, or discrimination. And there was a lot of, you know, queer, other queer people, and some other professors who were queer, so it was—I had a really positive experience.

KG: That's good. I know that some of the other professional schools have LGBTQ interest groups, like the Law School has OutLaw, which I think is a great name for a group. [BR: Yeah.] And I think the Business School has GLIB, do you know if the SSA has anything like that?

BR: I think it does, I never was really involved in it, but I'm pretty sure that they have one. And I know that SSA, or I'm not sure, is it University of Chicago's alumni association, LGBT alumni association or, I can't remember if SSA has one. But I have gotten e-mails from SSA about like LGBT-specific social things, you know, for alumni. I've been to maybe one event, but yeah, I think that there is one.

KG: Oh, OK, so there's like an SSA LGBT alumni interest group in addition to the [BR: student group] yeah, the broader... [BR: I think, I'm pretty sure there is one.] OK. That's interesting, I didn't know about that. Cause we have the full University LGBT alumni group too, but I didn't know there was a separate one.

BR: I think there is, don't quote me on that.

KG: Well, we can look into it. We can do research on that. We've partnered a lot with the University LGBT Alumni Group for obvious reasons for this project. [BR: For sure, yeah.] But that would be great to know, cause then maybe we could talk to more people from SSA. [BR: Yeah.] So you said you wanted to move back to Chicago, are you from the suburbs of Chicago, is that what you said?

BR: Yeah, so I'm from Highland Park originally, a northern suburb. And so yeah, so I lived there my whole life until I was eighteen and then moved to St. Louis for WashU and then came back for grad school, so. I always loved Chicago, and St. Louis, I mean, I liked St. Louis, and it's a little blue pocket in a red state, so I found St. Louis to be very LGBT-friendly, or at least it was on campus, so I felt like it was, but Chicago has, you know, the LGBT community is so much bigger and broader, more diverse here, and also just, other kind of cultural things are just more accessible here than in St. Louis, so I was just excited to move back here.

[30:00]

KG: Were you involved in LGBT communities before Howard Brown in Chicago?

BR: Good question. Let's see. I play on an LGBT sports league. [KG: Oh really? Which one?] Yeah. It's called Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association. Have you heard of it? [KG: I don't—maybe, yeah.] The CMSA. It's a very popular LGBT sports league, so I was playing on, like this summer I played on like a lesbian softball team, and I play on a dodgeball team in the winter, and occasionally a volleyball team as well. So it's all kind of a queer, it's like a, it's an all women's sports league, so that's fun. Other than that, I mean, something else actually to mention is that for a while, I was writing articles, it was like a blog, for The L Stop. Are you familiar with it?

KG: Yeah, I was actually gonna ask you about that, because when my supervisor e-mailed me your name I was like "I think I've heard of this person!" [BR: Oh!] And it was because of The L Stop, and I think I'd read that you were like one of their top lesbians of Chicago or something. Is that—I don't know what that, I don't think that's the right title.

BR: They did like a little “Lesbians to Look Out For” thing. [KG: Yeah.] Yeah, so for a while I was, during my role with them, I ended up stepping back ‘cause my responsibilities were growing here, but I was writing every month an article for them about different queer women’s health topics, so focused on like nutrition, and I think there was one on breastfeeding, and breast and cervical cancer screening, and part of it was an outreach kind of strategy. Part of it was to just raise awareness about the issues on The L Stop, of course, but then the other part of it was, I would always kind of end the article saying, you know, this is why breast and cervical cancer screening is important, and this is what you can get at Howard Brown. Yeah, so breast and cervical cancer screening for uninsured women is one of the kind of pillars of what my program does, but we also have an alternative insemination program where we help lesbian couples start families through insemination, we have three support groups for queer women, a coming out group, a bisexual women’s group, and then one called “Women Like Me” which is for women coming out later in life who were previously married or in long-term relationships with men, often have children, so we offer that group and then kind of just do outreach and education in the community as well. So it’s just a, it was a good opportunity for me to promote our work, because Howard Brown historically is kind of perceived as mostly a gay male space, just because historically a lot of the work that Howard Brown has done has been around HIV and MSM, so the women’s work is not necessarily as well-known or understood in the community, and so my program, there’s a lot of focus on really trying to get the word out about the work that we do.

KG: I was really impressed how many programs you offered, especially now finding out how small your staff is [BR: Oh yeah.] with the lesbian health part of that. Man... [long pause] sorry, I’m really sorry. [BR: That’s OK, don’t worry, take your time.] So do you, do you think your experiences as an SSA student have been typical of all SSA students, or LGBTQ SSA students?

BR: I’m not sure. I mean, I can’t, I don’t know what other people’s experiences have been like. I mean, there’s a few people that I know that are LGBT and went to SSA and have, you know, been in the clinical track. This one guy that I know who’s out now has his own private practice and sees clients, and so I think most of them had also a positive experience being LGBT at SSA, so... I can’t remember what the second part of that question was. [KG: Or just like SSA students in general.]

Yeah. I think that, well, something that’s kind of interesting about what I noticed about other students at SSA is that some people went to the school for different reasons. So there were some folks who knew that they wanted to do clinical work, they wanted to do therapy with clients, and they didn’t really want to go through all the schooling of becoming like a PsyD or a psychologist, which I think has more school, so they decided to do social work ‘cause it’s only two years, and that was always like a little bit frustrating I think for some other people who came because, they came into social work school because they were really, they really cared about social justice and really cared about equality and those kinds of issues, and so, you

know, social work school teaches you of course about working with clients and providing clinical counseling, but more importantly, it really kind of gives you this lens to look through your work with, this lens of equality, justice, and trying to create a better, more affirming environment for all different kinds of people. And so some people didn't really necessarily come in for that, they were just like "I kind of want to just do therapy, have my own private practice, and this is just a fast track to doing it." So I think that you know, there was some different schools of thought, I think, of people who went in there. But I think most people were kind of from the social justice angle, which I think is really where they should be for social work school in particular, which is why you choose that over becoming like a counselor, a professional counselor or something else that's not necessarily social-justice focused, if that makes sense. [KG: Yeah.] Yeah.

[37:00]

KG: Yeah. I guess I can see what you mean, especially based on what you've said about the internships where that's where your practical experience was actually at and the rest of the schooling was a little more theoretical. So has your—I guess, what kind of perception did you have of UChicago and SSA when you went into it?

BR: I didn't really know that much about it, to be honest. I always heard the "Where Fun Comes to Die" thing about UofC, but you know, at this point I found that not really to be the case. I think... so again, I didn't really know that much about University of Chicago or SSA, but when I took a tour of SSA I liked it and I thought that it was interesting and I liked Hyde Park, but what I found was that, I think that the undergraduate experience at University of Chicago is really different than the graduate experience. [KG: Oh yeah.]

So I think that the University of Chicago undergrads are probably a lot more, like working a lot harder and they're just kind of much more rigorous and much more intense about their work than social workers. Not that we weren't, or not that we didn't work hard, but I think it's just that it didn't have that same vibe. It wasn't super competitive, it was really just, my perception it was pretty laid back. I feel like I worked harder as an undergrad at WashU than I did in grad school. But again, I don't really think I had a whole lot of preconceived sort of opinions about it.

KG: Yeah. A lot of people have said that about the undergrads. I think pretty much every grad student's like "What is wrong with you guys?" [Laughter] And the answer is "We don't know."

BR: Do you feel like that's the same? Do you feel like that's the case with undergrads?

KG: I think so. I think, it's sort of changing now because the school has gotten so interested in improving its rankings and therefore trying to bring in more applications and reject more applications, but I think historically UChicago has kind of a self-selecting group of students who kind of want that lifestyle even as much as

we complain about it. I know that's sort of why I went there. [BR: Yeah.] So yeah, "Where Fun Comes to Die" is sort of this weird undergraduate badge of honor that everyone else is like "Why would you want to think that about yourself?" [Laughter] So have your thoughts on SSA or UChicago changed since you've been out of graduate school?

BR: Good question. I mean, I think that I realized that there's only so much that you can learn within the classroom setting, and I think that when I was in school I had never really had a full-time job before. So I think I didn't really, I was kind of naïve. [Laughter] So I think being out, I think it was still a great experience, I definitely refer people and encourage people to go to school, to social work school and go to University of Chicago, in fact I recently just wrote a letter, a recommendation letter for a friend to apply, and she just got in, so I'm excited for her—but I think that I've, you realize much more about the inner workings of non-profits, the challenges, the good things but also there's a lot of challenges, it's hard work, you're constantly under-resourced and under-funded, and there's never enough staff to do the work, and you know, and I think when you're in school you have a very idealistic kind of, like stars in your eyes sort of view about the work. And I think that when you get out it can be kind of a wake-up call, you know what I mean? It can be a little bit of a, you know, there's a lot of burnout. There's a lot of... it's hard work. Especially people who do clinical work. I mean, I don't even work that directly with clients, I do sometimes, but I don't really do a whole lot of client-facing work, but it's, you know, you're dealing with really heavy stuff a lot.

And so I think that you have to be able to really set boundaries, know where your limits are, take vacation time, do these things to take care of yourself. In school we would always talk about self-care and it kind of became this cliché thing to talk about self-care because we talked about it so much, and nobody was ever really very good at it. [KG laughs] But it's really true that you have to be very intentional about taking good care of yourself, sleeping, eating well, trying to exercise, like trying to set boundaries where you, you know, for me, like not looking at e-mail after a certain time of day, cause now with our smartphones we can look at our e-mail all day, every day, any time, and it's not healthy. You know? You have to be able to turn it off, and so I think that there's some things that you don't learn in school, like those things about setting those boundaries that you really kind of struggle through a little bit when you get out, you know?

KG: So with the self-care thing does SSA try to sort of prepare you for that or is there nothing really that they can do to help?

BR: That's interesting... I don't really remember there being any explicit sort of help around that. I do remember there being conversations about it, and about how there was a lot of burnout and self-care is important, but I think that there isn't a lot of explicit conversations or strategies around how do you do it, and so I think it's really important to be having those conversations and to be learning some ways... 'Cause it's different for everybody, some people do yoga, some people run a lot, some

people like to cook, or do, you know, whatever. And so I think that it's just really important to know what those things are for you, and I think that this goes for any job, this goes for being in school, this goes, you know, you can burn out and you can be working too hard and you end up not being a really effective, like I found in my work that, if you're running on empty, you're not really doing a very good job. You're not in a good mood, you're feeling like you just, you're like this crispy version of yourself, so it's really important to just find what those things are for you, even if SSA isn't explicitly teaching it, so that's been a big lesson for me.

[44:00]

KG: Yeah. Can I ask you why you decided to be interviewed for this project?

BR: I think it's really important to tell people's stories, I think it's really important to have access to archives of people other than the groups that are typically documented, right? We look at the history books and we know that the stories that are being told are just the stories that, they're just the pervasive ones, the ones that white men who had power were telling these stories, but we don't hear about women's stories, we don't hear about LGBT stories, and so it's easy to say "Oh, well there weren't people like me back at X time," and that's not the case, it's just that their stories weren't being told. So I think it's really important that we do that, and also it's exciting to know that in the future, ten years from now or even a few years from now, if the students want to look back and say "What were LGBT people doing and thinking before me?" they have access to that, and what a beautiful thing that is, you know? I wish I had that. [KG: Yeah.] So yeah, and I was recently interviewed for another, like a documentary, that was made by a student, focused on why being an ally is really important, it's called *Ally* and it's a great project, and I think I like to support fellow UofC people and LGBT projects and it's important to keep this work going.

KG: Yeah. I think one interesting aspect of this project is that the two graduate student researchers who are working on it have been teaching classes to undergraduates using, I don't know, research materials that they've found for the project, and I really hope that they can use these oral histories to keep doing that sort of thing. [BR: Yeah, that's awesome.] I think that undergraduates at UChicago really like having some kind of access to LGBT history at UChicago.

BR: That's really cool. I'm glad it's happening.

KG: Yeah, me too. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

BR: Not really... whatever you're interested in, I'm happy to answer.

KG: I think I'm just going to look over this one more time and then hope that I got everything I wanted to do. [BR: OK.] Yeah, I guess unless you want to talk more

about work, or I guess the only thing I didn't really ask you about was dating, but some people really don't like to talk about that, so.

BR: Oh, OK. I mean, I'm happy to—I mean, I've been with my partner now for four and half years, and we're actually getting married in about two and a half weeks. [KG: Wow! Congratulations.] So yeah, thank you, we're prepping for that, so... I met her, she was not in SSA, she was not a University of Chicago student, but I met her during the time that I was there, so it's been a little while, so I haven't had a lot of dating experience at UofC or otherwise cause I've been pretty taken during that time, but.

KG: Yeah, how did you meet her, if it's OK for me to ask?

BR: Yeah, sure. We met at T's before it closed, you know T's? It's a lesbian, well, it was like a lesbian bar, it's since... [KG: Oh wait, is this the tequila bar?] No, you're thinking of DS Tequila, in Lakeview. So this one's called, it's in Andersonville, where I live, and it was on the corner of Winnemac and Clark, so right by like Foster and Clark area, on the North side, and it was a big pillar in the lesbian community, it was just one of those bars that everyone kind of knew, and recently they closed cause they, I think they weren't paying their taxes or something. [KG: Oh no!] [Laughter] But yeah, we met there when I was in my first year at SSA, and that's how that happened.

KG: Oh, that's so great. So that was part of your social life being on the North side, then. [BR: Yeah.] OK. I'm like embarrassingly uninformed about lesbian places to go [BR: Yeah, that's OK], I guess, for the evening. [Laughter] I think that's pretty much it, I guess, unless you can think of anything you want to say.

BR: Nope. That's good.

KG: OK, well, I'm going to shut this off.

[49:23]

End of Interview