

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #69
WEAVER (SCHUSKY), READ (1959-) AB 1981**

At U of C: 1977-1981

Interviewed: September 18, 2013 (1 session)

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Transcript by: Mich Elliott

Length: 01:03:07

Interview September 18, 2013 by phone.

[00:00-01:43: discussion of demographic sheet]

KG: Maybe we can start from where you're from and how you chose to go to the University of Chicago for undergrad.

RW: I grew up in southern Illinois. Both my parents went to the University of Chicago, which, if nothing else, is how I knew about it. I chose Chicago because it was such an intellectual school. I was somewhat isolated in high school, partly for being a sissy, but also for being a brain. The Life of the Mind was not an official term at Chicago, but that's certainly how it was known and that sounded like a good thing to me.

KG: Mhm. Did you consider any other schools?

RW: Well, I considered other schools, but Chicago was always my first choice.

KG: What were your expectations of the University before you came, beyond the Life of the Mind reputation that the University already had?

RW: Well, liberalism. It was my assumption that being gay and being openly gay would be easier there than at a lot of other places.

KG: Were you already openly gay in high school, or were you waiting to go somewhere else?

RW: I was waiting to go somewhere else. A handful of friends knew that I was gay, but I was definitely not openly gay.

KG: Can I ask when you realized you were gay or when you started identifying yourself as gay?

RW: Oh, I was twelve or so, right around puberty.

KG: Oh, OK, so pretty young, for you. So, were your expectations of intellectual life and liberalism met when you came, during your first year?

[00:04:03]

RW: Yeah, I would say so, for both. Yeah, I don't think there was anything that I would say goes against that.

KG: And where did you live when you first came to campus?

RW: Oh, am I going to remember the name of the dorm? It was the dorm that was closest to Ida Noyes that I know was torn down fairly recently.

KG: Was it Woodward? Is that the one that was over there?

RW: Yeah, that sounds right.

KG: So, did you come out in the dorms or make friends who were gay in the dorms or—what was your social life like at Woodward?

RW: Oh, I didn't have much. I didn't really socialize in the dorms. I was publicly out immediately, so I was out in the dorms, but, I don't know, the dorms were not a big part of my life.

KG: How did you become publicly out at UChicago in 1977?

RW: Well, at the end of my first week, well, second week, the first week of classes was the first meeting of the group and I went to it and we elected officers and nobody stepped forward to be the male co-coordinator and I said, 'Well, I will.' So I was the head of the group at the very beginning of my first year. And, shortly after that, there was a story in the *Maroon* about gay stuff at school and I was quoted in it.

KG: Oh, OK, yeah, one of the other researchers found it. So, was the group called UC Gay Liberation Front at that time?

RW: Yes, that's right.

KG: Because we also have something from the *Maroon* that has you in it and it says you're co-coordinator of GALA, and that was from '79.

RW: Yeah, and to my later regret, I was the person who changed the name, or pushed for the name change, and I changed it because I wanted lesbians to be explicitly included. I'm slightly overstating it by saying I changed it, but I was definitely the person pushing for it. I later thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if it continued to have been called Gay Liberation

Front?’

KG: Were there other changes occurring in the group at the time that support the name change?

RW: No, I don’t think so. It was always mostly men, but some women, and I don’t think that changed during the time that I was there.

[00:07:26]

KG: What were your responsibilities as co-coordinator of Gay Liberation slash later GALA?

RW: Oh, I don’t know. We didn’t have meetings much. I guess I was involved in, oh, I don’t know, scheduling, there were people to answer phones. We were, for various sorts of reasons, a group that had had its phone number for—we were the gay group in Chicago that had its phone number for the longest time, and so people would find old gay resources lists and call up the numbers and we would be the only people they would reach, and so, although it didn’t happen very often, we would sometimes be the folks that people who were just coming out and wanted to make some sort of connection, that was us more often than it might be. I mean, people who had nothing to do with University of Chicago would sometimes reach us and no one else. And so, it was important that there be someone there to answer the phones.

KG: OK, so did you get someone to staff the phone all day long?

RW: No, no. I’m now not remembering, but we had times that we staffed the phone. I think the lists usually said that phones were staffed, and I know it was evenings, and I don’t remember if it was specific evenings. I think it was probably specific evenings that the lists said that it would be staffed.

KG: So, when people would call, did you just sort of talk them through coming out, or did they join the group or meet up with you guys somehow?

RW: I mean, I would say, this didn’t happen terribly often, but it was often just someone for folks to talk to. We would get folks who had never ever told anyone that they were gay and this anonymous person on the phone would be the first person that they would talk to about it. I guess, I think maybe occasionally we had people come to, come and show up to the meeting, or just come to meet someone in person. I don’t think that happened very often other than folks associated with the university.

It was also, we were, the two co-coordinators, if something happened that there was something to respond to, it was basically us who were dealing with it. It’s not like that happened very often either, but just thinking of sort of my job as a co-coordinator. That was one of the things that happened a couple of times. Oh, and, I don’t know if it was because I was co-coordinator, or just because I had the time and inclination to do it, but we put on coffee houses, oh, pretty often. I think basically every month, we would do one.

And I think, we would certainly do dances. We were probably doing one dance a quarter. I think that's right.

KG: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about the events put on by UC GLF because the *Maroon* from '77 says that your guys' coffee houses were so widely attended that they were the third largest activity on campus.

[00:11:41]

RW: Oh [laughs]. I didn't remember that and I'm not sure I knew that was true. But yeah, we would certainly get loads of folks, especially the first one of the year would always be quite big and maybe even, well, I don't remember. It was never empty. There was always a good turnout. But fairly variable. I mean, we would have—I'm completely making up these numbers, but to give you an idea of the variation, I would say—I don't know, 20 to 80 people.

KG: Yeah, that's what the *Maroon* says, that one of the coffee houses had over 80 people, so I think you're estimating correctly. So, what was the goal of the coffee houses?

RW: Just a chance to get together with other gay folks at this school. It didn't feel to me like we were doing it explicitly as a non-alcohol thing. I think drinking age for beer and wine was 19 at that point, so there were not a lot of people at the school who would have been excluded from bars. So, it was really just, this is a way for folks at the University to get together.

KG: Was UC GLF or GALA organizing activist events at this time?

RW: Certainly not events. I don't remember any... There were no demonstrations on campus related to gay stuff when I was there. I remember a petition and I don't remember what the petition was about. I remember being someone out asking for signatures, supporting gay rights, but that's all I remember about the signatures.

I don't think, and I later felt a little foolish about it, I don't think we made any particular effort to do a non-discrimination policy at the University. That happened shortly after I left. We thought about it, it was something we talked about, but never very seriously, and I think if we had, there would have been some feeling like, 'we don't think the school is ready to do that and so we don't wanna ask them to, because we don't want them to have said no.' But it hardly even got to that point.

KG: So, it sounds like your events were quite widely attended but you didn't think there would be support from the administration for gay rights?

RW: I think that's... yes. That is the sense that I had, that the school was not ready to make a public statement to that effect. And no one had. It was either no one had done it, no school had done it, or very few schools had done it at that point.

KG: Did you find that the student body was fairly open to gay rights and gay people existing and things of that nature?

RW: Sure... There was some discomfort, there was not outrageously open hostility and I don't remember ever feeling physically unsafe, but there was some hostility. There were snarky things that would happen, including in the newspaper, but not worse than snarky, I would say.

KG: You said that your social life wasn't really in the dorm, did you end up finding a lot of your friends through UC GLF and GALA?

RW: Well, yes. Certainly I would say most of my friends on campus were through the gay group. I would also, because I was doing gay stuff in the rest of the city, and so to a much greater extent than classmates, I was out of Hyde Park and doing things elsewhere. I'm not going to remember the name of this, but there was a pretty wide organization of gay organizations and businesses and I was always the person from U of C that went to that. So I met a lot of people through that, and I did some activism not on campus. There was a bar raid in '79 or '80, after there not having been bar raids for a long time, and I was one of the people who was involved in organizing a march about that.

[00:18:12]

KG: Which neighborhoods do you think you spent the most time in aside from Hyde Park?

RW: Well, Boystown. I'm not remembering the names of neighborhoods in Chicago now. I did, well, it hardly counts—I had a boyfriend who lived on the north side but not for very long, but it was another reason that I got off campus.

KG: Was the gay population, was the center of that Boystown when you were there?

RW: Yeah.

KG: It sounds like you had kind of activism centered around the University and participated in stuff outside, is that correct?

RW: Yeah, I would say so.

KG: Did you ever personally have any problems being out at the University or encounter any hostility from individuals or the administration?

RW: I don't remember any from the administration. I knew that I was going to be openly gay right away. I knew before I got to school that I was going to be openly gay. And before I got there, you got information on who your roommate was going to be in the dorms. I wrote him and said, 'I'm writing to figure out who's going to bring our stereos, etc., but before I do that, I should tell you I'm going to be openly gay, and so maybe you don't want to be my roommate.' And, he didn't want to be my roommate, and so, there was that.

He ended up being pretty good friends with another, not roommates with, guy who was pretty openly gay. That didn't feel... well, it was hostile in some sense, but he wasn't obnoxious to me about it, but he didn't want to be my roommate. I'm trying to remember. Yeah, I don't remember episodes, personal episodes. There would be anti-gay graffiti in the bathrooms, but I don't remember hostile encounters.

KG: Sorry, I'm just looking over my questions here.

RW: Did you find in your or others' researches the exchange of letters about the orange juice boycott?

KG: You know, I don't think so.

[00:22:08]

RW: We, in '78, I would guess, we wrote a letter to the *Maroon*, and this is actually another example of us not asking the administration to do something, because we didn't believe it would actually happen, and that I actually do remember that more strongly, we didn't believe for a moment that the school was going to boycott Florida Orange Juice, but we wrote a letter asking individuals to do so. The letter was given the headline 'Fruit Boycott.' ... And, I was more angry about that than some other people in the group, but the group was not pleased with that. We met with the editor individually and he apologized to us, and, you know, it was nice, but then we wrote a letter saying, 'Good for you to apologize to us individually, but really you ought to do this publicly.' Which was given the headline 'Bad Head.'

KG: Oh.

RW: [laugh] Which, admittedly, was clever, but fairly obnoxious.

KG: Yeah, it sounds like he didn't take to heart his apology, I guess.

RW: Right.

KG: Yeah, I think we found your letter about—I think we found your second letter, but I don't think we found the orange juice protest letters.

RW: It would have been just within a week or two before that.

KG: And did you succeed in convincing people to boycott Florida Orange Juice? I'm assuming this is connected to Anita Bryant, right?

RW: Yes. Oh, I don't know, hard to know. We certainly got the word out. People didn't know that it was an issue. It was not a well-known thing at that point, and I think that a lot more people knew about it as a result of that. The coffee houses always had Sunkist orange juice, which is a California company. [Ed.: We are uncertain of the exact brand.]

KG: I didn't know that [laughs]. I'm learning a lot about orange juice in this conversation.

RW: [laughs] Yes.

KG: Did UC GLF or GALA take any other actions to involve the student body in gay rights during the time you were there?

RW: Well, as I said, there was this petition and I can't remember what the petition was about [laughs]. I definitely remember... Oh! I think it was about the Briggs Initiative in California. I think that's what it was. And we put a full-page ad and this may actually have been a Chicago thing, not a University of Chicago thing. I think we were getting signatures to put on a full-page ad that appeared in, I don't know what, but a Chicago paper.

KG: Did you manage to get it into the paper?

[00:25:56]

RW: Oh yeah, yeah. It was definitely in the paper. But there was no particular University of Chicago connection.

KG: OK, so it sounds like you guys were doing a little bit of activism, but the events were more your kind of strong point.

RW: Yeah, they really were. We definitely were much more a social and support group than we were an activist group, although I would say that at that point being—I mean, both of those things were—I mean, just being out at that point was still a somewhat political thing.

KG: Right. So when you were having these events that were like a coffee house with 60 or 80 people, were all of those gay students, or was it a lot of straight students who were supporting the gay students?

RW: Oh, there were no straight students who came to the events.

KG: So there was a fairly decent-sized gay population at the university that was actively going to events.

RW: Yeah, there were at least that many people who were willing to go to events on campus.

KG: Do you have any good anecdotes or stories from any of the events?

RW: I'm not sure. I'm remembering that story that's not so much the events, but one of my classmates was very, very closeted and I remember being fairly annoyed with him, and eventually he did come out and his parents disowned him and he lost his scholarship, and

it taught me people have their reasons for not coming out and sometimes they're very good ones. The other thing that happened, I was not friends with him, but I was friends with people who were friends with him, the University stepped in and I think really found him scholarship money.

KG: Oh, really?

RW: Yeah.

KG: Yeah, because I was going to ask you how the scholarship and the coming out was connected.

RW: The scholarship had a religious base to it.

KG: So, it wasn't an academic scholarship from the University.

RW: Yeah, no, no, it wasn't the University, it was an independent scholarship.

[00:29:10]

KG: OK. But the administration or whoever, the financial aid office was trying to keep this kid enrolled in spite of this?

RW: Yeah.

KG: OK, that's interesting.

RW: Yeah, I remember being pretty impressed with the school that they made an effort about that. I mean, a successful effort about that.

KG: Was it uncommon to be out, or did a lot of students come out over the course of being at the University, or come to University with the plan to be about like you did?

RW: Oh, no, that was not common, and I think, my roommate, Sidney Skinner, a woman, and I were probably the two most out people on campus. No, there were not a lot of people who were aggressively out, strongly out, 'wearing gay buttons and t-shirts' out. That was definitely unusual.

KG: I was going to ask if Sidney was the other co-coordinator, but it looks like the woman's name was Susan?

RW: Yeah, Susan Henking was the other person, she was a grad student, also new to the school in '77. [Interview #79.]

KG: So you guys were totally new blood to this organization when you took over.

RW: Yeah. In that article, one of the interviews they got said that the students group was sort of cliquish, and my academic advisor saw it and said, 'How can it be cliquish if my student who arrived here two weeks ago is the head of it?' Which I thought was a nice observation that hadn't quite occurred to me.

KG: Wait, what was the adjective you were using to describe the organization?

RW: Cliquish.

KG: Oh, sorry, thought you said 'tweaking' [laughs].

RW: No [laughs].

KG: That's a different thing entirely. So, in your experience, not cliquish.

RW: Well, no, to be fair, I'm not sure that's the way I would phrase it, but I think that it was, I think that even though what we mostly did was social events, I think we were a group for political types. And I think that that's... I think there were people who did not feel part of the group, or weren't interested in being part of the group because they were only interested in socializing and not in... well, the being out wasn't important to them, and thinking about things in a political way.

[00:32:47]

KG: So, were you involved with UC GLF/GALA for the entire 4 years that you were in Chicago?

RW: Yeah, less so in my fourth year. I think it changed a little bit, well, I became more radicalized, I think that was part of the change. And there were other folks who had come in who were quite involved. It was getting along fine without me.

KG: So when you became more radicalized, did you do more socializing and activism outside of Hyde Park, or...? What did that change mean for you?

RW: Well, I was definitely more involved with feminist stuff, which meant being involved with more women's stuff to some extent. My last year, well, there was very little to be done in Chicago, but I got involved with radical faeries in my last year, and that was certainly how I was thinking of myself and the group on campus wasn't that at all. But it's not like there was a lot of other folks that I could be doing that with in Chicago, either. The activism stuff that I was doing was mostly with lesbians [laughs] and socializing was really with friends rather than organizations, I guess I would say.

KG: Was there a presence of radical faeries on campus? Because I've had somebody else mention knowing some radical faeries who went to school at UChicago.

RW: No. I did stuff, Peter Burkholder did stuff with the radical faeries. I can't remember

anyone else at Chicago at that time who did anything with the faeries.

KG: Did you do any socializing or activism in Hyde Park that wasn't associated with the University?

RW: No ... That wasn't associated with the University, no. I mean, every quarter, there was a party at Howard and Roger's, I'm sure people have talked about that, but that was University.

KG: Right. In regards to the larger student body, what kind of political or social issues were students concerned about at the time?

RW: I'm trying to remember other than feminist stuff, which I was very aware of because I was involved with things. I don't remember much.

KG: What kind of feminist stuff were you doing?

RW: The Equal Rights Amendment was a thing that I think most of my friends thought, 'Oh, yes, of course we have to do this,' but it was not really what we were interested in. Certainly, we were going to marches and things about that. Abortion rights was certainly an issue that we were going to demonstrations about. At that time, in that place, what became known as the pornography wars weren't wars yet. It was, if you were a feminist, you were anti-pornography. And that was certainly going on toward the end of the time that I was there. Oh, well, violence against women, Take Back the Night marches.

[00:38:18]

KG: So you were taking part in all of these sort of different marches for different issues at the time?

RW: Yeah, I was. Oh and nuclear power, not so much nuclear weapons, but nuclear power I would say was the other political issue that I was involved with, with some involvement on campus.

KG: Maybe, to just switch gears for a moment, could you talk a little bit about your academic experience at the University of Chicago? Like, what did you major in?

RW: Um... Psychology, the name was changed while I was there. I think it was Behavioral Science. It was either Behavioral Science when I graduated or when I started, I don't remember, but, Psychology. And that actually became less of an interest while I was there.

I certainly would have done a Women's Studies major if such a thing had existed while I was there. And I took all the Women's Studies classes that were offered. Sort of lackluster. I didn't put a great deal of effort into academics. I was middling, I would say, for University of Chicago. I liked the Women's Studies classes that I took. There were some other courses that I took that I found pretty interesting. I was working doing childcare,

and since I had this Psychology degree, I was doing pretty much all of the developmental psych classes that were available, I took. I kind of had a psych degree with a specialization in developmental psych.

KG: OK. So, what were the classes that you took on gender like? What were the topics that were being covered and what drew you to that?

RW: There were not many. Actually, I think there was one I didn't take, there was a conflict between it and my job. I think there was a Women's History class. I remember liking them. I took them and now not remembering a lot about them [laughs]

KG: That's OK [laughs]. Did you have any classes that addressed sexuality?

RW: No. I addressed it in most of my classes. [laughs] But no, I don't remember any courses where that was any part of the curriculum.

KG: Mhm. I want to ask you, in what ways did you address sexuality in the classes that you brought that up in?

RW: In the Common Core social sciences class, I was in one of the odd ones, Equality and Community in Contemporary Society, something like that, was the name of the 3-semester course. And one of the things that we did was use the, oh, what's it called, the big social science... The annual Social Attitudes survey that NORC had been doing for several years at that point and has done ever since then. [General Social Survey] There was like one question in there about sexuality, 'Is homosexuality moral?' Something like that. What I looked at was not the simple thing of education and income and so forth, cross-correlated with attitudes toward homosexuality. What I looked at was, because they also asked questions about premarital sex and extramarital sex. What I wanted to find out is, 'Who thinks that homosexuality is worse than premarital sex or extramarital sex?' And, interestingly, I found out that, the more educated you were, the more likely you were to think it was worse.

[00:43:36]

KG: Really?

RW: Yeah. And I have thought, 'I should do this again, twenty years later, ask the same question and see if that's changed,' and I haven't done it. So, that's an example of bringing it up. I had, well, the non-Western Civ class that I took was Islamic Studies and I, in talking about the Qur'an and stories, if you will, in the Qur'an, comparing it to the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible and making reference to—boy, I'm so much beyond biblical stuff I'm spacing the names, but—Miriam and her mother-in-law. Anyway, making references to same-sex love that's in the Hebrew Bible, but not as same-sex love, but simply as—the point was not about same-sex love, but about love being referenced in the Hebrew Bible and that's not a part of, that sort of romantic love, not being part of the Qur'an, but my examples being same-sex. So, two examples of how I

was bringing gay stuff to the courses I was taking.

KG: Were you bringing this stuff up in discussion or writing papers about it or going to office hours and talking about it?

RW: Most consistently, writing papers about it, but I would talk about it in class, too.

KG: And did you find that productive?

RW: [laughs] Um, yeah, I guess so.

KG: Did you have any professors who were mentors to you or influenced you specifically?

RW: I'm not sure I would say so. I had professors I liked personally, but I'm not sure I would say big influences. Yeah, no, I can't think of anyone I felt that way about at Chicago. I don't think so.

KG: Did you come out to your professors? Were they aware that you were in charge of the gay group on campus?

RW: I don't know. Some of them did, certainly. And, I mean, I really was wearing t-shirts and buttons [laughs], so I was certainly out to everyone. And the professors that I for whatever had single conversations with, it would come up fairly naturally. I think that what I was doing in classwork was fairly deliberate, but the individual one-on-one discussions, it would come up in a natural way, or didn't.

[00:48:03]

KG: After you graduated from U of C, what did you do? Where did you go?

RW: I moved to Boston, and I moved to Boston largely on the—well, there were a few reasons. There were a bunch of reasons I moved to Boston. *Gay Community News* was a Boston newspaper that was pretty national and pretty lefty and lots of women and men working there and it felt to me like that points to good things in Boston, and I would probably get involved with the paper. I knew of a group of gay men doing interesting community-building work, and I thought, 'That's a good reason to move to Boston.' And, someone I had a crush on was moving to Boston [laughs]. So that's how I ended up here. I did childcare for the first couple years that I was in Boston, as a living, and got involved in *Gay Community News* and got involved with the Faerie Circle, very involved with the Faerie Circle in Boston.

KG: Have you been in Boston ever since?

RW: Well, I was away at school for 7 years, but, other than that, yes, I've been in Boston.

KG: How did you come to your current profession?

RW: Well, my roommate in Chicago, after we had both left, got very interested in and involved with homeopathy. And, really because of her interest in that, I got interested in it. And was studying it but found I wasn't getting very far and decided that the only way that I'm going to get to a point of actually being able to do this is if I take a defined program of study, and the only ones of those that did that and would give a license was naturopathic medicine. So, it was a personal Chicago connection that got me there.

KG: How long have you been doing that?

RW: I graduated in '97, did a two-year residency, and then was on the faculty where I did my residency for one year, and then after that, moved back to Boston and I've had a private practice since then.

KG: OK. That's great. I'm gonna maybe ask you a couple of questions about looking back on your time at UChicago. Do you think that the experience you had there was typical of gay students at the time?

RW: No, I was way more of an activist than most people were, and way more strongly and deliberately out. Well, we were more publicly out—publicly is probably the right word for it—than most people were.

KG: Do you think your friends in GALA had similar experiences to you?

RW: Yeah, largely so, other than the being so out. But I didn't hear about people having bad experiences other than the guy that I told you about, and his bad experiences were explicitly not at University of Chicago, I mean, they were all about things not-there, that's where he was having problems. I think that's what I would say, that people were not having serious problems relating to being gay at U of C at the time that I was there.

[00:52:55]

KG: Has your—

RW: Oh, I just remembered another thing that I was involved with, really significant, outside of the University. I volunteered at Howard Brown Clinic. Always one day a week and sometimes two days a week.

KG: And that's in Lakeview, right?

RW: It moved while I lived there, and I don't think either of those was Lakeview. It would be a struggle for me to remember where it was. It moved between the time I arrived—the first time I went, it was one location. By the time I was volunteering, it had moved to a second location, and then it has moved at least twice since then. This was pre-AIDS, and so it was a very small clinic. I mean, it was a tiny little clinic.

KG: What type of volunteering were you doing there?

RW: We—[laughs] I've talked about this as a doctor since then. We were doing super-high-level patient education. We did intake interviews and exit interviews. It was an STD clinic, that's what it was. And the intake interviews, we were taking patient histories, and we were the main person taking patient histories as volunteers who were trained, and we were trained very well by the clinic, but we were not health professionals. So we were taking these detailed, I mean, important patient histories. They weren't terribly detailed, it was just an STD clinic, that's all we were dealing with was sexually transmitted infections. So we would be the people taking the patient histories and figuring out, 'Do you need to see the doctor? Do you just need to be tested?' et cetera. And then when patients were done, we would be doing exit interviews and we were the people who had enough time to explain, 'These are the possible adverse effects of the medication you've been given. This is when you can expect your symptoms to improve. This is what you need to be doing between now and then.' And stuff that, I mean, I look back on it and feel like, 'Oh my god, how can this have been being done by people who were not professionals?' and I know that we were doing a great job, and in fact, we were, I have since gone through medical school, and I know the training that doctors get in STDs, and we had better training than doctors get. It was sort of remarkable that it was so volunteer-run. And the reason it was volunteer-run was that in Illinois at the time at least, if you weren't paid, you couldn't get sued. For medical malpractice. And, there was no money. We were volunteers because there was no money, and the doctors who worked there were volunteering because that was a way of avoiding malpractice.

KG: Well, it sounds like you were doing very impressive work [laughs] with this organization.

[00:56:50]

RW: Yeah, I was definitely—I mean, the training was extensive. There was a significant amount of time put into the training and then it was a four-hour shift and I was doing, I always did one, and some periods of time I was doing two shifts a week.

KG: Did your perceptions of the University change at all since you've been gone?

RW: That the undergraduate program has gotten so much bigger is a huge change. When I was there, the whole time I was there, I had I think four classes that were taught by grad students. All of my other classes were taught by professors. And, the whole time I was there, I took, like, five lecture courses, and all of my other classes were twenty students or less. And I assume that has changed [laughs], given the number of undergrads that there are, I assume that's changed a lot. I've been impressed with—I mean, all I know is from reading the alumni magazine—but the gay stuff, the attitude toward gay stuff is interesting to see. I don't know that it's all that different from how it is at other universities, but it's certainly been a change since I've been there. That's been nice to see.

KG: Can I ask you why you decided to be interviewed for the Project?

RW: I have reasonably positive memories of the University, as a whole, and certainly of gay stuff. It's where I came out, it's where I became political, and so was interested in contributing to that. And, I also knew that, I was very involved a significant amount of the period I was there, and so I felt I have information that you wouldn't get from other people.

KG: Yeah, definitely. You have a much deeper knowledge of GALA than most people that I've talked to, I would say. Is there anything else you want to talk about before we end the interview?

RW: I don't think so—oh, I'll mention another, actually, I'm sort of proud of this. Another headline issue in the newspaper. Not gay-specific. There was a tiny little short paragraph about the number of women applicants to the college having gone up, and it got the headline, 'Next Year's Beavers Eager.'

KG: Oh. That's weird.

RW: That's not a term most people know, but I knew it and I knew it was outrageously offensive. [Ed.: "Beaver" is a slang term for the female genitalia.] And so GALA wrote a letter calling them on it. Basically, I wrote a letter calling them on it, and got GALA to agree to put its name on it.

KG: We actually found that letter, I think. What was the reaction to the letter?

RW: Well, there were folks who didn't know what 'beaver' meant. I certainly got folks saying to me, 'Thank you for getting that in there.' The paper didn't respond to it. Oh, and, I'm remembering now, Abbe Fletman was the editor, and she was away and it was the assistant editor who was acting as editor that week who did it. Oh, no, actually, they did respond. Abbe wrote the response, because she was back, and she denied that it meant anything, but privately I had heard from someone who had spoken to her privately, she knew exactly what the guy who wrote it had intended.

[01:02:20]

KG: Oh, well that's—it sounds like you had a lot of unfortunate run-ins with the *Maroon*.

RW: Well, there were those two. I didn't generally feel like we were having problems, but those two events, I definitely remember, yeah. The guy who wrote 'Fruit Boycott' is now somebody big at, I looked him up last year at some point, he's now a major person, he's now an editor at some fairly significant publication, I don't remember where. A little annoying to see that he had made it as well as he had.

KG: Well, journalism is dying, so who knows how long that will last, I guess.

RW: Yes.

KG: Not that I wish bad things on this person. [laughs]

RW: [laughs]

KG: OK, is there anything else that you want to talk about?

RW: No, I don't think so.

KG: Alright—

RW: You did ask, I'm not going to be able to tell you very much, you did ask about sort of non-University stuff in Hyde Park and I realized the only thing that I did do was, there were a handful of people who had at one point been involved with the University—and some of them did come to coffee houses and things like that—so there was a little bit of that, I don't know, hangers on in Hyde Park who were no longer involved with the University, but I just thought of them as in the same crowd. Didn't really think of them as separate from the University, although they may have themselves.

KG: Mhm. So, like, former students or staff?

RW: Yeah.

KG: OK. That's good, that's something that I was wondering about. Well, I am out of questions, so if you are out of stories, I will shut the recorder off.

[01:03:07]

End of Interview

Appendix I—E-mails from RW to KG after the interview

Email to Kelsey Ganser 9/17/2013

I just moved (and packed & unpacked), which means I knew where this was. I can probably take a better picture if you don't already have it.

I suspect more rare than this

<http://www.etsy.com/listing/159754113/vintage-university-of-chicago-tank-ho-ho>

(also here <http://thecore.uchicago.edu/Summer2012/departments/IN-ask-alumni.shtml>)

The funnier-than-you-think one was, I'm almost sure, originally a poster for a comedy festival, I believe in 1976-77 (I think I was seeing posters in dorms when I arrived in '77). The Ho-mo one would have been 78-79 or maybe 79-80.



Email to Kelsey Ganer 9/18/2013

I did think of another minor thing, relating to the t-shirt.

We got push-back from the dorm that used the Ho-ho shirt as a fundraiser that we were violating their copyright. It never became explicitly homophobic, but I did have a sense that that was at least part of what was underlying their not wanting us to use the image. The copyright issue never really went anywhere--they claimed the copyright symbol was there in the image, just hidden, and then that there wasn't a copyright symbol but they had filed for copyright (but never showed us the filing). Their claim being so weak was part of what made it sound like they didn't want their T-shirt being used for homosexual purposes, rather than it being an actual copyright issue. (This was happening right around the change in copyright law--the Ho-ho image came from a time when the symbol or the filing was necessary.)

(I saw on the tumblr site that you have the shirt already. I don't have an explanation for the ornate T in 'The' in the tumblr one and the plain T in mine.)

--Read Weaver Schusky

Email to Kelsey Ganer 9/19/2013

I thought of a couple more things (this may continue for a while, sorry).

The weekend of Hanna Gray's installation as president, after one of the coffeehouses, a sign was hung from the top of Harper facing the Midway that said "Gay UC Welcomes Hanna." That made it into *Gay Life* (the Chicago gay paper). (A classified ad showed up in the *Maroon* the following week that said something like "Harper human flies, contact the Student Activities Office," but the folks who did it remained anonymous.) A year or two later another banner was hung from the top of Harper facing the quads that said "Encourage homosexuality."

In 1982, one of the books written for people looking to apply to colleges had, for many schools, an item on gay life. UofC's entry said "accepted and very visible," which I found surprising (the visible part) until I realized "Oh, they mean Sidney and me." That certainly sounds conceited, but I think in 1981 it only took a couple people for straight folks to think that, and Sidney Skinner and I really were the only two people who went out of our way to be public.

Email to Kelsey Ganer 9/20/2013

As I suspected...

A more personal story--during the prospective students' weekend, spring '77, my host was Stuart Phipps. It quickly became clear that he was gay, and quite openly and politically so. Although I had come out to a few friends, I was definitely not yet public,

though eager to be once I had moved away from my parents. Seeing that Stuart could be openly gay in college was heartening. I came out to him the first evening of that weekend ("I must congratulate the admissions office on their perceptivity") and was then out to others during that weekend--it was a very good introduction to UofC.

Stuart, I believe, was elected student president around that time (before I became a student there)--the first openly gay person elected student president, if the NGTF ads naming someone else a couple years later are right--but he left school temporarily and didn't end up serving. He came back to school briefly and then left again before graduating.

To my shock and sadness, I found this this evening, it appears he died just a few days ago. That's definitely his picture.

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/kansascity/obituary.aspx?n=stuart-b-hipps&pid=167031167>

Email from Kelsey Ganser 9/23/2013

Hi Read,

Thank you for sending along these supplemental memories. I will make sure that they are somehow included with your transcript.

Cheers,

Kelsey