

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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #88
ULDALL, IVAN NOAH (1957-) MDiv 1983**

At U of C: 1980-1983

Interviewed: October 29, 2014

Interviewer: Lauren Stokes

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

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Phone interview with Ivan Noah Uldall, October 29, 2014.

[00:00]

LS: OK. So we like to start these interviews actually by asking how you got to the University of Chicago.

NU: Oh gosh. [Laughter] My undergraduate studies were in English and Religious Studies, so one factor was that the Divinity School at the University of Chicago had a degree program in Religion as Literature. So that was one factor. Another was simply that it was in Chicago, so I was aiming to get out of small-town Midwest and into a big city, and the last was that I had actually tried to return to school in the UK, I had been accepted to read law at Oxford, and unfortunately Margaret Thatcher's policies regarding tuition kicked in right about that time and that made that route impossible. So rather than reading law and trying to get back to the UK I decided to pursue an academic degree in the US.

LS: Were you from the UK originally?

NU: No, I spent a year studying at Oxford as part of my undergraduate degree.

LS: And where did you go for undergrad?

NU: Undergrad was at William Jewell College, which was a small American and Southern Baptist institution outside of Kansas City. It's in a small town called Liberty, Missouri.

LS: OK. So is it common for people in your family to get advanced degrees or even college degrees or were you one of the first ones?

NU: My generation was the first to get them. So I was not really among the first because I have quite a few older brothers and sisters and older cousins, but certainly the generation before mine, there were no advanced degrees, no college degrees, frankly.

- LS: So when you got to the University of Chicago, what did you expect, and were your expectations met at the Div School?
- NU: Very much. My expectations were high in terms of academic rigor and the types of people I would encounter, and they were very much met on that front. I think I may have expected a better social environment, shall we call it. That was a bit grim, but we did what we could to make it better, so.
- LS: Can you speak a little bit more about the social environment at Chicago?
- NU: I certainly wasn't from a background where you would say I went to a party school [LS: OK], however the social aspects of the environment were, I thought, almost non-existent at the UofC. I mean it's the usual stereotype of people spending their Friday and Saturday nights in Regenstein Library, I found that to be too true. Whereas, you know, I had to put in my time in the library, but at the same time, come Friday or Saturday night I like to go out and do something different, so.
- LS: And then you mentioned that you were able to do some things to counteract this stereotype. Can you talk a little bit about that?
- NU: For one of my years at the Div School I was the President of the Divinity School Association. [LS: OK.] So in that capacity I was able to work with a small number of other students who were interested in doing these things, to throw parties, get people out of the library, you know, quite frankly get them drunk, and get them to just socialize a little bit more other than the Div School Wednesday luncheon, so there was a bit of that. I also DJed a couple of parties and other events for the gay student group, so that was also another way of trying to get people to do things other than academic work.
- [5:05]
- LS: What was the gay student group called at that time? Do you remember? [NU: I'm sorry, what?] What was the gay student group called at that time?
- NU: The thing is, I cannot for the life of me remember. All I can recall is that they had a small office on the top floor of Ida Noyes Hall.
- LS: OK. And how did you get involved with them?
- NU: I didn't get terribly involved with them as a group, it was mostly undergrads, but whenever there were things to do I would get involved. A lot of gay social life when I was at the UofC revolved around Howard Brown and Roger Weiss and the parties that they would hold periodically through the year.
- LS: Sure, sure. Yeah, I've heard a lot about those parties in the course of these interviews. How did you kind of...

NU: I was going to tell you, I'm sure you've heard about those as well.

LS: Yeah. How did you find out about them?

NU: Oh, word of mouth. I venture to guess it might have been through—I'm blanking out on his surname now, a fellow from the music school named Eric who was partners at the time with a friend of mine named Jacques Vandervan. Jacques was not a UofC student, but Eric was, and obviously Eric had the connection through the music department. But they were widely known. If you were gay or known to be gay and knew other gay people in the University or in the College you would get dragged along and invited, so.

LS: Yeah, so the parties, was it mostly gay men, do you remember any women there, were people kind of experimenting with gender presentation at all at them?

NU: I don't necessarily recall any gay women or lesbians. I would be surprised if there weren't, but as is often the case with organized groups or whatever it might be, the representation of women would be low. I've never quite figured that one out, but it was definitely predominantly men. In terms of messing with gender roles, you know, apart from Halloween... My own take on drag is, it might be an expression of gender identity, it might just be messing with someone and wearing a costume. I frankly think of it almost like being a gay Shriner instead—of being a clown. [LS: OK.] And I realize for some people that's not what it is, so don't misunderstand me, but certainly for me and for many of the people I knew at the time it was that.

LS: So were there a lot of people who would dress up, like a lot of gay men who would dress up in drag at these parties?

NU: For Halloween.

LS: OK, just for Halloween, got it.

NU: Yeah, not as a matter of course at any of the other parties, at least not that I recall.

LS: Cool. Let's see, what else do I want to ask. I'm interested in that you had said that your previous, your undergraduate institution was a Southern Baptist institution in Missouri, were you out there, was it a different—how was it a different experience being gay in Liberty, Missouri versus in Chicago?

[09:30]

NU: [Laughter] Completely different. I'll back up a little bit and clarify. The College itself is associated or affiliated with both Southern Baptist and American Baptist Conventions, and given that my background is religion I'm going to be pedantic about these things. So American Baptists are typically based in the Northeast United States and much more socially liberal, they certainly are not teetotalers, whereas Southern Baptists, obviously more based in the South of the US, much more socially conservative. The other point I'll

make is that the College itself is privately chartered, whereas most Baptist colleges will be owned outright by the state convention for that denomination and so they can literally pull the strings on everything and anything that goes on, whereas being privately chartered, Jewell had a lot more latitude in what they could do.

So that said, it was still small town Missouri, I was not out, in fact I think I told one person at college that I was dealing with my own sexual identity and thought that I was gay and his response was “Oh God, just don’t do anything about it, let’s pray.” So it was not a conducive environment and bear in mind as well, that college experience was from 1975 through ’78. [NU coughs] Excuse me. So it was quite a long time ago as well. Dealing with my own sexual identity, a lot of that began to occur my final year of college, which was ’78 to ’79, which I spent at Regents Park College, which is the British Baptist permanent private hall at Oxford University. So there’s lots of factors to that, let’s call it. One is obviously, you know, when you’re five thousand miles away from anyone you know, it’s much easier to get free, to explore or deal with these things.

Another factor was just that there was a Gay Society at Oxford which I had access to, did go to some of the meetings, found it tedious, to be blunt, and just odd, and it was very small even at that time, while it existed, you’d go to a Gay Soc meeting and there’d be twelve people there, so it wasn’t a riotous kind of thing. But basically got my own head around it mostly during that year and began to come out to people when I returned to the US in late 1979.

In terms of coming up to Chicago, then, I had a year off between undergraduate and graduate school, lived at home, whatever, but did begin the process of coming out to friends and family. Most of that went relatively badly. I think the biggest consideration, apart from the fact that most of my friends and family are Southern Baptist, was that there was a sense of betrayal and a sense of how could you have lied to me for all these years and not been honest with me. And clearly that attitude betrays an incredible naïveté about what it would have meant to come out earlier and in that environment. But what that did was kind of set in my mind that from day one when I moved to Chicago and went up to the University of Chicago, I would be out at the earliest possible convenience so I wouldn’t necessarily meet somebody and shake your hand and say “Hi, I’m gay,” but at the first opportunity to bring it up in a conversation, or if someone says “Are you married?” I’d say “No, I’m actually gay.” Just to get it out. Does that make sense?

LS: That does make sense. Yes. I have a good friend, and when she came out as a lesbian, she would always joke that she would order in a restaurant, and she would say “I’ll have the salad as a lesbian,” so it’s a similar kind of thought. [Laughter] So...

NU: Actually that’s... [LS: Sorry?] Oh, I was going to come back to a question you asked about specifically the Howard and Roger parties and whether there were women. [LS: Sure.] Ironically when I was the president of the Divinity School Association, the vice-president of the Divinity School Association was a lesbian. [LS: OK.] And I did try very hard at times to get her to be more active and out in kind of the gay circles at the

University, and she just said “No, I don’t want to do it,” and very much gave primacy to her issues as a woman as opposed to as a lesbian, if that makes sense.

LS: It does, yeah. So you were talking about your strategy of coming out pretty early with people when you came to the Divinity School. How did that work out as a strategy?

NS: Absolutely fine. I never had a bad or negative reaction from anyone. [LS: Great.] And more often than not had a very positive response. Obviously some more than others. I think it startles people sometimes. [Laughter] But what I’ve found, because I still do that, even in work situations now, I find if you give people the opportunity to respond positively they do.

LS: So it doesn’t sound like being gay caused problems for you at the University, it sounds like you had pretty positive experiences with people when you came out to them, so that’s good.

NU: Yeah, absolutely.

LS: And then did you have other gay friends while at the University? Yes, I guess through the parties, or otherwise, like were your social circles...

NU: Yeah, I mean it wasn’t just, not just through parties and things, but I had a fairly good social life, considering that it was the UofC, I was clearly a bit in the middle of things at the Divinity School and fairly well-known there, and had some friends, very good friends in the student group there. There were gay friends.

I was also involved in a—this is going to be very hard to describe, and odd, but there’s a woman, and I’m not—God, what was her name, Joan something, she was a librarian in Regenstein. [LS: OK.] Her husband was a Lutheran minister. They were, for lack of a better term, pretty estranged, even though they lived in the same house. And Joan collected interesting students and would have everyone over to her house once a week for dinner. So there was this very odd, eclectic group of students, mostly male, though not all, about half gay, not all, who would get together at Joan’s house for dinner once a week. And so that little gaggle of people, and I would say there typically would be ten or twelve people for dinner once a week, formed a bit of a social circle through this route, and how I met Joan, again it’s back through the connection of a fellow named Jacques Vanderven, who I mentioned earlier, although how Jacques knew Joan I have no idea.

[19:45]

LS: OK, sure. Let’s see, there was something I wanted to pick up on, but what was it? Oh, just in terms of the Divinity School, what were you studying while you were there, like what did your studies focus on?

NU: The Master’s program is general [LS: OK], and heavily slanted towards methodology. There’s not a whole lot of opportunity to focus. I did apply for, and was accepted in the

PhD program, I did about half of the coursework for the PhD before I left, and... but that, I had proposed to study medieval mystical literature and how it intersects with death and sex.

LS: OK, interesting. So had you taken classes about, like, death and sex and medieval mystics at the Divinity School, or were there classes that kind of focused on sex and gender type issues, or no?

NU: There were theology courses that focused on gender, and I did audit specifically feminist theology, and I did audit some of those. My advisor was a fellow named Bernard McGinn and Bernie was an expert on, amongst other things, Meister Eckhart, the Rhineland mystic, but he was generally very interested in mystical literature, so there were lots of courses dealing with mysticism, and I would take those, but not classes so much as... it'll come to me, sorry I occasionally blank out on things like that, it was more of a forum than a lecture-type class, but in any event, the notion of trying to put that together with eroticism and death came off the heels of reading a book called *Sex and Death* by a French philosopher named Georges Bataille, so, if you think about it there's even metaphorically connections of things like, you know, referring to orgasm as 'the little death' or you know, self-violation is a part of many, if not most, mystical traditions. So there's certainly an interesting intersection there to explore. And that's as far as it got, to be honest, I didn't get to the point of writing a thesis much less, even completing the PhD coursework.

[23:00]

LS: Great. On the topic of sex [laughing], can I ask, did you have romantic relationships while you were at the University, and if so, where did you meet partners?

NU: I've always been fairly conservative sexually, at least in terms of number of partners. I had one partner for a period of about six months at the UofC, he was someone from the Divinity School. We were friends. He purported to be straight when we first met, and you know, at a point it became clear that was not the case. But it was all very odd and twisted, to be honest. Before sort of dealing with the fact that he had feelings about me, Bob took to doing things like lighting my cigarettes for me and calling me Darling in front of our mutual straight friends in the Div School, so it was odd on that front. I later found out that he had had other relationships with guys before at college, having met someone that he'd had a relationship with in his Catholic college in Indiana.

Anyway, long story short, at a point I moved into a shared house with Bob and it was one of the houses that the Unitarian Church houses students in Hyde Park, and it went from me being a housemate of Bob's and living in the room across the hall from him to pretty much living together for six months, and at the end of it he decided he'd quit Divinity School rather abruptly and just fled, and I had about a week to deal with the fact that the guy I'd been seeing and living with for six months was leaving, which was fairly difficult, pardon me, to deal with, so... and other than that, you know, I'd date, you

know, have the odd fling with someone, whatever, but nothing that approached seriousness other than Bob.

LS: Did you live in Hyde Park the whole time you were here?

NU: When I was in University, yes. I started out in Broadview Hall [LS: OK], which I hated. That lasted probably no more than three months and then I moved into the Unitarian House with Bob, and from there wound up living most of my time when I was in Hyde Park at Brent House.

LS: Oh at Brent House, OK...

NU: One of my jobs while I was in University was to be the house manager at Brent House. [LS: OK.] It was a period of time before, I know they've got a chaplain now, but when I moved into the house there was no chaplain, and pretty much the house and the program for students through the Episcopal Church was in disarray, and it was during the time that I was there that they did finally hire a chaplain.

LS: Was that Sam Portaro, or?

NU: Yeah, Sam's a good friend of mine.

LS: Yeah, we did an interview with him as well [Interview #65], and it sounds like Brent House was a really interesting, that he made Brent House into a really interesting space while he was there.

NU: Yep.

LS: OK, so Brent House... so did a lot of people live in Brent House while you were there?

NU: No, not really, at the most, before Sam showed up, four of us.

LS: OK. I don't know that much about this, but... is it mostly Div School people who end up living in places like the Unitarian House and Brent House, like theological seminary types, or is it just anybody who feels a connection to that space?

NU: In the case of the Unitarian-owned houses it was mixed, some of them were seminarians for the Unitarian Church, others like me were just kind of infill, needed a place to stay, they had a room, knew some of the other people living there, moved in.

In the case of Brent House, I don't know how they manage it now. When I first moved in, a friend of mine had managed to get a place in one of the rooms. The previous tenants had all been Business School students, and they, I won't say they trashed it, but they didn't take any care of the house. [LS: Sure.] So it was a mess, it was pathetic, and when I moved in I approached the head of the Episcopal Church Council, who was a Dean at the Business School, and said, you know, "I know you don't have a lot of money, but can

I at least get a budget for cleaning supplies,” you know, cause I couldn’t live in it the way it was, and it’s a beautiful house, and so I cleaned it up to the point that when they, the folks from the Episcopal Church Council showed up the next week for their Sunday dinner, which they threw for students even when there was not a chaplain, they were all kind of agog that the floor had been not only scrubbed and cleaned but waxed. [Laughter] That would kind of wind up with me being the house manager, so.

LS: So you mentioned that you were... [NU: And...] Oh sure, go ahead.

NU: No, I’m sorry, I was just going to say, when I did live at Brent House, three of the four students were in Div School [LS: OK], though only one was what I would call religious, he was an ordained Episcopal priest but studying religion and psychology at the Div School. The other two of us counted ourselves as atheists or agnostics even though we were studying at the Div School, and then the fourth guy was an Indian Business School student.

[30:30]

LS: So you mentioned that—you just actually said that you counted yourself as an atheist or an agnostic. Had that been something that had happened at some point during your education, or?

NU: Growing up I was quite religious. [LS: OK.] In fact at a point was a licensed Baptist preacher, which is kind of a step below ordination but still, you know, wind up in the pulpit with preaching, and I would characterize a lot of my education as a process of detaching from both my religious upbringing and my upbringing generally in small town Middle America. And I probably... on returning from the UK to the United States in 1979, I relinquished my license to preach, resigned from my parents’ church, began to explore possibly becoming an Episcopalian, which ultimately I did, but at this remove I kind of jokingly think of that as a pleasant cocktail party on the way to atheism. So I probably, it’s only in the past five years have I went from typically saying I’m agnostic to saying I’m actually atheist, so that’s an evolution that’s continued over the years.

LS: You said you resigned from your parents’ church basically upon coming back from the UK to the US. Were your relationships with your family strained after that? [NU laughs, LS laughs] Well, yeah, it’s a very personal question, sorry, but...

NU: It requires me to explain a little bit of my family to you.

LS: Sure, and if you don’t want to that’s fine.

NU: No, I don’t mind at all, it’s just that my answers won’t make a whole lot of sense if I don’t do that. [LS: Fair enough.] My mother is from the South, she was born in Mississippi, grew up for part of the time in Detroit, was part of that migration out of the South to Detroit in the 20s and early 30s. Lived most of her adult life before my father in Tennessee. My mother was also not at all educated, she only completed school through

the fifth grade. She married at 15, had three children, and was almost immediately after that a war widow in World War Two. So she had a pretty tough life in that regard. After the war, she met my father, my father was Danish, he came to the United States after the war to ostensibly study English, but it was one of the postwar State Department programs to bring young Europeans to the United States and show them what a good place it was and what, you know, democracy and capitalism could do for you. My dad was about four years younger than my mother as well. So they met, my mother was in St. Louis traveling with her sister, who was a Ladies' Garment Workers' union official. My dad was at Washington University studying English. Long story short, they met, they married, my mom had three more kids with my dad, so she had a total of six children. So my dad ultimately did become a Baptist, but took Baptist doctrine, call it, at face value. So what Baptists technically say is, every believer should read the Bible and make up their own mind. So my dad would read the Bible and made up his own mind, not realizing that that's not really what you were supposed to do, you were supposed to conform and agree with everyone else in the Church. So he would constantly get into hot water for saying things like "Oh, the Bible doesn't say anything against drinking."

And so that's... whereas my mother obviously, you know, being a born-and-bred Southern Baptist, in fact more, because her background was what's called Independent Fundamental Baptist, which means that being Southern Baptist is a step out into the big wide world, was quite different, so added to that mix that my dad's three kids were all precociously bright, so I'm the middle of those three children, my younger sister is also gay, my older brother is straight, and so when I came back from the UK I may as well have landed from another planet. I changed my attitudes towards all sorts of things, I changed my beliefs about all sorts of things. This was when punk was active in the UK, or late New Wave, and not at all popular in the States, particularly not in rural Missouri, so I was listening to strange music, dressing strangely, and so I came out to my younger sister, she didn't have a problem with it, she was struggling with her own sexuality, although did not admit that to me for many years after, and I think my mother more concluded that, in fact more or less said to me once that education has taken my children away from me. So she identified the culprit, if you will, in her children growing away from her as being the fact that they were educated, went to college, went to good colleges. That kind of thing.

And it was actually during my first year at the University of Chicago that I came out to my parents, and I had come out to more or less everybody but them by that time, did that by letter, probably for no other reason so that I could control the message and control the communication without getting dragged into an argument, and they struggled very much with it for many years. It was a hard thing for them to come to grips with. More so for my mother. Typically I would explain it by saying, for her to hear from me that I'm gay, and I no longer go to Church, etcetera, her conclusion from that would be, I'm going to be separated from my favorite child for eternity, because she's going to go to heaven, and I'm going to go to hell. So for her to say that she found that hard to accept is understandable. My dad struggled with it as well, but ultimately, as I described earlier, he came to his own conclusion, which was that he had three children, ultimately he found out that two of them were gay. We happened to probably be the two that he liked best and

that he respected most, and he basically at a point said “If anyone has anything bad to say about my children, they’re not my friend.” So he was extremely supportive in a way that you would not expect someone of his generation or from his social background to be.

It’s probably worth noting that my mother was a housewife for her entire life, she didn’t really work outside the home, my dad had trained in Denmark to be a sheet metal worker and plumber, those are the same profession in Denmark. When he came to the States he worked in plumbing, basically doing large construction jobs, worked his way up to be foreman of large construction jobs and ultimately owned his own construction company, initially with a partner and then subsequently on his own. So he worked very much in the building trades.

[40:55]

LS: What town did you grow up in?

NU: I was born in St. Louis [LS: OK], not in a very nice area. It was at the time unincorporated, which basically meant there was no government, no city services. What little services we got were from the county. It was a very poor area, when... not far, frankly, from Ferguson [LS: Sure], where riots have recently been happening. In fact people in Ferguson would go to the high school where I would have ultimately gone to had we remained in St. Louis, and around, gosh, ’68, my family moved out of St. Louis to a small town west of St. Louis called St. Peters, which now is a big sprawling suburb, but when we moved there the population was about three thousand, and we lived a mile outside of town. [LS: OK] So we lived in a small subdivision, but surrounded by cornfields.

LS: Thank you. Let me go back for a second to your time in the UK, your first time in the UK, I gather that you’re back there now [NU: Yeah], and you said that people were into punk, and late New Wave, and so you came back kind of dressing different and maybe with different kind of concerns. During that period, both when you were in the UK and then when you were getting your MDiv, what do you recall being kind of both cultural and then political issues that people were concerned with or subcultures that were important? Were there also late New Wavers in Hyde Park, or?

NU: No. For me, when I was in the UK, I ran with a little group of friends, all of whom were straight, mix of men and women, nothing too out of the ordinary about any of that. I did get into sort of the music that was popular and current here at the time, and for British Baptists dancing is not taboo, so we would have dances in college, and equally drinking is not taboo, so I started to drink beer when I was here, so all of those things...

LS: So those things were possible ‘cause you were still in a Baptist environment, but British Baptism is different from Southern Baptists.

NU: Yes, very different. [LS: OK, that makes sense.] So when I went home again, if you lived in St. Peters Missouri you wore t-shirts and jeans, I was wearing skinny ties and white

shirts with narrow collars and had my hair cut like Ric Ocasek in the Cars. [LS: OK.] It was just, you know, not done. [NU laughs] But it's what I chose to do. And part of it was a way to—I've often thought about that kind of personal presentation as being a bit of a two fingers up, which is what they'd say here, or kind of a fuck you to the world, to say "Yeah I'm different, fuck you," and I think it was that a bit for me.

And I did continue to, for lack of a better term, follow fashion until I was probably in my mid-30s, a bit arty-farty. I've always taken a lot of interest in art and aesthetics and things of that nature. My best friend in Chicago is a graphic artist who when I met him, just after leaving the UofC, was also struggling to try and be a painter. Actually for many years up until just recently I was on the board of About Face theater in Chicago, so that started—God, when was it? 2002 up until now, so about the past twelve years I've been on the board of About Face. So I've tended to think that art matters, theater matters, and they're ways of changing the world, for lack of a better term, if you don't think that's too grand. But they've become ways to get people to see other perspectives and other points of view and other people's experiences, which ultimately I think result in sympathy and empathy, which at the end of the day is what breaks down barriers.

[47:00]

LS: [Coughs] Sorry. Let's see, where was I? So art... so after, you mentioned that you had kind of applied for the PhD program but then ended up, you know, leaving kind of halfway through the coursework. What did you do after you left, then? Did you stay in Chicago?

NU: It's probably worth mentioning why I quit before what I did after.

LS: Yes, that is definitely something of interest. [Laughter]

NU: I was seeing friends of mine graduate, not just from the Divinity School, but from other PhD programs, very top of their league in terms of what they studied, which to be frank I was never going to be, I'd be OK, I'd get through the program, but I was never going to be a hot shot academic. Most of them were getting offers from small religiously affiliated institutions in the Midwest in small towns, and given who I am I just thought to myself "I can't do that." I'm never going to get a job at a big university in a big city, I have no intention of living anywhere other than a big city, having done the small town thing, and therefore I may as well just quit and get a job, which is what I did. My first job literally was to work in Midway Travel, which used to be the travel agency which was on the ground floor of the Admin Building at the University [LS: OK], which was, I don't have any idea how I got the job, to be honest, and it was literally just something to keep some money coming in so I could pay the bills and eat.

The job I got subsequent to that was actually a little bit funny, a friend, I had a couple of gay friends from the Div School, one of them did not live on campus, lived on the North Side and slept with someone who worked at the First National Bank of Chicago, had a brief fling, and that person got him a job temping at the bank. So Jim subsequently got

the other friend and I jobs temping at the bank. So my first job was as a temp at the First National Bank of Chicago, initially working in regional customer service on the phone, just dreadful, and sometimes inputting lawyers' time sheets in the evening for extra money. What I actually wanted to do was to work in advertising, it was a dreadful time to be trying to get a job in advertising, I got one interview in six months or nine months of trying, and that was only because someone knew one of my references, one of my references at the time was Bob Graves, who I've mentioned before was the Dean at the Business School and also the President of the Episcopal Church Council at the UofC. And when I got there, I was excited as I could be to get the interview, got there and the woman said, "I don't have any jobs, I just wanted to interview you because I know Bob." [LS: OK.]

So you know, at the end of the day what happened, I kind of fell into banking because of this odd connection, eventually I shifted from being a temp to being a full-time employee, not because I wanted to work in banking but because I wanted the benefits that you got if you were a full-timer, so you get sick pay, get insurance, all of that stuff, and eventually I just wound up staying in banking and going from one opportunity to the other and worked my way up to the point that I am where I am now, which was an interesting process. I would say my first three years or so of working at the bank, which was all retail and customer service, I was probably more interested in just having fun, partying, going out. I moved out of Hyde Park and moved up to the North Side of the city, you know, I lived to go to Club 950 and Neo and Smart Bar and those kinds of places at the weekend, and it was only after getting out of that job and into the commercial bank side of things that I began to be given an opportunity perhaps for me to advance, within the banking department, so... I've digressed from what you're asking for.

LS: No, that was really useful, and also, you're actually not the first person who said that they quit a PhD because they were gay and didn't want to live in small town America, so it's kind of...

NU: I'm not surprised.

LS: Yeah, it's not surprising, but it's kind of interesting how many times I've heard that exact same story in the course of this project, so yeah, you're not alone. So how long—you mentioned that you got involved with About Face Theater, that's like theater for LGBTQ youth, am I right about that?

NU: We have a youth program [LS: OK], so once a year they do workshops with young people and the youth will put on a show, but it's also a production company that does Equity or part-Equity productions. There's also a New Works and Readings program, but typically there's two or three main stage productions each year. We don't have a theater home, so we tend to either co-produce or use other theaters, be it Looking Glass or Silk Road has a theater downtown, we did a production with them last year, but it is an LGBTQ theater, yes.

- LS: But you said you got involved with them in 2001, 2002—did you stay in Chicago, the city, how long were you in Chicago the city for?
- NU: I left UofC in '83. [LS: Right.] So I got the job at First Chicago—well, let's actually take that back—I left the UofC in March of '83, I went permanent full time at First Chicago on Halloween 1983. So for some period of time in that I worked as a temp, and I lived in Chicago until late 2001, early 2002, when I moved to London. That was variously in Lakeview, Uptown and the areas along the lake, so.
- LS: Sure. I live in Uptown now [NU: OK] so I understand the appeal. Great. And then did you move to London because of a job, or...
- NU: Yes. Initially I came to London to be the IT manager for Bank One. Initially for Europe, which was really England, or London, and one small office in Frankfurt. Within two to three years I was the IT director for everything outside of the United States, so not only Europe but also seven offices in Asia, one in Canada and one in Mexico City. Then the JP Morgan acquisition occurred and I managed the merger for IT infrastructure in Europe, went over to JP Morgan, worked there for a few years cost-cutting, and cut my own job, effectively got made redundant and now work for Northern Trust, which I began in 2007, so seven years ago.
- LS: So in comparing, do you have any thoughts about comparing London and Chicago? Have you found them both enjoyable places to live, I assume, or any kind of thoughts on...
- NU: Yes. For the US, Chicago suited me. I don't think I would have enjoyed New York just 'cause it's so brutal. Comparing New York, Chicago, and London, I think it has the humanity, London has the humanity of Chicago but the buzz that New York has, so when I come back to Chicago now I find it a little slow-paced.
- LS: OK. Great, I'm...
- NU: Sorry. I was just going to say for me, I can't imagine living anywhere other than London now.
- LS: OK, sure. Yeah, I've actually never been, but I'm sure it's lovely. [LS laughs]
- NU: It's a great city, it really is.
- [58:25]
- LS: That's good to hear... Let's see, so I think those are most of the questions I wanted to ask you. We ask a couple of kind of looking back questions, like do you think your experience at the University was typical, and that other students had similar experiences [NU laughs], and it sounds like no! [Laughter]
- NU: I think that's correct.

LS: That's correct!

NU: I'm not sure there is such a thing as a typical experience. [LS: Sure.] I think the thing that sticks out in my mind when you say that is that I went to the UofC with nothing more than academic curiosity motivating me, and I can remember one of the times the gay group got together, there was a couple named Jonathan Katz, and his partner's name was Irwin, I think. Basically I can remember a situation where they were, Jonathan was very earnest, and he was trying to get this group of gay men to open up and talk to one another about what the concerns were, and at the time all I could think was, we were sitting around in a circle, and all I could think was "this is like a women's consciousness raising group or something [laughter] translated to gay men," and Jonathan posed a question, "What are you most afraid of?" Every single person around the group said "I'm worried about my parents finding out I'm gay," or "I'm worried that being gay will hurt my career," and it got to me, and what I said, and I remember because it took everyone rather, I think, aback, that "I'm afraid of being old and bitter and alone," and at the time my parents already know, I don't care who knows I'm gay, I just don't want to be isolated. [LS: Sure.]

And so I think, you know, and this goes back to this notion that I went to Chicago with the idea that I would never be in the closet again and that I'd out myself at the first opportunity, and I think that made a big difference in how I experienced my time at the UofC, cause I didn't have that—I shouldn't, I won't pretend that I didn't at times struggle with aspects of being gay, but by and large that was behind me. I'd done that and gotten through to the other side. Whereas a lot of people I knew while at the UofC, who were gay, at least, were still struggling with that part of their identity and also with how that placed them in society. Does that make sense?

LS: That makes a lot of sense, yeah, yeah. 'Cause you also mentioned earlier, I think, that you didn't spend that much time with the gay group except at kind of social events. Is that accurate?

NU: It was, I wouldn't say not that much time, but I certainly didn't just spend time with the other gay students. And then there were a few gay men at the Divinity School and at least one lesbian that I was aware of and it was easier to live a, for lack of a better term, a mixed social life. But I think for some folks, whether they were closeted in their own school, you know, and a couple of guys I knew who were either in the Business School or the Law School come to mind, or undergraduates who were struggling with their identity or dealing with their parents or whatever. I was in a different place from that.

LS: That makes sense. Do you still keep in touch with a lot of the people you met at the University?

NU: At this point no. Probably only two come to mind, and that's Sam Portaro, who we mentioned earlier [LS: Right], and a fellow Div School student named Tony who I

haven't mentioned until now, but those are the two people from UofC days that I still have contact with.

[1:03:50]

LS: Alright, I think that's all I have to ask. Another question we ask is, what do you think has changed between your generation and the people who are undergrads now? There's a lot. [LS laughs] It's kind of a silly question to ask, it's like everything! But yeah.

NU: To me, it's just unimaginable how—I can't get my head around what a kid might be, how somebody who's younger might deal with their identity in this day and age. I guess a couple of things come to mind. One is that I don't think it's ever going to be easy, or it's going to be a hell of a long time before it's easy, simply because there is that grand assumption until stated otherwise that everybody's straight, at least for most people. We will still grow up, many of us, in, I call it the camp of the enemy. People who will not only assume you're not gay, but who will assume that it's a bad thing if anyone is. [LS: Right.] So it's never going to be easy or straightforward, but compared to my own situation growing up... there weren't any gay people in public life, there were no visible gay people. I can remember the first time I saw two gay men, and it was burned into my mind. And that was literally, my family went to a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game, parked in the parking garage, going down in the elevator, two men got on the elevator, stood in front of us, very hippie-ish looking, a flower child kind of look, I have no idea what year this might have been, and as the elevator goes up, when they existed they took hands, took hold of one another's hands and walked away. And my mother nearly had a conniption fit, but all I could think standing there was, that's me. Even though I was probably only ten or eleven years old. I'm standing there thinking "Mom's having a fit over what she's just seen," and tutting and disapproving, but that's me. [LS: Right.]

So the other thing, you know, in terms of things changing, I mentioned that when I went into the workplace I followed the same pattern of coming out at the earliest possible convenience to my co-workers or to whoever. So typically that meant that not only my co-workers knew, but it would go around the office like wildfire. And two illustrations of how that's changed, or two or three... there were no protections when I first started working. None. Zippo. There are at least some now. I realize they're not perfect and they're uneven, but I can remember being told by my manager that I would not get promoted because his boss was very uncomfortable having an openly gay man be an officer in his organization. And the proof was in the pudding, 'cause as soon as that guy left, and a new person came in, I got promoted repeatedly. And it helped that I saved his bacon in terms of a project that I did and had some very good visibility for the work I was doing, but the workplace has changed. It went from a situation where I was a bit of a rabblouser at First Chicago and was getting gay and lesbian employees to get together off site, and we would meet at Ann Sather's up on Belmont, and it got to a point where we had fifty or sixty people coming to meetings to talk about what we could do to try to get recognition for gay people in the office, and what might we do to make the situation better. And this was pre, not just legal protection, but there were no policy protections within the bank, and that was one of the things we were talking about trying to get. And a

few of us did a fair bit of research and study on domestic partner benefits and trying to see what we could do to make a business case for it being a good business practice and how the market was changing to get the company to take notice of that, and that happened about the time that Jamie Dimon took over Bank One, and I thought, you know, what the hell. So we put a little memo together where we circulated the document and the research we'd done previously, popped it in an envelope, addressed it to the new head of the company. Two days later the man called me and literally just said to me "We've got your work, thank you for the work you've done on this, blah blah blah," and I explained to him that we'd sent it to the head of HR and others, and we had good business backing but we hadn't even had an acknowledgement from the head of HR about it. And two things, one is, he said "Don't worry, we'll get there, it might take me a little bit of time but it will happen," and it did within six months. The other thing I'll observe is that the head of HR was gone within a month. So... I'm getting a little bit emotional now, things have changed incredibly between the time I was at the UofC and today. [LS: Sure.] It's not perfect, but it's a hell of a lot better.

LS: Alright, well great, is there anything else you'd like to tell us or that I ought to ask, you think?

NU: Nothing leaps to mind.

LS: OK. Why did you agree to be interviewed for the project?

NU: Sorry?

LS: Why did you agree to be interviewed?

NU: I was just curious. It was an interesting thought, and I wanted to do my bit and see what it was all about. Just something out of the ordinary. I've never been asked to be part of a project like this before, so...

LS: Well, thank you so much, I've really enjoyed talking to you, and I've learned a lot, so you'll be hearing from us, just to let you know, you'll be hearing from us in a little bit when someone transcribes our interview, and we'll send that to you and you'll be able to kind of make any edits or emendations that you want to make, and then all of the transcripts are going to be deposited in Special Collections for the community and for researchers, and we're going to have an exhibit in the Regenstein and then also online in April 2015 that's kind of about LGBT lives at the University of Chicago. So thank you so much for being part of that, and it's been a pleasure talking to you.

NU: Thank you. It's been fun to participate.

LS: Have a great day!

NU: Thanks, and you. Take care.

[01:12:40]
End of Interview