

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #77

SOBEL, NAOMI (1983-) AB 2005

At U of C: 2001-2005

Interviewed: 2013 (1 session)

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Transcript by: Mich Elliott

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[00:00:00 to 00:01:19: KR goes through demographic sheet with NS.]

KR: Can you just talk about before you were at the University, where you grew up, what things were like?

NS: Sure, I'm from New York City originally. I grew up there pretty much exclusively. I spent a little time with my mom's family in California outside San Francisco, and also my family had a second home in western Connecticut. I grew up in a relatively affluent neighborhood on the upper west side. About half Jews, half non-Jews, 98% democrats. I went to prep school K through 12, all girls. Yeah, pretty sheltered, homogenous community. Everyone was college-bound. My dad is a high school teacher and so is my step-mom, and my mom runs a family investment company, and my stepfather was retired from IBM.

I came out in eighth grade, so I was 13. It wasn't quite a non-event, but it was pretty, in the scheme of things, pretty uneventful. My folks, my dad thought it was a phase. My mom, like, wanted to, was worried I would have a harder life than I otherwise would have, but they were both pretty much fine with it. My grandparents on my dad's side were super accepting and my grandparents on my mom's side, when we eventually told them, were sort of 'don't ask, don't tell' about it, which is how they are about like 95% of life. I had my first girlfriend in high school and was pretty involved in, I ran my high school GSA, and I was also involved in local LGBT stuff through GLSEN and the spoken word scene at NYU. I did a lot of stuff with my synagogue, which was a very LGBT-friendly place. They were the first big reform synagogue to have a lesbian rabbi on staff. She wasn't the only rabbi, but that was definitely a place that was very accepting, and my school was also at least officially accepting. In the scheme of schools in the 90s, pretty accepting, actually, de facto as well. I mean, there was a lot of 'That's so gay' but I was never made to feel unsafe, and I think also being in New York, it's easier than somewhere else. If you don't like people at school you can turn around and there are two

million other people your age scattered around the city. So, I didn't date people from my school, I dated people from other schools who I met mostly through my synagogue youth group, which is also where I made a lot of my friends in high school.

[00:04:22]

KR: So then, how did you find out about the University and end up there?

NS: So, I was a senior in high school. I had started my college process. We spent spring break of junior year looking at different schools. We had just sort of done the east coast loop looking at, wanted to see schools of different sizes and different kinds of things, and then, my mom being from the Bay, over the summer, we'd gone to visit my grandparents and I'd gone to see a couple of schools out there. I came back in the fall and my girlfriend at the time and my best friend both separately had people strongly recommend to them that they should apply to the University of Chicago. I had never heard of it and I was like, look they are the two most important people in my life, and everyone says that they should go there, I should at least investigate it. My dad's an economics teacher, so he of course knew exactly what it was. I was totally one of those east coast prep school kids who was like, 'Is that a state school?' Like, that was totally me. I had never heard of it. I went, I went for a visit, and I totally fell in love. I was really excited about the prospect of being in a community that really valued intellectual curiosity. I went to a really high-profile, fancy private prep school. It's the one that Gossip Girl is based on, so a lot of people know it from that. That's not totally accurate representation of the entire student population, but it's a very accurate representation of about a quarter of the student population. Everyone goes to college, most people go to top 20 schools, certainly top 50 schools. There's a real strong academic push for achievement, but not necessarily for curiosity. So there were a lot of people who were sort of punching time, figuring out how to game the system to get the best grade possible, which was different than being interested in learning.

When I got to the U of C and I sat in on classes, I didn't necessarily know what was going on, but I liked the kinds of questions people were asking and the different ways people were engaged in whatever the material was. I really liked—I remember being in Ida Noyes and looking at the bulletin boards and seeing the really wide variety of RSOs that people were involved with and that was something that I really got excited about it. It had, like, a college feeling, but was in the city, which was important to me. I have some vision problems, and can't drive. I have a license, but it's pretty unsafe for me to drive at night, and at that point I didn't have a license and I really wanted to be able to explore wherever I was. I was used to being very independent. My parents were divorced and I'd been schlepping myself around New York since age, like, 10. The idea of suddenly being stuck in one place was not appealing, so I definitely wanted to be in the city, but I liked the campus feeling. I also remember going, once I got accepted, I went to prospie weekend and it was the only prospie weekend I went to, I didn't go to any of the other places. When I got in, I got into Chicago and Vassar, and those were the top schools I was choosing between. I was waitlisted at Yale, which was my other top choice. I was like, 'That makes it easy. I'm gonna go visit Chicago and, unless something shocking happens,

I'm probably gonna go there.'

One thing I was looking for was to make sure there were visibly queer people on campus, because Vassar, that's not really a question. Vassar is *very* queer, and Yale, the people who were out in the year before me, one of them had gone to Yale, so I knew that that was gonna be an ok place. But Chicago, I didn't know as much about and that wasn't familiar, and so they had the RSO fair, and I remember that I was like walking through the RSO fair and there was this cute person who I was reading as butch with short, dyed red hair and a white t-shirt and jeans and I was like, 'Oh, if there's one of you, there are going to be more.' The funny part of the story is that she's about to walk through the door in about half an hour. We just stopped dating after like a four-year relationship and knowing each other for 13 years. So, that turned out well for me. But, indeed, the cute butch that I found turned out to be Diana. But, it was totally this feeling of like, 'Well, if there's one of you at the RSO fair, there must be more, you know, hiding.' Because there was that reputation of, like, 'Oh it's like nerdy and this and that.' And I was like, I know that there'll probably be like people who have same-sex attraction but other people who are like steeped in queer culture in the way that I am after having been out in New York City for 5 years and having grown up around musical theater and drag queens and things that were very familiar to me that I was not sure were gonna—you know, like, I had stereotypes about the Midwest that I had to make sure I wasn't gonna fulfill.

The other thing that was a big selling point was the potential to go South Africa for study abroad, which I ended up doing. I had taken a South African literature class in my high school, which, instead of doing AP, they had lots of smaller electives for English. So, I had learned a lot from the literature and I had some relatives who were South African and I had been on a family trip that was like, very safari-oriented and had a lot of very conflicted feelings, politically, about going to this country that's in the middle of this huge social upheaval and in the process of reinventing itself and really not interacting with very many people. I was excited to have a potential for a do-over. I did in fact end up going. I still see John and Jean Comaroff, who ran that trip and who are now at Harvard. Not regularly, but every like once a year or so. That's how I ended up at Chicago. And, I started, I will say that the other thing that happened on my way to Chicago was that my orientation began September 15, 2001, so the week of getting to college was a very exciting one because we all had to, like, completely shift our plans. We ended up driving from New York, we had been planning to fly. My mom had a broken arm and I turned 18 somewhere on the road in Pennsylvania. So, that was another sort of big thing that happened on the way to college.

[00:10:23]

KR: What did you first get involved with when you arrived?

NS: During Orientation, one of the things I remember most clearly was I went to, there was like a queer U of C 101 panel. I remember that I had to take my placement tests and I couldn't take one of them because it was on Rosh Hashanah and I wasn't going to take the test on Rosh Hashanah, so I ended up only taking French and not Spanish. I was

gonna take several language placements, so that changed what courses I took because I didn't get as many credits as I thought I would get, but I went to this queer U of C 101 panel, which was the first one they'd had, and Diana [Interview #78] organized it. She was the president of Q&A at the time. Does that still exist? Queers & Associates?

KR: Yeah.

NS: Yeah, so she was the president of Q&A, and it was her, Bert Cohler, rest in peace, and Kathy Forde [Interview #9], who's running the mentoring program, and they were this panel and they talked about queer life on campus and in the city, and all the out freshmen and a couple of people who were deciding whether to come out or not, we were all there together. Looking back on it now, Diana was there, Jose, who I introduced you to, was there and we made friends. [redacted] who now works for Obama. Actually, I know who I met there and we're not all in each others' lives anymore, but I made a couple of friends that day and that was during Orientation. I don't think I got involved with Q&A right away, but I started going to their events. I joined one of the a cappella groups, Men in Drag my first semester, I quickly dropped that. I'd been in a cappella in high school and figured it was a good, easy thing to do, which just didn't end up being the scene for me. Very straight. I went to Feminist Majority stuff on and off, I went to Hillel stuff on and off. I ended up sort of running Reform Chavurah for a while. Eventually, joined the rugby team, winter of my first year. I think that's probably most of what I was involved in. At some point, there was a big gender-neutral bathrooms campaign that happened while I was in undergrad and I was pretty involved in that. I ended up in the student paper and on a panel and things like that. What else did I get involved in? There was the campaign to get Taco Bell off of campus that was happening, that we won. I was sort of peripherally involved in that. I ran an LGBT Jewish conference my senior year that I got involved in. It was a national conference and we got it to be hosted at Hillel my senior year, but I went to another one two years before, three years before. Those were the main things that I was doing. When I first got to the U of C, like everybody else, I hung out with people from my house and I was one of—I think I was the only out—I was in Linn, which is now Linn and something else, Mathews?

[00:13:30]

KR: Yeah, Linn-Mathews.

NS: I was there during the big drug scandal, so that was very exciting. There was a meth scandal my second year and I left shortly after all that went down. I got there and I made friends with somebody who I thought was out and then who turns out had not come out and I was just reading him as, like, 'Oh there's no way that you're in the closet,' and that was sort of awkward when I realized that I was sort of like outing him by hanging out with him and we had to have a discussion about that. A couple people in the house later came out, you know, the people I was friends with. One of them, I didn't really suspect, but this, the one girl came out pretty quickly. That was interesting. At that point, I was making a really strong association between non-binary gender presentation and 'obviously you're out to everyone' and learned the error of my ways later on. That was

something, at first I really hung out with the house. Then, as I started to meet people through RSOs and classes, left that behind. It didn't turn out to be a very healthy community for me. I still have a couple of my, my best friends from college, two of them are from my house, but they're from the year above me. I don't have close friends from my year in my house.

KR: What about, academically, when did you start to take gender studies classes and...?

NS: That's a good question. I think I started taking them my second or third, I think my second year. I came in thinking I'd be an English major. I would thumb through, back then we had a class catalog, I would thumb through the course catalog and there were always a lot of exciting classes in gender studies, so I took the core, with Moon [Interview #74], actually was one of my teachers and Sarah Potter and Stuart Michaels [Interview #33] and some English professor that clearly didn't make much of an impact [laughs] who was co-teaching with Moon. I took the core, I took George Chauncey's class, I took Ron Gregg's class, I mean, I took a lot of classes as my major. They were some of my favorite classes. It was, I had actually, unbeknownst to me, taken gender studies in high school, we just didn't call it that, which I think is, I went to a pretty feminist all-girls school. We didn't talk about it as such, but I'd taken a class called Theater and Social Struggle that could have been in any gender studies department. We read Emily Mann and stuff like that. What else? I took a really terrible gender studies class with Wendy Doniger, which I feel very comfortable saying in an interview. I was appalled. Some of the students had to get up and, like, on the board be like, 'Sex. Gender. Gender presentation. Gender identity. Let's talk about what these words mean and how they're not the same and how bisexual and androgynous are not actually the same word.' That was a disaster.

Also I took some amazing classes. I started with the core and then I took everything I could find. By the end, I was taking the ones that had, I really started to be interested in the intersection between racial justice and gender justice, and so I was taking as many classes that focused on that intersection as I could, which of course were not very many. There was like a Caribbean Women's Lit class that was taught by Rosamond King, who was a visiting scholar. There was a Latino Intellectual Thought class, Coronado, that I took at the end. I took a bunch of classes in the Divinity School, some of which crossed over. I was sort of all over the place. I was gonna just major in Gender Studies and then the Jewish Studies thing sort of happened by accident. I looked up and realized I was like three credits shy, so I just took a couple more classes and there I was with a double major. I did my thesis with Tikva Frymer-Kensky, who's since passed away, who was in the Divinity School and who was in both departments. I was looking at trans, potential, I mean, what we would now call trans and intersex categories in the Talmud, which I had a lot of fun with. That was for both departments.

I loved my classes in gender studies. They had a lot of lectures, which I really appreciated, like outside of classes. They would have brown bags, stuff happening at the center. At that point, they had only recently—I guess it was like the second year that I was there, they moved in with the Center for Race, Politics, and Culture and had a lot of great co-

branded events, for lack of a better term. Also, there was some crossover with things like clubs were doing, like Fem Maj every year would do a, 'This is what a feminist looks like' panel with people from different parts of the University. Usually Gender Studies was co-sponsoring that.

In my last year, they started doing something really helpful, which was they started bringing in alums to talk about kind of careers, I mean, you could have whatever career you wanted with a gender studies degree, but what careers you could have that would *use* your Gender Studies degree. Evette Cardona, who's at Polk Bros Foundation in Chicago and had come, she had gone to the social work school at the U of C, came in talked about philanthropy, and that made a huge impression on me. She and I are still in touch, actually. I now work for an organization she knows. It's a kind of amazing cycle. Three or four careers later, I'm back in touch with her. That was really interesting to me because I knew I wanted to be working in social justice and working for queer rights, and I'm a *terrible* community organizer, like really atrocious, and that was the obvious path and if you couldn't do that, I didn't really know what to do. So, that was really helpful for me, they brought her in. They had a couple of other people, but she was the one that really stuck with me.

[00:19:34]

KR: Did you do any queer activism things at the University?

NS: I mean we did the gender-neutral bathrooms campaign, that was the big one while I was there. We also were—there was some negotiating being done with the health insurance to see if they would cover various kinds of gender-affirming hormones or surgery. Didn't get very far, but it was sort of the beginning of trying to get those policies changed. I don't know what they're like now. It was, I don't even remember who it was anymore, who the policyholders, er, the company was. There was a little bit of that. My first year, we did a bus, like a bunch of us from Q&A went on a bus that was organized by, I don't even think they exist anymore, it was called like, It's Time, Illinois, and we all went down to Springfield and lobbied for an inclusive, gender identity and sexual orientation-inclusive non-discrimination law. Q&A would invite, at that point, especially at the beginning, had a lot of outside speakers coming in, many of whom were from local activist groups, some of whom were like sex educators or people who owned sex toy store, and then some of whom were people working on queer and trans stuff in the Chicago area. That was definitely part of it. At that point, Lesbian Community Cancer Project was its own organization, it hadn't merged in with Howard Brown yet and every year, the mentoring program, which I was also involved in, would send a whole delegation of people to volunteer. We would get, like, half-price tickets because we volunteered, and that was like *the* big social event of the queer year, was always going to LCCP Ball, which was at the South Shore Cultural Center. It was a big deal, we'd all get very dressed up. There are pictures on Facebook.

I think there wasn't a lot of a lot of citywide activist stuff going on, and the stuff on campus was—I mean, we were trying to get gender-neutral bathrooms in, we wanted,

there was one in the Reynolds Club in the third floor, but they were renovating the A-Level of the Reg and we wanted a gender-neutral bathroom there and we wanted one in Cobb, and we got one in the Reg, and I don't know that we ever got one in Cobb. We *really* wanted one, I think we may have ended up getting one but I don't remember anymore. And in the process found out all sorts of, like, apparently Cobb used to be the place that you cruised in the 70s and 80s and they took the locks off the men's restrooms for that reason. Again, you find out all sorts of institutional history in the process of doing these campaigns, like the bathrooms in Cobb turn out to have a *long* queer history. There was sort of like a mapping process that went on of like where are the—the wheelchair-accessible, gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and there were like *two*. We had more than some other schools, but they weren't in high-traffic areas. You had to go, like, all the way up to the UT office, which was probably not the, the UT office is probably in Logan now, but, you know, third floor of the Reynolds Club or some basement somewhere. They were not easily accessible areas. Now, I think we did get one in Cobb, on like the first floor, like in a pretty high-traffic area, and since that's where all of us took our first-year classes, it was a big win. That's what I remember most in terms of activist stuff, was that local stuff, and it was a big deal also because it got picked up by, I mean, the Maroon reported on it, and then Windy City Times reported on it, and *then* Rush Limbaugh reported on it and if you interviewed Moon, I'm sure you heard that whole thing already, because he really had a field day with her name. That was a big deal. Those are the things I remember about it.

I think also there was a way in which just being out was sort of interpersonal activism, and that was sort of unexpected for me. I grew up very sheltered about what it meant to be queer. It was such a non-issue that until I came out and started getting involved in GLSEN in high school, I didn't really what a bullet I had dodged and what the potential coming out consequences were for other people could be. Which was partially about class stuff and having financial cushion and partially about cultural stuff and social location of various kinds, but I just completely didn't know that you could get kicked out of your family, or sent to hospital or clinics, or any of that stuff. And simultaneously, there were a lot of people I was encountering, gay and straight, who were like, totally befuddled by the fact that I could have come out in 8th grade and had it been, and not have it be this like—it was not like a big bold choice, right? Like, I didn't know it was a thing. I knew it wasn't what probably my parents were expecting, they might not be psyched about it, but I didn't, it was not like this bold move to be whatever. It was not like an activist statement, right? It was like, 'I have a crush on Emily Jacobsen, she's a girl.' That was shocking for many of my peers that that was my story, in ways that many of them were having conflict.

Oh, you know what, there was another group I was involved with which was called QueeReligious, we didn't really ever get anything done. It was sort of a support group for people who were queer and involved in religious communities and our goal, that we didn't ever achieve, was to try and develop some kind of materials that you could send to your parents around coming out from different faith backgrounds, and we were working with Daphne Burt, who was the Associate Director of Rockefeller Chapel at that point to try and concoct some stuff. What was happened kids were coming to campus—I mean the sort of general story of people who were in the group were coming to campus from

religious backgrounds, realizing they were queer, and trying to figure out how like, 'How do I talk about this with my family? How do I navigate being out here and maybe out at home and maybe not?' in this particular faith context. I think now there's a lot more resources out there, but this, we hosted a screening of Trembling Before G-d, and it was like, just out. Things like that. At that point, my first year, there was, Campus Crusade for Christ hosted somebody who was like an ex-gay evangelist and there was a whole back-and-forth and I'm sure Diana will tell you more about this because she was the Q&A president then, I was the Q&A president like two years later, but it was a really big deal of, like, did we want them to cancel the event? No, 'cause obviously like free speech is important, are you going to have a counter-protest? What's the best way to—how much airtime do you give this guy, but also it's really important to show up and say that not everyone thinks this and it's not actually ok, it's not about giving equal airtime. We had a sort of after, debrief conversation that was very interesting. I was at that point sort of showing up, I wasn't part of the planning for things like that.

[00:26:38]

KR: So you mentioned that at first you were sort of just going to some of the Q&A events, how did you start to get more involved with it?

NS: Part of it is that I'm just that guy who like doesn't ever only show up to things and ends up getting involved in whatever I do, which is I think very much a class thing and a product of lots of years of very explicit leadership development at the hands of my prep school. There weren't a lot of people stepping up and taking leadership. Like in Q&A, there was an election coming and no one was really doing it, and I was like, well, I can do it. Also, I was spending a lot of time in the Q&A office, flirting with Diana. At one point, I was like dating her roommate, I was in there flirting with her, you know, it was an easy next step. Also I was the treasurer of Hillel and I was in leadership on the rugby team, anything I was involved with, I was very involved with. I didn't really do, I wasn't really a joiner who showed up to stuff for the most part, which I think actually I maybe could have benefited from being involved in some things that I didn't run, but I didn't know that yet.

KR: Was Q&A more, did it have an activist-y element to it at all or was it more of a support group, social group type of thing?

NS: We went back and forth. We had monthly coffee and tea kind of things that would usually have some topic for discussion, and then sometimes there would be more of a political bent. It often had to do with whether there was something happening on campus that we could organize around. In the moments where there were obvious issues, we would sort of rally and do work around it as part of a larger coalition. It wasn't always explicitly political. We also went to see, like, when *Tipping the Velvet* was showing in Andersonville, we all went up to see it. There was definitely a big social component and sort of support group component. I would say a big piece of it was discussion group, which was just somewhere in the middle, right? Especially at first, there was a big sex ed component, because so few people came into the University with bare basics of sex ed at

all, right? And certainly around safer sex practices for people who weren't necessarily worried about getting pregnant as their number one priority, like that was. Sort of pleasure-centered sex ed was definitely part of it. Also, at that point, there was a sex toy store in Andersonville that was owned by two U of C I think business school grads, so there was some sort of relationship there, at one point I think it was called Tulip, I think it's gone now. I think it was on Berwyn. Anyway, so, over there. It wasn't apolitical, there were groups that were like, 'we won't do politics,' and that wasn't Q&A, but I would definitely say the overall trend was more social, sort of, study breaks with movies every semester. We threw a party called Genderfuck every spring, it was a drag party. Again, you could say that's political or not political. The Chicago Kings performed and some other acts were really political, but that wasn't like why they were invited. It sort of depended.

[00:30:07]

KR: Were the discussion meetings every week, or...?

NS: There was a meeting every week, and I honestly don't remember the exact details. If you talk to John Gabriel, he'll remember much better than I do. He and I were co-presidents, but he wasn't quite as swept up in the lesbian drama as I was in college, so he was paying more attention.

KR: How big was the group at the time?

NS: It really depended week to week, and it depended what we were doing, and what else was happening that week, and where the food was coming from. All the things that—I would say that we always had like 7 or 8 people and sometimes we had 20 people, and it was somewhere in the middle most weeks. If I really thought about it, I could probably still name most of the people who came regularly. I would say somewhere in the 10 to 12 range usually.

KR: Can you talk a little bit about the informal queer social scenes, like parties and things going outside of the RSOs and organizations?

NS: I mean, rugby was not officially a queer thing, but boy was it. Thank you, Moon, Leah, and all of us, really. I joined rugby because I looked around at Q&A and was like, 'Well, all the cute ones play rugby, I should go play rugby.' I had this idea that I would be the mascot or the photographer and then I ended up really liking it. That was definitely one of the scenes was in and around the rugby team. When Kyla and I were dating, we had an apartment on 53rd and Ellis and we hosted weekly L Word watching parties and that was, it was completely informal. People would bring beer and food. That was a big, for like a year there, we had like 25 people in our apartment every Sunday that that was playing. That was definitely a thing. There was sort of like a circle, and there was a circle around the basketball team because she'd been on the basketball team and then she'd come out, or she came out and then she went on the basketball team and we kept stealing people from basketball to come play rugby and so there was like basketball and soccer team.

Eliza [redacted], Harless now, who's in Chicago was dating one of the soccer players and she and I lived together, briefly, Eliza, after Kyla and I broke up. There was a bunch of people who knew each other through varsity sports, and the rugby people, there was some people who knew each other through gender studies and met at those things.

There were some of us who met in other activist circles. The people who met through the mentoring program, that was interesting, because they would have like quarterly pizza parties, and you saw completely different people, because they were the people who were gay, but not necessarily politicized around it or socializing around it who were in—it was often people who were doing, who weren't as radical or progressive necessarily, who were like pre-med and were on a more mainstream track, whereas the people I hung out with all ended up being like teachers and social workers and organizers. Sort of less professional-track stuff, although many of them do have graduate degrees in one thing or another. Several ended up in law school, but didn't conceive as themselves as on a track in college, either a science track or anything where you like 'do or die' about school. The person I dated after college who was a U of C grad I knew through QueeReligious, but didn't come to any of the other stuff because he was busy doing physics. That was definitely a scene around that. I'm trying to think where else we sort of congregated. We would go to Andersonville sometimes, though when the Chicago Kings were, and that was not a U of C thing, that was a city-wide group, Chicago Kings, they had a couple of U of C-affiliated people involved. When they were performing, a whole crew, you would see all sorts of people, mostly female-assigned people going, not only, but the majority. So, you would see people there, people would go out to Spin and a couple of other places on Belmont, but not that much. We went to teas, when people had cars, we would go to Andersonville. I'm trying to think what else, other places that we all found each other. The Q&A study breaks at the end of each quarter were, like, that was definitely a scene. And also that first meeting during Orientation, that first meeting of the year, became a huge cruising ground. People who *never* came to Q&A the rest of the year would go to the first meeting to be like, 'Who's the fresh meat?' That was always *really* interesting.

[00:35:20]

KR: I think that's still sort of happening.

NS: That's still sort of happening—I mean, how could it not, right? I worked on the Free Press for a while, a long-defunct student newspaper which had a lot of queers on it and sometimes they would have parties. There wasn't a formal thing that happened. The other thing was that there would be queer contingents in each house. You'd get to the people in that house and they'd have five friends that they knew from sort of that thing.

KR: Did you find that any of the dorms were more queer than others?

NS: No, not particularly. I think the ones in Pierce all knew each other because they were so much more social than everybody else because they had to be. At that point, no. I was in Burton-Judson which had like the weirdos, but not necessarily the queer weirdos. I think about people I dated, one lived in Max Palevsky, dated and slept with a couple that lived

in Blackstone, one had been in Breckinridge and then it closed. One was in I think Hitchcock, one of those two, let's, we'll call it Hitchcock. I kept getting set up with this one person who lived in Maclean, we weren't interested in each other. It wasn't like there was one—I mean, partially because like a lot of people didn't come out their first year and by your third year, you're in an apartment. So, at least then, not as many people were out right away, and so you wouldn't necessarily gravitate toward some house because it was queer because you might not even consider yourself that way and then it didn't self-perpetuate. I mean, the Pepperland was not a house, it was a building. Do you know what building that is? It's where Powell's was. That building always had, like, the whole Frisbee team lived there and a bunch of queers lived there and there were always parties in the Pepperland. Diana lived in the Pepperland at one point. Maybe some of the parties were at her house. Also, the grad students, several of us dated grad students on and off and they, how you met the grad students, it was always some crazy story because there wasn't any formal thing, right? Like, I was friends with a bunch of queer grad students through rugby and then they would have a party at their house and I would meet their friends. It was sort of like that. It was mostly just through who you knew. Like, Gerra Bosco threw a lot of really good parties in my early college years. And her, I think they're married now, anyway, her partner at that point was a bartender at the Pub. So she knew everybody, because she this very visibly genderqueer person bartending at the Pub. You're gonna meet everyone who wants to meet you at that point. That was another way that we all met each other.

KR: Do you think that a lot of the queer people on campus came out after being there for a while, or came out immediately when they go there before...?

NS: I think a lot of people came out over the course of their first two years. I have to say, I don't—I know one person who is out now who wasn't out when I knew them in college. I think that it wasn't that she was in the closet, like, I think that had she been attracted to women then, we would have all known about it. She was like only vaguely straight then, but she as far as I knew didn't have any female partners, and now does. Around sexuality.

Around gender identity stuff, a lot of people who ended up identifying as trans came out already out as queer, and then—I didn't have any friends who transitioned as undergrads. I had one person who—I guess I had one who started his transition as an undergrad. For the most part, it was people who realized by the time they were graduating that it was something they wanted to do, but was sort of, like, I'm leaving anyway, why don't I wait and then I don't have to deal with the social mess. There was like one trans grad student that I knew about who was out. I imagine there were many more who I didn't know about, but he was involved in the mentoring program. His name was [redacted]. I guess [redacted], I think he was, he was definitely trans by the time I got there. Like, as long as I've known him, has been male-identified. I don't know if he was an undergrad or a grad student. But there was sort of like that the grad students were at a different point in their lives. There've been a couple of people I've known who have transitioned since college, and they were all people who were out coming in, as queer.

[00:40:24]

KR: Was there anything the University did, like the administration or anything, that was a queer event, or started organizing anything?

NS: They started the mentoring program, right, was University-sponsored. Then, also, by the end, there was an official LGBT welcome back event in the fall, like maybe early October there was like a tea event. That people went to, it wasn't a big thing. That and the mentoring program, that was what they did. The mentoring program was all Kathy Forde, it may still be all Kathy Forde, but that was pretty robust and she put a lot of work into it. That was the main thing they were doing and then they had this one event in the fall.

KR: I know the LGBTQ office started like shortly after you left.

NS: I remember when they were in the process of building the LGBTQ website for the University, so that was something that happened while I was there was at least having some kind of central resource. Diana had been involved in a similar website resource for women at the U of C, like been building that. She'll know better than I do, she worked there for—she was a student and she worked at the University for four years after. She was there for much longer and knows a lot more pieces of what—as an undergrad you don't always have a really great sense of what has an institutional backing and what doesn't. I think they had a non-discrimination policy around sexual orientation, I don't remember if it was around gender identity yet, I think it might have been, but I don't know. They put money into, there was an intercollegiate queer conference of some variety that I helped plan. It was like all Cs, it was like CCCC, I don't remember, like 4 or 5 C's. That was cross-campus community conference, some euphemism that happened at UIC. The University kicked in some money, but they may have done that through Q&A, I don't know if it was official, if it was through the RSO or through the administration.

KR: Did Q&A or any of the organizations do cross things with other schools often?

NS: No, that was the main thing that happened. It was just that. The U of C is not known for collaborating with other institutions. The queers, I mean, we slept with people from other schools, not that much even. The most queers I met through other schools were definitely people who played rugby for other schools, that's how I met them, that's the only way. I mean, I met them and then I met—every once in a while we would hear about somebody, somebody was coming to speak and it was like Jack Halberstam came to speak at Northwestern and a bunch of us like got in a car and went. Things like that would happen, but it was completely like, 'Oh, by the way, this is happening,' and some email would happen and you would all go, but it wasn't a collaboration of any variety. We didn't even regularly, proactively notify the other schools about things that were happening. There was a listserv that happened in the city, it was a city-wide listserv called Queer to the Left that Debbie [Gould, Interview #58], oh what was her name, she was one of the, she was my SOSC teacher, big queer. She was doing her PhD on ACT UP, and I'm blanking on her last name. It's not Debbie Nelson, the other one. She's now gone, I think she went to Pitt. She was very active and Yasmin Nair, who's still in Chicago is really active and so

this was this listserv that happened and sometimes we'd figure out stuff from that that was happening at other schools and we'd all go. But there wasn't any sort of active collaboration that I know about.

[00:44:34]

KR: Can you talk a little bit about dating?

NS: Dating. We just all slept with each other, that's how it worked. Moon, in total futility, tried to enforce a rule in which the people on the rugby team would not reshuffle during the season, like whoever you came in dating at the beginning of the season, you were supposed to stop dating, not until after the season, not sort of dating new people, it didn't work at all. We really tried, but no. I'm trying to think, the people I dated, the people I hooked up with were all people I met through friends. The person I, the one person I dated for most of college was Kyla and she and I met, we met at that initial thing at the beginning of the year, the Orientation thing. And then a bunch of us, well, first Kate [redacted] tried to date her, without success. Then we like pulled her into rugby and she and I started dating. After her best friend tried to ask me out and I was like, 'Oh, awkward, because I have a huge crush on your best friend,' and then we started dating. After she and I broke up, I started dating Asher, who was going by his previous name as an undergrad. He and I officially met through QueerReligious, I think. He was the year below me. He lives in London, so good luck trying to interview him [laughs]. He was just back on break, I think, visiting his parents in New Jersey. It was all friends of friends, the people I slept with were all friends of friends. That was me.

I know that other people went on, there was PlanetOut, who would go on PlanetOut and then not get anywhere. I went on a couple of dates right before I left through online personals, things like the Nerve.com personals or On Our Backs personals, which I think were the same thing. PlanetOut never got me anywhere, but it was always funny to see your friends. You'd be looking for people and then you'd realize, oh, that's Eliza, my roommate, oops! That's not what I'm looking for at all. Those were things. People who you met at events, that kind of stuff. It was very, there were a couple of people that, there were actually like 3 or 4 people that Diana tried to foist on me. I kept hitting on her, and she kept being like, 'No, you're too young and from the east coast' and all these. We knew each other for 9 years before we started dating. In that process, there were multiple people where she was like, 'Why don't you date this person?' That was pretty funny. It worked, actually, once. At least we slept together. But the rest of the time, it was just like, nope, that's not gonna happen. I know Kyla and Jen [redacted] met through rugby. Diana never dated U of C students, she made a practice of dating people from other schools, so you'll have to ask her how she found them, but most of us just dated each other. There was very little dating, you'd meet at a party and then you'd be girlfriends, and then you'd live together, and then you'd break up in a dramatic fashion. Repeat. It was all friends, there was no like dating, per se.

KR: Where did you go after you graduated, did you immediately come here?

NS: So, no, I didn't come here. I had taken what would have been my fourth year spring off because I was running a conference and writing my thesis. I had a Metcalf that summer, which was great, at About Face Theater, highly recommend, best Metcalf ever. That was my first ever fundraising job, and here I am, that's my career, queer fundraising it turns out is what I like to do. So, I did that, and then I graduated in December. I stayed in that apartment which was me—it was a great group of people, it was me, Harless, who was doing UTEP, one girl who was an undergrad, but who was our age, who had taken a year off to do AmeriCorps before school, and then a med student and we lived on, wherever we lived is now some science building, there's no apartments there anymore. I think on Maryland and 57th, which is all University buildings now. I lived there for a year and I worked in Chicago for 6 months while—first I worked at, I worked at Center on Halsted, actually, for most of it, running their Spring Gala as a contract, independent contractor. An abysmal job. The guy I worked for then is now their executive director and he was not someone I had planned to ever work for again. It was good to, it was great, they paid 18 dollars an hour, it was *amazing*, I was paying \$300 a month in rent, so that was not terrible.

I was applying for jobs in, I was looking at New York and DC and San Francisco, again because I wanted to be somewhere urban and I can't drive and I wanted to be somewhere with Jews. I was looking at Boston, too, but then my aunt decided that, my aunt lived by herself in New York and had an apartment and she was like, 'You know, I've always wanted to buy a house, and I'm turning 50 and I don't know what I'm waiting for anymore,' so she was, like, 'Alright, I'm gonna go to the suburbs and buy a house.' But, we're New Yorkers, right? Somebody had to take her apartment. You can't just let the apartment go! So, I was like, 'I guess I'm moving to New York!' And I focused my job search on New York and I moved in spring of 2006, and I worked there, I worked in New York for a year, and then I did two years of grad school there. The whole time, I was dating Asher, who had left a month later and moved to here to go to MIT and so we dated long-distance for a while, and then I moved up here after grad school, so in '09. I've been in Boston ever since.

[00:50:34]

KR: What have you found to be different between the different cities, around queer life and stuff?

NS: You know it's funny, Chicago—Chicago, I, my gaydar is really messed up by the Midwest. There was a lot of, 'Is that a butch or just a Midwestern lady?' That happened. But I think there was a lot more mixed queer socializing, whereas in New York, it's very gender-segregated. It's hard to know what's about how old I was, you know, because New York was very different in high school than it was after college and in grad school. Boston is so neighborhood-y, it was hard to find queer stuff outside the queer neighborhoods, er—Chicago, not Boston. I was very comfortable being, I was out the whole time. I guess this is important, I was much more gender-non-conforming in high school and college than I am now. Like, I got misread in bathrooms regularly. I had like short hair and I didn't exclusively wear pants, but on a day-to-day basis, I wore pants and

sort of presented as a young queer boy. I was female-identified and I still identified as femme, but I had a thing where I didn't seem to get laid when I had long hair, so I'd give it some little while and have long hair and then get annoyed and cut it off and date a lot, and then be annoyed and let it grow it out and usually go through a break-up and cut it off again. I definitely got much more, so that's definitely a piece, my feelings of walking down the street as a queer person and being safe also tracks differently based on how I was presenting, right, like when I lived in Chicago, I got a lot less like straight-up gender-based sexual harassment, but a lot more queer harassment. But, I don't think it was about Chicago, I think it was about how I was presenting. It's just, like, that is a thing.

I mean, now I live in Jamaica Plain. This is like a little nest of queers here. Like, JP, it's like Northampton, it's ridiculous. I love it. You can't go to the Whole Foods in your pajamas because there's, like, cruising at the Whole Foods [laughs], you know? Ula Café, where, if it were a little less loud, you'd be doing all of your interviews at Ula Café, in the brewery, you can't go in there without seeing like 85% queers in Ula. So now I live in this complete bubble, and it's delicious, but it's like Boston. It's completely not representative of Boston, *per se*. When I lived in Somerville, right on the Cambridge border, there were a lot of same-sex couples and visibly LGBT people. Diana and I went to an all-women's gym and she felt pretty comfortable doing that as a pretty genderqueer-presenting person because they had a relatively expansive notion of what it meant to be a women's gym. Turns out that they're transphobic, sucks. So they're not quite as expansive as we were hoping they would be, and we don't go there anymore, but that's not why. It's because we moved here. It's hard to tell, right, like living here, there's been marriage for 10 years, so people are very blasé about that. Definitely the synagogue—I worked at a synagogue for two years and every grade had at least one kid with same-sex parents in it and I was working in high school, right, so that means the same-sex couples here, and the queer single people, for that matter, had been having kids for quite a while and not having a super-hard time about it.

Again, it's like 10 years later than when I was in Chicago, so it's hard to make comparisons between the cities. Chicago had more bars than Boston does. Chicago's also bigger than Boston, you know? It's just a different thing. Boston, people *really* stay in their neighborhoods. It's really hard to get people to go somewhere else. My queer scene in Boston is not super tied to commercial establishments very much. Like, dinner parties, cocktail parties at people's houses, brunch, and things like that. With the exception of like Mad Femme Pride and a couple of local groups. There's also not a lot of exciting queer grassroots organizing happening here that I would want to tap into. It's a sort of complacent kind of place about that stuff.

Whereas, in New York, there's a lot of amazing radical activist stuff going on, especially around Stop and Frisk. I'm in New York every month, so that's a better comparison for me to make. I think there are parts of New York that are like JP in their sort of little bubbleness, especially in Brooklyn, I think it's much more class-stratified, because it's so expensive. Boston's pretty racially segregated, like New York and Chicago. The exact patterns are different. Chicago, I think, is the most self-aware about their racial politics. Like, New York and Boston like to think that they don't have racial politics problems, in

a way that Chicago doesn't think that about itself. This is a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Used to be majority people of color and is now about 50-50. These are things that are true here, true in New York, and definitely has like disproportionate effects on queer people. In both cities, the queer scenes that I know are not exclusively white, but majority white. There's also a lot that I don't know.

[00:56:13]

KR: What about different jobs you had after graduating?

NS: What about them? Just what did I do?

KR: Yeah, what did you do, how did it intersect with queer things, I mean you do like a lot of queer fundraising since...

NS: Yeah, I've been professionally queer, professionally Jewish, ever since getting those two degrees, except for my brief stint in graduate school. I left Chicago and I had this job working, like running this, I had a Metcalf at an LGBT organization, which was great, it was like, 'Oh, this is what I want to do.' That sort of big-picture, organizational management stuff, and the fundraising stuff was interesting. So, I got this job doing event-planning for Center on Halsted, which was, I knew it would end in April, I got it in December, once the event was over, I was done. Which was great, because I was applying to jobs sort of on the spring cycle.

I got a job fundraising at an organization that at the time was called Jewish Funds for Justice, is now called Bend the Arc, and it's a social justice organization of sorts. They do a lot of programs. I don't even know what they do now, it's a little unclear to me. They started a (c)(4) branch, too, who knows. I worked there from '06 to '07. There were a lot of LGBT people on staff, it was a very, somewhere in between tolerant and accepting. Having a same-sex relationship was a complete non-issue, like, my partner being trans was a little bit, probably a pro in my job application, because it made me sort of interesting and cutting-edge in a way that's kind of gross. Right, so there was a lot of tokenizing around that. I mean, he didn't interact with them very much. At one point, we had a temp whose name was Kat and who was very gender-ambiguous and who worked like all over the organization. There were 40 employees and this temp worked all over the organization, and I didn't interact with him almost at all, and people kept coming to me and asking, like, 'Is Kat a guy or a girl?' and, like, you should probably ask Kat. And we went through this for weeks, it was like 3 weeks before I finally was like, this is so stupid, and Kat was working that day for my boss, and so I had an excuse to interact and like 3 minutes later, I was like, 'Hey, what pronouns do you use?' And he said he, and that was the end of it! But, like, it's interesting, this very progressive organization, it thinks of itself as super-radical and cutting-edge, and like no one on staff can even—I was like, 'Here's what you say. You say, 'What pronouns do you use?'' and they like couldn't do it. They were like, 'No, you have to do it.' Like, 'Why do I have to do it? I know how to do this. You should do it. Come on.' What does it mean to think of yourself as an ally? Many people on staff had like all gay friends, but most of them were, there were two femmes in

my department. Our department was great, but then people left, and I was one of them. I left pretty quickly after a year. I had three bosses over the course of a year. The second one that I had was a gay man, and he now lives here, and I see him regularly. He runs a Jewish social justice organization here now. Definitely the queers of us who were on staff were closer than other people. Like, those were most of my—well, mostly, I had a couple of straight friends there, but not mostly.

So, I left that after almost exactly a year. I took a couple months off and went to grad school at Columbia for American Studies. Which, basically, I was hoping to get into journalism, and I wanted to have a more robust background in sort of American history and political science, because I was interested in writing about queer politics in the US, and having done so much Jewish Studies, I didn't take as much history or poli sci or any of that. I did that, I took a lot of gender studies classes at Columbia, when I could. It turned out to be much more difficult than I thought, because being in a terminal masters program is like a tricky situation. There's nobody advocating for you on the department level, because there is no department. And then undergrads get priority in all the classes, and especially with Barnard, you couldn't get into any. All the good classes were at Barnard and you couldn't get into any of them. Unbeknownst to me and, I'd been looking at Columbia and NYU, and NYU had many fewer classes in Gender Studies and I was sort of like, 'OK, I'll go to Columbia,' but it actually turned out that, on balance, there were many more queer studies classes at NYU. At Columbia, the ones I could get into, it was all like feminism, which is great, I love feminism, but that's not what I was going for. So, there'd be like 2 or 3 queer classes a semester and I couldn't get into any of them. That was an exercise in frustration. I took some really great classes that I, like, queered up. I took a class that was sort of about historiography of untold stories, and I got to write some great papers on passing and the resources I had were mostly around racial passing, but between that and the Lesbian Herstory Archives, I was able to make into what I wanted. I ended up writing my thesis about the consequences of passing as it relates to gender and specifically around trans issues, like, passing as something you *are*, and what does it mean to use the word passing, like in a context where it's historically been around deception for people who are often accused of being deceptive. That kind of stuff. I had great faculty resources there, but I wasn't interested in, I don't even know what the queer stuff was on Columbia campus. I didn't live up there, I went to class, I went to the library and came home. I lived in the East Village, which is much queerer than Columbia. I had a pre-existing network of friends, mostly not from college, actually very few of my friends from college who were in New York were queer. High school friends and friends of friends that I made. Then I moved here, and definitely when I moved here, a lot of my queer friends were from college. Jose was here, Dustin Guzior who's now in New York was here, Asher was here, Diana was here, Kyla and Jen were here, but I haven't seen them, like, we're not friends. They also were here. [Redacted] is here, though I don't know how he was identifying then, or how he identifies now exactly. Nassira eventually came. There was just a bunch more of U of C scene here.

The job I got here—Oh, I interned at The Nation magazine, which is an amazing place to work, and not specifically queer, but I got all the queer beat stuff because I was like the queer intern, and that was really fun. I got to fact-check the piece on an interview with

Rachel Maddow, which is like, be still my beating heart. That was a great assignment. I never got to meet her, but it was ok. Someday.

That was my job in between grad school years and then I came up here and I worked at Boston Review magazine for a while and sort of got into various queer social scenes here. A lot of my friends were involved with Keshet, which is a nationwide LGBT Jewish group but their offices are like down the street. I met a whole bunch of different networks of people here. We had a floating butch-femme cocktail party group for a while, which was wonderful, and then disintegrated when some people had health issues. I worked at the magazine for a while, I had a temporary job doing development again for one of my former bosses when her assistant went on maternity leave.

Then, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do, and really sort of grappling with my own class identity. I'd inherited a bunch of money and was trying to figure out what that meant for my life and for my career and what I wanted to do about it and how was it gonna affect my ability to participate in social justice movements, and like, what it mean to be someone—like, I'd always had class privilege, but I'd never had access to money to go with it, and now I have both, and what does it mean to support organizations? It was all kind of too much. So I was just like, 'Alright, I'm just gonna work for a synagogue and run their education program.' I got recruited by my synagogue to do that and I was like, 'Great, I'll just do this while I try to figure out what it is that I want to do.' And by the end of it, I was like, 'Well, what I really care about is queer people, and specifically poor queer people and queer people of color and trying to figure out how do we build the power and capacity and resources in those communities.'

I knew about Astraea, I'd been giving to Astraea at whatever level I could for a while and had sort of penetrated up to being a major donor. A friend of mine who I'd met in college, he didn't go to the U of C, but he dated Jen Slotterback [Interview #10], who was Diana's roommate and, you know, it's a small world of queers, and he was working there in the development department, so he and I had a conversation in which I realized he was gonna leave his job and I was like, 'Well, wait a minute, I want your job. I wanted your job anyway and now you're leaving? Now, I really want your job.' So, five weeks later, I was signing a contract. I really am not one of those people who is like, 'Well, you put it out into the universe and it happens,' but I put it out into the universe and it happened. I was in the middle of crafting this plan of how can I get Astraea to hire me, like 5 years from now, and it happened 5 weeks later. So, now I'm queer all the time, you know, like, I work for Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, and my job is to talk to LGBTQ and allied people who talk about social justice and are trying to figure out how to resource our movements. Or LGBTQ and allied people who aren't thinking about that and should be! I spent a lot of time having coffee with older white wealthy lesbians who have been funding social justice work for 20, 30 years and they have the most amazing stories. It's so incredible. So, I do one-to-ones a lot and I get to hear crazy stories and amazing, beautiful things and hard things, and then I also get to hear from our grantee partners. Like Astraea funds queer rights and artists all over the world. We're in like 81 countries and 43 states, and so we're hearing from the people working to close the lesbian torture clinics in Peru, and the people who are working to make sure that South Africa, which

has its LGBT rights in the constitution actually investigates rapes of lesbians, which is a huge problem. They're happening a lot and it's called corrective rape, and the family is ok with it, and even making the introduction and the state is looking the other way, and this intersection of legal rights and lived experience is something I'm interested in, and that's my job now. I get to talk about this stuff all day long. Well, that and I spend a lot of time playing with Excel [laughs] and databases. I feel really lucky and it's great, I get to meet really cool people. I work from home most of the time. My coworkers are like 17 brilliant, hilarious queers, most of whom live in New York, because the office is in New York and I like telecommute. I'm there once a month, and then I have my life here. It's great.

[01:08:07]

KR: Looking back at your time at the University, do you feel like your perceptions of anything has changed, of your experiences, of things going on there now that you've been away?

NS: I had a great experience at the University of Chicago. I have definitely things about my particular experience that I would do differently. I think, for all that I went with this love of intellectual curiosity and that was what I was going for, I think I actually played it safe in terms of the classes that I took. I took classes that I knew I would like and knew I could do well in. I would do that differently now. I could have taken linguistics, I could have taken chemistry, there are a lot of things I could have taken that I'm sort of vaguely interested in and was afraid to fail. I don't think that the University had anything to do with it. I think it's my own—if I could do it again, that's something I would do differently.

I think the University at that point, I don't know if it's different now, barely scratched the surface in terms of tapping the resources of Chicago as a city and integrating student experience with the experience of living in the city. We got a lot of sort of overblown messages around street safety that were basically just racist. That, as someone who's been navigating public transit for 15 years already I felt pretty comfortable ignoring, but I think especially being a young queer person, I felt like I really needed to access the rest of the city. And there were ways in which the University did not facilitate that. Of course, also at the time we had a bus that went directly from campus to Belmont/Halsted. So, there were ways in which it really facilitated it, too. Right, like, thank you that bus that doesn't exist anymore, the 173. It was funny, there were ways in which it really facilitated and ways in which it didn't.

There were not a lot of visible queer—like when you looked at the materials, they did not make a particular—they were clearly making an effort to put racial diversity. I think the marketing materials for the University are much more diverse than the actual University, and they don't do something similar around gender and sexuality. I don't know that they need to, but I wonder about that. I remember that feeling of, like, OK, I'm here, I'm 90% sold, but if there aren't queers, I'm going home. I'm going to Vassar. Which is actually funny, thinking about the history of the University and the kinds of really groundbreaking research around human sexuality that have come by like the Center for Gender Studies, one of the first gender studies centers in the country. There was no women's studies

center. The kind of research that came out and the kinds of people who have worked at the University, like Lauren Berlant, and I don't think they do the kind of proactive job they could about like marketing that expertise, that that is something that the University should actually take more credit for, that this is something they do pretty well. They would do it better if they talked about it more.

They also lose—because they don't see it as an advantage, they lose some of their brilliant queer scholars and brilliant feminist scholars. They lost Jean Comaroff, they lost George Chauncey. They should be kicking themselves in the ass for not giving tenure to Melissa Harris-Lacewell, who's now Melissa Harris-Perry at Tulane on MSNBC and ruling the world, and she was there when I was there and I remember she was on the "What is Feminism?" panel during her three-year review and she'd just gotten divorced and she had a toddler and they just completely failed on gender issues. The game around tenure and women, it's not new, but here is this brilliant young black feminist rockstar political scientist, why are you not doing everything in your power to keep her? A University that is already pretty abysmal at retaining faculty of color, just not thinking it through. I think that there are sort of structural pieces around that I look back on now like, 'What were you doing? How could you have let her go? She clearly wanted to stay.' There's definitely a piece around recruiting feminist and queer faculty and then like promoting them and giving them the resources to do their work well. I don't know if they do that to the extent that they could.

What they think are gonna be selling points is not necessarily what young queer people are looking for in a University. I don't know what they're doing around gender-neutral housing, but whatever they're doing, they're not publicizing it. I don't know what you can get covered under the health insurance plan, they don't talk about it. There was some LGBTQ student fair and they are actually recruiting and things and they are doing LGBT alumni stuff that Diana was very involved with for a while and I showed up at some stuff, too. When I went for a reunion one year and there was a big party and they had one gender studies event and they had this big queer party at an apartment on the lake, which was, boy, you should find a way to go to that, that thing is amazing. It's like this amazing view and the apartment has some pretty incredible history with the University. You probably know all about it if you're doing this project. It was like Howard Brown's apartment, not that Howard Brown. There was a faculty member named Howard Brown, like now it's some other queer alumni's apartment. It's this great story.

I don't know what they could do specifically differently because I'm not enough to touch with what they're doing now. But I think there is something about who you promote as the face of the University, what you're doing on a sort of brand-building level. I also had such a bad experience with housing in terms of the stuff—I mean, I had no experience of being much queer-harassed in my pre-college experience and I didn't happen a ton in housing, but there were a couple of incidents and I had a particularly useless RH, which is evidenced by the fact that there was a meth scandal the next year, right? They sort of failed there for me, but I don't have a sense of how universal that was. I think the mentoring program is brilliant and they should resource it to the hilt. I know that when I was there, the LGBT student groups across the divisions didn't talk as much as they

should have. I think that that's true of almost every university, so I can't fault the University too much for that.

[01:15:32]

KR: What do you think has changed at all since you've been there that you know about?

NS: At Chicago? I know nothing about what's changed there. I have not, I don't know people who are students there now, like really, so I don't have a good sense for that.

KR: What about generally, just like in the world at large?

NS: In the world at—like, boy. You're asking someone who works in queer rights, right? Like, I think that there are a lot of legal advances happening, there's also a lot of backlash happening to those legal advances, and I think a lot of really exciting stuff is happening on local levels. Often in communities of color that are making really important advances on changing people's lived experiences for whom the existence of equal marriage is not going to make or break, that's not the thing that keeps them up at night. Certainly for many people, that's an important change. The change on the HIV ban, that you can now immigrate to the US if you're HIV-positive, which you didn't used to be able to do, is a huge thing. There have been some changes in how we do asylum work around LGBT issues on a national scale.

I think the internet, the fact that everyone who's going to college now who's queer has had internet access for the most part and, if they knew what to Google, they could find all sorts of things, and that was true for me, but I was right at the beginning of that. I went to college with people who didn't have internet access in high school. By the time you got to my age always had it at some times. The fact that I came out in the 8th grade and I was reading bisexual zines in 8th grade is a really different people than people had before me. Now it's really different. I think a lot of things have changed in some communities, and not that much in other communities.

I think there's a lot of changes happening in press coverage, and I think it's interesting to think about being a queer kid now and having a diverse array of out celebrities. We had some, but they all kinda looked the same and they mostly came out after I came out. I came out the year that Ellen Degeneres came out. And then were all these, they started to happen more and more. I remember on the Real World, when that happened, it was a big big deal, and today Robin Roberts came out and everyone's like, 'Well of course Robin Roberts came out.' Think about in '96 if a black woman who's the host of Good Morning America had come out, it would be very different. It would not have been, 'Oh yeah, of course.' When k.d. lang came out, people were surprised. Come on, no one was surprised, but like some people were super surprised. I think that the existence of that as a real possibility in people's minds is something that's changed. Very few people have never heard of gay people anymore, and that I think is one of the biggest shifts. What that means in people's lives? In some cases, it puts people in more danger, right, because you can't

fly under the radar, especially if you're gender-non-conforming, there's no, 'oh, that's just how he is.' I mean, not *no*, but there's less of that than there used to be in many places.

[01:19:26]

End of Interview