

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #10

SLOTTERBACK, JENNIFER (1982-) AB 2005

At U of C: 2000-2005

Interviewed: January 25, 2013

Interviewer: Kelsey Ganser

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

Length: 2 parts, 30:09 and 54:07

Interview February 6, 2013 with Jennifer Slotterback in her office (Chicago, IL).

[00:00:00]

KG: I think we can just start with what you did before you got to the University and maybe how you ended up at U Chicago, anywhere that you want to start that story.

JS: OK. I'm going to open the window shades real quick, apologies for the noise. [window shade noises] Well, let's see. I applied to the University of Chicago Early Action, actually, when I was sixteen, and it was pretty much my top choice and I went there straight from high school and part of that, most of my primary school years were spent in a small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan called Marquette, and background about that place is, it's a town of about twenty to fifteen thousand people, fairly isolated, very beautiful, sort of resort-style country up there, but a lot of the interactions that I had with urban folks or folks who were not from my small town were in the form of tourists, so I had a very sort of insular, very, I would say remotely situated upbringing in Michigan, and so when I was looking for a college, I was going to go the exact opposite. I was like, I want a big city school, you know, as close to the Ivies as I can get, and I visited the campus when I was sixteen and just fell in love with it. I was like "Well yeah, this is what I imagined," when I was trying to figure out what I wanted instead of my small town, this is pretty much what I imagined, so I applied Early Action, got in, I started at the U of C in the fall of 2000, and I was 18 at the time.

KG: What sort of image in your mind did you have of U Chicago before you came?

JS: Well, interestingly enough, I mean, you get tons and tons of recruiting literature from all these schools, and they're all very fancy, and some of them are like giant packets with all this glossy brochure-style information, and the quote-end quote recruiting pamphlet that I got from the U of C was the size of a postcard, it was matte black, and it just had a phoenix in grey on it on one side and the University of Chicago in gothic lettering on the other side, and I was like "What's that place?" [Laughter] So that was my initial impression of the U of C, I was like "Wow, you are so not trying to impress me, I like

this,” and so then I did some research, you know, my general impression of it before I got there is more or less the same impression I have of it now which is the sort of gothic architecture, gargoyles, ivy on the stones, that sort of thing. Yeah.

KG: Did your parents like the idea of you moving so, well, what seems far away I guess if you’re from a small town?

JS: Well, no, I was looking at schools much much further away [KG: Oh, OK], they were pleased that I moved close enough that it was actually like driveable in a weekend, not that I ever went home for the weekends, and not that they ever came to visit me, but it could have been done, so they were fine with it.

KG: Do people in your family go to college, or was that a new thing?

JS: Yeah. My father has a doctorate, my mother has a Master’s degree. I have one sibling, she’s my twin sister, Kimberly, and she also went to a very fine small liberal arts college called Alma in downstate Michigan, it’s, you know, like... I think my family’s unusual in that we’ve been pretty well-educated for several generations, like my grandfather had a PhD and his father had a PhD and education’s at a pretty high premium in our family. Both my parents are teachers, so...

KG: So they had probably heard of the University then.

JS: Yeah, in the abstract. I mean, like I said, we, my family lived in a fairly remote part of the country for a good fifteen years, my parents were incredibly well linked-in to what’s happening in academic circles and they weren’t particularly well linked-in to anything going on at the University of Chicago but they’d heard of it, you know, when I applied the joke in my family was that I would go and become a Friedmanite. [Laughter] My parents were pretty tickled at that thought, so they knew a little bit about the U of C, but, you know...

KG: Did that come to pass? Did you become a Friedmanite?

JS: No, I did not! [Laughter] I did not. [Laughter]

KG: I just wanted to make sure.

JS: Oh yeah. [Laughter] That’s why it was a joke, because it was such a remote possibility. [Laughter]

KG: Yeah. Did you live in the dorms when you first, well, I suppose your first year you lived in the dorms.

JS: Yeah, so my first year I lived in Burton-Judson [KG: Oh, OK, which house?]. Oh, shoot... [KG: I only ask because I lived in Burton-Judson] Oh, did you? Dodd? [KG: Oh yeah.] I think? That seems so long ago...

KG: It has combined with a second house now. [JS: Yeah?] Mead.

JS: Oh yeah, no! Dodd-Mead. Thank you. That is the house I was in, yeah. First floor, that was fun, and then I moved to Blackstone my second year because I was close friends with a fourth year and she got me in through the lottery, which was nice, so I got into Blackstone my second year and then I took a year off between my second and third year, so then my third and fourth year I lived off-campus, I had an apartment.

KG: How did you find social life in the dorms?

JS: Well, I mean, social life in the dorms, wow. Well, everybody in my house my first year was an alcoholic, and that's fine. To some extent it's like, well... [Laughter] I think there's a lot of that in general. There was a house spirit more or less but it was focused around, you know, drinking and use of other substances, and everyone was super studious, so there weren't a lot of, like house activities in terms of going out to things. You know, I remember essentially going to the symphony and the opera a couple times, like that was a sort of social life that was within my house at that time, which was fine, like that suited me perfectly well. I don't think I was super close with anyone in my house first year. Yeah, does that answer the question?

[07:56]

KG: Yeah, that's good. Blackstone is more like apartments, isn't it? Like suites?

JS: Yeah, well Blackstone's very very private, like there are two, there are essentially two bedroom suites that are connected by a bathroom and a kitchen and there was little to no social interaction there, but like I said I was living with a very close friend of mine and we just hung out all the time anyway, so yeah.

KG: Did you have a social life... I guess if you found this friend she probably wasn't from Dodd-Mead, then?

JS: Oh, right! No. Oh, here's, here, let me give you the linking part of the story, which probably would help. So actually my first interaction with anyone else who was out and queer at the University was in my house first year, my RA Stephanie was out, and she had a girlfriend Jenny, Stephanie Morris and Jenny Gogarten, oh, if you guys haven't gotten in touch with them, you totally should, wow. She actually, she picked me out of the crowd. I was out at the time, like I was out when I came to college, I came out in high school, like 16, 17, so she kind of picked me out of the crowd and was like "So you should come to the Q and A meeting after O-Week," I was like "Oh, OK, yeah, I'll do that," and so Stephanie kind of brought me into the, brought me into queer campus life a little bit and that is how I ended up meeting most of the folks that I'm still in touch with from that time period.

KG: Including the other person you lived with?

JS: Including Diana. [Laughter] I don't need to continue to refer to her by her, like "My friend," like that's so vague, oh my god! Diana Doty. [Interview #78] I'm sure she's involved in the project as well and I'm sure she would be fine with me using her name.

KG: Well, that's good, that we have that whole timeline now.

JS: Yeah, we have the timeline. So then I met Diana and then I met a whole bunch of other wonderful queer people, and I got very involved with Q and A, and a bunch of other organizations, and... sorry, next question.

KG: Were the other organizations that you were involved with also queer-focused or was it just RSOs?

JS: I don't know, RSOs. I was involved in like a billion different things my first year because I just couldn't decide, like I wanted to do everything. [KG: Yeah.] Like, I had a good friend who was Filipino and I was like "I'm going to join the Filipino Students Association!" and I did that, I was just so excited to be, part of this huge city university campus with all these new people and I was a total joiner my first year. [Laughter] Yeah. Well, once I narrowed it down, once I pared down and got a little more selective about my memberships what I ended up focusing on was Q and A. What was that other, I was on the board of something else... oh, Feminist Majority. Are they still around?

KG: No. I don't know anything about Feminist Majority.

JS: Yeah, super second wave, it's cool, they're probably not around. Those are the two big ones, so... but then I was kind of peripherally involved in a lot of other things like some Interfaith groups and various grad student organizations too, cause there really wasn't a lot of linking among different, like, student organizations and RSOs, and I think one of the things probably everyone who gets involved in student life tries to do is form connections and make communications where none have previously existed or you perceive that they haven't existed, so...

KG: Do you want to say something else about Feminist Majority? I haven't talked to anybody who has mentioned it yet.

JS: Oh, really? OK, yeah, yeah, yeah! Well, so, what was known as FEM-MAJ is what the listserv was called, F-E-M-M-A-J, and it was one of these RSOs that attempted to govern by consensus, and it was incredibly ineffective and there were absolutely wonderful women involved in it, and a few men, because it was the 2000s, and, but the objectives were fairly loosely defined, it was a campus branch of a national organization that's called Feminist Majority and I think they're sponsored by NOW [KG: Oh, OK] or something like that, so NOW sponsors various, like, campus groups called Feminist Majority, and it's essentially, like I said, it's second-wave, like the model is consciousness raising, and women's rights issues and trying to sort of do projects or programming or activities that reflect a feminist perspective. The, my partner my third and fourth year,

Ana Minian [Interview #64], got me into Feminist Majority because she was super-involved in it before she came out her first year and second year, so that's kind of how I got into it, but I'm not really great at consensus, like, you know, in terms of RSO involvement, you know, my third and fourth year I was the president of Q and A, and I did not govern by majority rule. [Laughter] And I still don't, to this day, so being part of the board of Feminist Majority and trying to rule by consensus was really, really hard for me and my involvement with that organization kind of dropped off my fourth year.

But, you know, we tried to do things together, like we did some events with Q and A and Feminist Majority together, particularly around survivors of sexual abuse and domestic violence and sexual assault, we did a lot of, like, we did one of these Take Back the Night things, we did some awareness training and presentations about the overlap between various populations who are at-risk for sexual abuse and violence and of course trying to educate people about how queer men are equally at risk, and how there's a perception that queer women aren't at risk, but they actually are, and that sort of thing, so we did some interesting kind of coalition-building stuff, but it wasn't my main focus. But I can certainly look up some more stuff, like I said, I have archives upon archives if you want to know more about Feminist Majority.

KG: Yeah, I'll talk to Monica, I think this is the first time anyone's talked about it [JS: Really?], but I could be wrong, she might have talked to somebody else about it.

JS: I don't think it was super long-lived, I really don't, yeah.

[15:10]

KG: That might be why. Let's see. Do you want to talk about academics at all?

JS: Academics. Well, I started out as, I don't think, I didn't have to declare a concentration until my second year and I didn't cause I had no idea what I wanted to do, wow, I still don't, it's OK. I ended up choosing Human Development as my concentration because it was sufficiently interdisciplinary to still let me learn everything I wanted to learn about and take all these crazy different classes and essentially design my own program of study, which was exactly what I wanted. So I ended up taking a lot of anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, a lot of different stuff. It was fascinating. Essentially—do you know what Human Development is? Is it still around?

KG: My roommate is actually a Human Development major.

JS: Oh, OK, OK. Yeah, I mean, it's essentially like adult developmental psychology, like adolescents and up, it's not particularly directed at behavioral or clinical, but it kind of incorporates some of those things and... oh, I remember. I was briefly a Psychology major. I remember that now. It was like, I did have to declare at the end of my second year, and I originally declared for Psychology, and I took a couple of really interesting classes, like some genetics, and some behavioral and like research psychology classes, and biopsych, and it was interesting, but I was like "Honestly, am I that interested in

what's going on in a lab or am I interested in what goes on inside people's heads?" and I chose the latter.

KG: And Human Development seemed closer to that for you.

JS: It seemed closer. Yeah, yeah. It was fun. My thesis advisor was John Lucy, who's a linguistic anthropologist, and he was just amazing, he was like, my thesis had nothing to do with linguistic anthropology [laughter] but he was like, the only person who was semi-qualified or interested in what I was doing. It ended up being on construction of parental identity in same-sex adoption cases, and I did a case study, I took legal case records from a couple different states and compared them and discussed what types of identity formation lead to what types of outcomes for same-sex parents in adoption cases. It was interesting. It was fun.

KG: Yeah. And so you got a linguistic anthropologist to help you out with that?

JS: So I... exactly. [Laughter]

KG: Interesting.

JS: Cause it wasn't particularly in a field. I mean, it's not like we have a legal, any sort of undergraduate legal studies committee, we don't, so...

KG: Yeah, I don't know who you would get otherwise either.

JS: But even if it had been a typical legal studies thesis, which it wasn't, I wanted to talk about things like speech act theory and like the power of language to define a person's identity in the context of the law, like that's what I wanted to talk about, and that really wouldn't have gone over very well in a traditional legal studies curriculum anyway, so whatever...

KG: How did you find this topic?

JS: I made it up. [Laughter] I was like "Well, what are all the things I'm interested in? OK, well let's mush them together. " [Laughter]

KG: That works. [JS: Yeah.] Did you take any, I guess as a Human Development major you might have, but did you take any classes that were specifically about gender or sexuality?

JS: I did not. I bypassed the entire G-STUDS curriculum because everybody I knew took it. [Laughter] I have all the books and I've read them all but I never took any of the classes.

KG: So everybody you knew was a Gender Studies major?

JS: No, but the thing to do was to take Gender Studies because it was like a very very new, the Center for Gender Studies was very new back then, and it was super exciting for all

the queer kids on campus who were like “Oooh, we can study ourselves,” although obviously that’s not really what it’s about, but, well isn’t all study in the end a study of oneself? But it was a very exciting thing, like everybody took Intro to Gender Studies, at least one and two, just because they could and it was so exciting that you could do that. So everybody took it, yeah.

KG: But then they just didn’t go on to major in Gender? [JS: Yeah, no.] Oh, OK. That’s interesting. We don’t really do that anymore. [JS: Really?] I mean, not anyone that I know.

JS: Well, it was also quite popular to discuss gender theory, and you know, it was kind of our idea of a fun time. We were nerds, what can I say? [Laughter] But it was like, not cool among my circle of friends to not have read up on your Judith Butler, so you just had to do that.

KG: That’s in the Core now, I think. Judith Butler. [JS: Right on.] Yeah. It’s in the third quarter of Self. [JS: Good, that’s wonderful.] So maybe that’s why everybody is not taking Intro to Gender.

JS: Actually, maybe that’s why, because it’s more integrated now than it used to be. That could totally be the case.

KG: It could be. I’m not sure what the Core was like from 2000 but I could look.

JS: It’s, you... it’s interesting. The course catalog, wow, I mean, wow. It was intense. [Laughter] It was intense. I actually was introduced to Judith Butler my third quarter of Hum because I took Greek Thought and Literature, and she wrote a book called *Antigone’s Claim* that’s like quite fascinating, which was not on our reading list because our reading list was made up of actual Greek writers, but my professor suggested Judith Butler’s book to me and I was like “Oh, OK, cool,” and I went and picked it up and I was like, did a little more research on her and was like “Oh, she doesn’t just write about *Antigone* and [laughter], fucking *Oresteia* or whatever, she writes about a lot of stuff.” So that’s kind of how I discovered Judith Butler was actually through Greek Thought and Lit. [KG: Wow.] Yeah.

KG: Did you have any professors that were like mentors to you or influential specifically?

[21:43]

JS: I can’t say that I did, no. I had a number of amazing professors, my professor for Greek Thought and Lit, the aforementioned professor who introduced me to Judith Butler, her name was Mary Helen McMurrin. I don’t think she’s there anymore. No, I know she’s not, she has probably gone on, but she, I think, was just an adjunct, and I had a number of adjunct or associate professors that just were incredible because they would just give their all to these classes, you know.

I did take, I took one quarter of Soc with Bert Cohler, when he was still teaching Soc, and that was amazing. He was the only professor who ever told me, who ever gave me any tips on how to conduct polite discourse, which was wonderful. Because I think somebody said something stupid in class, and I was never like that kid, I was never that kid that was like “I’m gonna jump on you for saying that,” but I got pissed off about something and I responded with some statement to the effect of “Well, you’re wrong” [laughter] or like, “That’s not true,” or something really uncivil like that, and Bert took me aside and was like “OK, I understand, you’re a very angry woman” [laughter], I’m paraphrasing here, totally paraphrasing, but, you know, these are the standards of academic discourse and this is how you interact with people when you think you are wrong, do not tell them that they are wrong, I was like “Oh, OK. Thanks, Bert.” No, Bert was a huge mentor to a lot of people. He and I weren’t particularly close but he was definitely, he was definitely someone who was there in terms of everyone, all the queer kids on campus knew, like, you could go to Bert with problems and he would always be so good about writing references. I don’t know how many people he got into grad school in my group of friends, but a lot, a number. Who else? Yeah, I can’t think of anyone right now.

KG: What attachment did Bert Cohler have to the queer kids of U Chicago? Just general interest in their well-being?

JS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. He just was like a total gay uncle figure to all of us, like he just kind of would watch out for folks and, you know, he was one of these professors that would hold open office hours like for people who weren’t in his classes, you know, and he was, he would always come to Q and A events, which was wonderful. He came to everything. Yeah, he just, I think he just felt like he really wanted to be connected to gay life on campus because, I mean he mentioned on a number of public occasions that he had had no gay adolescence himself, and that he felt very strongly about helping others kind of connect to that. But yeah, no, he just made himself available as a very general mentor. It was lovely, he’s a lovely man.

KG: He’s popped up several times in this.

JS: Yeah, I’m sure. He’s a pretty seminal figure in gay U Chicago history. I use the term gay loosely, by the way.

[25:12]

KG: That’s OK. Do you want to talk about sexual identity at all? Your terminology, how you came to define anything that you do?

JS: Yeah, sure! Well, like I said I came out in high school. I originally came out as, I think like probably a lot of people do in their first round of coming out, very conventionally like check the boxes, I’m a lesbian, that’s how I came out, but it always felt a little off, and I knew I wasn’t like what the box check was for bisexual, and I knew that I wasn’t quite the box check for anything else, so I came out as a lesbian and it took me a little while to sort of gain the vocabulary of, like, queer or any other sorts of, well, there’s tons

and tons of terminology that I suppose I could use to describe my identity at different points, but it, the fact that my sexual identity is in flux is something that eventually I was like “Oh, that’s what that is! Oh, I’m comfortable with that, OK, so we’re not going to use the model of a continuum but we are going to use the model of you know, there’s a certain amount of chaos and movement within identity, right? So once I kind of figured that out, I was like “OK, well I guess I don’t actually have to say that I’m a lesbian, I don’t have to say that I’m queer,” although these are handy codes, they’re handy terminology to use in identifying myself to other people, you know, for myself, within myself I don’t actually need to feel like I am these things in a sort of in-and-of-itself sort of way.

That was a probably confusing answer to that question, but, and it’s a little more complicated now for me, because I do work in a corporate, professional setting, although you see the way I’m dressed, like I’m not, whatever, I’m not trying particularly hard to match up to the stereotype of a corporate anything, whether that’s lesbian chic or the corporate queer that is just super well-dressed, I’m neither of those things, you know, my appearance now is not particularly androgynous, in college it was, and I think in terms of appearances, I may have identified far more with how I appeared on the outside. I had a very carefully constructed sort of dandy butch identity in college and worked very hard to maintain this [laughter], this image, obviously, and I would usually dress in men’s clothes, I would often pass, I would often bind, when I was going out I would even, I would even wear a soft pack, do you know what that is? [KG: Yeah.] OK. I just don’t know what kids these days are into...

KG: I look femme-er than I am. [Laughter]

JS: Nice. So I would often do that when I was going out to present a very masculine appearance, and oh, here’s another interesting tie in to Chicago history! So aforementioned best friend Diana Doty, the Chicago Kings had just developed in and around that time, like 2001, 2002, and she was super involved with their sort of inception and beginnings, and so I learned a little bit about drag culture that way and kind of became friends with some of the Kings and later ended up getting them to do a benefit at the U of C, which was awesome.

KG: A benefit for what?

JS: I don’t remember. I don’t know, probably made up some reason. [Laughter]

KG: We just need more drag on campus.

JS: Yeah, we just need to be super queer over here for a second, give us money, and what was awesome [laughter], I’m getting so off track here, but that’s OK! History is not linear. Diana was the, what was her title? She was the, cause she was two years ahead of me, so I was, when I was a third and fourth year she was working for the University and she was the Student Government coordinator. What was it? I don’t remember, Student Resource Activity coordinator? I don’t know.

KG: That sounds like...

[END OF FILE ONE: 30:09]

[00:00]

KG: Where you were at before was just describing your butch dandy look that you had.

JS: [Laughter] So we did miss everything! OK, we missed everything, that's fine. OK, yes, what was I saying, OK, so in terms of sexual identity, yes, that's what we were talking about. OK, dandy butch, etcetera etcetera... I think that for the most part that was also when I started to think of myself as more queer than lesbian because...

Oh, here's some useful context, I mentioned I grew up in a small town, I was out in high school, I did have out queer mentors in my tiny little small town, but the model in terms of sexual identity there was very much like the standard, like almost what you would think of... I mean, where I grew up is culturally speaking probably like 30, 35 years behind the rest of the country so there are a lot of holdovers there in gay culture from like World War Two, so the bar culture there was very much, you have your one little dive bar that has, you know, quote-end quote ladies night which is actually code for gay night, and it's a completely butch-femme culture, to the nines both ways, high butch, high femme.

And so that's the kind of culture that I came out into, which required a lot of adjustment on my part when I got to Chicago, and kind of started trying to figure out a little more about myself as opposed to trying to fit in one of these categories. So as a sixteen-year-old originally I came out as butch and immediately went pretty much to the extreme of that trajectory inside this small-town isolated culture. Which is fine, it worked really well, and there's a reason that that sort of culture works well in, in that circumstance because it gave me sort of more or less the armor or the shields that I needed to be very very visible in a very conservative part of the country. So you know, it wasn't, it was not an extremely safe place to be gay, it still isn't, actually, I'm still uncomfortable going back to my hometown every time, but when I moved to Chicago and there's this sort of huge wide warm welcoming gay world all of a sudden, I had to do some identity shifting because I was like "I don't need the armor, I don't need the shields," I can actually interact with people in a way that is not closely prescribed by this very rigid butch role, and I don't need to have like fear and anxiety happening in my interactions with other people because I'm actually not going to get beat up on the sidewalk, I'm not going to be harassed on the street, like that doesn't happen here, "Oh, interesting, OK, I have to, I have to shift who I am in response to this sort of much more open environment." So my identity did start to change throughout the college years in terms of, I became a lot more open to—and this is what I was going for right before the thing cut off—was male drag, but female drag as well, like I incorporated that into my identity as like "Alright, well, maybe it could be really fun to put on a glittery mini-skirt and a Cleopatra wig and super tall heels and go out, maybe that would be fun," and it was fun, and so then I was trying very hard through those years to incorporate a lot of different things into my identity and

kind of trying to figure out what I was going to keep and what I was going to throw away. I mean, eventually I ended up, you know, coming out of college vaguely androgynous but sort of masculine-of-center, ugh, I don't even like that term, but mostly sleeping with women but there were some men in there too and at that point in my life that was OK, it was like "OK, I can do that now, because I've figured all of this shit out," whereas before, if you had told sixteen-year-old me that you know, that it would ever either wear a skirt or heels or sleep with a guy I would have been like "Are you fucking crazy? Like, I will never do those things." [Laughter] You know? So there was a lot of evolution that happened I think over that time period in terms of my sexual identity. Yup. Did that answer the question?

[05:40]

KG: Yeah, that's good. Did you think, did you see other people doing the same sort of thing where they were changing around in terms of their identity here?

JS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, yeah, and that's what made it very safe and comfortable to do that, yeah, absolutely. I can't think of any particular examples, I think that's generally true though.

KG: OK. Did you have to re-come-out when you got here or were you...

JS: No, not really. I was just so painfully obvious. [Laughter] Actually in my dorm during first year, also—you may or may not hear this on playback, I never hear my own accent anymore, but I actually have a Northern Michigan accent and, but I had much more of an accent when I came to school, almost to the point where I sounded Canadian. Add that to the fact that I'm wearing guys' jeans, a plaid shirt tucked in, belted, a white t-shirt underneath, total *Boys Don't Cry* look, and I'm talking like a fucking Canadian, everyone in my dorm would tease me about it and call me, affectionately, they would call me Butch, and they would call me, as a nickname, not as, you know, like as a nickname, like "Hey Butch," and Lumberjack. [Laughter] It was slightly embarrassing at first because I was like "Oh my God, I'm such a country mouse, I don't fit in, these people are all so sophisticated and urban and oh my God, they're calling me lumberjack," but it was actually a term of affection, it wasn't meant as harassing or bullying, but initially I had interpreted it that way. But yeah, I was pretty obvious I would say, yeah. Although in my first house meeting I think I came out anyway just, except it wasn't like coming out, it was just like I made a statement that included that fact or something like that, cause you know you do those stupid icebreaker routines or whatever, yeah.

KG: Right. But you never really felt like it was necessary?

JS: I didn't think it was necessary. But I did actually verbally out myself I guess in that regard too, yeah, but it's a continual process, right?

KG: Yeah. Did you ever have any problems with that while you were here?

JS: At U Chicago absolutely not, never, I never had a problem, no. Not in comparison. [Laughter] OK, let me qualify that. Not in comparison to the problems I had in my hometown. So anything that might be perceived as a problem, like I don't know, if you were a little more sheltered or a little more, like less exposed to, I don't know, being terrorized at a young age, if you were not exposed to that sort of thing prior to coming to Chicago I can see how there might have been interactions where I felt a little uncomfortable, but it was so minimal. It was so minimal, for the most part I did experience Chicago as this very warm, welcoming place. Yeah.

KG: Did you ever go to the other neighborhoods in Chicago? [JS: Oh yeah.] And which ones and what did you do there?

JS: Well, alright... [KG: Or all of them, and everywhere?] I'm gonna just cherry-pick for the purposes of this interview because, yeah. I did spend a lot of time on the North Side. The 173 used to run directly from campus up to Boystown. [KG: Oh! We don't have that luxury.] I know, but it used to run, it would make a couple of stops downtown and then it would run express to Boystown and then it would circle back, and so we would take the 173 up to Boystown and just go up there, Andersonville. Andersonville was very different back then than it is now, it was not nearly as mixed, it was much more, we called it Girlstown because it really was. So, I mean we would hang out in Boystown a lot just because that's where the 173 dumped off, but if it was not a school night then we would go further to Andersonville and go to the bars there.

[09:52]

KG: Did you have any community that was in another neighborhood or was it mostly you and your U Chicago friends?

JS: For the most part it was me and my U Chicago friends, I would say. I didn't really form a lot of close ties outside of the University of Chicago while I was in school except through things like political activism that I was involved in, so like my student group was involved with a similar student group at another university, we would make friends with those people, some girls from Loyola, some girls from DePaul... oh, I was on the rugby team in undergrad, so like I met a lot of girls throughout the city that way cause they would, we would all go out for drinks and whatnot.

KG: Was rugby as queer then as it is now? [JS: I don't know, how queer is it now?] It's very queer.

JS: It was pretty fucking queer back then too. [Laughter] Yeah, yeah.

KG: My girlfriend was on the rugby team until she graduated, she said that they did a poll and it was like 50 percent...

JS: Oh, that sounds about right, yeah, 50 percent, yeah... No, I mean that's why I joined rugby, yeah. I played rugby for about a year and a half up until I seriously injured my

shoulder and couldn't play. It really sucked because I fucking loved it, really loved that sport. [KG: Yeah, it seems like there's a lot of community there.] Yeah, yeah, there is definitely a lot of community.

KG: Let's see... can I ask you where you met people that you dated?

JS: I tried so hard not to date people on campus! I really did, because I received a very sage piece of advice my first year from an older queer, some kind, I don't remember who it was, but they said "The easiest way to make yourself miserable is to date somebody on campus," and I was like "OK, I'm gonna take that advice to heart, I believe you because you are saying that with conviction, so I'm gonna try and follow your rule," and I really did for a while, and then I started dating on campus. Oh man, which is so difficult because it's already so insular there. And then, you know, you're dating somebody in your friend group, and then that's all that is going on in your friend group, and then everybody is privy to your internal relationship drama, oh god, should never have done it, but yes, let's see.

Well I came to college with a girlfriend from high school, no, I'm sorry, I said that the wrong way, she didn't come with me, I came to college in a relationship. OK, I'm really dancing around this subject because I behaved like a total, total dick. There's no other way to say it. The girl I was dating in high school, we were engaged when I came to college. I promptly broke that engagement and acted horribly to a number of people for a number of years and had a lot of casual relationships with some folks on campus. I finally got back into a serious relationship with Ana Minian and we were partners for two years my third and fourth year, also her third and fourth year. She was one year younger than I was, but because I took a year off we had kind of synched up in the academic calendar. So she was my one big, really serious relationship during undergrad. For the most part I think the people that I dated during undergrad I met either tangentially, like through a friend of a friend, or completely randomly because you know, when we would go out to these very nice events, I mean half the point of going out to these events was to locate suitable interested parties, right? So I did end up sort of casually seeing a lot of people that way, but in terms of a serious relationship... actually Ana and I hated each other to start with because, I don't remember why, oh because I, probably because I wasn't leftist enough, or... no, maybe I wasn't a communist. I don't remember, there was a reason that she hated me. It might have been because I was a jerk, because I usually was, and she actually, I was the president of Q and A when we met and she came to me with a project proposal to install gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and she was very, very aggressive about the proposal and very, very, like straightforward and very, almost pushy to an extent that I didn't understand, and it was because she thought that I was like not gonna go for it, that I was not cool, and that I wouldn't understand, that I would not understand why gender-neutral bathrooms were important for trans folk and the like. And of course I was like "Well, that's a great idea, like let's do it," we started working on that project together and then we started dating and then the project went really well and there are obviously plenty of them now and then we stayed together, so we met over gender-neutral bathrooms, that was my one big U Chicago relationship, yeah.

KG: Well, that's good to, actually that's really good information because Kathy Forde [Interview #9] has mentioned that project before [JS: Oh yeah?] but she didn't, I don't think she remembered who it was that was doing it...

JS: Ana started it and then I sponsored it and there were a number of people involved at the end, Moon, oh, what was her, I feel like she might have been the, was she the staff advisor? Shoot, I don't remember. If Moon Duchin has not been involved in this project she would be a great person to talk to, I also don't remember how long she was on campus for, but it was a while. [Interview #74] Have you heard this name before? [KG: No.] Really? [KG: No.] She's also the former rugby coach, I'm surprised. [KG: Oh, OK, we'll look at her then.] You should look at her, she's the one who's mentioned in the Rush Limbaugh piece about the gender-neutral bathrooms. [KG: Oh!] Yeah, so he did something, cause we had been interviewed by local news or something like that, it was Anna who was interviewed and Moon, and Rush Limbaugh had picked it up and said something really horrible about, I don't know, trans folks and they should pee in buckets on the street or something like that, but it was great for us cause we picked it up and took it to the administration and we were like "So this is what Rush Limbaugh thinks you should do, is that what you're gonna do?" [Laughter] It was great, it was wonderful leverage! It was fantastic, and they were like "Uh, OK, well now we have to do something."

But no, that was a fun campaign actually. Bill Michel [Interview #18] again was involved with that, and he was fantastic actually, he got the campus architect involved, he got an advisory board together, he really made everything happen from a logistics perspective, that. But yeah, I don't remember what the germ of the idea was, but it was a well-known thing in conversation at the time, we all had friends who were trans, a lot of people in our social group had struggled with things like not having bathroom availability or feeling uncomfortable in sex-segregated bathrooms, and to be honest they're weird places like they are. There's just a myriad of reasons why anyone would feel uncomfortable in one of them. So we got together, I remember Mary Anne Case at the law school, I don't know if she's still there, she's fantastic, she was doing some research on how sex-segregated bathrooms are actually less safe for women, and so we incorporated that research into our sort of argument proposal to the administration and that was great. Red Tremmel was a, I can't remember if he was a graduate student back then at the Center for Gender Studies? People's associations I just can't remember, I'm sorry, but Red was on a panel discussing some of the first person issues that Red faced, and then, yeah, so many people got involved with that thing by the end, it started out this tiny little thing and then it just snowballed and snowballed and escalated and became this big deal. I hear now that they've designed the new center with gender-neutral bathrooms on four different floors, and I'm like go Bill Michel, that's awesome, keeping it going.

[19:28]

KG: Oh yeah, I always forget that what we call 5710, which is the Center for LGBT Life, happened just the year before I started, but I always think that it's been much longer than that.

JS: Oh right, I have not been there yet. I have not been there yet. That was a separate initiative, that was a completely separate initiative from that, which Bill Michel also helped spearhead. That was an initiative that originally got started probably a couple of years before Anna and Diana and I were even on the scene, and I think there was a general lack in the University community generally of connections between RSOs that purported to represent quote-end quote minority groups of various kinds. And it was a constant thing when we were trying to organize events where it was really hard to work with, to work across race, class and sexuality sort of issues, it was, I mean, yeah, it's fucking hard I guess, that's obvious, but, you know, one of the things that was talked about a lot is that white queer people were not super welcome in organizations aimed at people of color and then queers of color didn't feel very welcome in our organization and so there was a lot of work needed to bring populations together and have there be enough overlap so that queers of color could just be OK wherever they wanted to go. And it wasn't necessarily about like "OK, you black people need to be comfortable with us white people now," like that would be stupid, but it was aimed a lot at, when there is overlap, there needs to be a way to still serve these students, there needs to be a way for them to feel represented no matter which space they're in, for them to feel like they have a voice regardless of whether today your racial identity is more important than your sexual identity or vice versa, if you can even parse it out like that, which I mean, I'm not expressing this well, but you know essentially the whole campaign for 5710 was to create a space where all of those needs could be addressed at once if that was what you were looking for. So.

KG: Right, and that makes sense. We have OMSA and...

JS: Right, well, you know, it was very segregated before, like in the worst way, OMSA was tucked away in some corner of Harper and Q and A was stuck in the basement of the Reynolds Club and all of these other RSOs don't even have space, a lot of people just don't have space, and even getting space was a struggle, the fact that Q and A had an office only happened the year before I became president, they didn't have an office before then, they just had, all of their shit was shoved under one of those sawhorse tables in the basement of the Reynolds Club, you know? There was no office, there was no actual space for anything, and the office situation actually happened in terms of giving Q and A its own space happened under Diana Doty and then it just—that's the thing, once you get something, you keep it, but it's so hard to get it to start with. [KG: Yeah.] So once we got that things got a lot better and we got more visible on campus, we were a stationary presence, we could kind of start making demands because people knew where to find us and we could be easily contacted and things like that. I don't know why activism has to be so much about logistics, but it really is.

KG: I'm just gonna read this over and make sure we didn't miss anything.

JS: Yeah. By all means, cause I feel like I went on just about, I just went on so many tangents, so... [laughter]

KG: That's the point though. [JS: Oh yeah?] That's better for me. [JS: Alright. Good, good.] Did you do any other political activism aside from Fem Majority, Feminist Majority and Q and A?

JS: Well, I don't want to over-emphasize my involvement with Feminist Majority, I was involved briefly with the board in conjunction with Q and A, but most of my activism was directed at Q and A related stuff. I mean, yeah, I mean we would get involved with national lobbying initiatives, like we would travel to Springfield and do things like that and voter registration, very typical lefty political activism stuff, we were always kind of pitching in to help other lefty organizations because it's kind of like that barter system where I'm gonna pitch in for your event, you're gonna pitch in for my event, bring your friends to see my band or whatever, you know, so there was a lot of that going on, but I mean targeted political activism other than that, not really, not really, I wasn't that much of a firebrand.

KG: Yeah. [JS: Yeah.] Did you do anything that was like Chicago-specific? [JS: Such as what?] I'm not sure if there was any like big news happening at that time that you...

JS: I don't know. There was a crazy, there was a crazy anarchist underground movement at the time which is probably still around, they've probably been around forever, they were fun. Maybe they were a holdover from the late 90s though, I don't know, but they did a lot of sort of guerilla actions and, performance pieces really is what they were, involved in a few of those.

Chicago specifically, I mean not really. I mean, there were a lot of things happening, like there were kind of holdovers from the late 90s still in the early 2000s and those were things like National Coming Out Day, public rallies, there were a lot of, I think I mentioned a Take Back the Night March, there were a lot of things based on that sort of premise happening around that time. There was always some rally or march or something happening in Boystown or Andersonville or something downtown. Day of Silence. Yeah, I mean there was a lot of that sort of thing going on in Chicago, like Andy Thayer I think is still in the, I'm sure he's still out there in the trenches, maybe he's not, maybe he's dead, I don't remember. He was pretty old when I met him. But yeah, there was a... have you heard the name Andy Thayer? [KG: No.] OK, Andy Thayer is a Chicago gay activist who has some sort of loose affiliation with U of C groups but only from the super early Gay Lib days, but he's still, I think as far as I know he's still kicking it, he was involved in a lot of rallies and actions and protests and things when I was an undergrad and he organized a lot of, a lot of sort of community mobilization type things. I can't remember what they all were, but yeah, he was definitely a player, and those were very Chicago-specific. A lot of times they were a reflection of things that might have been happening on the national scene or, yeah.

[27:18]

KG: That makes sense. Did you have any, Hyde Park related political activity or social, I don't know, social organizing or things like that?

JS: [Laughter] Did I throw parties? Yes, lots. Yes, wow. Well we had a number of social traditions. Obviously, I mean Halloween is like the High Holy Holidays for the gays, so we would have huge festivities at Halloween involving obviously costumes, but you know, many other things as well. I think we threw an enormous Halloween party every year. Although Diana and I just threw a lot of parties, just a lot. Like actually it was terrible, we would make up our guest list with the intention of causing conflict among people, it was really bad, we would be like “Oh, who would be really funny to put on this list,” like “Let’s see if we can start any fights” or like break up this relationship, or you know, like let’s put these five people on the list because these two are friends with this one, and these three are friends with that one, and these two hate each other, and let’s see if we can start something. We would do that sort of thing, it was terrible, we were very bad, bad party hosts. [Laughter] But our parties were very very big, and legendary, and mostly got shut down by the police. Never by the U of C police, either, I don’t know why that was. [KG: Always the CPD?] Always the CPD. We never lucked out and got the U of C PD knocking on our door, ever. God. Yeah, no, we used to throw huge parties. Kate Rockwood, who is I think now back in Chicago, she also might be a good interview subject, Diana and I lived with a girl named Kate Rockwood who was an English, a Creative Writing major, and when we all lived together in the Pepperland, which is now nice, but was not then, the Pepperland used to be crazy, and all of the Ultimate Frisbee people lived there. [KG: I’ve heard that, apparently, and I don’t know why I would have heard that.] Yeah, yeah, it passes down through the mists of time, it’s just like the Ultimate Frisbee people live there. So we used to throw huge parties in the Pepperland and have those broken up all the time.

But in terms of regular social occasions, no, not really. I mean, they were what you made them, because as you know, there’s just not a ton going on in Hyde Park, so you kind of make your own fun. [Laughter] [KG: Yeah.] So a lot of it was, you know, a lot of it was people just hanging out. We used to do a gay Thanksgiving every Thanksgiving cause a lot of people I think who are far away from home during the holidays, and you may be estranged from your family to some degree or another, you don’t want to go home for just the weekend and so there would be, there would always be at least a dozen of us in my peer group who weren’t going home for Thanksgiving and didn’t have anywhere to go, so we started gay Thanksgiving at the apartment of two lovely, lovely boys, Joe and Christopher, and we started having a sort of alternative Thanksgiving and making up menus and the only rule was that everybody had to bring at least two bottles of white wine, because that’s how much you were expected to drink, which is not that much, back in those days, but wow, that would be a lot now, thinking about it. But it was super fun, you know, it was just very chill, and we would all just cook a bunch of capons and make risotto and drink wine and smoke indoors and it was lovely. So that was our other social tradition other than huge parties. I can’t think of anything else. There probably are other things.

KG: I think, I think that’s... do you have anything else that you wanted to say about your undergrad experience before I go to looking back through your adult wisdom?

- JS: [Laughter] Oh, that's not what I've been doing all along? Is there anything else I want to say... yeah, I mean, I just, I feel like I'm leaving out so much, but I, yeah. [KG: Well, if you think of anything...] If I think of anything I'll just e-mail you and be like "I totally forgot to tell you this, this would have made more sense if I'd said this." Yeah. Alright.
- KG: Also feel free to cut into the questions. [JS: Hah! OK.] So given all of this, do you think that your experience that you had at U of C was typical for the time that you were there?
- JS: Oh, I don't know. What's typical? No, I don't think so. I think that... and this is gonna sound super egotistical, I'm gonna say it anyway cause I think it happens to also be true, in a lot of ways on campus my social group was sort of the, we were sort of the ones who set the tone for a lot of what else was going on on campus, so in that regard my experience was only typical in so far as I succeeded in disseminating it to other people. The sorts of attitudes and approaches that I took to doing things a certain way on campus I think had a ripple effect, I think they spread to other people that then did them the same way. Yeah, see, I said this sounds really fucking egotistical. I wasn't some huge trendsetter, I'm not saying that, but I'm just saying that, you know, what was talked about and what was said and how people dressed and what music they listened to and how they interacted, all of this was informed by a small group of people on campus and for good or for bad I think I was in that group. So was my experience typical? Probably not. Do I think it was in some ways an example of what was going on at the time? Yeah.
- KG: OK. That works. [JS: OK.] Has your perception of U of C changed since you've been gone?
- JS: Oh drastically. I feel so much more positive about it now than I did when I was there. I really, I took a year off, I mentioned this like twice, because I was absolutely miserable. [Laughter] It wasn't for fun. Because I just had such a hard time my first two years. A lot of that's culture shock, a lot of that was making huge adjustments to my life and my identity and trying to figure out what I was doing. So I came back to the U of C as opposed to transferring somewhere else because I took a good hard look at it and I was like even though I am so miserable, maybe I will continue to be miserable, but I would not be any happier anywhere else, and that was my judgment, and I went back, and it wasn't "I'm going back because this is the right place for me," it was "I'm going back because I wouldn't be any happier if I didn't," right, so that's a pretty dismal choice, and looking back I'm like "No, I made the right decision at the time." Not only was that true, but actually there would have been no better place for me, I think the University of Chicago was absolutely perfect for what I needed at the time. I needed to go through an absolutely horrible few years, I needed to pull myself together and meet the challenges that that institution offers head-on in order to kind of, oh, so cliché! Become who I am today. But it's true, so yeah, no, looking back I'm like "Oh, thank God for the U of C," because I totally would not be the same person, I would not be inquiring, I would not be, you know, I would not be as critical or analytical or as able to navigate the world if I'd gone anywhere else. I just wouldn't have been able to, it was the right place for me, you know, it is, it was a sort of sink or swim culture both academically and psychologically and socially even, it was sink or swim, but there's something really valuable about

learning to chart your own way independently, there's something really valuable about, ugh, going back to the metaphor, but learning to swim without the life preserver. So no, I think it was fantastic, when I look back I'm like "Wow, if I could do it all over again I feel like I would get so much more out of it," because I didn't even realize all the resources that were at my fingertips at the time, I didn't even realize what I could do with the immense weight and power that is that institution. Like oh my God, you can do so much with that behind you, I think I didn't even realize it at the time. So looking back I'm just like, "Holy shit, that was amazing!" [Laughter] I'm so glad I did that, I hated it at the time, but now I can't, I can't even imagine my life without the University of Chicago, without having gone through that, so yeah.

[37:45]

KG: Let's see. I think we're just gonna do a couple of questions about what you did after you left there. [JS: For sure. Cause we're already at like two hours, sorry.] [Laughter] If you have to leave or anything just let me know. [JS: I don't, it's fine.] Great. So did you start working right after you graduated?

JS: Yeah, yeah. [KG: And was it this job?] No. [KG: Did you have a different job?] I, this is probably a little atypical of Millennials, which I'm only barely, but I actually took the first job I was offered out of college, cause I had a lot of debt and I had a lot of bills to pay and I was actually supporting my girlfriend at the time and I was just like "Well whatever, I'm just gonna take a job." It happened to be in a law firm and it was actually in the field of disability law which to me at the time seemed kind of like "Well, that's cool, I can kind of use my human development background, my thesis was on a legal studies sort of ish thing and yeah, I know some of the vocabulary, I know some of the methods of reasoning, I can do this job." So it was just a real simple financial, essentially it was a clerical position that I got, first of all, and then I kind of moved up pretty quickly. I mean, I had like four promotions in three years or something like that and I ended up managing the financial department of this firm.

But I hated it. Also I got to a level where I was getting real burned out, and was providing, I was doing a lot more direct interfacing with clients, and it was getting to be a sort of, social services was like half my job, and I wasn't cut out for that and it was putting a sort of emotional load on me so I was kind of like "OK, you know what, I'm just gonna, I'm not gonna do this, I'm gonna look for another job," so I looked for another job and then I found a position here with the firm I'm currently with. It was entry level, so I was taking a huge step down, but I was so desperate to get out and I was so desperate to just get a paycheck. I feel like all of my work decisions have been about like "OK, I just gotta pay the bills" [Laughter], but, they have not been particularly entrepreneurial or anything like that, and so I took this job here about four years ago and now I've had five promotions in four years and now I'm managing the entire team that I was originally hired to work for again, which is awesome, and which is what I love to do, I really love being in a management position. I feel like I, it's too bad that I had to go through the whole cycle again, but when you're in a different field and you have no subject matter expertise that's

kind of what happens, so it's fine. I mean, I do love what I do, I've been in legal services I guess eight years now, so I must like it, so.

KG: Is this job attached to your Human Development at all, or is that sort of...

JS: You know, the only, the way I end up using my degree is not really, to some extent it's managing people and managing psychological aspects of people, but in a corporate setting like this one, those aspects are so invisible a lot of the time, it's not something that you're supposed to really discuss with your employees, for instance, like you're not really supposed to discuss their mental states with them. [KG: Right.] Right. Well, you do, but it all happens in a very coded way. So managing people's sort of emotions and cognitive processes, I actually do that, and I use my degree to do that, but it's not what I, it's not actually supposed to be part of my job cause it's this weird, nobody has emotions, we are all robots, and we are only here to increase efficiency, so that attitude is kind of troubling. I think more what I use my degree for is not at all about the psychology aspects of Human Development, it's much more about, well, you know, do I understand how to write well and analyze well and think well and respond on my feet and problem solve, that's what I use my education for. It's not... I would say I don't use my degree, I use my education, that's as close as I can get to it.

[42:34]

KG: Yeah, that makes sense. [JS: Yeah.] So you're married now?

JS: I am. I got married October 29th, 26th, in Canada, to a Canadian. Her name is Andrea Slavik and we dated for about four years prior to that. It's the longest relationship I've ever had, so yeah. We got married. I'm gonna move to Canada probably within two years or so. [KG: Oh, really?] Yeah, cause she can't immigrate here, even if the laws change in time, they're not going to change for her to immigrate in time, you know, so yeah. [KG: Did you meet her in Canada?] No no, she went to the School of the Art Institute and got her Master's degree there in Visual Critical Studies and I met her...

Oh, weird, oh my God, so I met her at this after party for a burlesque show that Diana fucking dragged me to because she was like "I don't know anybody here, can you please come with me?" I was like "Fine, I'll go to this burlesque show with you, and then I'll go to the after party because you're too shy to talk to girls on your own" [Laughter], and that's fine, because that's how it's always been, and I will totally be your wingman, I'm totally cool with that, and we were behaving badly as usual and we didn't know anyone else at the party as expected, and went out on the back porch to have a smoke or something and Andrea was sitting on the back porch by herself and so I like sat down next to her and started a conversation, you know like "We're smoking a cigarette," and I think I probably, being, you know, super smooth, started off the conversation by being like "So I don't know anyone here, who are you?" I don't know, something ridiculous, and she kind of turned around and was like "Yeah, I don't know anyone here either," and we started talking and we actually started talking about all this crazy stuff, and pretty soon it was 4 AM and then it was 6 AM and it was like "Oh shit, let's go to IHOP and get

something to eat,” so then we went to IHOP and then I invited her home with me and I called her by the completely wrong name in the cab and she didn’t correct me and then next morning she asked, I think I asked if I could see her again, but oh, it was complicated cause I was actually dating somebody at the time, so that was off to a rough start right there. But yeah, we actually met because of Diana Doty, which is so bizarre now that I look back at it. [Laughter] I just told you this whole story that’s not related to U of C at all.

KG: That’s OK cause it all [JS: It all comes back], it all comes back to Diana Doty.

JS: It all comes back to Diana. Yeah, so I’ve been dating Andrea for about four years and we’re, yeah... we actually decided, I actually have a lot of issues with marriage, so it was actually a really difficult decision to get married, I think for both of us, cause both of us were kind of like “What the fuck, do we really have to do this? I guess so, because it’s this legal thing that countries recognize, OK, fine,” not that we don’t truly love each other, like this woman is my partner in all senses, but it was kind of like “Oh, OK, so we’re just gonna, we’re gonna go through a civil ceremony,” which we did, in Windsor, which is where she’s from, Windsor, Ontario, and it was actually quite lovely. I was surprised, I was like “Oh, this does not feel like a crushing oppressive burden, oh good, I’m glad,” because that would have sucked. [Laughter] So, yeah, I got married, it worked out. [KG: Good!] Not to imply that marriage is a happy-ever-after ending to this story, that’s not what those two sentences meant.

[46:35]

KG: No, there’s more questions, don’t worry. [JS: OK!] So do you think that things were different for your generation of college students than they are now, or the ones before you? That wasn’t grammatically correct, do you understand what I said...

JS: Oh yeah, yeah. I think things were very different for my generation from those that came before it. I think that a lot of shit happened in the early 2000s that changed everything [laughter], in a lot of ways, although I don’t know, maybe everybody feels like that about their generation. Probably they do but you know, I mean, in my sort of political and social wanderings around the city of Chicago there were times when I would meet people who had gone to the U of C like generations past and they’d be like “Whoa, it’s so different now, you guys are so lucky, you have no idea,” which is probably true. But you know, I feel like when I was a student there the general thing was like “We are a community, we’re all gonna work together, we’re going to be very active and we’re going to build a lot of bridges across the city, across the campus because we really care about this and this matters” and there’s this very strong sense of idealism and a strong sense of capacity to act and I think that was lovely. I don’t know, I don’t know that every generation experiences that sense of power or, almost entitlement, I guess, where it’s like “No, actually we deserve these things, so we’re going to go get them,” I don’t know if that is a constant or not. Maybe it is. It certainly felt like something new at the time. In terms of generations after me... that is so troubling, that there is a generation after me. I’m only 30, for god’s sake. [Laughter]

KG: You don't have to think about it as a generation in the broader sense so much as maybe like a four-year generation. [Laughter]

JS: OK, OK, alright, thank you, thank you, Kelsey. Let's see. You know, I have to say I'm not super-sure, I haven't stayed in touch with a lot of folks who were younger than me, although I have hired like five of them recently, maybe I should ask. Yeah, I have like five U of Cers that I'm managing now, all straight out of undergrad. Crazy. [KG: Thank you. We appreciate that.] Well, I got sick of it because HR kept sending me Northwestern resumes [laughter], so I was like "Stop sending me Northwestern resumes, send me U of C resumes." So I got some. [Laughter] [KG: That's awesome.] Yeah. It just gets wearing after a while. Alright, so younger generations. I mean I hear you have an Akira and a Clark's now, so that's crazy.

KG: Yeah. The neighborhood, I think they're trying to make Hyde Park a destination now. [JS: That's not gonna happen.] We have a movie theater which is cheaper than AMC, so that's nice. [JS: Does the University own it?] I don't know. It's called Harper. [JS: Yeah, they own it.] It's on Harper Street.

JS: Well we used to have the Ghettoplex, which is a terrible racist thing to call a really shitty movie theater that the University also owned, but it was also in Harper Court and I bet it's at the same site. But it shut down my second year. [KG: Hmm.] Yeah, and then there was no movie theater for a very long time, apparently. [KG: Yeah, until now.] Until now, geez.

KG: We're also gonna get a concert venue that will be run by the same people who own Longman and Eagle I guess. [JS: OK, that's kind of sweet.] Yeah. [JS: Yeah.] I'm moving out of this neighborhood, so I don't know how that's gonna go, but... [Laughter] good for them!

JS: Yeah. Well, Hyde Park goes through its down and up swings. I mean, the neighborhood itself... I really enjoy visiting, I would never live there again. Yeah.

KG: Why did you decide to participate in the project?

JS: Why did I decide to participate in the project. I don't remember. Well, at first I was like "That's a really cool idea, I want to be part of that," and then it kind of fell off my radar, and then Kathy Forde prompted me about it. [KG: Oh yeah?] Because she was like "You need to include your voice in this project," and I said "Yes, Kathy," via Facebook, of course. There was no actual salute. [laughter] [KG: I'll tell her, I saw her at the gym today.] Yeah, no, I mean I understand, essentially the principles of oral history, I think it's a fantastic idea that you're actually collecting these interviews now. It's much easier than doing it twenty years from now. Yeah. [KG: Yes, as we've found with the alumni who are a lot older than you.] Yeah, no, exactly, I'm sure. Well, those are the perils of any sort of oral history collection, I just, you know, at first I was like "What," like "That's not history!" and then I thought about it and I was like, well actually it is because nobody I went to school with is still there, and nobody who shared the experiences with me is still

there, so I guess it's history, well shit. And then, and then I guess, from my point of view it was like "Well, that's kind of good in a way," that all of my experiences are now in the past, well and truly, and I should, you know, help you guys document them if you're trying to get this... it seems like you are really attempting to put together a vast sweep of information, and I expect that you probably will have, you probably do have several people from my generation in there, and my memory's not as, not as awesome as it could be, but I mean, the other reason I guess I decided to participate or, you know, continue to want to participate is, you know, who doesn't like having their voice heard? I think I did important shit, I'd like to tell somebody about it, you know, so there's that.

KG: Yeah, and it will live on forever in the Reg. [JS: In the Reg. Yeah, God.] [Laughter] But we will have a museum exhibition [JS: Oh, sweet], which I'm not entirely sure how the oral histories are going to be integrated, but they will be in some way. It's gonna be in two years, but we'll contact—I won't contact you cause I'll be gone, but somebody will contact you when that happens. [JS: Very good.] If you're not in Canada you can come, or you could come from Canada if you want to.

JS: Well, if I am I could probably still. I mean, I don't ever really plan to lose touch with Chicago. I mean, I've been here since, I've been here a long time now, twelve years, that's a really long time.

KG: Yeah. Is there anything else you want to add before I shut it off?

JS: Not particularly. I feel like I've gone into a lot of detail and if I think of anything broad or sweeping or super-important I'll e-mail you. [KG: OK. That sounds good. I might e-mail you about the drag king stuff.]

[54:07]

End of Interview