

Terence P. Meehan Jr. '96
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[SOPHIA M.]

WHITTEMORE: My name is Sophia Whittemore [pronounced WIT-ih-more], Dartmouth Class of 2020, and today I'm here in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, interviewing Terence [P.] Meehan [Jr.] from the Class of 1996. The date is currently June 3rd, 2019. Time is 12:30 p.m.

Terence, would you like to introduce yourself and where you're currently located in terms of building, town and state for this interview right now?

MEEHAN: Sure. Thank you for having me. My name is Terence Meehan. I'm a Dartmouth '96. I'm currently in Meriden, Connecticut. I'm at home in Meriden, Connecticut, right now.

WHITTEMORE: Okay. Awesome. And just a reminder, as a precursor, this project is to maintain an accurate oral history of the LGBTQ+ [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus] community at Dartmouth, so please try to remain as accurate and as—give as full an account as possible. And again, Terence, I can't thank you enough for participating in this project.

MEEHAN: Yeah no, absolutely. Thank you—you all—for arranging it, for organizing it.

WHITTEMORE: All right.

So, for a first question, to get a better sense of background, did you always live in Connecticut, or was there a time that you lived somewhere else? Probably, like, growing up especially?

MEEHAN: Yeah. So I'm actually from Long Island [New York]. I grew up on Long Island. I graduated from high school on Long Island. I lived there up until I went to Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: And what high school was that?

- MEEHAN: I went to Pa- —I went to Patchogue-Medford High School, which is in the middle of the island, in Medford, New York.
- WHITTEMORE: Hmm. And how would you say your sense of identity tied in when it came to growing up in that place?
- MEEHAN: Huh! Interesting question. Yeah. So I pretty much always knew I was gay. I mean, my first—I mean, I can remember thinking back maybe in third grade, something was different about me. And at that point, I mean, I didn't necessarily have the vocabulary for it, but people in my school offered me the vocabulary. [Chuckles.] You know, they would call me the F word, the faggot word, and—so I certainly wasn't out. I mean, at that point—you know, this was in the eighties—nobody was out in—in public schools that I knew of.
- But I planned to change that by going to college. You know, throughout high school I was looking forward to going to college and meeting other smart, gay people and being able to be more comfortable with myself.
- WHITTEMORE: And what were—what was family or friends like? Did they have any particular impact on your life at that time?
- MEEHAN: Huh. In terms of my gay identity? I mean, none of my—
- WHITTEMORE: Or in terms of just identity in general.
- MEEHAN: I'm sorry?
- WHITTEMORE: Or in terms of just identity in general.
- MEEHAN: All right. Let me think. I mean, I was kind of unique in my family. I come from a family that's not—it's not really well educated. I was the first in my—my family to go to college. They didn't really understand that whole process. They didn't understand why I wanted to go to college.
- I had some friends at high school who were a bit more academic minded, and what not—none of them knew that I

was gay. I mean, probably most of them did know I was gay, but it was nothing we were able to talk about at the time.

I just remember growing up just really looking to get out of Long Island. [Chuckles.] It—it—it didn't feel like a comfortable place for me, mostly because I wasn't able to be an openly gay person but also just a level of curiosity and an academic mindedness that I had. I had trouble finding a place for me in high school and on Long Island.

WHITTEMORE: So what drew you to Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: So I was looking for colleges, and basically I wanted to experience something new and something as different from Long Island as I could think of. And that's why Dartmouth was at the top of my list. [Chuckles.] Actually, two colleges were at the top of my list. It was Dartmouth and Williams [College], because they were small colleges, they were in rural areas, and I didn't apply—I didn't apply to any colleges that were in cities or anything. I thought it would give me a chance to kind of broaden my perspective and do something different while getting away from Long Island, but not too far away that my family wasn't relatively nearby if I needed them.

I would up getting into both Dartmouth and also to Williams. I ended up choosing Dartmouth based on the music program, because I'm a cellist, and that was really important to me. And Dartmouth had a better orchestra, and the president of Dartmouth at that—at that time, James [O.] Freeman [sic; Freedman]—a year prior, he had made this speech I think at one of the graduations that he wanted to make—he wanted to make Dartmouth a place where people who wanted to translate catalyts or—or play the cello would feel comfortable, because he didn't feel that Dartmouth was a place like that quite yet. And I thought, *Well, that sounds great. If they're planning to do that, that sounds like the place for me.*

WHITTEMORE: So what was campus culture like at the time?

MEEHAN: At the time. So, actually let me just back up one thing. There was a little bit of hesitancy for one reason: I had—I had read in the news—and I don't remember the exact year, but it was sometime around the time I was applying, sometime while I was in high school, in the very early nineties or late eighties. There was a lot of news about *The Dartmouth Review* and them outing gay students and harassing professors of color and just kind of really aggressive tactics. And Dartmouth was—kind of had a reputation as a very conservative place among the elite colleges.

I kind of latched onto what President Freeman [sic] said about his plans for Dartmouth and hoped that it would be different. So when I got there—you know, I was really excited to come out. You know, the first day I was there, I looked around campus. You know, of course there are signs for different organizations: "Come to this meeting." You know, "Join this organization." And I looked for the gay organization, and I couldn't find it.

I looked—I looked the whole first term. [Chuckles.] So basically, I—I gave up that idea. I gave up the idea of coming out at college, and I wound up staying in the closet, which was really disappointing. I mean, looking ba- —I didn't know this at the time, but looking back on it, I—I—I think that was a—a function of the campus culture in the wake of *The Dartmouth Review* incident. I mean, I imagine there were gay organizations before—before I was there, and maybe—maybe even while I was there, but they certainly were not public whatsoever.

I looked on, you know, the Blitz[Mail] system. I don't remember exactly how—how we looked for organizations there, but there was no mention of any—any gay organizations on campus whatsoever that I could find, which was really disappointing.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any alternative organizations that you felt drawn to?

MEEHAN: Well, I certainly—I certainly joined the orchestra. You know, that's still an important part of my life. It always has. I wound

up becoming, like, the general manager of the Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra. That was really my home for a while, for most of my four years, but especially the first two. I made friends there. The music director and conductor was a great person.

WHITTEMORE: And who was the music director at the time?

MEEHAN: What's his name? His first name—we called him Tony [Anthony Princiotti], so I'm trying to remember. Unfortunately, I don't remember his name. I can get—I can get back to you. He was the music director for a long time, though, so I'm sure it's easy enough to—easy enough to look up. For a few decades, in other words.

And he was really great. He really—he was relatively new when I started, and he really raised the quality of the orchestra over the years that I was there. It was very impressive, so—

WHITTEMORE: So—and forgive me if this is a personal question, but did you stay and remain closeted throughout your time at Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: I remained closeted the first—well, for the most part, I remained closeted the first two years. So here's what happened: So the first term I was there, I wound up meeting someone in the orchestra who was from Indiana,—

WHITTEMORE: And do you remember their name?

MEEHAN: Yeah, his name is Rob. I'm not going to give a last name just because he—you know, I haven't talked to him yet.

WHITTEMORE: Okay.

MEEHAN: His name is Rob. He's from—he's from Indiana. He was also a closeted gay. I mean, I, you know, pretty much could tell that, and he pretty much could tell that about me, and we kind of, for much of first year, kind of danced around kind of almost telling each other but not. You know, we were afraid. We became very close friends. He absolutely hated

Dartmouth. He hated the—what he felt was the kind of conservative—like, he was trying to escape kind of conservative Indiana, and he felt like he landed back in a similar place. He wound up transferring to Harvard [University] second year.

So my second year, he and I kept—kept in touch really closely. Every night, we would—we'd talk over the internet. There was this kind of interface. It was called Talk. It was basically just a messaging platform. And we would talk into the,—I—I—I mean, to the small hours of the night. And finally, one of those nights in second year, we both came out to each other. We actually wound up together—wound up together as a couple for nine years. [Chuckles.]

So that was the first two years. And I didn't come out to anyone else on campus, anyway. I wound up coming out to my family at that time, I mean, some friends from high school, but I still didn't feel comfortable on campus. So I decided to take a year off, myself.

And I moved, basically with Rob [chuckles], and we lived in Boston [Massachusetts] for a year. I took a job—you know, I felt that Boston was a place that I could feel more comfortable coming out, so I—so I met some people. I took a job at a place called Glad Day Bookstore [sic; Glad Day Bookshop]. It's in Boston. I'm not sure if it's still there. But it was on—it was in Boston on Boylston Street. It was actually one of the first gay bookstores in the country.

And so I took a job there. You know, got close to the manager. I learned about gay literature. I started getting involved in the gay community. I read widely, and I got really comfortable with myself as a gay man. I [unintelligible]—

WHITTEMORE: Hello?

MEEHAN: And then I came back—

WHITTEMORE: Sorry, I think you cut out for a little bit. Could you repeat that?

MEEHAN: Yes. So I worked at Glad Day Bookstore [sic]. You know, I read about gay history. I read some gay literature. I read widely. I made friends in the gay community. I kind of dabbled in some activism. Very limited at that point.

WHITTEMORE: What literature did you read?

MEEHAN: A lot of Oscar Wilde's—oh—Gide, André Gide. What was that book? I don't know if this was before or after, but *Best Little Boy*. I'm terrible at remembering names, but—

WHITTEMORE: No, that's fine.

MEEHAN: All right. Yeah. And a bunch of history books. I'm not really interested history. It's a lot about—

WHITTEMORE: Any particular period of time?

MEEHAN: Well, just gay people throughout history. I mean, so one—you know, kind of like Greek and Roman period, ancient history and medieval history, how gays have been treated kind of differently throughout history. I mean, that's not something—the way the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] community—the place that it has in the community hasn't always been set. You know, it's to some extent socially contrived and it depends on the situation. It depends on the circumstances, and it's different at different points in history. So I thought that was interesting.

And just reading about, like, the early gay movement here in the United States—you know, from the Stonewall [riots] and at that point things like ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] and—you know, the LGBT movement in the U.S. was really starting to become a lot more visible in the nineties.

WHITTEMORE: ACT UP?

MEEHAN: I mean, different organi- —the LGBT community, but ACT UP was one of those.

WHITTEMORE: And you said that you were drawn to activism while in Boston?

MEEHAN: I mean, I'm not sure I could say I was very active in activism, but yes. So I read about beginnings of, you know, the gay liberation movement. It was early in the forties and fifties. And then from Stonewall, the people who owned and managed Glad Day Bookstore [sic]—they had lots of stories to tell from the early days—you know, from the sixties and seventies, about the different laws that they had helped—laws that they had helped enact either in Boston or—or wherever. And it—it—it—it seemed really exciting to me, and—

WHITTEMORE: Did any story particularly stand out?

MEEHAN: Did any story particularly stand out. Unfortunately, most of the negative ones. [Chuckles.] They had—yeah, they certainly had some stories about—about being in Boston and—you know, I don't remember if it was the sixties or the fifties, but going to, you know, gay bars and having the police come in and beat people up.

And there was some incident—and, again, this is kind of a vague memory, but they told me about some—I think it was even the bookstore got raided by the police, and they were—they were accusing them of pedophilia and, you know, just really kind of the way that any—any gay organization was always at risk at that point, of—of being targeted by the police. And, while to some extent they had a public profile. It was always at risk.

WHITTEMORE: And this was all during your gap year, correct?

MEEHAN: Yeah, so this was during my gap year that I learned about all this.

WHITTEMORE: And how did you feel about returning to Dartmouth if you felt that way?

MEEHAN: So yeah. So I was really eager to go back to Dartmouth. You know, I felt like—I felt like *I'm an empowered gay man* at that

point. You know, I was still very young at that point. You know, I felt very confident in myself, and I was, like, you know, *I'm gonna change things*. And I was very idealistic.

I learned from some of these old-timers, like, the importance of coming out. I mean, I think that was something—that was the point that went through all these stories, that the more people come out, the more the broader community understands that, you know, we come in all shapes and sizes and—and just makes it a little bit easier for people to understand.

So I was ready to go back to Dartmouth. I was ready to either join a gay organization or start a gay organization or somehow get really involved in changing the culture at Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: And how did this, like, sense of self in Boston and the freedom you had there contrast with the more conservative atmosphere back at Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: Oh, I felt so much freer in Boston. It was amazing. It was a wonderful year. It was—it was a defining year in my life, really. I mean, three parts of it, really: I mean, working at the bookstore and developing my relationship with Rob. You know, it became a romantic relationship kind of officially.

And then going to gay bars. And that was still—I mean, it's a little different now, but back then—I mean, that was how you met people. That was how you met people in the gay community. Things like AOL [American Online] and stuff were starting to—were starting to be used to meet other people. But otherwise, you know, it was hard—it was hard to find gay people. Like, how would you know if someone was gay?

So those three things. I—I—I—I was really involved. I met lots and lots of people, and I felt really secure in myself by the time I got back to Dartmouth. And that's certainly not what I felt the first two years at Dartmouth. I mean, I was—I mean, I hid that part of myself entirely.

WHITTEMORE: So there was a shift in administration at Dartmouth at the time, at large, between [U.S. presidents George H. W.] Bush and [William J. “Bill”] Clinton, correct?

MEEHAN: You mean in terms of—

WHITTEMORE: Like, at large.

MEEHAN: Hmm. I mean, when I got there, James Freedman was the president, and he—he was definitely a different president than Dartmouth had had before. I think he was chosen partly for that reason. It was a little scandalous that he didn’t go to Dartmouth; he had gone to Harvard, actually. [Chuckles.] Yeah. But he was re- —I mean, he really kind of led the charge trying to make Dartmouth a more inclusive and open place.

And I think he did—I think he did do a lot of work. I mean, I think it was during the time that I was there that a lot of this happened. I know that by the time I left, there was—I don’t know—I’m not sure when it started, but there was a dean of the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer] community by the time I left. You know, an official dean that publicly—

WHITTEMORE: Do you know who the dean was?

MEEHAN: —with an office. I don’t remember his name, which is too bad. I was in his office quite a lot. Yeah. But, like, I mean, the first two years, you know, there was—you could—you know, you couldn’t find the word “gay” on campus at all. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: And how did LGBT+-identifying students feel in terms of the Dartmouth administration?

MEEHAN: Huh. I’m not sure. I’m not sure how that came up. I mean, certainly the dean of students for the LGBTQ community—I mean, he was very popular among students. And I’m sure—you know, I’m sure that was welcomed. But, I mean, really more than anything in terms of the relationship of these students and administration, I—I—I just remember more kind

of typical, kind of student—like, more kind of complaining [chuckles], more—I mean, which is good. You know, which is one of the roles of students, you know, to push—to push things forward with a more open mind.

WHITTEMORE: In terms of, like, political activism at the time? Anything when it came to either President Clinton or President Bush?

MEEHAN: I wasn't too involved in political activism at—at the time, so I can't really speak to that. I mean, I know that—I know the campaign—the campaign in 1992 was when I first got there—no, not the one in '92 that I remember. I remember the one in '96 was really active. There was a lot campaigning for the New Hampshire primary. I mean, I am very interested in politics now. At—at—at—at that point, I—I wasn't very involved in what was going on. It was more kind of like on-campus things.

WHITTEMORE: Mmm. So when it came to on campus, was the DRA, or Dartmouth Rainbow Association [sic; Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance] in effect at the time?

MEEHAN: It definitely was my last two years. I don't know if it started during the year that I returned or during the year that I was away, but I was definitely involved with the DRA. Actually, it probably started—it probably started during the two years I came back, because I know that when I first came back, a group of us—and I know we did this informally. I—I—I—I don't remember, like, official meetings about this. But a group of us talked, and we decided to organize a National Coming Out Day on campus. So this was in 1995.

And I had the idea—at—at—at the Glad Day Bookstore [sic], we used to sell these little rainbow stickers, and they were really popular. We decided to get a whole bunch of those stickers and to set up a table and start giving them out to students. So we did that. You know, we were all nervous and whatnot.

We got 500 stickers. We were, like, “I don't know how this is gonna go.” You know, we were really nervous. We set up the table, and, like, an hour or two later, all the stickers were

taken. Everyone was—the campus was so enthusiastic. There were rainbow stickers all over the mailboxes in the Hop.

WHITTEMORE: And the Hop is the Hopkins Center [for the Arts]?

MEEHAN: The Hopkins Center, yeah, where the student mailboxes are. For me, that was amazing. I—my image of Dartmouth up until then had—had been—you know, there was no gay organization, it was a conservative place.

WHITTEMORE: And conservative coming mainly from?

MEEHAN: I'm not sure what you mean.

WHITTEMORE: Did you get, like, this conservative sense from any particular, like, student body or organization?

MEEHAN: I—I—I think just generally the campus. I mean, I think—well, I think what I learned from that National Coming Out Day was that—that that reputation was unfair, that understanding on my part was a *misunderstanding*. I mean, I do think a lot of that came—kind of an aftermath of *The Dartmouth Review* scandal and stuff. You know, there was kind of like a chill on campus. At least to me, that wasn't—there wasn't overt—and I probably didn't even understand it in those terms at that time. Looking back on it, that's clearly the case.

I just had this idea that Dartmouth was the place where if you were gay, that's not good. If you were a person of color, that's not good. It's risky. When we did that National Coming Out Day, initially with the stickers and, you know, 500 different students, on their way to pick up their mail, said, "Oh, sure, I'll put a rainbow sticker on my mailbox." I—I was astonished and realized, like,—alright, actually, if you talked to Dartmouth students and asked them, they're—you know, they're very—they're as tolerant and open-minded as you would expect university students at an elite college to be, you know?

So that really opened my mind. I don't know if I was—I don't know how mistaken I was about the Dartmouth climate or

if—if this was one of, like, the first opportunities for people, like, to publicly demonstrate that, “No, we are—we are open-minded and tolerant. We are college students. We are learning about each other and learning about ourselves.”

WHITTEMORE: And this was with the Dartmouth Rainbow Association [sic; Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance], correct?

MEEHAN: Yeah. And, again, I’m not sure if that was—if—that was organized—organized under the DRA or if it was just a few of us. I mean, I know it was just a few of us. It was, like, four of us.

WHITTEMORE: And who—

MEEHAN: I don’t remember who we were working under the auspices of the DRA.

WHITTEMORE: And did you hold a leadership position in this?

MEEHAN: I was—I was something like co-something. [Laughs.]

WHITTEMORE: [Chuckles.]

MEEHAN: I—I—I remember running for president and not—and not getting it, which is actually kind of funny. The person who wound up becoming the president of the DRA—I mean, I don’t know if this is too much information, but the person who wound up coming—I don’t remember his name—he became the president of the Dartmouth DRA. I learned just about five years ago that he’s now a great public and vocal anti-gay activist.

WHITTEMORE: Oh, wow!

MEEHAN: [Chuckles.] And he used to be the president of the DRA.

WHITTEMORE: Was there anybody else instrumental within the DRA?

MEEHAN: Yeah, there was—who else was involved? There was Pieter [pronounced like Peter] [A.] Ott [Class of 1986]. He was definitely involved with me. There was [Matthew R.] “Matt”

Kramar [Class of 2000]. He was maybe a '96 or '7, maybe even a '98. There were a few '98s, actually, come to think of it. So I guess that would have been my last year there, starting the last year. I graduated in '97, even though I'm a '96, because of the gap year. I know the Class of '98 was—was really well represented in the DRA when I came back. Not so much my class and, like, the '97s, but definitely the '98s were really well represented.

WHITTEMORE: And do you feel that was because there was a shift?

MEEHAN: I think probably. I mean, you know, it's hard to tell. You know, unfortunately,—and clearly I wasn't able to talk to the students who were still afraid, who were still in the closet. I only talked to the people who weren't. And I know that there were a lot of '98s who were really involved.

I imagine—I imagine the organizations now at Dartmouth are much—much larger and much more well integrated into the community. I mean, around that time, there was certainly a lot of change, and—and—and I guess that's something for historians to distinguish. I'm not sure personally how much of it was that / changed personally, because / certainly went on, you know, a huge personal journey from the time I got to Dartmouth to the time I graduated, versus how—

WHITTEMORE: Can you speak a little bit more about that shift of sense of self?

MEEHAN: Yeah. I mean, when I got there, you know, I knew I was gay, and—but I had no understanding of what that meant, and I was completely closeted. And I had—I had zero connections with anyone else who was gay or lesbian or trans. I mean, that wasn't even in my purview at that point. And by the time I left, you know, I was a confident gay man. I—I—I was very public that I was gay. I remember writing letters to the editor of *The Dartmouth*, you know, where I—I talked about myself as a gay man. And, you know, I was involved in the DRA. And so there was a shift in me personally.

But there was—there was also at that time—there really was a shift in the culture at Dartmouth. And I'm just not sure,

looking back, how much of it was that Dartmouth changed and how much of it was that I changed, you know.

WHITTEMORE: And where did you most notice this shift when it came to the—the college itself?

MEEHAN: I mean, most obviously that—I mean, the word “gay” was—the word “gay” was spoken. LGBT. There was a dean for LGBT students. You know, the community has added on letters now, but I—I—I don’t mean to be leaving anyone out. I’m a little older. We used to call it “LGBT community.”

By the time I graduated, there were rainbow flags on, you know, half the mailboxes of students. There was—there was the dean of LGBT community, as I said. There were faculty members who had stickers saying “this is a safe place,” or they had rainbow stickers—that was not—absolutely not the case when I got there.

And I remember—I remember because I looked [chuckles]—when I got there, I looked for that—you know, the DRA—we got information through the Blitz system. We’d get signs—signs up—

WHITTEMORE: And the Blitz is the e-mailing system, correct?

MEEHAN: Yeah, yeah. Some of the Dartmouth lingo, sorry. Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: So records stated that there was a professor, Elise [M.] Boulding, who was an adviser of LGBT student organizations at the time? Do you have any experience with that professor?

MEEHAN: Elise Boulding?

WHITTEMORE: Yes.

MEEHAN: I do not. That name doesn’t even ring a bell.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any particular faculty members or professors that shaped your life during your time at Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: [Sighs.] There was. And I'm sorry I'm not being very helpful with names. I'm pretty bad at names generally. And this was certainly a long time ago.

There was one professor—I mean, it wasn't in an official capacity, but there was a professor at the [Dartmouth] Medical School [now Geisel School of Medicine]. He was a doctor and obviously a physician, and he was a professor at the Medical School. And I—I—I guess it was '95 or '96 when I came back. I organized these weekly gay social gatherings at the Hopkins Center. I mean, not many people came, but—but he always came every week. And he would sit down, and he would meet with whoever was there. There was usually, like, maybe three other students, and we'd talk, and, you know, we'd share experiences. So he—and I'm—it was only for a period of two years, but he was pretty influential on my life. I mean, nothing in particular, but just having, you know, an older, successful role model to talk to. That was really nice. And I—and I just don't remember his name.

WHITTEMORE: And did this professor identify with the LGBT+ community?

MEEHAN: Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any particular moments during these meetings that stood out?

MEEHAN: Not really. Well, I mean, one, I guess. [Chuckles.] There was—there was something—there was a blood drive on campus one year. I think it was maybe my senior year. You know, the [American] Red Cross had a blood drive. And I remember I was—you know, I was a little excited I was going to give blood. I was a do-gooder. I still am. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: And this was year '96, '97?

MEEHAN: Yeah, something like that, '95, '96, '97. It was after my gap year, before I graduated. And so, you know, I—I—I went down to the Hopkins Center where they were doing it. I sat in a chair. I started filling out paperwork. And I was told that I couldn't—I couldn't donate blood. And I was, like, "What?" And it—and—it—it—it's because they—and I should have

realized this—but on the—on the form before you donated, they asked a question. One of the questions was—it was, “Have you had sex with a man”—you know,—“in the previous year?” Or something like that. And it was the policy of—of the American Red Cross at that point to not allow people to donate blood if they answered yes to that question, basically.

Now, for me, at that point I was shocked. I was angry. I felt that, you know, it was targeting gay men and, you know, it wasn't getting to the root of what they were trying to do. Obviously, they were trying to protect the blood supply from HIV [human immunodeficiency virus]. I mean, that—you know, in the 1980s, in the early 1980s, many people got very—got ill and died because of problems with the blood supply because it wasn't screened well enough.

But I was angry because I thought of it as they weren't excluding heterosexual people who may have had unprotected sex, whereas me, a gay man, who—I don't know at that point if I had even had sex [chuckles], or I certainly wasn't at that point at risk of HIV, based on my behaviors. So I was really angry.

I talked to this doctor a lot about that. We had a lot of discussions about that.

WHITTEMORE: And this was the doctor/role model from the Medical School, correct?

MEEHAN: Right, right, yeah. I mean, he had a good point, and, you know, in looking back on it, I—I certainly see the point. The point is that the question they ask is really the best that they could do. It's the closest that they could come to who's highest at risk, you know, with the information that they can get from a—from a short form. I mean, interestingly, a few—a few years later, they stopped that policy, and that's no longer the policy of the American Red Cross.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other moments that, you know, there was, I guess, this pervasive sense of fear from the HIV/AIDS

[human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] crisis, even though that was in the eighties?

MEEHAN: Yeah. And that was—it was mostly in the eighties, but, you know, students who were on campus at that time, we grew up hearing that on TV and radio. That was a very frightening thing for us, you know, even though by that point, 1995, '96, you know, they had the highly active antiretroviral treatments and HIV/AIDS was a manageable chronic illness. You know, that hadn't truly percolated down to the—to the public consciousness, I think, by that point, you know, so it was still a—still a very fearful time in terms of—in terms of that. I mean, I—I can't think of anything that made Dartmouth any different in those terms than anywhere else, but—

WHITTEMORE: All right. So shifting a little bit, so you talked a lot about, you know, carving out alternative social spaces. What were your thoughts on Greek life?

MEEHAN: [Laughs.] Yeah. Oh, you brought that up, and I—I basically almost forgot about that. That—I mean, yeah, that was—that was always a topic of conversation. Just on campus in general, but especially among—especially among the members of the DRA. You know, it was very—it was always a very controversial issue: Greek life, having Greek life and the drawbacks of it and the pluses of it.

Me personally? I—I went to a fraternity party my freshman year.

WHITTEMORE: And which fraternity was this?

MEEHAN: Oh, jeez. I couldn't tell you. [Laughs.] I don't think I know any of the names. [Laughs.] I went to a fraternity party, you know, with my freshman year roommate, and we went in the basement, and people were drinking, and I saw people vomit, and the floors were sticky, and it stank, and it was just horrifying to me. [Chuckles.] And I left, and I—I never, ever went in a fraternity again my entire time at Dartmouth. So I had *no* interaction with them whatsoever. Yeah.

I imagine now—you know, actually, at some point while I was there, there—there was a gay fraternity, I believe. I don't think that was there when I got there. It may have been. I could be wrong. But anyway, I'm not the person to talk to about Greek life because, again, I went to a party once. I was disgusted by it, and—

WHITTEMORE: Do you happen to remember the name of the gay fraternity?

MEEHAN: I don't. I can—I know someone who was a mem- —member of it, I think? Jeez, you're asking me to dig back [chuckles] in my— recesses of my memory. I think I knew someone who was in it. I—I would have to—I would have to ask a few friends and kind of figure this out, because I can't quite remember. I mean, I certainly wasn't involved in it.

WHITTEMORE: Perhaps it was a co-ed fraternity?

MEEHAN: Maybe. Well, there was—ac- —well, there was a place called Panarchy. I mean, that wasn't a fraternity, but I—I was involved with Panarchy. I lived there for—I don't think I lived there for very long. I think I maybe lived there for a term or two terms. It was kind of like an alternative—almost like an alternative to fraternities.

It's called Panarchy. It was kind of—you know, it had a reputation as kind of the—kind of more—like, some people would say the crunchy granola, some people would say the progressive, environmentally conscious. There are various ways to describe it.

But I—I—I found it wonderful. [Chuckles.] And, you know, I—I—so I lived there for at least one term. Maybe it was a two. They had—it was two. They had a house on—I guess it was on the main street. I don't even know—I don't remember what that's called. College Street [in Hanover, New Hampshire]? I don't know.

But, yeah, they had a house, and it emphatically wasn't a fraternity, but it was—it was—it was—it was a social group, and we lived together. [Chuckles.] And it was definitely co-ed, yeah. And that was a really pleasant place. I—I—I think

there was a lesbian woman who—who lived there. I mean, it was—it was—it was the kind of place where, like, that—that didn't even come up much. You know, like, that was just no big deal. Yeah. I forgot about that. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other alternative social spaces where you felt a sort of sense of belonging?

MEEHAN: Yeah. Well, for me mostly, though most of my four—for most of my four years, but especially the last two—for me, it was the Hopkins Center. I was—I was—me, personally, if—if someone needed to find me and they couldn't find me, they would go to the Hopkins Center. Like, they—you know, like, chances are, I was there.

And whether it was because of the DSO, the Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra, or—I just kind of—I hung out in the café area a lot. I would do studying there. I think I liked it because a lot of people came through, so it was a nice place—you know, you could kind of be by yourself but you weren't completely alone because people would walk in and out and—you know, especially people who were involved in music and the arts, which my friends tended to be.

So that for me was the place I remember hanging out the most. Until the last year that I was there. And then—oh, I'm remembering another thing. [Chuckles.] And then there was a new space that opened up, and it was in a basement, the Cowboy—was it called the Cowboy Café or something like that?

WHITTEMORE: Dirt Cowboy Café?

MEEHAN: Is that what it's called?

WHITTEMORE: Yep.

MEEHAN: Yeah. [Laughs.] I—I mean, these memories are coming back from—from back then. I haven't thought of that since 1997 or something. So that opened up whi- —you know, like, I don't know, my—my—my third or fourth year. So we—a bunch of

us—a bunch of my friends—we all—we all happened to be involved in DRA. We wound up hanging out there a lot.

And I remember an *Ellen* viewing party. And this was when Ellen [DeGeneres] came out on her show, and that was, like—

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember what the show was called?

MEEHAN: The show was called *Ellen*, right? I mean, her—her—her—her show, Ellen DeGeneres's show. And she came out on the show. It was her coming-out episode. And everyone in the country knew she was going to do this. Well, all the gay people did, at least. I don't know if it was a surprise for everyone else. But it was a huge national, like, event. I mean, some people argue now it was a turning point in the culture, really.

And I just remember, like, a whole bunch of people. We were so excited! And we had a viewing party to watch Ellen—Ellen [L.] DeGeneres come out on her show. I mean, she came out as her character, in her character, but her character was essentially herself. And there was this funny scene in the show where she happened to lean, and—lean by a microphone as she's coming out. She didn't know it was on, and she says, "I'm gay." And everyone in the airport hears—I remember everyone cheering in the room.

That was in that basement room near the Cowboy Café.

WHITTEMORE: And this was her sit-com before the talk show, right?

MEEHAN: Right. Yeah, this was—this was going back—you know, 19— I don't know, 1996, 1997. Yeah. That was big—that was a big deal back then. That was a real big deal back then. Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other pop culture icons?

MEEHAN: I'm trying to think, back then. There was—this is kind of—I mean, almost a detour, but there was a minor *Dartmouth* gay celebrity [chuckles], at least—at least to me and some of

the—some of my friends there. Apparently,—and this was before I got there, so this was before 1992, even. There was a student. His name was Michael [F.] Lowenthal [Class of 1990]. He was a valedictorian of one of the classes, maybe 1990 or something like that. And he gave his valedictory speech, and he came out in his speech. And, you know, people were shocked, and it made the national news. You know, back then, you come out, it made—made the national news. [Chuckles.]

And so I remember him coming to campus once to speak. I—I actually wound up meeting him kind of on a social basis when I was in Boston at the bookstore. You know, he's a writer now and was back then, so he would come by the bookstore every once in a while, and we found out we both had Dartmouth ties, and we became friends. We're still friends now.

So that was someone a few of us looked up to.

Returning to your question more broadly, cultural icons. Now, at that point, Ellen was it. [Chuckles.] She was—yeah, she was the gay person. [Chuckles.] Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: And Michael Lowenthal was, like, a more personal icon?

MEEHAN: And for me—you know, the fact that he went to Dartmouth, and he was a writer. He wrote on gay themes. He'd come out and made the national news, so that was kind of—he was kind of a Dartmouth icon in my book.

WHITTEMORE: And did you ever do any writing yourself?

MEEHAN: Not—well, not on his level. Certainly not fiction. I do write a lot. I could share a different story, actually. I wrote a paper while I was at Dartmouth. I was a Russian major. I wrote a— a paper on HIV in Russia. It was—I don't remember what class it was in, but it was one of my Russian classes. I believe it was my last year, so it was either '96 or '97.

I wrote a paper on HIV in Russia, and I did some research for it, and I was just blown away. I was shocked by how—

how horrible the epidemic was and how different it was from here, how horrible people were treated, and—there were stories of people being jailed. Oh, I get upset even just thinking about it. You know, there were stories of people being killed and—

So I wrote this paper. I—through my research, I found out about the one—at the time, the one and only organization that did HIV prevention work in Russia at that time. I reached out to them. I wound up getting a job with them after graduation. I moved to Russia. So out of that paper, that writing that I did in a—

WHITTEMORE: And what was this? What was the organization?

MEEHAN: It was called AESOP [pronounced A-sop]. The organization is called AESOP, and it stood for An Effective Shield of Protection. They had—I mean, it was a relatively small organization, but, again, it was, like, the only organization that was doing that work in Russia at the time. They got some medal—they were recognized kind of internationally. They got some medal from President [William J. “Bill”] Clinton for service.

The Russian government was a little less pleased that they were there. And that’s another story. That’s another non-Dartmouth story entirely, but—so from the paper that I wrote while I was a student at Dartmouth—it led to my first job out of college and moving to Russia. It changed a lot in my life.

WHITTEMORE: Just rewinding a little bit, there was also an organization called q.u.e.e.r [spelling unconfirmed] at the time, lower-case q. Do you have any knowledge of it?

MEEHAN: No. Wait. Might that have been, like, q period, u period, e period,—

WHITTEMORE: Yes.

MEEHAN: Just the fact that you say that makes me, like, remember it, but no. Like, I didn’t—I didn’t know anything about them then, and I don’t know anything about them now. But I feel

like I remember seeing a sign about it. I don't know anything about it, though.

WHITTEMORE: And there was also a Colors rally that was in response to an incident of hate speech. Do you have any memory of that?

MEEHAN: A what rally?

WHITTEMORE: A Colors rally.

MEEHAN: A Colors rally. No, I don't. I mean, I remember an incident of hate speech. I mean, there—there were probably many. But I remember—soon after—after the National Coming Out Day, the one that I was involved with, there was graffiti scrolled on someone's door. I believe it was someone I knew who was involved in DRA, but I don't remember the person's name. I don't remember what the graffiti was. You know, I didn't see it. But it was something vile, and there was a lot of outrage on campus. There may or may not have been a rally in response to that. I don't know if that's—but I don't have much more memory than that.

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember what the response was, if there was any? Aside from, you know, student backlash.

MEEHAN: No, I'm afraid—I'm afraid not. I'm afraid I don't really remember. I know at that point—I—you know, it's kind of funny. Memory is a funny thing. I remember the—I remember the feelings better than I remember anything in particular that happened. But I remember, you know, being outraged when I heard it happened.

But then I also remember, like, not being so angry, because of the reaction of people, so it must have been a really kind of positive reaction of support, I'm guessing, from the administration and the community, because I remember, like, almost being comforted by it. I don't remember what happened, though. Yeah. I'm not sure how involved I was with it or not.

WHITTEMORE: And finally, on campus at the time, there was a Take Back the Night sexual assault awareness march. Do you

remember anything about just what campus was like at that time?

MEEHAN: I certainly remember a lot of talk about that issue, about sexual assault on campus. I'm not sure I remember that event in particular. I can't say that I was very involved—involved in that issue. It's a shame, looking back. So now I can't—I can't really speak to that issue.

WHITTEMORE: And shifting again, you said you wrote that paper for—was it a thesis as a Russian major?

MEEHAN: No, I don't think so. I think it was just a final paper for a class. I can't imagine what class it was, but it was a—it was a—it was a class in the Russian department.

WHITTEMORE: And that led to your first job out of college?

MEEHAN: Yeah, yeah. So I wound up—I was just so thrilled by this organization, the work that they were doing—well, more the need for the work that they were doing, that I reached out to them, and I had some phone conversations with the director, and he wound up offering me a job, and I—I moved to Moscow and helped run that organization.

WHITTEMORE: Can you speak a little bit more on just, like, what your role in the organization was?

MEEHAN: Yeah. So, I mean, it was—when I got there—like, I'm not even sure I had an official title, but I was—I was soon told that I was the assistant director, kind of—it shows you how small the organization was. [Chuckles.] The organization—it—it was kind of falling apart by that point.

And there was an incident—I mean, this is going into completely non-Dartmouth stuff, but we were organizing an event at, like, a gay bar or a nightclub or something. We were organizing, like, an informational event, handing out fliers on HIV. And armed, masked gunmen broke in and started beating people up and arresting people, and we had our hands against the wall, and they were asking for our papers, and, you know, I—I—I thought it was—I thought it

was terrorists, and that we were going to die. It was really horrifying, actually.

It—it—it turned out that it was the police. It was basically the equivalent of a SWAT [special weapons and tactics] team. It's called the OMON [pronounced ah-MUHN] in Russia. It—it turned out—I didn't know this at the time, but it turned out, apparently, that it was actually a business dispute, and one of the—one of the businesses hired the Russian SWAT team to do this. But there were certainly some—an anti-gay—there was a lot of anti-gay stuff thrown around [chuckles] by them. They were calling us all terrible words.

And I—I organized—well, I helped organize—I pretty much organized a—a—a press conference in the aftermath—in the aftermath of—of that. It was actually—it was televised on national television in Russia. And we talked about how, you know, this was—this was an attack on the gay community. I don't think that would happen in Russia now. [Chuckles.] But in that brief window, when I was there, that was able to happen. Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: And you were in Moscow during what years?

MEEHAN: Ninety-sev- —well, I got there in '97, and I was there kind of on and off till 2001 or so, 2002.

WHITTEMORE: And what happened after?

MEEHAN: What happened after?

WHITTEMORE: Mm-hm.

MEEHAN: Oh. Well, I don't know if we're going to go into my whole life story, but— [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: We can go into what life was like after graduating Dartmouth.

MEEHAN: I think I'd just like to leave it at my Dartmouth experience. Maybe for another time. But I—I wasn't really prepared for that.

WHITTEMORE: Sure. That's fair.

MEEHAN: Yeah. I mean, my life has certainly—you know, I've had a lot of ups and downs, myself. And Dartmouth was certainly a formative time, looking back on it. And I still—I—I still have a great fondness for Dartmouth. Conflicting feelings about the first two years, but a great fondness for the place. And—you know, let's just leave it at that for now.

WHITTEMORE: All right. Were there any alums you kept in contact with from Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: Yeah. So Robert, who was—I mean, who was my partner for nine years—I mean, we're not together anymore, but we're still very close. So he's a Dartmouth '96, even—even though he transferred to Harvard. Pieter Ott. I haven't talked to him for a little while, but—yeah, he and I stay in touch. He's a '97, I believe or '98. Matt Kramar, who's a '98 [sic; Class of 2000]. Michael Lowenthal.

I also keep in touch, just—like, with my freshman year roommate. I mean, he's not gay, but—he wasn't involved with that, but—some other people like that, some other people just online. Yeah, yeah.

WHITTEMORE: And how would you say that, you know, times have changed since your time at Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: [Chuckles.] Wow. Yeah. It's—the world is a very different place—well, the United States, at the very least, is, you know, a very different place for LGBTQ people, for most of us. [Chuckles.] But the environment, broader culture is very, very different. My partner, my current partner, my fiancée, actually—the fact that I can say “fiancée”—the fact that I'm going to get married—

I actually remember—I'm taking a little detour, but I remember—I remember being at a conference in the late nineties. This wasn't affiliated with Dartmouth; I was a grad student at Harvard later. There was a conference on where the LGBTQ movement was going, and one of the conversations was about—about marriage. And there was

this big divide of, like, “No, we can’t ask for marriage. That’s terrible. Like, that’s crazy.” And other people would say, “No, I think that’s—you know, that’s the next thing.”

And I remember that being a hot topic of conversation. And now, you know, it’s—in most circles it’s relatively uncontroversial. [Chuckles.] Same-sex marriage is, you know, the law of the land.

It wasn’t that long ago that it wasn’t like that. It wasn’t that long ago that that was unthinkable. I know that I, in the late nineties, never, ever, ever thought that I would or could get married. I never thought I would because I—I couldn’t, so I, you know, thought I would reject the institution of marriage because they were rejecting me, kind of.

Now there’s—I—little more I want to do than to marry my partner. And we’re going to do that. And—and that’s in the space of what? In twenty years?

WHITTEMORE: 2016, was it?

MEEHAN: But I mean just to now. But, yeah, something like 2016. I think it was—I think it was 2015 when it was passed in New York, but in 2016 nation wide.

WHITTEMORE: Yeah, 2015.

MEEHAN: Yeah. So a lot has changed. I mean, in 1996 or wherever it was, we had this huge viewing party on campus that I just talked about, the show Ellen had a gay character. I mean, that was huge news, as if it had never been done—you know, I think there were probably gay characters on TV, but it was either as a joke or—or—or—it wasn’t the same. [Chuckles.] And now I—I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a TV show without a gay, lesbian or trans—trans character, at least one. And that’s in the space of twenty—you know, twenty,—you know, twenty, thirty years. A lot has changed.

I don’t know what it’s like at Dartmouth now. I’d be very curious. I’m sure it’s very different than it was then. And, you know, it took a lot of—it took a lot of work to get there. I

think—you know, as I said earlier, one of the things I learned in my year off, when I was at Glad Day Bookstore [sic]—I mean, the old-timers told me the importance of coming out and being public with who you are. You know, being a gay man or—you know, I'm talking about me personally, but being a lesbian or a trans person. Being open and public about that is an inherently political act. I mean, I think it still is.

And it's because so many of us did that that so much is different, so much has improved for a lot of people. And we still have ways to go. You know, not—not everyone is enjoying the fruits of that. I'm certain—I'm certain there are still eighteen-year-olds who are starting college, who will be starting college this fall, who will get to a campus and feel that they can't be themselves. So we haven't reached everyone, so we have—we have work to do. But it's definitely improved.

WHITTEMORE: So after graduating, did you pursue any further academics past Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: Yeah, a lot. [Chuckles.] Yeah. I—I got a master's and a Ph.D.

WHITTEMORE: And what schools?

MEEHAN: The master's was at Harvard. My Ph.D. was from SUNY Albany [State University of New York at Albany].

WHITTEMORE: And was this in medicine?

MEEHAN: No. I mean, that's kind of another story. Yeah. I said that I wasn't going to talk too much about my life, but I'll say one more thing about that. When I was at Dartmouth, I was pre-med. My going to Russia kind of took my life in a different direction, but I came back to my dream of becoming a doctor, and I'm actually in my fourth year of medical school right now. That's what I'm doing in Connecticut. I made a huge mid-career change, so—

WHITTEMORE: So that's—

MEEHAN: But that's about me personally, so—

WHITTEMORE: So what's your professional life been like since Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: I mean, again, I think I prefer just to talk about Dartmouth, I'm not going to—

WHITTEMORE: Yeah. Completely fair. And do you have any closing remarks?

MEEHAN: Closing remarks. Well, I'd really be curious to—to read through—to read through this project and to read about some of the stories from other—from other Dartmouth students. You know, my Dartmouth experience was my experience, but, you know, I mean, 4,000 other people on campus, and I'd be curious how—how similar and dissimilar people's experiences were at the time that I was there and also before and after. So I think that it's great that you're doing this project. I think we could learn a lot.

WHITTEMORE: And what do you hope to see for the future at Dartmouth?

MEEHAN: What I hope to see for the future of Dartmouth. That it continues to be there, that it continues to be an oasis, an oasis for learning. You know, Dartmouth is a special place in that—you know, one of the reasons I chose Dartmouth was that it is—I mean, I don't want to say “in the middle of nowhere,” but it's essentially in the middle of nowhere. And it's, you know, kind of a special bubble, where bright, ambitious, young people from all walks of life and from all experiences and from all over the world can come and just immerse themselves in learning and in a learning environment and, ideally, in an open-minded, tolerant and questioning environment. And being in a place like that for four years is really special, and I hope it continues to be that for many people.

WHITTEMORE: Thank you so much, Terence. I just wanted to say thank you again for participating in the SpeakOut project. Everything you've shared has been incredibly invaluable, and I really hope you have an amazing day.

MEEHAN: All right. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

WHITTEMORE: Thank you so much. Bye.

MEEHAN: Bye-bye.

[End of interview.]