

Michael L. Friesner '01  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
SpeakOut  
November 5, 2018  
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[ABIGAIL R.]

MIHALY: My name is [Abby] Mihaly, and I'm doing an oral history interview, through SpeakOut, with Michael [L.] Friesner [pronounced FREEZE-ner], and I am in Rauner [Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College]. It is 2:20 p.m. on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

And, Michael, if you wouldn't mind, could you introduce yourself and tell me where you are?

FRIESNER: Sure. My name is Michael Friesner. It is the same time as for you, but I'm in Toronto, Ontario, in Canada. And I am a Dartmouth Class of 2001. I don't remember what else you wanted me to say, but—

MIHALY: No, that's perfect. Thank you. Awesome. So, I mean, obviously some of this interview will focus on your time at Dartmouth and your experience here, but I'd love to just start out a little bit with your childhood, if you could tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your parents and siblings were like, if you—if—if those were relevant.

FRIESNER: Sure. I grew up in Hollywood, Florida. I'm an only child, so no siblings or [chuckles]—you know.

MIHALY: No. Yeah.

FRIESNER: My parents are both from New York, and I can't—I'm sorry, I'm trying to remember everything you told me to say [chuckles], and I'm not sure what to say. Both very Jewish.

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: I think that's—

MIHALY: Yeah!

FRIESNER: —that’s all. Basically, I lived there my whole childhood, in south Florida. I haven’t lived there since, but—yeah.

MIHALY: Great. And—and what were your parents’ names?

FRIESNER: My father’s name is Bruce [D. Friesner], and my mother’s name is Renee [S. Friesner].

MIHALY: Okay. Great. So what were your interests, growing up, a little bit?

FRIESNER: I would say I was definitely a sort of intellectual [chuckles].

MIHALY: Yeah, sure!

FRIESNER: So, I was—I was very school focused. We did a lot of traveling when I—my—my father’s big passion is travel, so every time we had any time—any time I had a school break, basically we traveled somewhere else, so I was very widely traveled as a child compared to most of my peers. And that sort of got me interested in languages and that sort of thing, so I was—I was studying a lot of languages in school.

Outside of school, I wasn’t really very much of an athlete, but I was on a bowling league. That was my big sport. And—yeah, I did, you know, various activities that—that parents make their kids do, but I wasn’t necessarily—like, I took piano lessons for, like, eight years or something, but I can’t—I can—I can—I can play a note, but that’s about it.

And I did—I guess I did gymnastics when I was younger, but then when I was the only boy doing it anymore, my parents didn’t want me to continue.

And—yeah, what else?

MIHALY: No, no. No, that’s great.

FRIESNER: I would say I was definitely not a—well, I wasn’t exactly in, like, a not-cool crowd. I wasn’t really in much of a crowd in school, I guess. I was—I was a good- —goody two-shoes a bit. And—yeah, so I didn’t actually have that much of a— [Chuckles.] I did have a social life, I suppose, but mostly

within school. I didn't really have much of a social life out of school. It was more, like, family things and that sort of thing.

MIHALY: Sure. Were you close with your parents, would you say?

FRIESNER: I would say so, yeah. I mean, I was an only child. They were older parents. Well—older—than anyway—in those days especially. They were both thirty-seven when I was born, so—which is younger than I am, so that's a little bit scary, but, yeah, so—so, you know, it was a lot of their—my peers were—were, you know, older than most of my friends' parents because they were, you know, my parents' friends and that sort of thing.

MIHALY: Sure. Yeah. I had a similar experience growing up, so definitely understand the—yeah. And I'm sure traveling with them also brought you guys closer as sort of like a family activity.

FRIESNER: For sure. And it was—it was always the three of us. I mean, a very—a very—very few occasions, we did travel with, like, other friends of theirs or relatives, but most of the time it was just us.

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: And I had family in—most of my parents' relatives—I mean, most of my relatives, I guess, were in New York. We did have some that were in Florida but not many.

MIHALY: Okay.

FRIESNER: My grandparents lived in—my father's parents lived in Florida, but they both passed away before I was—when I was seven or eight, so they were part of my very small childhood but not after that.

MIHALY: Sure. Great. And—so then going—moving into high school a little bit, what—do you think your relationship with your parents shifted at all in high school, or—was it—what was your path like through high school, I guess? It can be a hard time for some people.

FRIESNER: Yeah, high school was a tough time. I mean, I think middle school was tougher than high school for me, but—because I don't think I really have a sort of—I mean, I guess I was made fun of a lot in middle school. By the time I was in high school, I had sort of come out of that phase and was just kind of my own person a little bit more.

I had, you know, the ups and downs of high school. I had moments where I was depressed or whatever, that sort of thing, and, you know, I was kind of figuring out the whole coming out process and figuring out what I was exactly and what that meant and whatever. But—but, yeah. I mean, that was mostly—high school was pretty similar to my other experience in that way.

I was not really that social, per se, so it wasn't that much of a—I mean, I was social. I had friends. But, like, we had, like, phone friends. I would—like, my freshman year, I had a friend who I was on the phone with almost every day, and then she—well, I guess my first two years. Then she graduated. She was two years ahead of me. And we sort of lost touch after that at some point.

But, yeah, like, I had the activity—I was involved in a lot of, like, cultural activities. Like, I was in the French Club and the German Club and that sort of thing, so related to languages and cultures and stuff, so I—I knew people from the—we did, like, various dinners and things related to that. But I don't think—I mean, I wasn't—I wasn't—I wasn't really an outcast per se like maybe I was in middle school, but high school, I was just kind of like—you know, I was just, like, one of the smart kids or whatever, right?

MIHALY: Yeah. [Chuckles.] So—

FRIESNER: I went to a prep school, so, I mean, everyone was a smart kid in some sense, but I was—I was sort of the over- —one of the over-achievers of that school in terms of—of academics and that sort of thing.

MIHALY: What prep school did you go to?

FRIESNER: I went to Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

MIHALY: Okay.

So, I mean, you mentioned you were made fun of in middle school. [Chuckles.] What—what—what kind of things were you being made fun of for? Like, what was that—what was that like?

FRIESNER: I think, you know, I probably played into it. I didn't quite know how to solve—I mean, I was—I was always little bit young for my age, I guess. I mean, I looked like I was about eleven, probably, when I was in like—

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: —And so I think that I got made fun of some for that, but I kind of played into it and—and—you know, I liked to sing around school and stuff like that. [Chuckles.] Yeah, so I think it was—it was—it was more like that. And then I guess in high school people sort of matured. I still looked really young. I mean, it's probably [unintelligible]. If you saw a picture of my senior year high school, I looked like I was about thirteen or fourteen. [Both chuckle.]

MIHALY: Okay, yeah. And so great—I mean, you mentioned sort of trying to figure out your coming out process through high school. Did you come out in high school, or can you—can you talk a little bit about that?

FRIESNER: I didn't—well I guess it depends on what you define as coming out. I suppose that I—there were a couple of friends that I confided in to that I might be something: bi, gay, I don't know, right? But I didn't really date. I was—I was—I was kind of—most people just figured I wasn't dating because I was young for my age or whatever—you know, immature for my age or whatever. And I don't think most people even crossed their mind, at least in a serious sense.

Like, obviously, when kids make fun of each other at that age, they say things like, "Oh, you're gay" or whatever, you know. But I don't think anyone actually thought that was, you know, real. And I know they did that to a lot of other kids who—who—well, I don't know what their secret sexual orientation is like in their—in their minds, but—you know, that are married to women, with kids, so, you know—

[Chuckles.] So I don't think it meant that the people actually really suspected anything per se.

But it wasn't very present. I think it was a different time, then, you know?

MIHALY: Mmm. Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: Like, it's not like—it wasn't really on the radar, you know. It was more like a thing to make fun of, but you didn't know that there were—there were real gay people around. Like, I found out after high school that one of my favorite teachers was—she was in a relationship with a woman for a long time, but I never—it never even crossed my mind, even though she talked about traveling with this woman. I just thought it was a friend of hers, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: I knew she was divorced, so I figured, *Oh, she's divorced and traveling with one of her female friends*, right? And then, you know, there was one teacher that I kind of semi had it confirmed that he was gay, but still no one actually really knew what that—you know, believed that or whatever. And then there were maybe, like, two or three people who were out in the school maybe, but it was—you know, it wasn't really a thing and even then they were out because they kind of had to be because everyone—it was—it was obvious enough that people would have assumed it anyway, right?

MIHALY: How big was your school?

FRIESNER: There were about 150 people in my class, so 150, 160, something like that. And it was—the school was all the way from, like, K to twelve, so I started there in seventh grade, but—so, I mean, I don't know—I don't know—I don't know as much about the lower school or whatever, but seven to twelve was kind of all together as the upper school. And then I know they changed the structure since then, but—so, I don't know, do the math, like, 1,000 people maybe.

MIHALY: Yeah. Okay, yeah.

FRIESNER: Yeah, so, like, a medium size, I guess. Like, everyone knew each other, but it's not like everyone knew each other's private lives that much, right? And—yeah, I'm trying to think of, like, in terms of awareness—yeah, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] things weren't really talked about. Like, I have memories that were kind of, you know, semi-scarring, not—not—not that extreme—about, like, teachers that would make kind of homophobic—not even comments, more like inter- —part of their lesson.

Like, I had one teacher—one of my eighth grade—my eighth grade history teacher had this routine he would do about Richard the Lionhearted, which he would call Dickie T Lionhearted and put on—put on, like, a lisp and make fun of him for, like, the lesson. And it was really uncomfortable. [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: Jeez.

FRIESNER: Like, it just seems normal, so nobody complained because that's what—what's what is done—that's what was—it was supposed to be, like: "Oh, he's so dynamic and entertaining. He has these characters." Because he had other characters that he'd do, you know, where he'd act things out. That was just the one that stuck out in *my* might, right?

MIHALY: Sure. And, I mean, as early as eighth grade, do you feel like you were aware that—was that—those kinds of things affecting you because you knew that you might not be straight, or—

FRIESNER: Yeah, I'd—I'd say so. Like—I don't know. I mean, I don't think I really knew enough to know to know what that mean exactly. Like, I knew I was different in some way, and I knew that, you know, when people made fun of me, calling me gay, that I didn't think it was that far off from being within the realm of possibility, right? But I—I definitely felt like I identified with that—I iden- —I felt targeted in some way, so I obviously was identifying with the community in some way, but I didn't really know what that meant. I didn't even know there was a community, actually, at the time, right?

But, yeah, and I'd say maybe it was about probably about tenth grade, I had—that was when I, like, started to—about

it—talking about it to some friends. But still never really like that, never in that much depth, I guess, you know.

MIHALY: Sure. Yeah. And you also mentioned that you were close with your family, but it sounds like this wasn't something you were talking about with your family until much later.

FRIESNER: Oh, yeah. No, I didn't talk about it at all in high school.

MIHALY: Okay.

FRIESNER: I didn't even know what I would have—I don't know how I would have said it, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: And my parents may, like,—I mean, in—in the way that things—that was appropriate back then, and maybe, probably still happens today, but more then, where, like, people would just make comments, not thinking, you know? So I—but I still—even though they made comments, not thinking, I knew that. I still looked like, *I don't know what that means* for how they would reac- —more my mother than my father, actually, because she would have—she had this—she went—my mother went to, like, one of the schools for the gifted in New York, which—Hunter High School, the school for the intellectually gifted girls, which is how she always called it. And every time when she met people who were boys who went there, because there were some that I knew from Dartmouth, she would say, “Oh, you went to Hunter High School, the school for intellectually gifted girls,” which of course they loved.

And, yeah, she had a story about how, you know, soon after she finished, they let in boys, and then she'd say, “Oh, yeah, but it was only the queers that went there,” that wanted to go at that point, right? What boys want to be [chuckles]—I don't know. So, yeah, that was kind of the way she sort of described that story, you know, and that was kind of just an off-the-cuff remark and that there were, you know, various things like that.

MIHALY: Yeah.

So, I mean, I guess moving a little bit towards Dartmouth, can you—can you tell me a little bit about how you sort of ended up here and, yeah, what that process was like in terms of—from high school coming to Dartmouth?

FRIESNER:

Sure. So I think—you know, by the time I was looking at colleges—and my parents—you know, again, o- —over- —over-achieving child and overbearing parents of single—of, you know, only child, so we sort of organized our vacations for about the last two ye- —well, like, my—end of my sophomore year into my junior year of high school—around visiting—visiting colleges, so I think we visited, like, twenty-some—like, almost thirty colleges.

So we did, like, a New England visit. We did, like, a Mid-Atlantic. We did—you know, that's how we organized our vacations. So I kind of had a lot of information to—to build—to—to—to use, to sort of select where I would go. And so clearly this was in my mind, because I was thinking about certain places.

Like, one school that I really liked and was admitted to was Georgetown [University]. And, you know, I actually ended up doing a grad degree there. So I know it's changed a lot since then, but there was a very clear presence of homophobic element, whether—you know, because of the Catholic Church or whatever, but, you know, it—it—it was known that it might not be a great place to be out. And it was already in my mind, so, you know,—I mean, certainly there was also the *It's a Catholic school and I'm Jewish, and I don't know how that will play out*, but, you know, that—that was definitely something that—that crossed my mind internally, not that I talked about it with anybody, but it—it was a factor.

And I think because more—more because I was, you know, used—I was used to being in a suburban environment. I was young for my age. I think I was kind of afraid of most of the city schools. Georgetown was one of the few city schools that I seriously considered, just because I liked how international—how—the language element and all that, which was sort of drove me to Dartmouth as well.

So, I mean, I knew I wanted to do something with languages, culture, something like that, so—so Dartmouth was kind of

an obvious choice among sort of the stronger schools for that. I applied to eight schools, and I was admitted to all but Princeton [University], which was the one my counselor—you know, college counselor at hi- —was advising me to—was trying to—pushing me towards.

I can't say if I would—I—I think—I think I made a better choice anyway, but I don't know, because I didn't have that choice to make, right? But I got into all the others that I applied to. I think it was—if I can remember, it was Dartmouth, Middlebury [College], Williams [College], Amherst [College], Swarthmore [College], Tufts [University]—I'm leaving one out. I don't remember what I—was that eight already? [Chuckles.] I didn't keep track. Dartmouth, Middlebury, Swarthmore, Amherst, Williams, Tufts and the one I'm leaving out.

MIHALY: [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: So obviously just didn't leave a huge impression, apparently, because I can't remember what it was.

MIHALY: Was it Georgetown or—

FRIESNER: Oh, and Georgetown. No, no, Georgetown, because I already said it. That's why—thank you.

MIHALY: [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: Yeah. And other than Georgetown were, like small liberal arts kind of colleges, and that's sort of the environment I wanted, I think because I was at of prep school where we were definitely coddled a little bit with small classes and that sort of thing and—and, you know, getting to know teachers and that kind of thing. I was looking for that experience, again. And then the language focus as well.

So I think by the time I got all my admissions letters, I was deciding between Dartmouth, Swarthmore and Georgetown, maybe Middlebury, although I knew that, considering sort of just rankings and that sort of thing, I was probably better off in one of the other three. And—yeah, and that's—I mean, ultimately I chose Dartmouth, right?

MIHALY: Yeah! Great! I mean, so can you tell me a little bit about, like, your arrival on campus and your first couple of days here? Do you remember if you felt like it was what you expected?

FRIESNER: I definitely think it was what I expected, yeah. It had that community feel right away. I mean, obviously they start you with the—with the—what do they call the—the Dartmouth Outing Club [First-Year] Trips, right?

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: And so I was more concerned about the fact that I didn't know how to do any camping or outdoorsy things and that I was going to end up doing that, because, you know, even though I wanted to be in a pretty rural environment, I didn't really necessarily want to do camping. [Chuckles.] But, you know, and I did it, and I was—I was very happy to have that experience. And I thought that people that were on my trip were going to be my best friends for the rest of Dartmouth, and most of them I hardly ever saw again, but—[Chuckles.] You know, that was—that was kind of a nice introduction to—

And I actually did meet some—some people—at least one person that I met at the [Moosilauke Ravine] Lodge ended up being, you know, a long-term friend, not that I see him or talk to him all the time, but I was at his wedding a few months ago, so [chuckles], you know, that—that—there were some lasting friendships that came out of that.

I think in terms of just the adjustment, I don't think that LGBT was totally on my radar as much as some other aspects of the adjustment. I mean, not being—so my school was probably, like, a third Jewish, and my elementary school was about two-thirds Jewish, so I was kind of used to everybody being Jewish. And, you know, my parents were—that was one of their concerns about Dartmouth, was, like, “Oh, you picked the Ivy League school that doesn't have Jews at—in it,” right? Which I don't know why, because Dartmouth is still, like, 10 percent Jewish or something.

But, you know,—and they said, “Oh, when you talk to people that are not, like, from Jewish environments—remember when we sent you to—to day camp and it was at, like, the—

where our community college and that you were one of the only Jews? And remember how you commented that everyone had, like, names like A.J. and M.J. that you had never heard of? Like, they didn't have full names?"

And, you know, they're, like, "Okay, you have to be Mike. You can't be Michael." And, like, that's fine because when people call me Mike now, it still—it kind of—it—it—it kind of reminds me of that time when I was, like, pretending to be something I'm not, right? Because I was never Mike before, and then all of a sudden my parents told me I should be Mike so that people will accept me because, you know, people have nicknames in—in non-Jewish context.

I don't know if there was really any connection with Judaism at all, or Jewish culture, but that was their image of that, anyway. That was how it was represented, and I didn't know any better. So—so, yeah, I was Mike for my first year, until I finally said, *This is silly. I've never been Mike before. It's not really a name that I wa- —that I, like, associate myself with.* And so now it kind of bothers me when somebody does that, calls me Mike, because it reminds me of that time of inauthenticity in some way, right?

MIHALY: Yeah, it's really interesting. What do you think your parents were concerned about in terms of wanting you to go buy something that would make you, like, fit in more in their eyes?

FRIESNER: I think they had two concerns. I think one concern was that I was going to experience some kind of discrimination that I wasn't prepared for because I never really experienced that before. So that's one side of it.

And the other side of it is I think that they wanted to make sure that I maintained some attachment to my community so that I kind of separated my—my life in terms of my general presence at Dartmouth and academics, and then I could go to [the Dartmouth] Hillel [Club], and I know they mentioned a lot of times I should be involved in Hillel and, you know, have that—have time to be with in group or whatever, you know.

So I think that that was—they were thinking kind of on both sides of it, but, like, that I was going to have to seek that out,

which I wasn't used to because when I was in a school with—you know, a third of the people are Jewish, I don't have to search for Jewish—I don't have to search for Jews, everyone's Jewish, right? Yeah, not everyone but a very large percentage of people. I don't—I don't think I really realized before then that—I mean, at least not in any real sense that Jews were a minority, you know, so—we never were, anywhere I was, right?

So I think that that was—that was sort of their concern. I think also knowing that I, you know,—I don't know why they always thought that I wasn't that experienced with the world, even though I had traveled a lot more than other people, but I think still I was—I was sheltered in some ways, right?

MIHALY: Yeah, absolutely.

So that was—it would have been fall of '97 that you were arriving here, right?

FRIESNER: Exactly. Yeah.

MIHALY: Okay. Great. And then what was moving into your dorm room like? I mean, did you have a roommate, or what was your first—

FRIESNER: Yes, so I had two roommates. I was in Russell Sage [Hall], in a two-room triple, which I don't even know if they still do that, because I noticed a lot of those rooms are getting unbundled or, like, you know, people need more space now than we did back then, apparently. But, yeah, we were—we were three in—and we—we had—one room was the bedroom, and one room was the study room, so we were all three in the same room. I think that that was a little bit tough, just because of, you know, me sort of coming to terms with LGBT things, and that—you know, whatever, whatever that meant.

I know—I mean, it's interesting because I had two roommates that were very different from me, and one, a little bit more similar—so one was—he was on, like, the—what is it? The crew, I think it was? I think he was on the crew team. Anyway, he was on some sports team. I think it was crew. But he went to prep school and, like,—I think—it was a long time ago. I'm feeling old now, but Connecticut, I think, or

something. You know, so—kind of could be a similar background in some ways.

And the other one, he is from, like,—he— is from, like, a logging family in northern Maine, and so I didn't think that we had that much in common, right? And I also—he—he started— immediately poster'd around his bed was, like, pictures of, you know, kind of bikini models or something, right? [Chuckles.] So I'm, like, *I don't know how much we're gonna have in common*, right?

I think it's—it's in- —and—and the other thing was that he was, like, a homebody, and so he basically was in the room all the time, and so I'm, like, I never had any kind of privacy, right?

In the end, the other roommate—I don't think ever talked—I rarely ever talked to him, and I never saw him after he was my roommate. I don't even know—for all I know he didn't graduate. I don't know. Probably he did. But we never really talked. And he was—since he was on a team, he was up super early and—and in bed super early, so I don't think we ever really interacted that much. We didn't have any problems, but we didn't really interact.

The other roommate—it's interesting because we had that sort of rough patch, and then he ended up being in my drill class when he took French, and I—you know, and I remember having a talk with him, saying, like, "If you're not—if you would rather switch, there's another section at the same time. We can switch you." And he said, "No, I know that you'll be good, so I'd rather stay with you."

MIHALY: Oh!. [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: Okay. And he also ended up taking the—like, the same ice skating PE [physical education] class, and that was sort of like I had—I developed a crush on one of the instructors [chuckles] there, from the hockey team, so—so it was interesting. And so we—we ended up by talking more, and I was helping him with his writing.

And I know that he was frustrated because, you know, he worked—he worked very hard to be successful at his

classes and that's, you know, how he had made his way to—to Dartmouth, coming from a family that didn't necessarily have everyone going to—to higher-level education. And so he would, like, outline his—his assignments for the semester or term or whatever—yeah, for the term—and then, like, start writing—like researching for his paper, final paper in, like, the second or third week of the term.

And then he'd see, like,—he'd see me in—like, say, a Wednesday at 5 p.m., and I'd say—and, you know, he'd say, “Well, what are you doing?” I'm, like, “Oh, I have a paper due tomorrow morning, so I'm starting it.” [Laughs.] “You're starting.” “Yup. I'm gonna—I'm gonna get some books in the library and then I'm gonna read, and then I'll write the paper,” and—and, you know, by about one—one in the morning I'd be done. [Chuckles.]

And I know that frustrated him a lot. But in the end, like, he actually had me read over some of his papers. You know, he was working on some creative writing as well that he—that he had me look at and edit and stuff like that, so we ended up, you know, having mutual respect and—actually I remember toward the end of the year, we had some kind of conversation where I basically came out to him, but I didn't really need to because he said—you know, he said, “I know”—I'm trying to think of how he said it exactly, but, you know, he said, “You were—you were in—we were in the same ice skating class. I saw how you looked at the hockey players. I could tell.” [Chuckles.] “You're not that subtle.” That was kind of funny.

You know, and he's like—I was, like, “Oh, wow! Because I didn't know if you—you know, you might not have had any experience, like, with LGBT people.” And he's, like, “You know, you're reading my creative writing about my family. I don't—the uncle that I go fishing with”—I think it was an uncle, I don't remember—“that I go fishing with in one of the—in one of the—a couple of the stories you read is—is gay.” [Chuckles.] “But I'm not not experienced. I know—I know people. Like, it's not a thing.”

And that was kind of funny because, I mean, I had built it up to be this thing, and it—it obviously wasn't, and it wouldn't have been but—you know.

MIHALY: Yeah. Was that the first person that you came out to in college?

FRIESNER: No. The first person I came out to, I would say—it was—it was right around—that's funny, actually, because I think it was—I—I kind of like the analogy. It was right around—I don't know if it was on Groundhog Day, but it was right around Groundhog Day in my first year, and I remember thinking, like, *That's so appropriate, to come out on Groundhog Day—*

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: *—because you keep going in and out and in and out, so it's—it's kind of—I remember it wasn't exactly that day. But it was in February of my—of my first year, and I had—so I first came out to a friend of mine that I had been hanging out with, who—I mean, I didn't—I didn't see her too much after because she actually transferred after that year, out of Dart—well, she transferred to Yale [University].*

But, you know, so I had been talking to her, kind of, and she has a lot of—like, her best friend was gay, from high school, so, like, she had talked about him. And I did—I ultimately met him when he was visiting but not—not then.

And then—yeah, and then the—we had—well, I don't know. The structure is different at Dartmouth now. Right? But we had—what were their names? I can't remember. We had UGAs [undergraduate advisors] and then R- —R- resident advisers. I think what they were called. RAs, I think that was what they were called, who were, oh no, cluster, whatever. They were like cluster advisors. Now it's mostly professional adults that do those jobs, right? But at the time, it was all students.

And I knew that our RA for the cluster was—well, I guess this is probably making—I don't think he would care because he was obviously very out even then. But anyway [chuckles], I'm like, you probably can figure out who I'm talking about. But, you know, he—he was—he was kind of one of the few out people that I was aware of. And so, you know, she said,

“Why don’t you talk to him? I think that might be a good person to talk to.

So I did, and it was—it was kind of good because he’s, like, “This is exactly why I went into this, and—and I was waiting for this moment to happen with somebody in the cluster.” [Laughs.] So he got very excited and had like, all sorts of books to lend me to read and—so that was kind of fun.

But—and, you know,—and then little by little, I told friends and whatever, and then, of course, ended up having a girlfriend the next year and confused everybody. But anyway, that—that’s sort of how my—how my process went in that time.

MIHALY: Okay.

So can we—if you don’t mind sharing, what were the names of those roommates? Do you remember the name of that roommate that you were—ended up being pretty close with?

FRIESNER: I mean, close with for that year. I did, I did chat with him throughout the time at—at—at—at Dartmouth, but, I mean, you know, I don’t—I’ve lost touch with him since.

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: His name is Scott. Do you need his full name? Or—

MIHALY: I don’t know. Do you know his last name?

FRIESNER: Yeah, I know his last name, but I didn’t know if was, like, appropriate to—I don’t know. Scott [P.] Dionne [Class of 2001] was his name.

MIHALY: Okay. And do you remember your other roommate’s name also, or—

FRIESNER: Tom something. Tom.

MIHALY: Tom? All right. [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: I don’t remember his last name.

MIHALY: That's okay.

FRIESNER: Something—something English-sounding, but I don't remember what it was.

MIHALY: No, no, that's okay. Great. Okay. So then—yeah. I mean, you've mentioned Hillel a little bit. I'm curious—a little bit more just about how that community was important to you during your time here.

FRIESNER: Oh, yeah. I mean, that was—that was some—that was some—I mean, I actually was certainly more involved in than I am now in Jewish life, which is kind of a shame. I go—I go back and forth throughout the years, whether I'm more involved or less involved. But—but, yeah, certainly at Dartmouth I was—I was more involved, I think, than even my parents expected, because they were not—like, they were—Jewish culture was very important to them, but they were not very sort of religious or even—like, they—they—we joined the synagogue because I asked. I said, "Why are all my Jewish friends going to synagogue and we're not?" Like [chuckles]—that was when I was maybe eight or nine, right? And so that's why we even joined.

But my—my mother grew up in, like, a—I mean, I wouldn't say Orthodox, because they were not really. But, like, they—she grew up in a kosher home, and they—you know, whatever. And they—it was very—

MIHALY: Conservative.

FRIESNER: —important to—

My father grew up in a home where they were very culturally Jewish, but they didn't—they weren't kosher, and they didn't do—you know. So I think—and then the reason they didn't is mostly his influence, right? Because my—my father said, you know, "I don't want to be kosher. That's too much work." And so my mother said, "Okay, we won't do it then." Fine. And that was the end of that.

So then I think they were actually surprised that I was going to Hillel services, not necessarily every week but many weeks. And I was on the board, and I got involved in—you

know, I had various roles at—at Hillel throughout my time. But I think it was a really—it was important in terms of finding people that had sort of similar upbringings to me in some ways that I didn't necessarily share with—with everybody at—at Dartmouth.

And I think that I realized that I had a lot more in common with people from Hillel, regardless of where they were from in—well, mostly the country; I was going to say the world, but mostly they were American—where they were from in the country or, you know, where—what kind of school they went to. I had a lot more in common with them than, say, somebody who went to prep school in Connecticut.

MIHALY: Yeah. I mean, do you think a lot—like, were a lot of your close friends also involved in Hillel?

FRIESNER: I had friends from Hillel. I would say in—so I had sort of—I fell into this social group, which was weird for me because, as I said, in high school I was sort of—like, I had isolated friends and that was it. Like, they weren't all, like, a crowd that did things together. And then I suddenly fell into this crowd, and I was never really that comfortable with the idea of being in that—this, like, crowd.

And—and, you know, they were—so I—I mean, I—I was more of a peripheral member at various times of this, but I was always in it, whereas some people kind of came and went, right? But they always went to eat at Food Court [Class of 1953 Commons] at, like, five o'clock every night, so I knew if I wanted to see them—and I actually couldn't go to dinner at five o'clock because I was teaching drill a lot of the times, which was at five or—I think—well, it changed. They changed—it was at five, then it was at five twenty. I don't remember but it was around that time when I wouldn't have been able to have dinner anyway. I didn't think that was a dinner-eating time anyway. It was a little early for me.

But, no—but I knew they were there if I wanted to find [chuckles] them, you know. And so sometimes I—I think there were a few times where I went after drill, and they were still there or something like that, or I wasn't teaching—I was teaching morning drill that term or something like that and I

would stop in. But I wasn't really that central a part of that group.

But there were a few people in that group who were Jewish, but they weren't really involved in Hillel. Like, they might have come—like, I might have sat with them at, like, High Holy Day services or something like that, but they weren't that involved.

MIHALY: So how did you meet that group of people? Was that, like, a—a freshman group, sort of, or—

FRIESNER: So one of them was the one I met on—at the Lodge, at Moosilauke Lodge. And then I met—I don't remember where I met Olga, but we—I know we did table tennis as our [chuckles] PE together, so maybe that's where we started talking more. And she had met [Robert M.] "Rob" [Hallenbeck, Class of 2001], who was the one I met at Moosilauke, before because they're both from the same town, even though they didn't go to—they went to, like, rival high schools; they didn't go to the same high school. But, like, they—they had met up at var- —at, like, Dartmouth admi- —admi- —admission events or something before and—and had been in touch over the summer.

So that's how the group sort of started around the two of them, and then she was in—I forgot what it was called now. There was a—I don't even know if it exists. Untamed Shrews, I think it was called. It's like kind of a performance group where they'd recite mostly, like, feminist type poetry and something like that. So poetry, scenes from theater, whatever that was. And so there were a couple of people from that group.

And then—I'm not su—oh, and then Rob was involved in Ledyard Canoe Club, so then there were some people from that. So it's kind of weird that I had this group because they had [chuckles] very different interests from me, right?

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: But I somehow was always in this group. And—yeah, so that was where that circle of people came in. And, you know, we all did a clu—we—we did the bidding—they changed the—

the—the dorm assignment process—process—my senior year, and so we had a bidding thing whereas before, I think they just assigned us. So we decided that we all needed to be clustered together—well, they decided, and I agreed to join the clustering. I was a little bit mixed—had mixed feelings about it. And so we were all in Streeter [Hall] together.

But even then, I was kind of a little bit apart, because I think I was the only one on the third floor. Yeah, because the second was women, I think, so the women in our group were on the second floor, and then the guys were all on the first floor except for me.

MIHALY: Okay.

FRIESNER: And I don't remember why that happened. I think that it happened—there weren't enough rooms for us all to be on the first floor, I think, and—and I—I think there were—maybe I had the choice of a smaller room on the first floor or a bigger room on the third floor, but I kind of also liked the idea that I wouldn't be directly—like, didn't have to, like, also kind of share—like, wait for the shower [chuckles]. Didn't need to see them brushing my—right?

MIHALY: Great. And you said it was—it was Rog and—

FRIESNER: Rob and Olga, yeah.

MIHALY: Rob. Oh, I misheard that. And what was Rob's last name?

FRIESNER: Hallenbeck.

MIHALY: Honda. Okay.

FRIESNER: Hallenbeck.

MIHALY: Holland- —Hallenbeck. Okay. [Laughs.] My bad. [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: That's—yeah.

MIHALY: Yeah. I mean, okay, great. So, like, what—what other activities or—or what did you do kind of in your free time and

your social time, apart from Hillel and hanging out with this group?

FRIESNER: Yeah, I think—I definitely—well, my first year—because I had been on the yearbook in high school, and so I didn't realize that it wasn't really the same thing [chuckles] at university as it is at—at high school. So I joined the yearbook my first year, and I was, like, a yearbook photographer. But, like, I don't really have any photography training, and I— [Both chuckle.] So I did that my first year, but I didn't do that after that.

I'm trying to think of what other clubs and things that I was involved in, because it's a while ago now. I'm probably going to have to look at my résumé from back then.

MIHALY: [Laughs.] Well, that's okay. I mean,—

FRIESNER: But I was in—yeah, so in terms of, like, clubs, I—I was very—like, so I think my—I wish I had found about my freshman fall, but I found about—found out about doing drill as a job my freshman winter. And so I got very involved in [the] Rassias [Center for World Languages and Cultures] stuff, and that was, like,—and actually, my—most of my isolated friends that I hung out with were from that—either from language classes, language club activities, whatever, or from drill.

And so that was—I taught drill, I would say, almost every term after that. Like, I think I missed—I skipped—I think—yeah, I—I know because I tried out for French drill my freshman winter, and I was assigned John [A.] Rassias's class, so that was pretty intimidating. [Chuckles.] Like your first time—you're a freshman, and they're, like, "Oh, the famous John Rassias." And I was—that was who I—taught drill for, for his French II class. And then—

MIHALY: Whoa!

FRIESNER: Yeah, exactly. And then I taught drill that win- —that spring again in French. Always—actually, I never did Level I; I only did Level II. But I did French II and then—we didn't have drill in sp- —Level III for those languages, like there are—for Romance languages like there is now.

And then I worked for the ALPs [Accelerated Language Programs] summer language program—

MIHALY: Oh, cool.

FRIESNER: —that summer, and then—in French and Italian, because I had took Italian that year. And then I did it the fall—did I teach drill in the f- —yeah, I think I taught French drill in the fall of my sophomore year, and then I taught Italian drill in the winter because they were short in Italian. And then I took that spring off because I was taking four classes, and it turned out to be good because that's the term my father had a stroke, so—and he was—he was in the hospital in Boston [Massachusetts] and then in a rehab center in Boston, so I was going to Boston pretty much every weekend.

MIHALY: What year was that?

FRIESNER: That was—so, '99?

MIHALY: Oh, okay. And did you have to take off any time or anything like that, or—

FRIESNER: I didn't take time off, and it was—you know, it was one of these things where when it happened, they—my—my—so my father's cousin is a—well, no long- —he's no longer living now, but at the time he was a renowned cardiologist. Well, he's still a renowned cardiologist because he actually published a book about his—his struggles with Parkinson's [disease] before he passed away. But—so he was a renowned cardiologist in—in Boston, and when my father had his stroke and it seemed—it was—seemed clear he needed heart surgery, and my mother didn't trust the doctors that they were suggesting down there, that she had heard horror stories about, so she called for a recommendation, and they had him airlifted to Boston, which—

It—it turned out to be good because if I had—if he had been in Florida, I probably would have had to drop out for the term and—and go down there. Or I don't know what I would have done, right? Because that's—that's not what happened, right? What happened is they said, "Sit tight." I think my

mother said, “Sit tight. I think we’re gonna be in Boston.” And that’s what happened.

So then they were in Boston for, like, three months or something. My mother had, like, a residence hotel she was in for a while, and then—by the hospital, by Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and then he was in a rehab clinic that was elsewhere in Boston. They didn’t want to leave to travel, send him back, so she was—I think she had to move to a different residence hotel that was closer to there, but—but, yeah, so I was going back—

And my aunt, my mother’s sister, who was in Long Island, but she quit her job and went to help my mother, so—so I was just there on weekends, but I was there—well, I don’t know. I don’t remember my exact class schedule. It’s possible I did—I—you know, there was—I can’t remember if I had a day where I could have gone down there, right, but anyway, I was—I was there every week.

MIHALY: Yeah. Wow.

FRIESNER: I don’t know how I completed that term. But I did. [Both chuckle.]

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: I—I—yeah.

MIHALY: So—yeah, I mean, just to loop back around your—you majored in—in linguistics and Romance languages, right?

FRIESNER: Yes, that’s right.

MIHALY: Okay. So—so definitely a lot of what you were doing here was surrounding languages. Do you have any specific memories of, like, favorite classes or favorite professors here?

FRIESNER: Well, obviously John Rassias was—is, you know, a legend.

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: I took his theater class, and it was just like this amazing—I remember the experience of the class more than his actual teaching, honestly, because a lot of it was prac- —theater in practice, so he didn't, like, lecture that much in the class. I've seen him lecture in other contexts, but—but, yeah, that was—it was sort of this—this kind of amazing class, where he just basically let anybody who wanted to take the class in. Probably, you know, didn't even—everyone didn't even have the prerequisites.

And we were put in these groupings of, like, five or six people, maybe, to perform scenes from each of the plays we were studying. The—the scene was French plays that were inspired by mythology, like Greek and Roman mythology. And I just remember, like, we became these characters, and, like, I was—my—my group actually—if I—probably if I—if any- —if anyone from that group that I only knew from that class; other people, I knew elsewhere, but they still called me Sipeon because that was my role in [unintelligible]. It was Sipeon.

And I—and so—I mean, that was just kind of an amazing way to kind of take that on as your own. And I wasn't a big literature person, which is how I ended up in linguistics rather than just doing a pure language major because I liked languages but didn't want to do—go the literature route, which I think there's a lot more diversity now in language programs than there was then, but, you know, in those days it was mostly literature if you were in a language program, right?

So—so, yeah, that was sort of like a—oh, wow! It's actually—even though we're doing literature, in a sense, quote unquote, it was, like, bringing it to life, you know, and I think all of the Rassias stuff—that both teaching drill and all that—that gave me a lot of confidence. I think I was not that comfortable speaking in front of groups. I remember in high school I had to take a—whatever they—I forgot what they called it, but it was like a speech class, where you had to give speeches, right? And—and I was very nervous, and I remember, you know, shaking once—like, one—one—one of the speeches, I was, like, shaking throughout the whole thing.

And so I think that gave me a lot of—the method gave me a lot of confidence, and then his class was sort of building on it even more.

You know, I took some other great classes in language. I took—I took a literature class with Nancy [L.] Canepa, in Italian literature—it was—it's Comedy in—or the Italian Tradition in Comedy. And—and that was an excellent class. She's—she's—I think she's still teaching at Dartmouth now.

MIHALY: What was her name? I'm sorry. It was a little unclear.

FRIESNER: Nancy Canepa.

MIHALY: Okay. I'm not sure. Was—was John Rassias, like, one of the reasons that you came to Dartmouth?

FRIESNER: So it's interesting because I—I would say yes and no, in the sense that, you know, he has a reputation that precedes him, right? And so I was very excited to be in a place where language was a priority, because that's not—most—most schools kind of minimize the importance of language or it's—you know, programs are being cut or it's kind of this extra kind of thing that's not crucial in a program. And at Dartmouth it was central. Like, you have your class, and the you have your drill, and every- —like, it's a big part of the Dartmouth experience. And so I think that was something that made me excited about Dartmouth, for sure.

I was scared of the method because all I—the people—all that people said was, "Oh, it means that your teacher is going to crack eggs on your head." Like—which is like from the *60 Minutes* set that he did, where he kind of hammed things up. Okay, that's not really what it is. But I know I was afraid of that. And I had had a meeting—my father, who—my father went to Penn, the University of Pennsylvania, for—where I ended up going to grad school as well, but he went there for—for undergrad, and he really wanted me to go there and, you know, had me meet with some professors and stuff like that. And I was, of course, afraid of being in the middle of a city. I don't know why, because now I can't picture moving to a place like New Hampshire long term, but who knows?

You know, at the time, I was afraid of the city, and Philly [Philadelphia] was more dangerous then than it was even six years later, when I did end up going there. But I remember meeting with a professor in the French department and, you know, him kind of speaking disparagingly about the method, and he said, “Oh, yes, Dartmouth’s very good for languages, but they have that weird method”—like, you know, which now that I’m—now that I’m a language teacher, I see that it’s much more effective than many of the methods I’ve seen. But, you know, that—that was—

So I had kind of mixed feelings about it because I was afraid of *What if I don’t—what if this doesn’t mesh with me?*—right?

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: But, yeah, that was a reason that Dartmouth was a draw, and that’s the reason why Middlebury was a draw as well, for lan- —you know, known for languages and [recording glitch] as well, right?

MIHALY: Yeah, absolutely.

Okay, well, I guess this is shifting a little bit, but I’m curious about how you interacted with Greek life when you were here. I know you’ve mentioned that it was both important but also that you were unaffiliated, so, like, yeah, how—what was that like for you here?

FRIESNER: Yeah, I mean, I think it’s—it’s interesting because people—it’s sort of framed as this, like, dichotomy of you’re either involved in it or you’re out of it, and I think it’s probably changed a lot over the years, too. I’ve seen it certainly change, just from being back, working for the language programs over the summers. And in some ways for the better, for sure; in some ways, maybe—maybe for the worse in the sense that I think that it—it—my impression—and I’m not a Dartmouth student, so I don’t know, but my impression is that it’s much more polarized now than it was then.

MIHALY: What do you mean by polarized?

FRIESNER: I bet it was—like, then it was just—that’s—I mean, then it was like that’s the social outlet. That’s the social activity at

Dartmouth. So you can do that, or you can be one of the people that, like, sits around and has hot chocolate or, like, goes to the—goes to the movies. Those are your—like, you—like, you have—you—that it—that *is* the outlet. It's the same as, like, that's where—that's the bar, except that is not a bar, right? So—so it wasn't like a—it—it wasn't—there wasn't really a difference whether you were affiliated or not or whatever. I mean, I'm sure there are people that didn't go to thing—you know.

But it was definitely a big part of my—my social life, more than even that—that circle of friends because—because I would—I think I was probably at a—at a Greek house, like, most weekends, not necessarily both nights on the weekend but possibly, if there was something that, you know, I thought was fun. I wasn't a big drinker. I don't think—like, before high school—I mean, before Dartmouth, I think I had tasted alcohol, like, once or twice [chuckles] in my life.

And I think my first year I didn't even drink at all. And I think even by the end, I had been—you know, then I had studied abroad in Europe, and so obviously there was more, like, having wine with dinner and that sort of thing. But even then, like, I think the most I ever had to drink at a party at Dartmouth was, like, once a term, when they had the '80s party at Sigma Nu. I would have, like, three drinks, and that was about it.

I made up for it in grad school, but [chuckles] that—that was how it was at—at Dartmouth. You know, it was more just about, like, that's where you go and, like, socialize, and you can dance, and you can listen to music, and, like, you know, just be—be free and be fun and, like, not care what other people are like.

And, obviously, people were there for different reasons. Some people were there to drink heavily, and some people were there to find somebody to sleep with or whatever. But I was just there to either be social with people or to not be social and just dance and not think about things too much [chuckles], right?

So, yeah, it was definitely a big part of my life. I didn't join a house. There was certainly a sense that they weren't

necessarily that LGBT friendly, and even the LG- —there were some—like, Sigma Nu had some out gay people in it, and even so, they were kind of like of two categories. Like, they were either, like, the big rainbow flag on their door type people, or they were, like, the “Everyone knows they’re gay, but we don’t talk about it”—like that kind of thing. There was no, like, kind of middle ground. And that’s kind of where I placed myself, so I didn’t really feel like that was—there was a place for that middle ground.

And I started rush with Sigma Nu when a couple of other friends joined it, and then I didn’t go through to the end, because I didn’t really feel like—especially Sigma Nu, because I felt like it was the nerdy frat. And if I was going to be hazed as they said they were going to do and I was going to be paying dues, then it would be kind of nice to have the status and not then just be able to say, “Oh, and I’m in the nerd frat,” right? [Chuckles.]

But, you know, I think that if I had—I found—again, similar to how my social life was, I didn’t like to be limited to one social group, so I also felt like if I was in a house, then I was in a house at the exclusion of all the other houses, right? And I liked the freedom to choose where I was going to go.

Certainly, I had friends—I had a lot of friends in Sigma Nu, and a lot of friends in Zeta [Zeta Psi], so I was usually invited to their kind of closed events. And then my girlfriend was in [Epsilon Kappa] Theta, so I was invited to their closed events when we were together, so—so, you know, I think I was—I was certainly more active in Greek life than most people who were unaffiliated, probably. But it was still kind of a peripheral—I didn’t—you know, I didn’t—I didn’t feel like I was in a central social circle of a specific house or something. I was—you know.

MIHALY:

Yeah. So you—you mentioned a little bit, like, the polarizations of, like, you know, those spaces you didn’t talk about anyone being gay versus the spaces with the, like, you know, Gay Pride flag. Are—are—is that, like, people that you’re talking about in terms of there were—there were people on both sides of that, or—or do you mean, like, frats—

FRIESNER: Oh, no. I would say there were people within a house like Sigma Nu that was, quote unquote, “gay friendly.” Because not many were. And the ones that weren’t gay friendly only had the ones that were—that people knew but they—you know, people suspected, but they weren’t out. Like, that’s—like, Zete was like that. I know at least three or four people who came out pretty soon after Dartmouth who were in that house. But nobody would have been out there. I mean, I don’t know what happened within brothers—you know, when—when others weren’t around, if they told each other or what they told each other secretly. But, like, nobody would have been openly gay in those contexts.

MIHALY: Sure. And what spaces, yeah, did you feel most comfortable in? Because it seems like you were able to straddle some different kind of cultural spaces, if that makes sense.

FRIESNER: Yeah. Do you mean comfortable in terms of comfortable being out or comfortable in general?

MIHALY: I mean, I guess in general. And how does that interplay with—with you maybe feeling comfortable in a space but not feeling comfortable being out? That’s interesting.

FRIESNER: Yeah, because I think—like, I was comfortable in most—  
[Electronic tone.] Whoops. I accidentally pushed something on my oven.

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: Yeah, no, I was comfortable in—in most spaces, comfortable in terms of just being there because—and anyway—like, the great thing about the size of Dartmouth is everywhere you go, there’s somebody you know and you can be comfortable with, and there is people you don’t know, and so, like, you always kind of find your person that—or people or whatever that are like you in some way, whether it’s, like, okay, we are all here’s the language people. We’re all going—we’re all going to this French movie, but, like, we’re the only ones who are going to understand. [Chuckles.]

Or, you know, you’re with—you—you—you find all the Hillel people and you’re like, *Oh, good. It’s Passover and they’re*

*not—they're serving pizza. Like, we can all figure out how we're gonna make this work. Whatever. You know, there's kind of—[Chuckles.] There's all sorts of things like that, where you find—you find your people that you never feel like—you never feel like you're alone, quote unquote, but you all—but you—*

So, like, I don't think that there were contexts where—where I was *uncomfortable*, even places where people would have been uncomfortable. Like, I used to go to [Chi] Heorot. That was a house that was known as, like, not necessarily comfortable for people—not just for, like—I mean, I had straight friends who didn't like to go there because they felt, like, intimidated by, like, the hock- —they're, like, *Oh, the hockey guys are gonna pick up all the hot girls, and I'm—what—what—what's skinny, short little me gonna do there?* Right?

So, like, it was intimidating maybe for different reasons, but, like, you could have thought of that as a place that would have been LGBT *unfriendly*, and maybe it was if I had been, like, wearing my—wearing rainbow flags or something. I don't know. But I don't know, I liked it, maybe it's because I liked looking at the hockey players. But, you know, I also—they had fun music and pro- —you know, whatever. [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: So—so I never really—like, I never let things—I think because maybe I had gone through that phase in middle school, where I was just made fun of. Like, I had kind of been desensitized to that. If it had happened, I wouldn't have really cared. I was—you know.

And I was teaching drill. Like, I had people of all these—I had—I had big, manly athletes in my drill classes—like, especially hockey because many of them were Canadians, so they—they were more likely to take French. So, you know, I—I kind of was able to be comfortable maybe because of that. Like, I had—I had to be—I had to treat everybody equally and respectfully in drill, so therefore I couldn't really be afraid. They were respectful to me back, and so why would I be afraid of them, right?

MIHALY: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's really interesting to me. Like, it sounds like you just did a really—you were able to straddle a lot of different kinds of people in a way that I don't think a lot of people are able to.

FRIESNER: Yeah, I think that's—that's probably true. And, I mean, I think Dartmouth creates an environment that allows you to do that—

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: —because it's not—it's not—there's no pretensions. Like, if you're having professors invite you over for dinner or, you know, you're in—you're in these groups with people from all over the world and whatever—like, that's—that's not an environment that—that would—where you'd expect sort of a hierarchy. It's not a hierarchy—and, I mean, it's interesting—I don't know. I—I—I—obviously, I never went to Princeton, so I don't know how it is, but my impression is that Princeton is—or my impression at the time, anyway, was that Princeton was *not* like that. They have your eating clubs, and you're either in it or you weren't, and you wouldn't—you know. And your—your professor spoke Latin to you. [Chuckles.] I don't know. I mean, that's—these are probably not true. I never really spent any time there. But Dartmouth wasn't like that.

And then that's something that resonated with me from the beginning, because I'm not—I'm not comfortable with that. Like, that's probably why I didn't really connect with the prep school people that much, because I went to what was, quote unquote, a prep school, but, like, a school in south Florida where half the people are going because their—you know, their—if they went to their public schools they'd have fifty people in their class. And, you know, it's certainly—I don't know what the costs of it now are, but I'm—it was probably a quarter to a fifth of the cost of what prep school was like in New England, right?

So—so I think that I—I thought that that would resonate more with me, and in the end, that's not really the group—it's not that I had any problems with people that had that background, but they weren't the people that I was going to

become closest—closest to, I guess, unless there was some other reason or something else that we had that we—like, they were also doing language things or something like that.

In terms of sort of comfort level with LGBT stuff, I think that there were—there, there was much more of a difference in terms of where you would—where you would be able to be out, but I think because I was also sort of not sure what my status was or whatever [chuckles], you know—like, I think—I think that that—I don't know how much of it was just, like, if I had just been, like, *Oh, I'm gay, and that's it, and it's as simple as that*, if it would have been fine or not. But that's not the situation that I was experiencing, so it's hard for me to just—say how it would have been if it had been different.

I definitely—the one time I noticed that I would have, like, not really been not—not comfortable was when I was studying abroad and working abroad. But that's—I mean, that was Dartmouth. But still—it was still Dartmouth, but it was—it's kind of different Dartmouth, right?

MIHALY: Yeah. What was—where were you studying abroad?

FRIESNER: So I did the Italian FSP [Foreign Study Program], as it was then—I think it's LSA+ [Advanced Language Study Abroad] now—in Rome. And then I worked as a teaching assistant for the Fresh LSA in Lyon, France. And so, you know, both of those cases were—were sort of, like,—first of all, the Italian program was very small; there were nine of us, so it's, like, even if one person is not LGBT friendly, well, that's one—that's, like [chuckles], you know, about twelve percent of your peers, right? So that's a pretty large amount. And if it's two people, then it's a quarter of them.

And, you know, it also was complicated by the fact that I had a girlfriend at the time who was on the—the Classics FSP, so they were in Rome about half the time as well. So, you know, I think that it was tough on her because I think that people in her group sort of suspected, knew, had heard from previous years or whatever, and I think she got made fun of. She never really told me that, but I talked to other people from her group that told me that. So I feel bad for that.

But, you know, I think it was not an environment where that could have been talked about.

And then in—in France when I was a TA [teaching assistant], it was a little bit more isolating because I was—I couldn't really socialize too much with the students because I was kind of—even though they were Dartmouth students as well, I was—I had a different status during the program than they did, and—and I was with a family that was—a host family there that was very conservative. And I got along with them in many ways, but they made very—made it—made it very well known that they were not LGBT friendly.

MIHALY: Sure. What do you mean by that? Like, how did they make that known?

FRIESNER: Well, for example, I was—there was a family friend that was going through some legal difficulties and, you know, it was unclear, but he had a—he had a housemate, and I don't want to go too much into detail because I don't want this person to get identified, but he had a housemate, and the housemate was selling drugs, and he got arrested, too, and it was unclear if they were both doing it or what.

And—and then they said something like, “Oh, well, you know, were they really just housemates, or, you know, sometimes these people end up being gay, and that's just disgusting.” [Chuckles.] Yeah. And they were—I mean,—and it was even uncomf- —even though they were very—they were so religious that, like, they were, “Oh, you have a religion, and it's something you believe it, and that's important.” Like, I don't think—I think they would have rather have a Jew than an atheist in their house.

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: But on the other hand, they had friends that we—that came over for dinner, that made, like, were clearly anti-Semitic—like, xenophobic, I would say. They were supporting the Front Nationale, which is like [Marine] La Pen and, like, you know,—

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: —[Donald J.] Trump on overdrive or not even actually really, but I'd like to think that. And, you know, they said things like, "Oh, you know what the problem is?" Like, I remember this one time when there was—I don't remember if it was at their house or—because they took me to some dinners at relatives and things, and somebody said, "Oh, the problem with France these days is there's too many Jews," and I overhear, like, the—my host mother going, like, "Shh! The American—he's Jewish!" And he goes, "Oh, I mean Arabs. There are too many Arabs." I'm like, *Okay*.

MIHALY: [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: That's not better.

MIHALY: Oh, God! [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: Yeah.

MIHALY: Oh, my goodness.

FRIESNER: But, you know, that was—that was—there were some uncomfortable moments. And, you know, that's part of studying abroad, is you learn to either take things with a grain of salt or understand the cultural context and, you know, you're—you're not—you can't do it with the eyes of your own culture. And that doesn't mean it's okay, but it means it's not necessarily the time and place to start an argument.

But, you know, so I think those—those were some of the more difficult moments in terms of identity—you know, approaching one's identity. But on the other hand, that's why you study abroad, is to put—be taken out of your comfort zone, right?—and—and to understand other people's perspective. Whether—whether it's more valid, equally valid, or less valid, that's not the point. The point is that you want to understand where they're coming from.

MIHALY: Sure, absolutely.

So, I mean, I guess to move a little bit back to the Dartmouth community, I'm—I mean, I know you weren't super involved in, like, the [Dartmouth] Rainbow Alliance and stuff like that,

but were you aware of that kind of stuff on campus, and what was that landscape like?

FRIESNER:

Yeah, I think it—it changed over the time that I was at Dartmouth, I would say. I remember my first year and, you know, I said my RA was very involved in the Rainbow Alliance, and he tried to, like, introduce me to some of his friends from the Rainbow Alliance. And they were just, like, the gayest people I've ever seen. Like, they were so out and proud and stereotypically gay, and it didn't—it's not—it didn't bother me at all. On the contrary. But they didn't seem—I didn't see myself in them, right?

So I didn't—I didn't really—I was, like, *Okay, that's who's—that's—like,—and I think at the time, I wasn't sure if I was supposed to say, That's who's gay, and that's who I'm supposed to be, and that's what I'm supposed to be like, and I'm just not.* Or if it was more like, you know, *I think that's not—I—I don't know. I'm not—I forgot—I forgot the “or” side of it. But, you know, I don't think that they—that—that didn't feel like a place where I felt wel- —not exactly unwelcome, but I didn't feel like it was the right place for me.*

And I remember they had, like, the Drag Ball, which I don't remember what time of year it was; I don't remember if it was my freshman year or the beginning of my sophomore year, but it was after I was out to—to some of—

So I remember that there was a Drag Ball, and—and Olga, the same friend that I mentioned, said, “Oh, well, then you have to go and dress up in drag and duh, duh, duh.” And I'm, like,—so that was the first—that was the first and last time I ever wore drag. And it wasn't funny at all because I was short and looked young, and so really I just looked like an average woman, and it wasn't funny. And it wasn't really something that I felt comfortable doing or I had any desire to do. And it kind of depressed me a little bit afterwards because I was, like, *Is that what I'm supposed to enjoy- —I'm supposed to enjoy being dress- —by dressing in drag?*

Like, I know it sounds really naïve because nowadays there's so much information in the media and so much exposure to LGBT things. But, like, the first time I ever, like,

knew that LGBT was a thing really was, like, Ellen [L.] DeGeneres, like, coming out of *Ellen*. Like, that was it, right?

MIHALY: Right, yeah.

FRIESNER: So that was recent, you know, from then. And then—

MIHALY: What year was that?

FRIESNER: —there was *Will & Grace*. And again, dichotomy: You're either Will and you're masculine, or you're—you're Jack and, like, you know, super effeminate.

MIHALY: Yeah. That's interesting.

Yeah, I mean, I'm curious to talk more about that drag experience. Like, who did you go with, and—and what was the scene there?

FRIESNER: So I went with the—like, with Olga and—I don't remember—two—two or three other of the girls from the group. (None of the guys would go.) And I remember it not being very heavily attended, and most of the people that—I know that's probably changed if they still do things like this. It wasn't very well attended, and it was most of those people that I had met, who were very nice and welcoming when I came in and were, like, "Oh, it's great to see you," whatever. But, I mean, I was never really friends with them, right?

But they greeted me, and, like,—but that was who it was. It was like the—it was like the clubhouse, like the—it remi- —you know, like, in—what was it? Like, *Clueless*, where there's like, the out- —the people just kind of like who stay by themselves, who are not—I don't know. It was kind of like that.

And then—then—you know, that's the kind of environment that actually—you asked me environments that I'm not—that I wasn't comfortable with. That's the kind of social environment—not because it's gay, but it's the kind of social environment that I wasn't that comfortable with.

And I can think of another example that's not [unintelligible]. It was one of the few gay friendly places, actually, on

campus at the time, but,—like, openly gay friendly. But, like, I knew some people that were in Amarna, which was, like, the alternative to the Greek system house, right? And I remember going there, and they were doing—they were making s'mores and playing board games, and I was, like, *This is not an environment that makes me comfortable.* [Chuckles.]

And it's like—they were all, like, hugging each other and, like, spooning together, and, like, *This is not—this is not me,* not because I—like, and I actually had quite a few friends over the course of my time at Dartmouth who were in that house, in fact, so it's not that I—not that on a one-and-one level there was anybody in that group that I *wouldn't* want to hang out with, but, like, that wasn't—I didn't want to be that. That's not what I wanted, you know. [Chuckles.]

So it was kind of like—it was another one of those kind of environments where it was, like, you're kind of deciding to be an alternate group that's just as organized and just as cliquy as the main group that you're reacting against, but [chuckles] you like to think you're different, right?

MIHALY: And that's what made you uncomfortable, it sounds like.

FRIESNER: So I don't know. I didn't stay very long. Like, people either—people who didn't recognize me just thought I was a random girl because—you know, just looked like a random girl.

MIHALY: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I guess—so can you talk a little bit about your—your experience, like, with your girlfriend? Like, I know you mentioned to me, like, kind of jokingly in our previous conversation that you kind of had to come out more than once. What was that experience like, and—and—yeah, what was that like?

FRIESNER: Yeah. I mean, who knows? She may—I don't—she may end up listening to this file, I know. Hopefully not. But, yeah, I'd say—I mean, we were friends from—we—we became friends, like, sometime in freshman year. I can't remember exactly when. And at some point, it turned into more than that, and then—and, like, we were hanging out—she was in my—she was in my drill class, actually. [Chuckles.] In the

winter of my sophomore year. And then we were hanging out, kind of, after drill together, and talk more.

And then, like, by the sophomore summer, we kind of—it kind of developed into something more, and I know that she was very concerned what was my orientation, and I was, like, “I don’t know, but I know that I’m into this” and, like, you know, whatever. And, yeah—and so then we were together for sophomore summer. And we actually didn’t tell everyone right away.

And there—there—there is a funny story, a side story, which I’ll tell very quickly—a quick version of, where a friend stopped into Dartmouth—stopped by Dartmouth unannounced, who had just graduated, and she—she knocked on my door to say hello, and she hears, like, the sheets ruffling or whatever. [Chuckles.] And then she’s, like, “And then I went to talk to my gay friend.” She’s, like, “I’m having a surreal week. Then I went to see my gay friend, and he was in bed with a woman.” [Chuckles.] But, yeah, so—so we had kept it—So she was actually one of the first people to know about that.

And then we were together for, like, all of junior year, because—yeah, I mean, we were—we were both in Italy at the same time. And then we—I was in France in the winter, and she was in California, but we met up at—like, during the week of—like, there was a week break in the program. And then—yeah, we were together that spring. And then, like, toward the end of the summer, when we were coming back, that’s when we sort of ended it.

I’m going to say it that way because I’m not sure that I want the details on record.

MIHALY:

No, no, that’s totally fine. You don’t have to share anything else.

And so—yeah. I mean, I guess how do you feel like that affected your college experience and your—your—like, not involving her in this anymore but just the—sort of your own experience with yourself, if that makes sense.

FRIESNER: I think I had never really had a sort of serious relationship, so regardless of the gender of the person, I think that that was sort of the first one, so in that sense, you know, I grew a lot from that experience. I think it definitely made studying abroad easier, because I mentioned—because of all the things I mentioned, I think that, like, they wouldn't of even ask the question—that host family, that was clearly homophobic wouldn't even ask the question because I was calling—I was on the phone with my girlfriend all the time [chuckles], right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: So—so that did make that easier. And, you know, even just with the group in—in Rome, even though some people knew my—eh, like, two people in the group, three people in the group knew my past before that a little bit, but, like, you know, the people that I didn't—the people that I would have been concerned about not being gay friendly didn't even have to really ask the question, right? So it did make that easier.

But—and I think for me, I—I was—I had come out maybe a little earlier than I was ready, and so I think that I needed a little—I needed a little bit of confirmation of what that meant. And, mean, you know, it's always a continuum, and I still think it's a continuum. I'm certainly not 100 percent—you know, 100 percent only into men, whatever. But, I mean, I'm still—well, it's a label, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm. Yeah.

FRIESNER: But probably label myself as gay. But, like, I'm not 100 percent. Like, so—so I don't think that—you know, I wouldn't—I definitely wouldn't be opposed to—if there was the spark in the—you know, it—it made sense that I was with a woman, that would be fine. Like, I don't—you know. [Chuckles.] But—but yeah, I think that I needed to have that experience as well, to sort of not be wondering *What if?*—right?

It was tough—I think it was confusing for my parents, because they had finally sort of been coming to terms with [chuckles]—with—with it. Like, not that they were—I mean,

they were very—they never were, like—you know, they loved me. I'm an only child. Like, they never were going to disown me or anything like that, but they weren't really that comfortable with it to talk about it, right? And I think that confused them more.

In terms of—

MIHALY: When—

FRIESNER: Yup?

MIHALY: When did you first end up talking to your par- —or, like, telling your parents that you might be gay?

FRIESNER: Well, my father asked me my first year, so I told him, and he had seen some stuff on his computer that he shouldn't have seen, so I think he—[Chuckles.] You know, he—he kind of already knew. And he actually thought—without talking to me about it, saw a therapist to talk about it, so—and that was good, actually, because he had—he—when I was visiting, I guess—was it spring break or summer? I can't remember—he asked if I would meet with the therapist.

And I met with the therapist, and I'm glad he picked a therapist that wasn't ultra conservative, because you know, there certainly are. And the therapist said, "You know, your son seems pretty well adjusted. He's just into men." [Chuckles.] Like, you know,—so, like, "Oh, okay. Well, that's good." I—I was—I was surprised about the first part, but, you know—[Both chuckle.]

But, yeah, I think—and then—but then, you know, I definitely think that that confused them, when I had a girlfriend. But, like, I don't know that that meant that they—they thought it was a phase or they thought, like, I was bi, or what they thought. Like, I really didn't know what was going through their mind, right?

But, you know, I was—I was—my—my—my mo- —my father knew before my mother because I don't know what—I don't know at what point he told her. I talked to her about it at some point. But, like, he had already talked to her about it by then because she knew, so—

And—and—you know, and then after that,—after the relationship ended, I don't—I mean, I—I definitely came out again, quote unquote, to a lot of people at Dartmouth or came out to people that didn't really—I didn't know that well before I was with Julie—oh, I shouldn't have said her name. Anyway, it doesn't matter. [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: It's okay; we don't have a last name. [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: What? Yeah. And, yeah, but I think, you know, there was definitely another process of, like, coming out again. I remember, like, in—at the—one—one of the people that was on the trip with us, who was kind of more of a loner, who was in—who was in the program in Rome, but, like, he kind of was on his own a lot, but we did—especially there were three guys. So, like, whenever we did, like, travel, with the three of us were, like, roommates or whatever. [Chuckles.]

And I remember seeing him at a party at the—at the—graduation week or whatever and—and, you know, coming out to him, I guess, or whatever. And—it—it was fine, you know? [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: But—

MIHALY: Yeah.

FRIESNER: Yup. That's—

MIHALY: No, just—I mean, yeah, that all makes sense. I mean, after your junior year and after, like, you ended up breaking up with your girlfriend, coming into senior year, like, where did that leave you, and where did that leave your parents and—and your friends and people who might have been confused, including yourself?

FRIESNER: Well, I know that I went and sought—sought advice from whatever, I don't—counseling services—I don't remember what they were called, but whatever it was—you know—so I—so I saw a counselor. And it wasn't just about that. It was

also, like, *Oh, my gosh, I'm graduating. What am I doing with my life?* Typical senior-year issues, right?

And I know that I had a friend who dropped out of the term— I had two friends that dropped out of the term, that term.

Have you gone silent?

MIHALY: No, no. I'm still here.

FRIESNER: It got silent. I was like, *oh it got cut off and I'm still just talking*. Yeah, no, so I had two friends that dropped out of the term—not dropped out at Dartmouth, but one—but—and so I was, like, *Maybe I should be doing that. Maybe I'm not ready to be done*. [Chuckles.] And I was going to be doing a senior thesis, but I was, like, *I don't even know if this is what I want to do*. And I was going to do it on—I ended up—I ended up enrolling for an art history minor, which I never finished. I did take more classes in art history, but I never finished the minor, but didn't really need one, right? But, you know, just to do something different, right?—and that I also thought was interesting.

And, you know, I think that that *did* help me a lot, actually, just, like, figuring it out. But there was a lot of, like, *What am I—you know—job*, duh, duh, duh. You know, like, all of that. So I don't know how much of it was related—some of it was related to the LGBT stuff, but I think that I had—because I had already had that coming-out process before, I don't think *I* was confused. I think I had more to, like, help other people not be confused. [Both chuckle.]

MIHALY: Yeah. What did that look like with your parents?

FRIESNER: I'm trying to remember if I ever even had the conversation with my parents again or—I think my mother asked me at some point. Like, “Oh, well, what does this mean? Are you gay or are you”—you know. And I think I said well, I was genuinely into—into that relationship, but, like, I said, “You know, I'm definitely more into men. I don't know what that means, but I'm more into men.” That's sort of how I—you know. And I think that that made sense, so that made sense to them, and it was—it made sense to them and was true, so it had—it had two benefits. [Both chuckle.]

Yeah, so, you know. And then—when did I—I mean,—when did they see me in, like, a relationship again? I mean, they saw me, I think, not until I was with, like, my partner that I was with for, you know, several years, so I think that that was—so that was 2004, so, you know, there was only, like, three or four years in between there, but—which actually is a lot [chuckles], when I think about it, because it was almost as long as my Dartmouth career. But, you know.

MIHALY: Yeah. Yeah.

FRIESNER: Yup.

MIHALY: So, I mean, I think,—so you said you went to grad school after college.

FRIESNER: Yeah.

MIHALY: At Princeton, right?

FRIESNER: No.

MIHALY: I'm sorry.

FRIESNER: Penn.

MIHALY: Oh, at Penn, okay.

FRIESNER: I never got into Prince- —I didn't apply to Princeton—

MIHALY: Got it.

FRIESNER: —[unintelligible].

MIHALY: Got it. [Chuckles.] And what was your—

FRIESNER: No, I—yeah, I went to—so I didn't go right out of Dartmouth. I taught at a boarding school for a year. And that was— certainly had its own challenges with being LGBT and all that because, you know, then you're with students, and they're your age, and it wasn't that open-minded, I would say, a community.

And then I went back to Dartmouth and worked there for a year, at the Rassias Center, while tak- —while auditing, the Rassias Center's Foundation it was called at the time, while auditing linguistics classes so I'd be better prepared for grad school. And so that was the second year after I graduated, so till—what is it, 2003? Yeah.

And then I went to Penn and did my Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] at Penn, although I was in Montreal [Quebec, Canada] for a lot of the time. That's where I did my field research. And—yeah, so I was kind of between Philadelphia and Montreal most of those—many of those years. And, yeah—I don't know—[Chuckles.]

Then—then—then my life went on after that. [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: [Laughs] Well, so you ended up in Toronto, right? That's where you are currently.

FRIESNER: I'm in Toronto now, yeah. So I went—I went to—I—I—I was a professor at the University of Quebec [Université du Québec] in Montreal for four years. For various reasons, I was not happy doing that, and my ex was not happy living in Montreal, and so we moved back to Philly, and I was working at Penn for two years.

Then I decided maybe I wanted to try something different. Did an MBA [Master of Business Administration] for two years at Georgetown and then moved to Toronto last year.

MIHALY: Okay. And—and throughout some of that, you've been coming back to Dartmouth for the summers, right?

FRIESNER: Yeah, I was—I—so I worked for the Rassias Programs, especially the Accelerated Language Programs, ALPs, most summers since my freshman summer. [Chuckles.] You know, I now oversee a large portion of the programs, and, yeah, I mean, sometimes I can't go back because of other work responsibilities or whatever, so I think I missed, like, 2007, because I was doing field work, and then I missed a couple of years in, like, the early 2010s. I don't remember which—which years exactly.

MIHALY: It's okay.

- FRIESNER: But I missed a few years. But I've been back almost every year, yeah, for sure.
- MIHALY: And I mean, how has, like, the experience for you changed over time? I mean, obviously it's different to work here than to be a student here, but—just your interaction with Dartmouth.
- FRIESNER: With the students or with the space or with—
- MIHALY: Yeah. I mean, I guess—I guess I meant with the space first—like, with the school. How have you watched Dartmouth change, also?
- FRIESNER: I think—Yeah. In terms of LGBT or in general, or both?
- MIHALY: Both, yeah.
- FRIESNER: Yeah, in terms of LGBT, like, it was shocking to me when I saw Greek houses with rainbow flags, like,—which I think is amazing. But—because that was such a hidden thing that nobody would ever talk about and now there's, like, rainbow flags on Greek houses. Like, that's—that was a huge change.
- I guess I didn't say the change in terms of Dartmouth—you asked me, but I never got to answer you because we've changed topics,—
- MIHALY: [Chuckles.]
- FRIESNER: —but my senior year there was more infrastructure. I think [Pamela S.] "Pam" Misener [pronounced MIZE-ner] started there my senior year, as LGBT adviser, and she instituted a lot more activities that were not, like, so extreme, like, that were more, like, coffee chats and things like that or whatever, you know. So I remember we had this one—I don't remember what it was called—but this get-together once a week, that I didn't go to necessarily every week, but, like, where people would just kind of chat about their, you know, whatever, various stages of LGBT self-acceptance, not—you know, whatever. And that was kind of a nice thing that didn't make you be something that you weren't. And so I

think that that already made it a much more—it made it normalized a lot more.

And I noticed that even the freshmen coming in, like, the Class—'04s—like, there were—there were more of them that came in who were out before they started. Like, I don't think I knew anybody who was out before they went to Dartmouth. And then in that year, in that class, there were. And, granted, they were of the—many of them were of the other type, where, like, you know, they were, like, Gym Bunny, whatever, which was not me either, right? But, like, still, there was a little bit more diversity in terms of what was represented as LGBT and with comfort with being LGBT.

But certainly that has progressed more, and that's just society as a whole I think has progressed more, but, you know, it's much more out in the open. Like, it wouldn't be—I remember one of the instructors who taught at Dartmouth but also had taught for the summer language programs saying something like, "Oh, I was grading a paper this week, and the student was talking—was writing about their boyfriend, and it was a male student." She's, like, "And I corrected all the agreement because I guess they got confused and didn't think it was—and didn't realize they needed to make it feminine." And then she's, like, "And I asked the student, and they said, 'No, it's about my boyfriend.'" [Chuckles.]

So it's kind of interesting that even though, yes, there was a student who was willing to—was op- —was comfortable writing a paper for a class about their boyfriend (a male student), but the teacher [chuckles]—the instructor was still not—just not even in a—not in a homophobic way, just in a, like,—wouldn't have crossed the—wouldn't have been on the radar, right? Like, this was a grammar mistake, not a "Oh, they're actually in a relationship with a man," right?

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: So—so it's kind of interesting that—that—you know, that I think has changed a lot. I don't think that anybody would be shocked and—and—you know, as somebody who teaches now, I don't know how it is at Dartmouth, but I—I've just seen how different academic institutions have evolved, and,

you know, it's, like, nor- —like, even—we wouldn't have brought up an example if it was—if it was possibly LGBT. Like, you wouldn't have—you wouldn't have mentioned that in class. Like,—

MIHALY: What do you mean?

FRIESNER: I—I—I know that I did a song with my students that had—that, that's about LGBT activists, and we would have glossed over that fact. Or, would have either not chosen that song, or we would have glossed over that fact of their life story even though it's crucial, because, you know, it's just not a topic that it would be comfortable to talk about.

Now—now it's open, right? So that's academia in general, and Dartmouth I think is not—I don't—Dartmouth is not really a pioneer [chuckles] in that either, but it's also not behind the times, so I don't know—I don't—I think that Dartmouth follows the trends in that. But it is nice to see because I remember how it was before. It doesn't affect me the same as seeing, like,—I know that Georgetown has actually advanced a lot more because they started out from a less welcoming and open place. But I wasn't really there day to day, seeing how it was on the ground in '90—in the—in the late '90s. Dartmouth, I was there, so I can definitely notice—notice the difference.

In terms of other aspects of Dartmouth, I mean, you know, sometimes I feel like I'm now one of the old, curmudgeonly alums who thinks things were better back [chuckles]—back in the day, right? No. Certainly, there are some nicer facilities. The air condition—there's much more air conditioning.

MIHALY: [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: There was, like, this anti-air conditioning attitude at Dartmouth in the old days. “Oh, you don't need it in New England.” And nobody who's ever been there for sophomore summer thinks you don't need it in New England. But never mind. We made it—we made do, obviously, so we didn't need it. But I always had horrible allergies, which is one of the things that was great for me, moving up to the North, because I didn't have them as much, because the plants die

in the winter—or, you know, the leaves fall in the winter, whatever. But you know, not having air conditioning and having had the windows open in the summer was pretty bad for my allergies. Right? [Chuckles.] So I—that’s—that’s a nice—that’s a nice change.

But I think some of the changes that I haven’t quite gotten on board with: I don’t understand the housing system. There’s, like, this—this—this decision to—to artificially create communities when we always had communities, and that was the great thing because they weren’t forced upon them. We could have communities for different things. We can have our Jewish—and, you know, as you said, maybe I was more comfortable navigating these, and—and this change in housing system is not for people like me. [Chuckles.]

But, you know, for me, I liked the fact that I could be in—I could live in different dorms if I wanted to over the—over the course of Dartmouth. I could have different friends that I hang out with, for different reasons, and I don’t like to—I wouldn’t have liked to have it imposed on me to be in a cluster where that’s my—that’s where my main interactions are supposed to be and I’m limited to that. So I really don’t like that idea. I don’t like that—that autonomy for those—

And I understand—I understand that, like, the times have changed, and there’s a lot, maybe deeper issues that are out in the open now that an undergraduate adviser is not as skilled to handle. So I understand the reasons why, but it was kind of nice when I was coming out that I could go to my resident adviser, who was, like, three years older than I was, and talk about my issues. And I’m not sure I would have been that comfortable doing that if it was somebody who was, like, twenty years older, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm. Yeah!

FRIESNER: So I don’t like that change. Even though I understand why, and maybe it *is* better. I don’t know, but I liked how it was.

I think Dartmouth needs to continue to be a pioneer in languages, and it worries me what—what the legacy of John Rassias is going to be, because, you know, now that he’s no longer living, there’s no—there isn’t that power—and

Dartmouth could just easily fall into the pack, and that is unfortunate because that *is* one of the greatest things about Dartmouth, is its language programs and its focus on language.

And I already see a difference, because, you know, I think that they've increased the number of ATs that are needed because they're doing drill on more levels of language. Instead of just doing it in the first two levels, they're doing it in three in many languages, and that just means there's not as many—like, the people that are doing it are not going to be as skilled because there aren't [chuckles]you know—because they used to pick and choose—it used to be very competitive campus job. We would have, like, twenty people try out for eight spots or something, you know, or thirty people. I don't know, so—and now it's, like, well, they have to take almost everybody because there's—you know.

So—so that is something that I—I—that Dartmouth—Dartmouth can't be—can't try to mimic their systems based on other universities. Dartmouth is in a unique position where it has its own identity. Even though it's an Ivy League school, it has its very own, unique identity in terms of languages, in terms of its location. And if it tries to mimic its housing system after other universities or that sort of thing, it's going to become a school for rejects of Harvard [University] and Princeton, and that's not—Dartmouth is better than that, you know? So—

And I didn't—I didn't get rejected from Harvard because I didn't apply, and I'm not sure if I would have chosen Princeton over Dartmouth in the end, either. So, you know, that—that is something that I don't—necessarily am not on board with.

And then in terms of the Greek system, like, I just don't like that that's become so polarized. Like, you either hate the Greek system and think it should be abolished, or you—or you love it. Granted, I am naïve because I didn't experience the things that—that a woman experiences in a Greek house, right?—because I'm—I'm not a woman [chuckles], and I didn't experience even sort of—I didn't experience that feeling of exclusion that maybe some LGBT people felt. But I didn't really feel that. Yes, I guess I felt excluded that I

wouldn't have talked openly about it, but, like, that was Dartmouth and the environment in general, so there was not—it wasn't that different in a Greek house than in a class, you know. [Chuckles.] Like, you weren't probably going to talk about it, so—I don't know if that changed.

But that's something where I really appreciated having that system there. And that doesn't mean there can't be improvements made to it. I mean, it's very different. Like, I've been to Greek houses not maybe, *Okay, maybe it's been like*—no, I guess I was at my reunion, which was, what?—two years ago now? It was probably the last time I was in a Greek house.

But, I mean, I have been over the years, especially earlier—more when I was—when I was younger [both chuckles] and could actually look like a student. But, you know, still, in the, like, ten years after I graduated or something—and I would go to things at Greek houses sometimes, and I would notice—I mean, in—in a sense, I—there's fewer safety risks and safety violations than fire risks and stuff like that. But there was something great about that grittiness that—that—it would be nice if there were places that still had that, right? They're so clean! And they feel like you're in a dorm, and you understand why—why don't you just be in—why don't you hang out in a dorm, then, right?

MIHALY: What do you mean by “grittiness”?

FRIESNER: Like, you'd go in, and it would reek of beer and cigarettes and, like—[Laughs.] You wouldn't know where—you know, you wouldn't walk around barefoot, right? [Laughs.] And—and—you know, you didn't know—and the stairwell would creak as you were walking down it, like,— and there would be old couches with, like,—I don't know. It's, like,—that was kind of—it was kind of fun to have that, because—I understand why you wouldn't need something that looks just like your dorm looks, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

Have you had the chance to talk to students outside of the classroom? Like, when you're coming back for summers, do you interact with students?

FRIESNER: Yeah, I mean, we—we—we usually have staff members who are students working for the programs, like I did when I was a freshman, right? Or after my freshman summer. So, yeah, we always have some Dartmouth students. Less now than we used to have. It used to be that most of the staff for these programs were Dartmouth students, and more and more, it's been sort of, you know, either alums or other people that have been involved in the programs in other ways, like they took the program or something like that.

MIHALY: Sure. What have you noticed, talking to—talking to those kids? Like, what—how do you feel like the student body has sort of changed over time, if it has?

FRIESNER: I think that—well, it's hard to make a generalization of the student body as a whole, right?

MIHALY: Sure.

FRIESNER: I think it—my impression is that the social scene has changed a lot, but I don't really know what that means because it might just be that people that I had—have—that happen to work for these programs now are more of—you know, have—have one point of view. But I—I think, certainly,—we didn't think anything of—like, well, again, it's the Greek system. We didn't think anything of it. It didn't seem like something that you would want to say—you would—you would want to have a position on, you know.

But that—like, I hear about sort of more varied activities. Maybe there—maybe Dartmouth students are more—like, doing more things in the Upper [Connecticut River] Valley, outside of Dartmouth, because we didn't really leave campus. I don't know. So—but that's—that's something I can't really—like, I guess—

MIHALY: Sure.

FRIESNER: I don't know if it's a sample of people that we tend to get. [Chuckles.] Or—

MIHALY: Do you remember sort of the—any discussion of sort of like an overhaul or reform of the Greek system when you were

there? I was doing a little bit of reading, and it looked like there was some push from the Trustees [of Dartmouth College] and the administration to sort of change the Greek system.

FRIESNER: Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of that happened after I left, but—

MIHALY: Okay.

FRIESNER: —there was—because there was more just, like, talking about it, so I don't know anything concrete, right? There was—there was—there were pushes to have new houses. There—and pretty soon after I graduated was when they had the Zete scandal—

MIHALY: Got it.

FRIESNER: —and they were shut down. I think they're back, right? But I don't know. But anyway, they were shut down, which we all thought was really weird because—well, we'd all—the reaction that everyone had was, like, if this happened to Zete, then what was happening every other house? Because Zete were, like, the nerdy—not—not quite the nerdiest, as like Sigma Nu, but the second nerdiest, like. So if that's where there's these scandals, like, what are we not seeing that's going on in all the other houses, and, like, why are—it's easy to make an example of a—of a house that, like, can't fight back, right?

So it was kind of interesting, not that I'm thinking that they were acting in the right. On the contrary. But, like, it kind of makes me think, well, what was going on everywhere else? Because [chuckles] these are the kind of nice guys, right?

MIHALY: Yeah, sure.

FRIESNER: So, you know, it was—it was I think—clearly, that should have been a signal that reform needed to be done, rather than, “Oh, we need to shut down this house and make an example of them” when, you know, probably that was more symptomatic of something going on over all. I know I say this—I said, “Well, oh, but everything was very nice”—you know, I—I—again, since I wasn't in the house, I *could* say that. I can just take—I—I could take advantage—maybe

that's selfish, but I didn't pay dues; I just took advantage of it for what I wanted, right? [Chuckles.]

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: But, yeah, it's definitely—there were definitely all sorts of talks about reforms, but I—I never really—I mean, there was nothing concrete that I saw that was—that was supposed to be—you know, it's interesting because I know that they've made sort of—there's a lot of red herrings because I think a lot of it is probably for appearances and what makes it look like change is being made. Like, I know there was the whole thing about—what's it? No more hard liquor, right?

MIHALY: Mm-hm.

FRIESNER: Yeah. And that was not even a thing. Like, I don't even know—I mean, there was—they—they had cocktails, yeah, and that's where I learned how to have a cocktail. And still, I would have, like, one or two, you know? Like, I don't think—I don't see—like, certainly, there was stuff going on that I didn't see, but in my experience as seeing people drinking heavily, it was all beer. If you had alco- —if you had liquor, it was, like, a cocktail, and then that was it. So I don't think that's actually the case because I'm sure there were people that were doing whiskey shots in the back or vodka shots or whatever. But I just—for—for me, that was kind of a strange decision to make because I think that beer was much more of a prevalent—of a—of a—of a present danger [chuckles] than—than other alcohol, so to single out other alcohol was a little bit weird to me, but then again, it's all illegal for most students anyway, so [chuckles] whatever.

MIHALY: What do you hope that Dartmouth and the Greek system and also Dartmouth and LGBT sort of becomes? Like, what do you hope for the future?

FRIESNER: I mean, I hope it's a place where everybody can feel—this sounds really cheesy—everyone can feel free to be whoever they are.

MIHALY: [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: But it's kind of true. I mean, the Greek system—it—it—if it's not the Greek system, there needs to be a—an infrastructure for social activities that is not—that doesn't look like a dorm, because not everyone wants to sit around and have s'mores and play Parcheesi, right? I think—when I compared it to friends that I knew who went to other schools that I had applied to, even, like Williams and Amherst, that didn't have that, their activity *was* sitting around in a room, drinking, like, sharing—passing a bottle around, right? In a dorm room. And that's what I *don't* want to have happen.

So I think that if there's—if there are ways to ensure that those activities are inclusive, while still not looking like every other activity that's going on, right?—then—then that's—I—I—this is not a concrete solution, clearly [both chuckle]—

MIHALY: No, that's okay.

FRIESNER: —but that's what I—that's what I would like to see. And I would like to see focus on the actual issues, like alcohol abuse, sexual harassment, instead of things like community and whatever, which I don't think was ever a problem. Like, you're fixing something that's not a problem, and you're putting—you're throwing money at things that aren't a problem and doing construction and building faculty—forcing faculty to move in with students, which, you know, as somebody who has been faculty, I can think that it must—that's very difficult—it's a very difficult position to put faculty in.

And, you know, I think that those are wastes of time, money, resources, and you could use a lot of those resources figuring out how to make sure that the community is as inclusive as possible. You know, as I've said, it's made a lot of progress, so—but I just don't know that Dartmouth has made more progress than society as a whole.

MIHALY: Sure.

FRIESNER: And I would like—I would like a place like Dartmouth to be a—a pioneer in that. Especially with its unique strength in international relations and languages, that should be a place where—where cross-cultural inclusion is there at the fore of—of that, and Dartmouth could be leading other institutions

in—in that, because that is their—that is a unique point of difference that Dartmouth has but doesn't exploit, right?

MIHALY: Absolutely.

Is there anything else that—that you want to add? I mean, I've really—I've enjoyed the conversation, and I don't have any other specific things that I wanted to cover. What have I missed? [Chuckles.]

FRIESNER: I know. I'm trying to think of, *What about my—my experience back in the day?* I would say—like, some of this is obv- — some of what I said is me personally, and my own path, right? Some of it is just sort of observations of the community as a whole. But, like, I think—I think my personality traits made some things harder, like not finding quite the club or the group that's LGBT that I felt right in. But I think in other ways, it made it easier, because I didn't—I wasn't—I—I wasn't a person that had the sense that I needed to belong to a group.

And I think that for those people who needed that, who were LGBT, it was much harder at Dartmouth then. And now, the fact that there are more activities—LGBT options that are LGBT specific, and that they can be out and open in the Greek system if that's something that they want means that there are options for those LGBT people who need to belong and yet need to be true to themselves.

I think that it was easier for me, because I didn't feel like I needed to be part of a group. I was—I was always, like, "Well, if you don't want to be friends with me, then you don't have to be." [Chuckles.] You know? "If you don't like gay people, don't—don't be friends with me."

MIHALY: [Laughs.]

FRIESNER: You know, whatever. So I think, you know, that's something where there's a lot of progress that has been made, and maybe—even though it's not—it's not something that necessarily would make a difference in my life—like, some of the things that I said where there were—where there was a group where not everyone was one extreme or the other. Like, that was helpful for me.

But I think other people who really are in their—and this is for many people—they're far away—I was far away from home, but, you know, for many people, it's, like, completely out of their realm of experience, and—and they're looking for that place to belong. And I think that that's something that Dartmouth has progressed a lot in.

And, I mean, not just LGBT, not just Jewish—you know, because I was there for the creation of kosher dining and all that, and I knew people that transferred away from Dartmouth because they were kosher and couldn't eat—

MIHALY: Mmm.

FRIESNER: —so that was a big—you know,—and certainly, I definitely still notice—there's something that I notice about the Dartmouth space, that there's a lot of progress. There's still a large separation of people of different ethnicities and racial groups. And, you know, the—the spaces have changed from what they were back then, but they're still spa- —like, Novack [Café]—I did all my—I wrote my undergrad thesis in Novack, and I was there my whole senior year, and it was a very important space for me, even though it was only there my senior year.

But I notice that, like, the only time I ever see black students now at Dartmouth when I'm there is in Novack. And they're, like,—like, the café area, anyway, is all, like, African-American students. Like, that's something that—it's—I mean, it's great when people can have—and, as I said, like, I did the same thing with Hillel and all sorts of other things, so it's great when you have a space where you can be, but it's also, like, I don't see that many African-American students elsewhere on campus, so why is there—why—why is—why is there so much more—like, why is that not something that Dartmouth has progressed in that much?

So even though I think that in some—some groups have been, you know, more—like, LGBT students are more included, which doesn't mean they don't have spaces that are LGBT only, which—you know, which is important—was definitely important in my time in Philadelphia, that there were, like, a big—that Penn had a big LGBT center, and

there was—there were gay bars and that kind of thing, you know. I—I appreciate that just as much.

But I also would like to be able to be who I am in a mixed group, and so that's something that I see as still missing for some groups on campus. And I hope that that's something that—that—I think it's progressed, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure if it's progressed, really. But that's kind of a question mark.

MIHALY: No, absolutely. I mean, there's only so much that, like, I feel like you can be certain of as just one person observing.

FRIESNER: Yeah.

MIHALY: Thank you so much.

Can I—there was one—can I just grab your birth date? I forgot to ask at the very beginning.

FRIESNER: Oh, yeah, that's fine. June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1979.

MIHALY: Okay.

Thank you so much for the time.

[End of interview.]