

John C. DeSantis  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
SpeakOut  
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[Daniel A.]

FISHBEIN: Hello. My name is Dan Fishbein. I'm here with John [C.] DeSantis. Today is February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It is currently right around 9:10 a.m. We are in Hanover, New Hampshire, in Rauner [Special Collections] Library, in their Ticknor Room, and we're going to be talking about John's history here at the college and, you know, how that relates to LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] issues at Dartmouth.

So how are you today, John?

DeSANTIS: Oh, I'm—I'm fine. I had a little—right after I met with you yesterday briefly, I had a little accident where I tripped on the—on the ground and fell face forward and—

DeSANTIS: Oh, no! [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: —dealing—dealing with some bruising today, but other than that, I'm feeling fine.

DeSANTIS: Okay. So I'd like to, you know, start at the—at the beginning. You know, that's normally a good place to start in these sorts of stories. If you could tell me a little bit about, you know, where you grew up, where you're from.

DeSANTIS: Okay, so I'm—I'm from—I'm Canadian. I'm from Toronto, Canada. I did all of my studies in Toronto: my bachelor's degree, my two master's degrees and my doctoral program, which to this day remains unfinished. After I received my library science degree, I left Canada and moved to the U.S. to take a job at Amherst College in Massachusetts, and that was early in 1992. And I remained there until 1995, where I—I had an opportunity to move to Dartmouth [College] to take a more—I shouldn't say more interesting job, but it's a job that provided me with more opportunities than I had there.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. So, yeah, can we maybe go back to, you know, that time when you were growing up in Canada for a little bit? Did you know that you were gay then? Was that something that was—

DeSANTIS: So—I certainly knew—was aware that I—that I was gay as a college student. Well, for one thing, when I was a, I guess—there they call it a first-year student; here they call it a freshman. When I was a freshman, I was actually in a relationship with a friend from high school during that year and did not do very well with my studies as a result of that.

And after that ended, I kind of went back into the closet, even though I was aware of, you know, the fact that I—that I was gay. But, you know, I didn't really act on it until probably after graduate school.

FISHBEIN: So were you—you know, you said that you knew this person in high school. How do you, you know, thought about it and—

DeSANTIS: Oh, we were best friends in high school. And I think after we graduated we came out to each other and then sort of fell into a relationship that lasted for about a year when we were both in—in university, as we called it there in Canada. They call it “in college” here, right? But I—we were not that far apart, so, you know, I saw him fairly frequently.

FISHBEIN: How do you think the climate was around LGBT issues in Toronto back in that day?

DeSANTIS: Oh, wow. Well, that's a really interesting question because in a sense, I'm kind of a pioneer. It was—it was just sort like at the very beginning of what they would call the gay lib [gay liberation] movement. How—how antiquated does that sound these days? There was a professor at the University of Toronto, an English professor, who offered a continuing education course called—I'll never forget the name of the title—New Perspectives on the Gay Experience. And it was mostly, you know, for—you know, for people from the community to take this course. And he—he had programmed different readings that were available at the time. And, it was kind of unusual for me, as a first-year student—and this was

1974, so I guess that kind of dates me, doesn't it?—to be taking this course.

So there I was, this seventeen-year-old in a room with all these guys in their thirties and forties, but it—it sort of galvanized me. It really opened my eyes to, you know, not only the fact that I was part of this, you know, community but just what—what all the issues were.

FISHBEIN: Mhm.

DeSANTIS: It's—it was probably the most important thing that I did that year.

And the professor, who later became a very well-known AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] activist, whose name is Michael Lynch—has since died, but he had a major influence on my life during that period.

FISHBEIN: Can you talk a little more about that in terms of—you know, you said you were, you know, clued into the major issues—

DeSANTIS: Yeah, he—

FISHBEIN —[cross-talk; unintelligible].

DeSANTIS: I kind of saw him as a role model. I thought that you know, as I got older, that—that that's the kind of gay man I would like to become. Not necessarily an academic, even though that was the—the career path I was on at the time. But I don't—just the idea that, you know, being gay wasn't just about—you know, it wasn't about being yourself and just, you know, having gay relationships; it was about community. It was about connecting with others, and—and—at the time, it was seen—it was seen as a struggle because it was still—you know, the closet was a big issue. It felt very secretive and subversive to even be taking this class.

FISHBEIN: Right.

DeSANTIS: So I don't know what more I can say. It just—it just set me on my path, I think.

- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. So that would have been, like, right around the same time as [the] Stonewall [riots], right?
- DeSANTIS: Stonewall was a bit earlier. Stonewall was, I believe, '69 —
- FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.
- DeSANTIS: —and—and—and we—we, of course, date Stonewall by its coincidence with the death of [actress] Judy Garland. [Chuckles.]
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.
- DeSANTIS: You probably don't who—I'm kidding. I'm sure you know who Judy Garland is.
- FISHBEIN: [Laughs]. But, um, do you think there was, like, that similar, you know, climate of, you know, gay repression that they faced in New York up in Toronto? You said that you thought this class was a little bit subversive.
- DeSANTIS: Yeah.
- FISHBEIN: Maybe you could say a little bit more.
- DeSANTIS: It was—certainly—certainly, there—there—there was the whole issue of—it was certainly oppression. I mean, the—the—the gay bars were still, like, unmarked, you know, and enter through the back alley, this sort of thing. You know, there were—there were, you know, homophobes running around the city, trying to beat up gay men, things like that.
- The relationship with the police was not good. They—they were—you know, there was a famous raiding of the bath house in Toronto in 1981, where they—they went into the bath house and just arrested everybody and things like that. And, of course, that, again, was a galvanizing event for the gay community because then they just, like, took to the streets for, like, a week, protesting, things like that.
- FISHBEIN: You've used that word “galvanizing” a couple of times, Were you, yourself, a protester at some of these events?

DeSANTIS: No, I was—I was—I was too timid and—and in some ways, too young or too busy. You know, I was in grad—I was either, you know, finishing up my undergraduate degree or—or in my graduate program, and I guess I just—you know, too involved with that to really get more involved with the gay community. And I do regret that now. I think I could have had a richer life in my twenties if I had been more outgoing.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. What did you study as an undergrad and then in graduate school?

DeSANTIS: My entire undergraduate program—and you probably could not do this any—any other place—even now, you could not do that at the University of Toronto, but for all four years, I took nothing but language and literature courses, in many different languages. I studied French, Italian, Russian, Polish, Serbian, Czech, and their—and their corresponding literatures. And then I went on into graduate work in—with a specialization in Polish.

FISHBEIN: Did you have a particular focus as you were exploring these languages, or—I mean, I'm—

DeSANTIS: A particular focus?

FISHBEIN: Yeah. I'm interested in were you learning about LGBT aspects related to those kind of foreign communities, too, or was there something else that you were drawn to?

DeSANTIS: Hmm.

FISHBEIN: I mean, I'm thinking about, you know, the Czech Republic in that era.

DeSANTIS: This would have been the eighties.

FISHBEIN: Interesting stuff going on over there.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. I'm not sure that I was—I was that plugged into the social aspects. I was really focusing on the—the language, and, I was—you know, my studies were more of a linguistic focus.

For a brief time [chuckles], when I—when I was doing my doctoral program, I submitted a thesis proposal on a gay Polish poet, so that was one way of combining those two interests, but then I decided that I really—as much as I was interested in—in this poet and his life, I wasn't really all that interested in poetry. [Both chuckle.] So then I changed my thesis topic back to more of a sociolinguistic topic.

FISHBEIN: Okay.

So I'm wondering: What—what do you think that that, you know, coming out experience—you said that you regretted, you know, not being more of an activist back in the day. Are there other—you know, how—how else do you understand that, you know, experience in your twenties in Toronto, anywhere, you know, learning from people like Michael Lynch, you said, and, you know, seeing some of the activism? How do you think those experiences affect you today?

DeSANTIS: Today, I—I think of it—I feel—I feel grateful that I—that I had that experience when I did in 1974, but mostly what I feel I regret, that I—that I didn't—I didn't follow through in a more meaningful way. I'm certainly, you know—I was aware of everything. I was, you know, buying the weekly gay newspaper and, you know, keeping with—with what was happening in the city and things like that. But I—I was watching from the sidelines. I wasn't really an active participant.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Have you—you know, since the seventies and eighties, you know, maybe tried to become more of an active participant?

DeSANTIS: Yes. So I—I think my real coming out in 1992, when I moved to the U.S.

FISHBEIN: Okay.

DeSANTIS: And I—when was working at Amherst College, and there were two other gay men working at the library where I was working, and I became friends with them, and—and they sort of, like, helped me to get more connected, because I had just moved to a place where I didn't know anyone. So they

had—they had a big influence on me, you know, when I—when I first moved to the U.S.

And so, yeah, I did do things. Like, I—I would go to, you know, the Gay Pride marches in Boston [Massachusetts], and at one point—that was when the—the AIDS quilt [sic; NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt] was being shown around the country or displayed, I should say.

And I think there were a couple of years when I was what they called a quilt monitor, where you were assigned a certain section of the quilt to just sort of, like, keep an eye on it and—and—you know, just to be there, you know, if, you know, people should walk by and they were overcome—you know, if they saw their family member's panel on that quilt, things like that. I did that for a couple of years.

I did a couple of the—the Marches on Washington [D.C.]. I was there for the one in '93 and—in '93 I was working at Amherst, and I went down for the one in 2000 with a contingent of Dartmouth students. That was a much smaller march. It's kind of forgotten these days, but it happened.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. So I'm not familiar with the story of the AIDS quilt. Can you go into that a little bit more?

DeSANTIS: Yeah. So during the AIDS crisis, there was—because of the response to the AIDS crisis, mostly by the U.S. government at the time, there was concern that—and nothing was being done to—to help these men who were dying—a concern that they would not be forgotten, that they would be remembered.

And there was a man named Cleve Jones, who's still alive today, and who I've actually met in person. He, himself, has a very interesting role in the—in what we know as the—the gay movement in San Francisco [California]. There was a miniseries based on a book he wrote, called *When We Rise*, and he was portrayed in that film.

Anyway, I mention Cleve Jones because he was the one who came up with the idea of—of—of starting a quilt of—asking family members or loved ones of the person who—who died of AIDS to create a—a little quilt—I think it's maybe, like,—what would be the size?—three feet by five

feet? You know, they would paste things on it or sew things into it. Some of them were really quite elaborate. And it was like a—it was meant to be, like, a permanent, loving tribute to that person's life.

And then eventually these panels were all quilted together into one enormous quilt. At one point, the quilt was so large that it spread out over the entire Mall in Washington, D.C.

FISHBEIN: Wow.

DeSANTIS: And then it eventually grew—and it's really sad because when the quilt grows, you know what that means. It means that more gay men are—are dying of AIDS. And I keep—I keep saying "gay men." In—in—in fact, the quilt was nondiscriminatory. It was meant to—to honor anyone's life who—who was impacted by—by AIDS.

I've lost my train of thought. What was I talking about? The—the—the quilt, right?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

DeSANTIS: So does that answer your question about what it was?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm, yeah. I appreciate that. Did you have any friends or, you know, loved ones who ended up on that quilt?

DeSANTIS: Hmm. I didn't—I never had a—because I was not so plugged into the gay community, I did not—I have to say I did not lose any close friends to AIDS, although I have—I know of, you know, people who had died of AIDS who were family members or loved ones of those who were close to me. One of my best friends, one of the men I mentioned to you that I worked with at Amherst College—his younger brother died of AIDS, and—and there was a quilt made for—for this young man, David, and I remember finding that particular panel on the quilt and taking a photo of it for my friend Stephen so he could see that.

I also remem- —there was also a memorial grove [National AIDS Memorial Grove] in San Francisco. I think that still exists—where you can plant a tree in memory of someone, and the whole grove would be, you know, trees in honor



people who died of AIDS. And I remember planting a tree for David there, or having one planted.

FISHBEIN: Did you spend some time out in San Francisco in that era, too?

DeSANTIS: Yes. My very first time in California and in San Francisco was in 1992, for the San Francisco Gay pride [sic; San Francisco Pride], and it was—you know, you could just imagine the exuberance of a young gay man who had just come out, and I was there with a—a friend, who eventually became my boyfriend for a little while. And so, you know, there we were, you know, in our—in our [chuckles] 1992 gay garb, with, you know, the rainbow this and that and all kinds of accessories and whatnot, and—and just feeling very liberated. And, you know, this large crowd, and there we were, like, making out right on the streets of San Francisco. It was—it was a lot of fun.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. What was that like? You must have some happy memories from that.

DeSANTIS: I have very happy memories of—of that—of that trip to San Francisco in '92, yeah.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

So I want to backtrack a little bit. You said that by '92 you had moved to Amherst,—

DeSANTIS: That's right.

FISHBEIN: —but then you had also, you know, come out more than you were.

DeSANTIS: Yes.

FISHBEIN: You'd kind of come out a little bit in college but then went back into the closet.

DeSANTIS: Right. So in 1992 I was completely out. I mean, I came out gradually, you know, to certain friends. In 1992, I—I came out to my biological family. And I have to say that it was probably in—in—in direct relation to the fact that my father

had died earlier that year. And I don't know whether on some subconscious level I felt that since he was no longer there, that I—I was now at liberty to do that. I don't know. In any case, yes, I've been living pretty much openly as a gay man since '92.

FISHBEIN: Do you think your father would have not supported your decision to come out?

DeSANTIS: I'll never know. It's not—not something he and I ever talked about. I think that over time, had he lived, he would have,—you know, he would have come around, as my mother did, you know, and—I'm not sure if it ever was an issue for my mother. She—she was fine with it from the very beginning, really, and was always, you know, very friendly and supportive of—of my boyfriends and—and, you know, I've been with my current partner for twenty-five years, and she, you know, treated him like a son-in-law.

FISHBEIN: That's great. So do you think there was, like, a noticeable difference in the climate around LGBT issues when you moved from Toronto to Massachusetts? I mean, I think we have this perception of Canada as, you know, more socially liberal, more progressive.

DeSANTIS: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: Was that something you noticed at all, or—

DeSANTIS: Not really. I—I think—I think it really has more to do with—with cities.

FISHBEIN: Right

DeSANTIS: Like, certainly LGBT life in Toronto and Boston around that time could have, you know, been very comparable. I was living in western Massachusetts, so there—there were just little pockets of—of—of gay culture there. Like, the—the—the gay gift shop in Northampton, things like that. And UMass Amherst [the University of Massachusetts, Amherst] would, you know, bring in celebrities to entertain us, things like that.

FISHBEIN: Mmm. Was that a grand program you were in, in Amherst, or—

DeSANTIS: No, I was working.

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: I was working at Amherst College full time,—

FISHBEIN: Doing—

DeSANTIS: —as a librarian.

FISHBEIN: Okay. Librarian in what sort of field?

DeSANTIS: Same—same thing I'm doing here at Dartmouth, in cataloguing.

FISHBEIN: Okay.

DeSANTIS: I had a specialization there. They hired me as the Russian cataloguer, so I was cataloguing exclusively Russian, which kind of got old after—after three years.

FISHBEIN: [Laughs.]

DeSANTIS: And that's probably one of the reasons why I moved up here to Dartmouth, so I could do more than just Russian.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. So you moved up to Dartmouth in?

DeSANTIS: Ninety-five.

FISHBEIN: Ninety-five. What was that experience like? What were you hear—you know, what did you feel upon arriving here?

DeSANTIS: I—I didn't know a lot about Dartmouth. I mean, I knew it was one of the Ivy Leagues, and my—my partner had done a MALS [Master of Arts in Liberal Studies] here years ago, so it was kind of familiar to us. And he had a lot of affection at the time [chuckles] for—for Dartmouth. It just seemed like a really good fit and a good move for me, even though I—I didn't like the idea of—of entering into a commuting

relationship, which we ended up doing for many, many years before he eventually moved up here.

So it was almost like what—what it was in '92, moving to a strange place where I didn't know anyone. Yeah, it was—you know, I went back to western Mass[achusetts] every weekend, but during the weeks, it was pretty isolating and lonely.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. So you met your current partner at Amherst.

DeSANTIS: Yes.

FISHBEIN: What was that—

DeSANTIS: That was—

FISHBEIN: —you know, can you tell me more about, you know, origins of that?

DeSANTIS: A year after I moved there—I moved there early—January of '92, and I met him in January of '93. And we didn't start dating until October of '93. And what could I say? Hmm. That's right, he—[Chuckles.] I'm trying to think, is he going to be listening to this? Well, there isn't anything that he doesn't know. You know, I felt—I felt a connection that I hadn't ever felt before, and I had a sense that this—this is my destiny. So I—I decided not to run from it. And—and—and here we are, still, today.

FISHBEIN: How do you, like, kind of—you said you were coming out around that time. Was that something you had done before you met him, or did he kind of help facilitate that process?

DeSANTIS: No, this is all pretty much '92 and the first half of '93, so, yeah, I didn't—I didn't have a long period of—I mean, you know, I was—I was living as an openly gay man in Toronto, as well, for all those years. Just I wasn't out to my family, so—yeah.

FISHBEIN: What was dating culture like in western Massachusetts in the early nineties for [chuckles] gay men? I'm curious about that.

DeSANTIS: Oh, yeah. So it was—you know, it was finding a boyfriend and breaking up with a boyfriend, and a lot of angst and—I mean, this—this was the pattern for friends who were single. Those who were partnered—you know, they're pretty much the same as what it is now.

FISHBEIN: Were there any fears around, you know, AIDS? You had talked about this—this blanket—

DeSANTIS: Yeah,—

FISHBEIN: — going around.

DeSANTIS: I mean, it was the—you know, that—that was the period of time when you had groups like ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] and—oh, I'm trying to remember some of the others, some—either based in San Francisco or New York. But, yes, it was—it was still in the forefront of everyone's mind, you know, big—a lot of safe sex campaigns. I think I remember buying this poster of two hot guys embracing, on my first trip to San Francisco in '92. I eventually had it framed. It was hanging in my apartment. It said, "Safe sex is hot sex."

FISHBEIN: [Laughs.]

DeSANTIS: So it was—it was that kind of campaign, and, yeah.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. And you said there were some, you know, gay bars and whatnot in—in western Massachusetts.

DeSANTIS: There was one in—one, really—

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.]

DeSANTIS: —in—I don't think I ever went to it—in Northampton. Yeah, there—there wasn't much of a bar culture at all. And frankly, I—I was never much of a bar person. I don't think I ever—maybe a couple times I went out to—I never went to an actual bar in Toronto. Maybe a couple of times to dance clubs. But I'm not a late-night kind of person, so—and those things don't really get started until late at night, and I don't want to be out late at night. [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.] Right. So where would you and your partner hang out when you were first, you know, getting to know each other?

DeSANTIS: Well, we actually met at a—at a gay social group. It was sort of like a potluck gathering for gay men in western Massachusetts, in the basement of a church, that sort of thing. It's kind of funny that—that we—we met at a place like that, and instead of—instead of at a bar, because neither of us were bar people, so if we were destined to meet. I guess it makes sense it would be in a place like that.

Did you have another question? I think I—I spaced it.

FISHBEIN: Well, yeah, that's where you met. Were you—were you a big churchgoer then, or was mostly—?

DeSANTIS: Oh, he—he always was, and—and is to this day. I—I never really was. I was raised Roman Catholic against my will, and—and at the age of eighteen, I just completely rebelled and threw it out the window, and it kind of like spoiled me for any kind of organized religion.

But, you know, I—I—I support his church attendance, and you know, I'll go with him once a year when they have the blessing of the animals, you know, because, you know, we bring our dog into church, and it's kind of fun for me.

[Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: I know we're kind of throwing chronological order out the window a little bit, but you mentioned growing up Roman Catholic—

DeSANTIS: Mm-hm.

FISHBEIN: —and, you know, your kind of rebellion against that. Can you talk a little bit more about that experience and maybe how it relates to, you know, LGBT issues as well, your own experience as a gay man?

DeSANTIS: Yeah. Yeah. I—I never enjoyed the experience of being raised Catholic. Everything about it annoyed me. It was all about obligation. I was able to perceive that as a child. Like, “No, you can't go out and play because today is a holy day

of obligation, and we must go to church.” You know, and the church experience was, like, sitting there trying to, you know, stay awake or keep from being bored. It was like—like the longest hour I’d ever experienced. It just seemed like such a waste of time.

Then later, as—as an adolescent, you know, wanting to sleep in on Monday—on Sunday mornings but no, bang-bang-bang on the bedroom door. “You have to get up and go to church.” So it just really felt like a big intrusion on my life. And I don’t know. Just the whole—the culture of—you know, when I was—I went to an elementary school for five years that was run by priests and nuns, and I just really didn’t like the regimented feel of it all.

Ironically, I had four other siblings, and all of them are still to this day practicing Catholics. I’m the only one that re- — rebelled in this way. I think what really clenched it—there’s a Catholic ritual called confession, in which you are expected to go into a little booth with a priest, who cannot see your face; there’s just a screen. And you’re supposed to confess sins and then get absolved. And I can never think of—like, I always thought of myself as a good person. *I don’t—what is a sin? I have to think. What would they consider a sin? Because I don’t think I’ve sinned.*

So I’d try to make up something, but—and you can imagine, you know, the creepy old priest with this, you know, eighteen-year-old boy and, you know, trying to get me to talk about salacious matters, things like that. And—and when I saw where that conversation was going, it was *No, no. No, no, no, no.* So that was my last time in a confessional.

FISHBEIN: Do you think you heard any homophobia, growing up in the Catholic Church?

DeSANTIS: Subject never came up, no.

FISHBEIN: Then were your parents pretty religiously pious?

DeSANTIS: My mother was. My father, not at all. I mean, he—he would occasionally go to church, but it wasn’t—it wasn’t a huge interest of his.

FISHBEIN: And your mother didn't feel a conflict between her, you know, religious identity and, you know, her having a gay son, or—

DeSANTIS: You mean after she knew that I was gay?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: Well, no, because it was my life, not hers, so it's—

FISHBEIN: Right.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. I mean, I guess at that point, by the nineties, it was common enough to have gay relatives, that people realized that you're not going to go to Hell because you have a gay relative, so, yeah, I don't think she internalized it that way.

FISHBEIN: Mmm.

So [chuckles], back to the—the—you know, you and Amherst, meeting your partner when you, you know, came up to Dartmouth. What was that long-distance relationship like? Was that difficult for you?

DeSANTIS: It was, yeah. It was about a two-hour drive. I was living in Lebanon [New Hampshire] during that first year. Yeah, it was—I mean, we did—did we have—yeah, we did have the internet, but he—he—he didn't have access to it at home at the time, so I think it was basically phone calls, which was kind of funny because now—like, we never call each other. We just text. So it's kind of funny that back in the nineties we communicated with phone calls. I'll have to remind him of that. [Chuckles.]

But, yeah, if it—if it were, you know, farther away and, you know, we only saw each other once a month, that would have been a different experience. But—so it kind of felt like—you know, I was still living there in Massachusetts, but I was just away during the week.

FISHBEIN: Right.

And coming to Dartmouth, did you find, you know, a gay community here, or was that not really on your radar?



DeSANTIS: I was—I was very fortunate because at the time, there was a—one of the administrators in the library was an openly gay man and was aware of the fact that, you know, I was joining the staff and that I was gay, and so he—he was kind of like a mentor to me, and he—and he would advise me on—on what opportunities there were in the Upper [Connecticut River] Valley and on campus.

And he was one of the founders of—of this campus group called the CGLBTC, and there's probably information on that group here in the—in the archives. It stands for the Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. And they had monthly meetings, which I certainly began attending, just—I was interested in the issues, but I was also interested in meeting—meeting other gay people on campus.

There was also a social group [chuckles], where he actually met—met his current husband through this same social group. It was called SAM, S-A-M. And it was euphemistically [chuckles] titled Social Alternatives for Men. If that isn't code, I don't know what is. I don't recall whether I actually went to one of their meetings. I may have gone to one. It would have been, like, a potluck in someone's home, that sort of thing.

That—that's really—that's about it in terms of—of my exposure to a gay community here at Dartmouth.

FISHBEIN: So when you were with CGLBTC—did I get that right?

DeSANTIS: Very good, yes.

FISHBEIN: What sort of issues were you—were you working on? What were the—what were the concerns?

DeSANTIS: A lot of them had already been resolved by the time I arrived. I think this group formed in the very early nineties, and I joined in '95. I think domestic partner benefits for college employees was a big issue. That was long before there was even a notion of—of civil unions or gay marriage. So they—they were petitioning the—the administration and Human Resources to—to provide such benefits. And I think they eventually did succeed because that—that was already

in place. You know, if I had—if my partner were with me in the Upper Valley, I could have included him on my Dartmouth benefits as being a—what would they call it then?—a partner, life partner. I think they called it—yeah.

What else were they working on? Oh, God! [Unintelligible] going back over twenty-five years. I'm trying to think. Maybe not quite twenty-five years, but, yeah, I'm —I think maybe there were a few—a few little details related to that. I lot of them had to do with benefits and our—our status as GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender] employees on campus.

FISHBEIN: How did you feel about you not being able to, you know, provide benefits to your partner when he was away? I mean, I think that, you know, there are definitely couples that I know of, who work at Dartmouth, you know, who—maybe they're married, but that really wouldn't have really been an option for you at that point. You know, one lives in California, and the other lives here, and they can, you know [chuckles]—

DeSANTIS: Right.

FISHBEIN: —do all these things for each other, so that does seem a little bit discriminatory to me.

DeSANTIS: Well, I mean, I could have—I mean, he didn't necessarily have to be here. I mean just the fact that he was my life partner, I could have provided him with Dartmouth benefits—

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: —if I chose to. But he was employed full time at UMass Amherst, so he didn't really need my benefits anyway. He probably had better benefits there anyway.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

So did you really—were you one of the leading people of the CGLBTC when you got here? What was your relationship?

DeSANTIS: No. These were people who had already been involved for a few years, and they all knew each other, and I was the new guy, so, you know, I didn't—I didn't dare do anything except,

you know, you know, attend the meetings and occasionally say something. No, I never had an official role in that group.

They—they had an official chair, and that would rotate every year, and I think—oh, here's the rotation: It was a faculty and staff group, and the rotation was one year the chair would be a faculty member, and the next year it would be a staff member. "Staff," meaning administrators or whoever.

FISHBEIN: Were you—and were you, you know, pretty friendly with these people outside of that, you know, formal context?

DeSANTIS: Abolu- —oh, yes, there was definitely a social component, and there—there may have been some social gatherings that they set up. Yeah, now that I think about it, yes, they did actually have—you know, sometimes in—in someone's home. Yeah, I do remember going to—yes, Professor Susan Ackerman [Class of 1980], who's still on the faculty here, teaches religion—she hosted a—an event in her home. I remember going to that. So, yeah, no, we—we did have a friendly relationship with each other outside of meetings.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Can you tell me more about what it was like to, you know, be part of that community? It sounded to me like, you know, you maybe found some gay community in Amherst, you know, and talked—you know, when you were talking about your time in college, that community was, you know, really going to be important to you as a gay man. So what was it like to kind of find that here at Dartmouth?

DeSANTIS: I never really found it here at Dartmouth.

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: I—I think—the difference was that I—I did have two close friends at Amherst, and I've never really—I never really had a close friend here, at Dartmouth, since I moved here.

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: So I never really felt a strong connection to—I mean, I've been friendly with—with people that I—you know, I know through campus connections, but I—I never felt part of a gay community here.

- FISHBEIN: Hmm. What was the community like that you formed with those couple friends in Amherst for you?
- DeSANTIS: Well, I knew their partners or their boyfriends and—and their—their friends, who then became, you know, mutual friends. There—there would be more, like, social events that I'd be invited to or go along with, things like that. So I think, maybe that was it.
- FISHBEIN: What sort of social events?
- DeSANTIS: Outings to—I don't know, what did we do? Let me think. Oh, shows, concerts, like, you know, a group of people get together to go up to see Ellen [L.] DeGeneres at UMass or something, or—Oh God—I don't know, meeting at a coffeehouse in Northampton. What else did we do? In people's homes, dinners in people's homes, things like that.
- FISHBEIN: And you don't really feel like those sorts of activities, you know, happened when you got to Dartmouth as much.
- DeSANTIS: Never. So in all the years that I've been at Dartmouth, I've never been invited to anyone's home for dinner. Yeah.
- FISHBEIN: Hmm. How do you feel about that?
- DeSANTIS: It makes me feel like there's something wrong with me. [Chuckles.]
- FISHBEIN: Hmm.
- DeSANTIS: Because I know that other people do have that experience.
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Has it been something that you sought out, or—
- DeSANTIS: Not particularly. I mean, I guess maybe it's not really all that important to me. I mean, I—I—I'm content with my own home life. If I were single, it might be more of an issue for me, but right now, or at least for the past few years, what I think about is getting through my workday so I can, you know, go home and—and—and, you know, begin my home life.

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: We're pretty much homebodies. And we live—we live quite far—for the past twelve years, we've lived far from campus—like, thirty miles away.

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: Before that, we lived right—right in Hanover.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Where do you live?

DeSANTIS: I live in Newbury, Vermont, which is right on the New Hampshire border, about halfway between White River Junction [Vermont] and St. Johnsbury [Vermont].

FISHBEIN: Hmm. It must be pretty rural up there.

DeSANTIS: Extremely so. Although I do live on a main road, so at least I don't have to drive on a dirt road to—to get to my house.

FISHBEIN: Do you like that seclusion? How does—how does that feel for you?

DeSANTIS: I like—you know, when I was in Hanover, I was in faculty housing, and it was—the housing itself was rather nice, although we didn't have a lot of space, but there was a—a sorority house right across the parking lot, and they were very noisy, and all I could think about was getting away from them. And so what I do like is that—because the houses are so far apart in this rural area that I live in, you just don't hear other people. And fortunately, they don't hear us because my dogs can be really noisy. So I do like that aspect of it, yeah.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Yeah, I definitely get how that, you know, isolation can be kind of—kind of soothing.

DeSANTIS: It's—but it can also feel—well, isolating. [Chuckles.] You know, as I said before, I'm from a city. I'm from Toronto. I'm—I'm used to—I act like I'm from a city.

FISHBEIN: Right.

- DeSANTIS: You know, I go into a store, I don't make chit-chat with—with the shopkeeper. I—I pay for my purchase and—and leave. And if I see someone ahead of me, making small talk with the cashier, I get annoyed because—*Let's get this going! We're here to make a purchase, not to chit-chat.* You know, the sort of city mentality. [Chuckles.]
- FISHBEIN: Right. Yeah, and it definitely seems like you were a part of a pretty, you know, vibrant LGBT scene in Toronto back in the day, you know, right at the beginning of the, you know, gay liberation movement. As you said, a lot of stuff going on, a lot of, you know, newspapers to read, professors to talk to who were, you know, active in what was going on. And then you come to Dartmouth,—
- DeSANTIS: Mm-hm.
- FISHBEIN: —and I'm assuming that—I don't know, were there those kinds of things here,—
- DeSANTIS: Yeah. Absolut—
- FISHBEIN: —or not so much?
- DeSANTIS: There were—when I came to Dartmouth, probably—I think the—the best thing—and you may have read this somewhere, that—I think the past couple of years, Dartmouth has been rated as one of the top ten or top five GLBT-friendly campuses.
- FISHBEIN: Hmm. Hmm. Do you know if you rated it that way?
- DeSANTIS: What—what was the rating?
- FISHBEIN: Yeah.
- DeSANTIS: I'm not plugged into the organizations that—that rate colleges and universities [unintelligible]—
- FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.]
- DeSANTIS: —so I don't know what—what the rating was. But it was a fairly reliable source. And, of course,—I don't know—you—you probably are aware of Dartmouth's history on those

issues what with, you know, *The Dartmouth Review* and some of the really horrible incidents that happened in the—the eighties here.

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: I would recommend looking at—there was an honors thesis written, and I’m blanking on the name of the author, which is unfortunate. In any case, he basically wrote his honors thesis on the—on the history of—of gay life at Dartmouth, to that point, anyway. I think that was late eighties, early nineties when he—when he did that honors thesis.

So when I came here, there was—shortly after I came here, the Office of Pluralism and Leadership hired a person to lead GLBT efforts on campus. They hired a woman named [Pamela S.] “Pam” Misener [pronounced MIZE-ner], who not only filled that role well but—but really went out of her way to be a kind of like a mentor and caregiver to GLBT students on campus.

You know, she—she would bring in nationally-known speakers. She, you know, would send out messages on—there was a very active listserv that—that was used on campus for anyone interested in—and she—inviting students to lunch on just—on the spur of the moment, things like that. Very—very warm, very nurturing, highly respected. Very, very effective in her role. And she also was very good at outreach, too, of faculty and staff, too. And she’s been gone now at least five years. We—we still miss her.

FISHBEIN: Did you have personal relationship with her?

DeSANTIS: We’re—we’re definitely friends. I still keep in touch with her on Facebook. I’ve not, unfortunately seen her since she moved away from Dartmouth. She moved to southern New York State, and then has since moved on to Pennsylvania after that.

FISHBEIN: What was that friendship like for you here? Did that help with the, you know, feelings of isolation?

DeSANTIS: It definitely made me feel—my friendship with Pam made me feel more a part of the Dartmouth community. She would

organize things like a special graduation ceremony for the GLBT seniors and would invite me to attend and participate and, you know, help hand out awards, things like that.

FISHBEIN: Okay.

DeSANTIS: It was called the—what did they call that? The—there was a name for it, some sort of—there was a dinner involved as well.

When—when she was unavailable occasionally to introduce a speaker, she asked me to fill in and introduce the speaker, so I remember one nice occasion—I don't know if you've ever heard of Jennifer Finney Boylin, who's a very well-known transgender professor and author, and came to Dartmouth at least twice. But I remember on one occasion, you know, introducing her, and that was a real honor. And going to dinner with her.

FISHBEIN: Mmm! What was that like, to, you know, be able to get to know some of these, you know, renowned activists, scholars, you know, people like that?

DeSANTIS: It's—it's—it was—you know, I've met many, many famous activists and—and—and authors over the years, mostly through my work with the American Library Association, so it's probably been one of the most rewarding parts of—of—of my career, is getting to—to meet these famous people. I have a collection of books that have been inscribed to me by all these people as well. I call it the DeSantis Signed Book Collection. Perhaps Rauner will one day inherit it. [Chuckles.] If there's interest. So, yeah, that's—that's been very meaningful to me in my life.

FISHBEIN: Can you talk some more about those experiences?

DeSANTIS: Oh. Well, I've—I've been going regularly to the American Library Association conferences since 1991, even before I moved to the U.S., and I haven't missed one since then. They're twice a year, and they tend to bring in very, you know, famous people as speakers or just to make appearances in the exhibit hall. And so—and for a few years, I was chairing a committee that—that gave out awards to GLBT literature, and so I would arrange for dinners for the



winner authors and sort of like accompany them around, things like that. So that's how I got to know many of them fairly well, that way.

So, yes. And, of course, I always asked them to sign their book for me, but more importantly was—was getting to know them personally. I—I formed a friendship with the late Leslie Feinburg, because I was on the committee when she won the award and got to have dinner with her in South Beach [a neighborhood in Miami, Florida] and him, I guess.

FISHBEIN: What did you two talk about? What was that experience like?

DeSANTIS: Leslie was—was—was—she was very, very charming, but—but—but it—it was all about the struggle, and, you know, it was, you know, transgender rights and—and respect and just a—a better life. I mean, you get that from reading her books. You know, her—her dying words, that were repeated by—by her partner—before she died, she said, “Remember me as a communist revolutionary.” I may have gotten that slightly wrong, but that was—that was—that was—that was what she was about.

FISHBEIN: Wow. Could you maybe talk some more about her life and what those issues were at the time? I'm not necessarily familiar with this story.

DeSANTIS: Oh. Yeah. Well, I mean, she sort of like opened my eyes to transgender issues in this country, and I—and I believe to a lot of other people. I think I was—when I was working at Amherst College, I was involved in bringing her to campus, and she spoke to, you know, an auditorium filled with people. It was really—you know, just trying to make people understand, you know, what—what privilege is all about and how transgender people are denied that sense of privilege.

There was a male undergraduate—I think the student body at—at Amherst is very much like, I think, the student body at Dartmouth, although I think Dartmouth is considerably more diverse. But in any case, you—you get these, you know, privileged young men who went to, you know, prep schools and so on—no offense if that's your background [chuckles], and so one of them raised his hands and said, “You know,

I'm a very privileged, good-looking, white heterosexual male. Why should I care at all about what you have to say?"

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: And I thought, *Wow!* You know, I don't know how she responded, but—but—but certainly I think his question illustrated the point she was trying to make, that—that transgender people do not enjoy privilege in this country, and they're—are probably the—the last social group to gain mainstream acceptance.

FISHBEIN: I know you said that she died. Was that of—can you talk a little bit more about that, or—

DeSANTIS: She—she had been ill for many years. I'm trying to remember. Some sort of bacterial infection that she never really recovered from? Yeah. And that illness really set her back, and she was not able to be as active in the struggle, as she would have put it, as she would have liked to. And I think she was sixty-four when she died. And this would have been how many years ago? Three or four years ago, maybe?

FISHBEIN: Okay. What was it like for you to hear about that?

DeSANTIS: [Sighs.]

FISHBEIN: It sounds like she had a pretty big impact on you.

DeSANTIS: I was very, very fond of her, and—and you know, I'm used to hearing about the—the deaths of activists and authors. I probably felt the same amount of sadness at hearing about her death that I felt when—when I heard about Michael Lynch's death.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Can you talk a little bit more about that—that latter experience? I know you talked some about Michael Lynch when you were talking about—we were talking about Toronto, and then—I'm not really sure, like, what his activist career was like, so if you could, you know, maybe tell that story.

DeSANTIS: What, Leslie's career?

FISHBEIN: Michael Lynch's.

DeSANTIS: Michael Lynch's career.

FISHBEIN: Yeah, and your kind of relationship with him.

DeSANTIS: Well, Mich- —Michael and I didn't have a relationship after I took that course, although I may have run into him a couple of times. He had a—a—kind of a hard time. The university was hassling him over the fact that he was actually employed at—at—at one of the Catholic colleges, and the official party line of the Catholic Church is to disapprove of homosexuality. (Another reason I'm no longer involved with them.) But they—they did not approve of his teaching this course and—and some of his other activities, and he was kind of drummed out. And then he, himself, developed HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] and eventually AIDS, and I think that—that experience made him an activist.

There was a book written about his life. The title of the book was *AIDS activist*[*: Michael Lynch and the Politics of Community*]. It's kind of interesting that that's his legacy. That's what he's remembered for, instead of, you know, being an accomplished English professor.

FISHBEIN: Right.

DeSANTIS: A very interesting person. His archives are in Toronto, and he kept a diary every day, and I keep meaning to go back and go into the archives and look at the diaries for 1974 to see if he wrote anything about this seventeen-year-old kid coming to his Gay Perspectives class. [Chuckles.]

He eventually—let's see, he was married to a woman who I think was a lesbian. I'm not really sure what that was all about. And they had a biological child who grew up to be straight but very—himself a LGBT activist. And I've had some e-mail exchanges with him, and it was very meaningful for me to be able to tell his son how important his father had been to me in—in my life.

FISHBEIN: How did you get in touch with—with the son?

- DeSANTIS: Stefan [Lynch Strassfeld]? I think it's fairly easy to find someone's e-mail if you want to, so I think I just e-mailed him.
- FISHBEIN: So, yeah, you—you were talking about, you know, the kind of impact that, you know, both Lynch's death and also Leslie Feinburg's death had on you. Could you, you know, maybe elaborate a little bit more about what that was like?
- DeSANTIS: Well, it just filled me with such regret, because they could have done so much more. If Michael had lived—oh! You know, if he had lived, I would have—I would have come back to Toronto when I—you know, when I—[Chuckles.]—when I finally became a man and could have gone back and—and—and talked to him and—and just told him face to face how important he was to me. And I'll never have that chance.
- With Leslie, you know, we didn't see each other all that often, and, you know,—but I always remembered how friendly and kind she always was to me, because I don't often get that response from people.
- FISHBEIN: Can you—you talked about, you know, becoming a man. I'm wondering what—what you meant by that, what that process was like.
- DeSANTIS: Oh, just—just having the self-confidence to—to—to go where I want, say what I want, do what I want and—and not be afraid of anything. I've been a very timid person most of my life, and I no longer am. So I don't know how I reached that point. Maybe it's just the natural process of aging. But that—that's where I am right now.
- FISHBEIN: Hmm. When did the process kind of unfold for you?
- DeSANTIS: Hmmm. I would say probably, maybe right around the time I—[Sighs.] I don't know if I can—I don't know, late—when I was in my late forties, around fifty?
- FISHBEIN: Hmm.
- DeSANTIS: Maybe then. Yeah. So that would have been what? The late nineties, I guess?

FISHBEIN: Do you think there was a particular event that helped, you know, with that process?

DeSANTIS: No. As I said, I think it's just part of the—the aging process. You know, there's no—I wish there was, like, “After this happened and that—” No, nothing. There was nothing like that. No, I haven't had any, you know, major occurrences in my life other than the—the death of my parents, so, you know—

FISHBEIN: So, yeah, could you speak about maybe those as major occurrences? You know, what—what that—

DeSANTIS: Mmm. I was young when my father died. And he was young when he died. He was fifty-nine. And it feels weird now to have lived more years than he ever did, so [chuckles] I look back at what he was like at the age of forty and fifty, and then—you know, very—you know, he was a physician, so very important, self-assured, established. And—and, you know, at that age, I—I was just—just going to work and not really—I never thought of myself as very important.

So, yes, he died from cancer, after struggling for, like, eight years, so it was expected, but it was—it was really—I mean, we were all young when he died. It was—it was—it was pretty traumatic. It was—it was a big, big loss. Probably something that you never really get over but you just sort of learn to live with it. It just becomes part of you. That's—that's what they say.

FISHBEIN: You had mentioned that that death took place right around when you first came out. Was there—do think there was a connection?

DeSANTIS: So everything happened—so within a period of, like, six weeks, I—I moved to Massachusetts, where I didn't know a soul, started a brand-new job and lost my father, all at the same time.

FISHBEIN: Right.

DeSANTIS: So it felt very stressful at the time.

FISHBEIN: But it's impressive that you, you know, kind of responded to that stress maybe by, you know, declaring that you had this—this identity that you, you know, were who you were.

DeSANTIS: I saw myself as starting a new life, so I didn't really—because no one knew me. I didn't feel like I needed to hide anything from anyone, so it was very easy for me to—to be out at work and things like that. Yeah.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. A certain degree of anonymity.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. And—and it felt very supportive. Like, my—my supervisor at work had a lesbian daughter. She was very, you know, pro-gay and very liberal. I mean, we—the two of us clicked right away, and we're still good friends to this day.

FISHBEIN: Mhmm. And then your mother—were you and her close?

DeSANTIS: Yes. Yeah, my mother had—she was a widow at fifty-eight, and so the—it's kind of funny: I just recently told this story to a—I was in Seattle [Washington] a couple of weeks ago for a conference, and I met up with my younger brother's best friend, who is—who is now gay. And—well always was. But anyway—[Chuckles.] He wasn't gay when I knew him as a little child, so I probably haven't seen this guy since he was, like, thirteen or fourteen, at most. And then now he's a man in his fifties. So that—that was a big culture shock.

But anyway, we were comparing notes about our lives that we had lived, not really being in touch with one another until that point, and, you know, he had really good memories of my mother, and he wanted to know what it was like when I came out to my mother. So I told him the story, and I'll repeat it here.

I was dropping hints. I—I couldn't actually come right out and—and tell her, so I was dropping hints so that—I was hoping that she would assume—you know, I was, like, wearing an earring, and I had my hair a certain way. I had a bandana that I tie around my head, and—I don't know, these crazy outfits. [Chuckles.]

I remember once in To- —before I came out—no, this is after I came out to my sister, but I was still wearing these crazy

outfits. I was visiting Toronto, and I was going out for the evening and staying with my youngest sister. [Chuckles.] I don't know, this is one of my digressions, but it may be relevant to the whole story.

So I'm leaving, and I had this get-up on, and she said, "You're not going out like that." And I said, "Why?" She goes, "You look like a gay slut." I said, "Oh, thanks. That's the look I was going for." [Both chuckle.]

Anyway, so I—I never actually did have to come out to my mother because she wrote me a letter saying that "I suspect that you may be gay, and if so, I want you to know that it's not an issue for me, and it's okay." So then I called her on the phone and confirmed it, and that's how I came out to my mother.

FISHBEIN: What was that phone conversation like?

DeSANTIS: It felt a little awkward to be talking about that for the first time. But it—mostly, after the phone call, it just felt like—you know, a great sense of relief that, you know, *I don't—I don't have to hide from anyone now. I can—I can—I can be me.* so, yeah, that was—it was really liberating.

FISHBEIN: I'm hoping you can talk some more about the relationships that you made with the American Library Association. Did I get that name correct?

DeSANTIS: Yes, that's right, yeah.

FISHBEIN: Yeah, you said that you—you know, in addition to Leslie Feinburg, there were some other, you know, well-known people who you became acquainted with through that. Can you maybe, you know, go—go through who those people were?

DeSANTIS: Yeah. Wow! So I have to go back a few years. I'm trying to remember now, some of our speakers. So we—we had Congressman Barney Frank, who was one of our speakers. It was fun meeting him. I'm trying to think of some names that would be—oh! Well, Emma Donoghue. I don't know. She—she wasn't well known at the time that she won our award—that would have been '97, and she's since written a

number of more high-profile novels, including a screenplay for her—for her book, *Room*, which was I think nominated for a few Oscars.

So, yeah, there was Emma Donoghue—oh, gosh. So two very famous activists, one of whom is still alive—they were very active in the gay liberation movement in San Francisco in the fifties and beyond, and up until—so the names are Phyllis [A.] Lyon and [Dorothy L.] “Del” Martin [née Taliaferro]. They—they’ve written a couple of books, and—and I’ve met them on more than one occasion there. They—they—they were like Leslie Feinberg, where it was all about the—the—the struggle. They—they--they weren’t so much interested in you as a person as what—what is your experience as—as a gay man in the struggle for liberation where you live. You know they said, “Where do you live, and what’s it like there?” That’s—that—that was kind of interesting. But they’re both very sweet.

FISHBEIN: Do you maybe not—you know, when you were talking about your, you know, conversation with your mother, you used the word “liberation.” But—

DeSANTIS: Well,—

FISHBEIN: —it seemed to me like you have. I don’t know. What’s—what’s your attitude towards these people who, you know, focused just on liberation, focused just on the struggle?

DeSANTIS: It’s—oh, I think it’s a generational thing, because there—there—the—the—the terms is now very antiquated, but it was in the seventies that that was—that was the term that was used there. There was, you know, women’s liberation or women’s lib, as it was known, and then there was gay liberation, gay lib. “Gay” at the time I think was meant as an inclusive term. Today “gays” stand—is meant to—gay males, right?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. I don’t know too many women—there might be some women who might say, “I’m gay,” but usually they—they would say something else, right? So yeah, that’s—it was just the term of the day, and in these older activists who I—who I



met are still—that’s—that’s still their point of reference, from—because that’s where it started. They were thinking liberation.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. I guess my question was, like, how do you—you know, maybe you weren’t actively working in those struggles, in those liberation movements. How did you feel about them or what were your attitudes towards them, toward these, you know, people who—who you met?

DeSANTIS: I have an incredible amount of respect and—and so privileged to—to have met them. You know, and—and so happy that some of them are still with us today, even though they’re quite elderly. Always sad when I hear about, you know, a gay pioneer from the fifties or sixties who has died.

FISHBEIN: What—what do you think “liberation” means? I mean, I know that’s kind of a philosophical question. What—what do you think those people were struggling for?

DeSANTIS: It’s kind of in- —yeah, you’re—you’re right. Why—why did they come up with the—

FISHBEIN: What do you think they were striving for?

DeSANTIS: —with the—I think that they came up with the term “liberation” and, you know, it was, like, 1970, so that was, like, right after Stonewall. And I think the whole idea was that, you know, gays and lesbians in the U.S., and I guess and in Canada, are oppressed, and we need to be liberated from that oppression. So I think where the term “liberation” came from.

FISHBEIN: Did you see your own personal experience in those terms?

DeSANTIS: Not—well, because I was kind of closeted as a young man during that period, I—I guess I didn’t feel the oppression first hand. I mean, I—I was never gay bashed or attacked or—I think there—there—I may have been—you know, someone—oh, yeah. Once, in 1992, when I was with that boyfriend that I mentioned earlier, that I had met, the one that I went to San Francisco Pride with—so we were walking down a street in a gay resort, holding hands, and I guess

some guys drove by in a car and screamed “Faggots” at us. I guess that—that is kind of bashing. Anyway.

[Chuckles.] In any case, no, I—I didn’t—I didn’t—I didn’t personally feel the oppression other than the fact that I didn’t feel that I was at liberty to come out.

FISHBEIN: What was that experience at the resort like for you?

DeSANTIS: Nothing. I just thought they were jerks. It didn’t—it didn’t—it annoyed me, but it didn’t affect me in any particular way.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. So can—can you talk a little bit more—I’m [chuckles]—I want to keep going back to this American Library Association.

DeSANTIS: Yes, yes, Some of the others.

FISHBEIN: So that’s pretty interesting. What was your relationship like with those people who you did mention? You know, when you said, you know, you met Barney Frank, when you met Donoghue and you met these activists—

DeSANTIS: Yeah. So—

FISHBEIN: —what do you mean by “meeting”? What did—

DeSANTIS: Oh. So I was chair of the—what they called the—it’s now called the Stonewall Book Award Committee. Back then it was called the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Book Award Committee, managed by the American Library Association. So our—our task was to identify a nonfiction book and a—and a work of literature, fiction, drama or poetry and bestow upon them an award, and usually it would be accompanied by a—a monetary amount as well as the certificate, and then organize a award ceremony, which back then was a—a breakfast event that people would pay money to attend, and then there would be the awards presentation, and we’d have, you know, keynote speakers and so on.

So because I was managing either the—the breakfast event or the—or bestowing the awards, I would have to be in personal contact with all these authors, and then—oh, then there would also be, like, a dinner for the people who were

on the committee that I would organize as well. So—so I'd have a chance to chat with them over dinner, before the awards were presented the next day, things like that.

So some of the other names? Jim Grimsley. That was—I mean, his book, *Dream Boy*[: A Novel], which was eventually made into a film—that was a really powerful book that affected me. And—and all of his writing is—well, that particular book was not, but a lot of his writing is autobiographical, and he's led an amazing life.

FISHBEIN: How did it affect you?

DeSANTIS: That book? Oh, I don't know. Oh, how can I explain what *Dream Boy* is? It's—it's—it was a book about a true, pure love between adolescent boys and ended very sadly, mostly because of homophobia in society. But his writing is just really exquisite. A subsequent book that he wrote about a gay couple in a relationship, called *Comfort & Joy*, is also one of my favorites.

So getting back to some of the others—so at a very first event, we had Patricia Nell Warren, who just died a few days ago, as our keynote speaker. And she is very famous because she wrote the groundbreaking novel, *The Front Runner*[: A Novel] in the—when was that published, 1970, '71? Maybe even earlier. But, you know, people of—of my generation would always point to *The Front Runner* as the very first gay book they ever read. And it was kind of interesting that it was authored by a woman, but she—she got it right. A great book.

[Exhales through his mouth.] I'm trying to think in more recent years, who have we had? Oh, we brought in—all right, I'll have to move on because I'm—I'm blanking on some of the names. I can—I can visualize her, and she was a very famous lesbian publisher, but I will move on to some other names that I might be able to remember.

Oh, [mutters to himself]. God! Too many years! Too many names! And now that I'm put on the spot, none of them are coming to mind.

FISHBEIN: That's all right.

DeSANTIS: Maybe they will later on, in which case I'll—I'll bring them up.

FISHBEIN: What sort of impact did meeting these people have on you? I mean, it sounds like they're really kind of very important people in LGBT history, LGBT life.

DeSANTIS: Yeah, it—it—it made me feel that—that I was making a difference. It made me feel important. And, you know, they—they were talking to me like—like a real person.

Oh, Andrew Holleran. I met him a number of times, the author of—of *Dancer from the Dance*, another seminal gay novel from the seventies. He's still around, still writing.

Hmm. [Mutters to himself.] Yeah. No, it—it feels good to actually know these people personally and—and—and to be able to, you know, talk to them, not because “Oh, I'm just so in awe of you” but I can talk to them like—like real people, you know?

Like, I met this television actress who was on the sitcom, *Gilligan's Island*, a big celebrity. She's like, —cult following an all that. And—and—you know, I chatted with her, talked to her like a normal person, and that was kind of fun.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. You—you said, you know, it helped you make a difference. That—that seems like it was pretty important for you. I mean, you were talking earlier about how you regretted, you know, not being more of an activist, and now you to, you know, help facilitate all these events—you know, bring these people to come speak.

DeSANTIS: Yes. And, you know, and some people would regard that as activism. In fact, one of the inscriptions in—in one of the books that was—it may—it may have been even Leslie who—who wrote this in—in one of her inscriptions to me, where she thanked me for my activism. And I never thought of it at the time, that I was—that I was being an activist, but I—I guess because I was out there and—and, you know, being open about—you know, “I'm—I'm—I'm a gay man representing, you know, the American Library Association and—and, you know, we—we're trying to get in touch with these authors” and things like that and, you know—and bring

these books into the mainstream. I suppose on one level one can look at that as activism, armchair activism. [Both chuckle.]

FISHBEIN: That—that must have been pretty—pretty important for you. How do you kind of look back on those experiences now?

DeSANTIS: My relationship with that group, with the GLBT roundtable of the American Library Association has soured over the years, mostly because as—ass time goes on, new people come in than the—those who were there at the very beginning kind of get pushed out and—and—and are seen as irrelevant, right? Because, you know, “Yes, we don’t care that you did this in the nineties. We’re doing it this way now.” Right? So I—I don’t really have much to do with them now.

But when I was involved with them, wow, it was really—it was prob- —I saw it as probably the most important professional activity that I was doing. At Amherst College, you know, I was, you know, “Look at this gay collection! We—we have to make this accessible to the world!”

So one of my friends that I mentioned earlier from Amherst—the two of us published this bibliography, a thick book. It was called *Gay and Lesbian Materials in the Amherst College Library*. Dartmouth has a copy. And the reason we did is that Special Collections inherited this amazing stuff from—from a couple of alums, like historical gay newspapers and—and magazines and just stuff that you just wouldn’t find normally in an archive. So we felt it was our duty it let the world know that we have this here. [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: Yeah, I think that—hmm—that that publicity—you know, that kind of sounds like it was important to you. I mean, you were talking with the American Library Association about how you kind of—you know, you saw that publicly declaring that, you, you know, were representing, you know, LGBT people, and that for you, that was sort of a form of activism. And now you’re trying to bring that publicity by, you know, making sure that people know where to find it in the archives.

DeSANTIS: Right. So, I mean,—and I’m doing that much less at Dartmouth. I think—I think—I’m not the only gay librarian working at Dartmouth, but I think that if there were a GLBT

issue or if there were, like, a database because people know that I have more experience with GLBT librarianship than anyone else there, they would—they would come to me with questions like that.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Have you had any of those sorts of experiences at Dartmouth?

DeSANTIS: At Dartmouth? A couple of times, yeah. Colleagues would ask me for advice on something like that. But, you know, I'm not the official selector. I don't buy gay materials, but, you know, when the—when they're published, the library buys them anyway. They don't need me specifically to do that.

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.] Right.

So I'm wondering—yeah, so we were talking earlier about, you know, you kind of—looking to make, you know, gay friends here at Dartmouth, and with that being, you know, right after some of the, you know, events that have happened. Well, I know *The Dartmouth Review* incident that happened as an example of homophobia. Were there other examples in the, you know, late eighties, early nineties that you, you know, were hearing about when you got here?

DeSANTIS: You know, I—I used to go to the DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association] reunions. They said they're open to staff, so I did go to those, and I met some Dartmouth alums who were here in the eighties and nineties. And I did hear about some of the stories.

There's the very famous story by—I think this may be in that thesis that I mentioned—a student named Eric [W.] Stults [Class of 1980], who I became friendly with for a couple of years after we met here at a DGALA event, where apparently he spent two days locked in a closet, presumably because it was, you know, gay harassment. And he has no memory of the incident. Anyway, that—that was documented.

I can't think of any specific incident. I mean, there was one at Amherst that, you know,—I was very friendly with the gay student group there, and—and, you know, one of the out

students was harassed, where a group of Amherst students gathered outside his dorm window in the middle of the night and screamed “Faggot, faggot, faggot” and things like that. And that was a huge issue, and, you know, the—the college had to respond. There—there—there was an official, you know, panel to address the issue. I mean, they took it very seriously. I don’t recall hearing about stuff like that at Dartmouth.

One particular incident that—that did impact the gay community at Dartmouth, happened shortly after Matthew [W.] Shepard’s death. Do—do you know who that is? Do I need to—Matthew Shepard was a gay college student—this would have been 1998, I believe, who was murdered by a couple of other young men, sort of like left—tied up to a fence and left to die, and in many ways became a martyr for the GLBT movement of the late nineties and early 2000s.

Anyway, so when he did die, it—it was—I mean, especially impacted college campuses all over the country, because he—he was a college student when this happened to him. So there were vigils held, and there was a ceremony that was held here at Dartmouth. You know, the room was packed. People were invited to get up and—and share their thoughts and feelings about this, and I think I actually got up and spoke. I don’t remember what I said, but—

One of the other speakers was a Dartmouth alum, whose name I cannot remember. His first name is Andrew. But he happened to be the Episcopal priest for St. Thomas [Episcopal Church] here in—in Hanover. And he got up and made some very vague, non-supportive remarks that—that no one could quite figure out why he was there and what his intention was. He—he and his wife were notorious homophobes, to begin with, so [chuckles]—so that kind of sparked a little bit of a—a reaction, at least within the Dartmouth gay community, not so much the Upper Valley. But it was a little bit of a kerfuffle here on campus over his remarks.

FISHBEIN:

Hmm. Were you offended when he said whatever it was that he—

DeSANTIS: Oh, I thought—well, I mean, at the time I thought, *What—what was that all about? That’s—why did he even speak?* That was completely—it wasn’t so much that I was offended, but I was just confused about what he was actually trying to say. And then later, you know, after people started talking about it, I gave it a little bit more thought, and then, yes, of course I was offended.

FISHBEIN: And you don’t remember what it was he said.

DeSANTIS: I don’t remember his words or anything—you know, I wish I could go back into my e-mail archives from ’98, and—and perhaps I may have them on a hard drive somewhere. [Both chuckle.] If I could find them.

FISHBEIN: So were you at all involved with gay student life here when you were a staff member here? Did you have any interactions with the Dartmouth, you know, GSA [Gay Students Association] or—

DeSANTIS: Oh, very, very few. Gosh, no. You know, I—I—at events that—that, you know, I attended or that—that I may have been involved in speaking at or things like that, I may have had a chance to—to meet a couple of students, but—or sometimes the students would attend the DGALA events, so I’d meet some of the gay students there. But, you know, I’ve had remarkably little contact with Dartmouth students over my twenty years at Dartmouth.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Hmm. How do you feel about that lack of connection?

DeSANTIS: Well, I mean, it’s—it’s—it’s to be expected with the kind of work that I do. I mean, I’m not one of the front-facing librarians that would sit out in the public, where people would come up to you, things like that. My office—well, you—you know where it is.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: Hard to find. So I don’t really see the students. I don’t know, I—it’s probably okay. I—I can’t imagine that—I try to put myself in their shoes because I was a college student at one time, and I can’t imagine that they would have any particular



interest in—in—in—in, you know, talking to this old guy who happens to work at the college. But anyway,—

FISHBEIN: So I'm wondering: You mentioned Pam Metzger [sic] as a—

DeSANTIS: Pam Misener?

FISHBEIN: Pam Misener. Yeah. I'm sorry—as a friend of yours.

DeSANTIS: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: You had met here. Were there any other, you know, close LGBT staff or faculty members that you got to know?

DeSANTIS: Yes. I was very, very fortunate for a number of years. We had a visiting professor in women's and gender studies, named Michael [A.] Bronski. Michael Bronski was known to me prior to his arrival at Dartmouth. He's a very well-known author in his own right, and I had met him at the Outright Conferences in Boston. So in the early nineties, they would have these enormous conferences for GLBT writers and readers at the Park Plaza in Boston. And I often participated on the panels there, usually introducing the authors, not necessarily speaking in my own right. But, yeah, I got to know Michael there and then also socially through friends in Boston.

So I was very excited when Dartmouth hired him, and he came up here, and he taught courses on GLBT history and GLBT film and things like that, so—and he and I would have lunch occasionally, and—yeah, it was—it was very nice. I—I hope that he appreciated having someone like me here, although he was much better connected, because he has those skills, than I was. He—you know, he—he had direct contact with the students and, you know, in many cases, became friends with some of the students after their graduation. He actually co-authored a book with a former Dartmouth student.

FISHBEIN: Hmm.

DeSANTIS: It was a commercial publication, like—oh, what was it called? *How Do You Know If Someone Is Gay?* Or something like that.

- FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.]
- DeSANTIS: It was Michael [J.] Amico [Class of 2007] was the co-author with him on that book.
- FISHBEIN: Okay. Did you feel, you know, more connected to Dartmouth when you were having this friendship?
- DeSANTIS: Yes.
- FISHBEIN: I know you talked about, you know, that kind of community building.
- DeSANTIS: Yes. He—he was—he was a delightful gossip, and he filled me in on all kinds of things I otherwise would not have known about. So, yes [chuckles], he was—he was fun to hang out with.
- FISHBEIN: Did you ever shadow one of his classes or anything or anything like that?
- DeSANTIS: No, I didn't, although I did audit a—when I was at Amherst, I audited a—a course on—God! It was an English professor. His name was Jay Grossman. The class was filled with, like, mostly, you know, gay students, but it had to do with—I don't know how to explain the course. The focus was on—it was on AIDS literature as it related to gay men. So I did audit that course.
- FISHBEIN: Mmm.
- DeSANTIS: I actually got to know, you know, a lot of the gay students at Amherst, more—more so than I ever did at Dartmouth.
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Have you been attending any—you know, the college will invite sometimes, you know, people through the WGSS [Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Study] department or other people, you know, who have connections to LGBT history, writing, what have you,—
- DeSANTIS: Yeah, there is the—

- FISHBEIN: —to come speak on campus? Do you ever go to anything like that?
- DeSANTIS: Yeah. Oh, sure. Not lately, but, you know, when Pam was here, she had a hand in that, and I'm sure that her—her office collaborated with that department in bringing—there was, like, the—what's it called?—the Annual Stonewall Lecture, maybe? There was this annual lecture, and they would bring in some big names, like Jonathan Ned Katz [American historian of human sexuality]. I remember going to that one. [Cartoonist] Alison Bechdel—she's been here more than once. Who else? I can't—some well-known gay academics.
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.
- DeSANTIS: But, yeah, no, I—I would definitely go to those. And they were always really well attended.
- FISHBEIN: Do you think it's really important to you to, you know, become educated on these issues? It sounds like, you know, you've read a lot about, you know, what's going on.
- DeSANTIS: Well, I—I think I pretty much am more educated on these issues than the average gay person, so I—I was already familiar with—with the—the—with the work of these people before they brought them in. But it's still a thrill to see them in person.
- FISHBEIN: Hmm. Why do you think that that's, you know, so important to you to, like, you know, become familiar with this work? What do you—what do you get out of that?
- DeSANTIS: I think that's—that's how I feel connected to GLBT history in this country and to the gay community, through—through my—through my knowledge of—of the issues and—and—and the works of these people.
- FISHBEIN: Will you, you know, discuss them with your partner when you're reading them? What is that process like for you when you're, you know, becoming familiar?
- DeSANTIS: Oh. Have we? We probably have. I—I mean, if anyth- —I—I probably wouldn't have had a big discussion with him,

because that's really not his great interest, but if—if the person in question is particularly interesting—like, I remember, like,—do you know who [Olympic diver, LGBT activist and author] Greg [E.] Louganis is?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: He was an Olympic diver. So I met him, and he signed his book for me, and I think I did recommend that—oh, my partner probably thought he was cute and had a crush on him, and that's why he read Greg Louganis's book, but [chuckles] anyway, occasionally that does happen, but—but we don't actually discuss the—the issues between us.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. But it sounds like it's maybe—you know, reading the works of these people is maybe why, for you, you feel connected to that—

DeSANTIS: Oh, absolutely. Oh, very true, yes.

FISHBEIN: —across time and space. Yeah.

DeSANTIS: Yes. A very—very—very perceptive remark.

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.] A community of—of books. I—I feel the same way often.

DeSANTIS: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: Yeah, they can definitely be helpful for dealing with some of that, you know, feelings of isolation that I think come to us in [chuckles] New Hampshire winters.

DeSANTIS: My fantasy is to find someone who's as interested in—in all of these gay writers as I am, and to bring them to my home and say, "Look at this. Let me show you this inscription. Look what *she* wrote for me"—and pull them down from the shelf. And all of that. [Both chuckle.]

FISHBEIN: Have you—so, yeah, it sounds like you became pretty close with this—what was his name, Michael Bronski?

DeSANTIS: Michael Bronski, yeah. We're no longer in touch. But, yeah, while he was here on campus, yeah—when—you know, I

would help him with his classes, too. I would get—get films for him or find information that he needed.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Was that somebody who you felt like you could kind of connect this, you know, body of knowledge that you have built over the years?

DeSANTIS: Well, yes. I mean, we were—we were on the same playing field—I mean, he—he knows way more than I do, but, yes, he—I didn't have to explain or tell him who someone was if a name came up because we all knew the same people.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: And he—he was actually a winner. He—he won the ALA award one year.

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: So he came.

FISHBEIN: So you had gotten to know him a little bit through that.

DeSANTIS: Well, I had known him already very well up to the point where he won. I had no hand in his winning because I was no longer on the committee at the time,—

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: —but it was really thrilling for me to see him win that award. He wrote this big compendium of—of gay history.

FISHBEIN: Mmm. Have there been any other, you know, faculty or staff members, you know, the LGBT world that you've, you know, become close with?

DeSANTIS: At Dartmouth?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: Now retired faculty, but, yeah, there's an English professor named Peter [C.] Saccio [pronounced SAH-cho]. He was a friend while he was here. Occasionally see him—like, he's

still around. He's quite infirm. But I still see him come into Hanover now and then.

Well, most of the other librarians who have since retired. This is what happens when you stay too long. Everybody leaves, and then you're the—the last guy standing, which is one of the reasons I'm doing this interview, since there's nobody else around [chuckles] who can give you this information.

Nothing else comes to mind.

FISHBEIN: What was your relationship like with Peter?

DeSANTIS: Peter Saccio?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

DeSANTIS: Nothing—I mean, he—he was I think appreciative that, you know, there—there was an openly gay man in the library, who was, you know, helpful with, you know, campus events relating to gay and lesbian speakers. He—he was at that dinner that I mentioned with Jennifer Finney Boylin. So I always felt appreciated by him. We—we weren't close, but—but we had a very cordial relationship.

FISHBEIN: When you're with the library staff over the years, have you really felt like, you know, you had to, you know, make your—you know, voice yourself, like, as a gay man to those people—you know, be really public and out, you know, in your—in your office?

DeSANTIS: I've never—I've never tried to hide it, but then I've never really talked much about it, and that's mostly because of the office culture, where people tend not to talk about their personal lives at work. You know, I mean, we—we have a once-a-month coffee hour. I might say something in which I would allude to my partner, but, you know, I've never really felt that I had to be an advocate for GLBT issues at the library, because when I arrived—like, I mean, there were already, you know, gay library administrators, both of whom became friends of mine and have since retired.

Right now, we—the person in charge of my division—he’s very new; he’s an openly gay man, much, much younger than I, so we’re—we’re not close. Also because he’s very new.

FISHBEIN: So it sounds like it’s a pretty, you know, welcoming work environment.

DeSANTIS: As—as far as that goes—it’s—yeah, I mean, there’s—it’s—it’s—it’s just not an issue at all. No one—no one thinks about who’s gay and who isn’t, and if somebody is, it’s—it’s just not a big deal. There was a—an openly lesbian administrator in the library, who was there for, like, ten years. And she was very—there was a—oh, what was the name of that student group that they were advocating for immigration issues? Most of them were of Latino origin.

FISHBEIN: CoFIREd [Coalition for Immigration Reform and Equality at Dartmouth]?

DeSANTIS: Yes! Thank you! CoFIREd. So she was very active with working with the CoFIREd Group, as—as was I, and the whole issue of the illegal alien subject heading and that—a lot of publicity for Dartmouth. But, yeah, I was part of that.

Anyway, despite the fact that she was a lesbian and I was a gay man, that issue never came up between us. I—we—once in a while, she would—she would make some—and I guess I should clarify before I make any remarks that—for most of the time that she was here, the two of us had what I would consider to be a contentious relationship. That relationship did improve and was actually rather cordial by the time she left, but for most of the time, it was not a good relationship.

So once in a while, she would say things to me like—at an event—like, when my partner was making a presentation and she would say, “Isn’t it nice to see your life partner get this kind of recognition?” Okay, whatever. But norm— it never really came up. And I always found—it was interesting that—that here I was, a gay man who’s being kind of oppressed by a lesbian. You know, “Whatever happened to good old fashioned gay nepotism? It does not exist in *this* library. That’s for sure.” [Both chuckle.]

FISHBEIN: You—you said you were involved in CoFIRED. Can you talk some more about that experience?

DeSANTIS: I got involved completely by accident, and this—one of my colleagues, Jill [E.] Baron, who was the librarian for Latin American Studies, among other things, was helping a student with—with research and—and came upon this subject heading, “Illegal Aliens” in our catalog. And the student wanted to know why it was there. So Jill contacted me, as a catalog librarian, to see if I could explain why it was there and if we could get rid of it.

And I explained that no, we can't because it's a Library of Congress heading, and so we would have to petition the Library of Congress to change it. And so we did. And through a very long—long process, they agreed to change it. But then [the U.S.] Congress got wind of this. Somehow, it got so much publicity, both in the Upper Valley and on campus, that it somehow got into the mainstream media. Congress found out about it and thought that somehow we were changing the lexicon for the English language and not just library catalogs, because it was the Library of Congress. So in their minds—“Oh, they are the arbiters of the English language, and they're changing the heading 'Illegal Aliens,' and the Library of Congress is being unnecessary political. And it all came from Dartmouth, and it's all their fault.”

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.]

DeSANTIS: All this stuff. And—and so—then they tried to stop it from happening, and long story short, the whole thing is on hold because of the—the current administration and political climate, although it was the intent of the Library of Congress to actually change it. So in that sense, CoFIRED was successful. But the—the 2016 election just—just changed everything.

FISHBEIN: I can imagine.

DeSANTIS: I'm still hopeful that—that in future years, that we can go back and—and pick up the work where we left off.

FISHBEIN: And what—what was your particular role in the process?



DeSANTIS: So, because I am the catalog librarian and—and I have—we—we—Dartmouth is a member of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, we actually were able to submit this request to the Library of Congress. So I had to do all the paperwork involved in submitting the request.

FISHBEIN: Wow. Sounds kind of copious.

DeSANTIS: Well, I—I had some help from my colleagues. They—they actually got all the—the data that I needed, and then I—because it has to be created in the form of—I don't want to get into too much library jargon, but I had to create authority records to submit to them so that they could then make their decision. So that—that was probably pretty much of it.

But then, I don't know, somehow my name kept getting out there, and the media kept calling me—

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.]

DeSANTIS: —and I was giving interviews over the phone to, like, *The Valley News*, and then getting invited to speak on this topic at many conferences around the region.

FISHBEIN: Wow.

DeSANTIS: Not—I always co-presented. Maybe I think once I did it on my own, but usually they would invite me and Jill or me and another librarian I know at Mount Holyoke [College]. So, yes, I got a lot of mileage out of that. [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: Did you speak about. Did you go to these engagements that you were invited to?

DeSANTIS: Yeah, they were at other conferences. They're usually held in regional colleges: [College of the] Holy Cross, UVM [University of Vermont]—where else did we go? Oh, I can't remember now. It's all a blur. [Chuckles.] It all happened in the course of one year.

FISHBEIN: [Chuckles.] What—what was that like, to be speaking about these—these issues?

DeSANTIS: I mean, I—I got used to it after a while. At first it was, like, *How did I get here? This is*—I mean, it's kind of interesting that—that—that people are taking an interest in subject headings in the library catalog, because usually when I think of students using library resources, they're—they're putting keywords into a little box and seeing what pops up. So I thought it was kind of interesting that—that there's a focus on the content of a catalog record, which, as a catalog librarian, does, of course, make me happy. So I was happy to be talking about this, and—and it was gratifying to see so many people interested in this topic.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: But that's not the important thing. The important thing—and I kept saying, "It's not about me. This is about the—the Dartmouth students who were activists and who actually made something happen." And that was the story we were trying to tell. And my colleague Jill, who's actually more involved with this than I am, actually made a documentary film about all—with all the people that were involved in the whole process: the students, I was interviewed, another librarian from Minnesota—she flew her in to interview her. I don't think it's ready yet, but I'm looking forward to seeing its release.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. So it sounds like you really got to become sort of an activist in these, you know, immigration issues as well.

DeSANTIS: Yes. By accident, but I'm—I'm just as supportive and—and committed as anyone else on this issue. And, yes, I—I will—I will interrupt anyone who uses the term "illegal alien" and correct them.

FISHBEIN: What do you think, you know, encourages you to, you know, feel that way about these issues? Like, do you think—

DeSANTIS: Well, I think, being a gay man, you—you instinctively have a sense of social justice, so I'm—I'm sympathetic to any group that is oppressed.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Can you say some more about, you know, what that sympathy has, you know, looked like over the year, what it's, you know, meant—meant to you?

DeSANTIS: Again, I think of myself as more of an armchair activist. I haven't really done that much, and—and it made me happy that I could contribute to—to this effort in some small way. I'm—I'm well intentioned. I—I wish I could help everyone, but I don't always have the energy or the means.

FISHBEIN: Mm—hm. We—we do what we can.

DeSANTIS: Mmm.

FISHBEIN: I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about your—your home life here, what that's, you know, been like for you. You talked some about the library, but I'm curious, you know, what it's like to, you know, be a gay person living in the Upper Valley, what that experience has been like.

DeSANTIS: Well, I mean, living in Hanover, it was never much of an issue. I mean, there are lots of gay staff and faculty around. You know, there are a lot of out students now, so, I mean, it felt—it was—it was a nice, comfortable environment living in Hanover.

So living where I do now—it's a very small village. There is a village center, but—but even though we're technically in the village, it's—it's quite rural in the part that we live in. People were surprised that a gay couple would move into this little village, where there aren't—apparently there are other gay couples there, but—but we don't know them, at least not in the village.

There is another gay couple that we met—actually, one of them is kind of a celebrity or actually *is* a celebrity. His name is [Daniel E.] "Dan" Butler, and he's famous for playing the character Bulldog on the sitcom *Frasier*. So he and his husband bought this house in Newbury, where we live, and we—we've been to their home and occasionally run into him in—in—here in Hanover, although they're not here, you know, twelve months out of the year. They are also in L.A. and New York and so on.

So the—you know, people keep to themselves. This is New England, and especially Vermont and rural Vermont, so it took us a while before we, you know, made friends in the

community, but they—oh, they're fine with us. They're—they're warm, very—in some cases, they—they become close friends. We go to their houses, they come to ours, and—and, you know, my partner was recently hospitalized, and, you know, the—the neighbors were all calling and sending him cards and, you know, very concerned. So it feels like we—we are liked and accepted there.

FISHBEIN:            Hmm. Was he okay?

DeSANTIS:            Oh, he will be. Yeah, he's—he's—he's at home on short-term disability. He had a collapsed lung, and it's going to take a while until he feels normal again.

FISHBEIN:            I'm sorry. That—

DeSANTIS:            Yeah. It was a very tumultuous January. It happened, like, the day after New Year's. Yeah.

FISHBEIN:            So when did he move up to come live in this area with you?

DeSANTIS:            Ah. Well, he had been a librarian at UMass Amherst for many, many years. He started young. So he was able to actually retire from UMass Amherst when he was in his fifties, and that would have been in two thousand—at the end of 2003. He likes to say that he was officially retired for one week because then he got this—the job at—he knew he was retiring, and he was planning to move up here to be with me, and so he had been looking for jobs at Dartmouth, and he eventually was hired by Rauner Special Collections Library, the—the same building that we are currently in. And so he started that job in January of 2004, so he just had his fifteenth anniversary here. So, yes,—we've been—we've been—we've ended the community, and we've been living in the same place since 2004.

FISHBEIN:            That must be nice.

DeSANTIS:            Oh, it's—it's so hard to imagine now that I was doing all that driving back then, because now I can't even imagine—I mean, well, I'm—I'm doing all that driving just to come to and from work, but still, I don't have to get in the car and go somewhere every weekend, and, yes, it is nice to be able to see him every day and not just on weekend.

FISHBEIN: Mmm. Are you two married? Or—

DeSANTIS: No, we don't have a civil union, and—and we are not married, despite the longevity of the relationship. Yes. Yeah.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Is there a particular reason why you chose not to?

DeSANTIS: It's kind of interesting. You know, we—and—and we have talked about this. So when—if there were a man and woman who were living together as partners and they'd been together for a number of years, would people be asking them, "Oh, you two have been together so long. Why aren't you two married?" So I don't know if people would ask that question or just assume that some people don't like to get married. So I think there's an assumption within the gay community that because gay marriage is legal, you are expected to do it. I mean, it was never—when it was *not* an option for us, you know, that—that basically made the decision for us. So I guess we felt that we didn't feel we had to do it just to fulfill someone's expectations or because it just happened to be legal now. So I hope that's an answer that makes sense.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. So what—what was your kind of attitude towards the, you know, marriage equality movement? That really was kind of going on in Massachusetts when you were, you know, visiting there pretty often, that, you know, is happening here in New Hampshire too after you moved up here?

DeSANTIS: Oh, well, yes, I—I think that anyone who—who wants to marry should be able to. So of course I was very happy. And many of my—my—friends have married, some with a big public wedding and some, you know, very quietly in—in their town hall. But, yeah, I would say probably now, for long-term couples, more would be married to one another than not, so I think probably we might be in the minority.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. But you—yeah, it sounds to me like it's really important for you to, you know, kind of see it as a personal decision, rather than—

DeSANTIS: Yeah. I mean, we're—I think we—we got ourselves all covered. We—we—we have advanced directives. We both have Wills. So, you know, it—you know, in terms of, you know, legalities or inheritance, I suppose the only—the worst thing that could happen is if one of us were hospitalized and they had a rule that only a spouse can visit the other in the hospital and they demanded a wedding certificate before they would let me into the hospital room. Then it would be an issue [chuckles], but I think most hospitals are kind enough not to do that.

FISHBEIN: Nothing like that came up on this recent hospitalization.

DeSANTIS: Oh, no, not at all. No, I—I was with him the whole time, and even in—he was hospitalized in—in Florida. He had some sort of strange amnesia attack while we were on vacation in Florida. And, you know, that was years ago, before there was gay marriage. And then they were still very kind, and they let me go in and so on.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Do you think that you have been, you know, impacted by any sorts of, you know, oppression or discrimination since coming to Dartmouth?

DeSANTIS: [Chuckles.] Well, lately I'm feeling discriminated against because of my—my age and longevity with- —within the library. I—I—they seem to want to support the careers of younger librarians, who perhaps may be more energetic or— or need to fluff out their portfolios for advancement and things like that. And I guess they may see me as just, like, dead weight. I'm not getting promoted. I'm not—you know, I—I don't need to be going to professional meetings and things like that, because I'm seen as "late career," even though I don't have any intentions to retire in the near future. So that feels like oppression to me, but other than that, no.

FISHBEIN: How does that feel to you, that you're kind of, you know, being sidelined? Where do you go for maybe some of the—

DeSANTIS: How does it make me feel?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

DeSANTIS: Well, it makes me feel—first—anger is not an emotion that comes easily to me, and certainly not one that I ever express outwardly, but it makes me feel internally angry. It makes me feel hurt and betrayed by colleagues in the library that I thought cared about me. I guess that would cover it.

FISHBEIN: What are some strategies you have for dealing with those frustrations?

DeSANTIS: Basically I look for other—other ways to get what I want. When I'm—when the library denies me what I want, then I will look for other means to—I mean, I'm not [chuckles]—I'm kind of rebellious, so if—if they were to say to me, "You cannot go to this professional meeting because you've been taking too much time off," I would figure out a way to get there anyway.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. [Chuckles.] Yeah, I definitely can—can relate. That's sort of my attitude, too.

So I'm wondering if you have any, you know, other issues that you'd like—or questions or anything you'd like to say that hasn't been brought up yet.

DeSANTIS: Oh, let's see. We've—we've—I think we pretty much covered my—my involvement with GLBT issues here at Dartmouth. And—and—and—and—and the conversation has actually brought up memories for me that I—that I hadn't thought of in—in many, many years, like the—like the Matthew Shepard memorial incident, and things like that. So I'm—happy that that came out, that we were able to talk about that.

I don't know what—what other issues you might want to cover, based—based on other interviews you've done, but, you know, we can talk about whatever you'd like.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. So I guess—I don't know, there's one incident that I remember hearing about before, and perhaps you are familiar with it, perhaps not. But I think it was right around 2000, where the graduate—valedictorian speaker was—you know, basically went on a tirade about you know, how the college, you know, oppresses gay people, about how, you

know, Dartmouth had been a really negative experience for him because of that.

DeSANTIS: Oh, it was a—it was a—it was a Dartmouth alum who was making the speech.

FISHBEIN: Yes.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. Oh, that would have been—that would have been 1990.

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay, so that was before your time here.

DeSANTIS: Well, yes, but they—but—but the individual is a friend of mine.

FISHBEIN: Oh, okay.

DeSANTIS: He's—he's since become a very important gay writer. His name is Michael Lowenthal [Class of 1990]. And we have many of his books here in the library, some here in Rauner, even. Yes, yes, that was—that was a big moment in Dartmouth gay history, and it certainly put his name on the map, not only for that but for everything he's done *since* he graduated from Dartmouth. And he has come back to Dartmouth a few times—you know, usually when he's got a new book out.

FISHBEIN: Could you say some more about your relationship with him?

DeSANTIS: So Michael and I met, again, through the Outright Conferences in the early nineties, and—and, sort of—I guess he was interested in me mostly because I—you know, I'm an openly gay man working at Dartmouth, and we—we knew some of the same people.

He was very good friends with Susan Ackerman, even after Dartmouth. I think that—did he live in her house for a while? I think—yeah, he—he lived in the Upper Valley after he graduated, and he actually lived in her house. But, yeah, they've remained good friends.

And I got to know his—his—his partner. Up until recently—I think I heard that they have separated after twenty years.



Anyway, his—his partner at the time, Scott Heim, a very well-known writer—gay writer also. I got to know him when the two of them would come up.

And we had another friend in common, so we always seemed to have things to talk about. We're not close, but I've always been very, very fond of him, and I like his books.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. How—how do you think he kind of felt about Dartmouth over time, or can you, you know, maybe tell me a little bit about, like, what he said in that speech?—whether, you know, he kind of maintained that—

DeSANTIS: I wasn't there, so I don't know what was said in the speech, and I don't know if it was—how much of it was transcribed or recorded. You know, these days, all college ceremonies are recorded by the Media Production Group, and you can actually, you know, view them. But back then, I don't know if they were recording things. It would have been on VHS, wouldn't it? [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: I suppose.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. So—regards to the exact words, I think it was incredibly brave of him, and I think he's probably one of the—the heroes of—of Dartmouth gay activism for—for taking that step, and—I mean, you know, that—that's—that's quite—that's quite a place to—to make that kind of speech.

FISHBEIN: When you knew him when he was living in the area, was he still really kind of disillusioned by Dartmouth? Did he still have that perspective?

DeSANTIS: Well, see, I didn't meet—I didn't meet him until he had actually moved away from the area, so we were never living in the Upper Valley at the same time, so when I met him, I was still living in Massachusetts, although I think he was in the Upper Valley at that time, yeah. And by the time I had moved up here in '95, he had moved away to Boston, I believe.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. When you would talk about Dartmouth though, would he, you know, reflect negatively?

DeSANTIS: No, I never heard him say anything really bad about Dartmouth. He—he maintained a lot of close friendships here with faculty and—and, you know, just the fact that he’s willing to come back here and—and meet with, you know, Dartmouth students from time to time—

DeSANTIS: Right.

FISHBEIN: I—I think that—you know, he—he—he was probably unhappy with some of the impression he felt as a gay student here, but I—I don’t think that—you know, he’s certainly not burning bridges with Dartmouth.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. What—what sort of impression do you think that’s like for gay students here? I mean, I know that might not be your experience, and we’ve talked about, you know, how maybe you don’t really feel that as a staff member, but, you know, how might you think that—you know, it seems like you have some connections with ex-, former students, with faculty members.

DeSANTIS: You know, I—I think if—if someone is closeted, that—that can—that can feel—that can be oppressive. You know, whenever I hear about a young gay—sorry, a young male student committing suicide, they never report the death as a suicide, but it’s pretty clear that it sometimes is. It makes me wonder, you know, is it—was this young man closeted? Did he feel that—was he so tormented that he felt that he didn’t have a good life ahead of him? So I think about things like that.

And, you know, and then there are—there are some really mean people, whether they’re, you know, young students in their late teens and early twenties or whether they’re in their forties or fifties. They can just be mean, unpleasant people who—who feel that, you know, they can gain validation from mocking or harassing or—or bullying people who are different. And I’m sure they still have that at—at, you know, Dartmouth. You know, *The Dartmouth Review* is still going. They seem to recruit people year after year, and I think, *Where do they come from? How do these young people turn out this way?*

FISHBEIN: Was that feeling of torment that you talked about—was that something that you, yourself, had experienced, growing up?

DeSANTIS: Oh, it was—yeah, I mean, being—being closeted as a college student? Yeah. It felt—yeah, it felt like a burden. It felt—you know, I could never really truly be myself. I felt I was hiding from everyone.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. How—how did you personally deal with that, and what are—what are some ways that you think people that are struggling with that, you know, at Dartmouth now could hope?

DeSANTIS: Hmmm. Well, I think—you know, there—there were really no institutions of support, I guess you would call it. I mean, there may have been a gay student group, but, I mean, if you're closeted you're not going to join a gay student group. I think that because things are so different now, it's—I mean, gay culture is—is quite mainstream. The gay students on campus are, you know, more visible, not just within the—the little organizations they have but in general.

Like, you know, Pride Week [Dartmouth PRIDE] here is—it's, like, a big campus event. So I think—I think that gay students here probably feel that they are supported. I think probably the only obstacle would be if—if they were really closeted and—and they just felt that they couldn't take that step, for whatever reason.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. Has there—have you had any, you know, personal interactions with people at Dartmouth who have, you know, voiced these emotions to you? Do you have, you know—

DeSANTIS: I've always, you know, wished that I could—you know, because I had made so many mistakes in my own youth that, you know, if I could have—could be a mentor to someone and—and, you know, help someone come out and—and—and just, you know, reassure them and—but no, no one has ever come to me that way. I sometimes think that, —you know, I have a number of nephews, some of whom are, you know, young adults, college students, and I'd like to think that if any of them, you know, were to self-identify as gay that they would come and talk to me. And that would—that would make me feel as if I—I was put on this

earth for a purpose, if I could help a younger person deal with this issue.

FISHBEIN: Mmm. That sounds like mentoring is—

DeSANTIS: Yeah. I mean, I'm—I'm—I'm pretty old now, so I—I—I—I—I have a lot more common sense than I did when I was young, and a lot more wisdom, so I can probably do that fairly well.

FISHBEIN: What sort of mistakes do you think you made when you were younger,—

DeSANTIS: Oh, just—

FISHBEIN: —and how have you kind of learned from them?

DeSANTIS: —so—just being so timid and disconnected from everything and closeted and just to making connections and—and, you know, living a full life.

FISHBEIN: Yeah, definitely—yeah, it definitely sounds to me like, as we've talked over this interview, that, you know, you've really talked about how you went from being that timid person to, you know, somebody who, you know, gets connected with these, you know, writers and, you know, activists and, you know, works for the, you know, American Library Association and, you know, gets to know all these people at Dartmouth, so I definitely see—

DeSANTIS: Oh, yeah. And—

FISHBEIN: —some sort of transition happening there.

DeSANTIS: I'm really a very different person than what I was [chuckles] in my twenties. Yeah, it's true.

FISHBEIN: That's great. I'm—I'm happy that you've been able to make that progress,—

DeSANTIS: Oh, thank you.

FISHBEIN: —as—as that was pretty meaningful for you to, you know, make those transitions.

- DeSANTIS: Yeah. I feel—I feel like I’ve—I’ve eventually ended up with a—with a good life. I mean, my—my regrets probably are just about a wasted youth.
- FISHBEIN: Well, I—I’d like to wrap up our interview. I think there are a couple more questions that I’m supposed to ask.
- DeSANTIS: Is this thing still running?
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.
- DeSANTIS: Okay.
- FISHBEIN: So the—yeah, I guess—all right, I want to—we’ve—we’ve talked a lot about, you know, your experiences as you were experiencing them, and I’m wondering, you know, what your kind of plan is going forward and, you know, how this kind of history and especially this transition that you made, you know, from a timid to, like, a more connected person—you know, what’s that—what does that mean for you, like, in this present moment?
- DeSANTIS: Hmm. Whew. [Sighs.] Gosh, I’m not sure what to say here. I think I’m—I’m just—I feel like I’m in a really good place in my life, and I’m not really seeing any big changes coming for the future. I think the only big thing that’s going to happen in my life at this point will be retirement from my job, presumably within the next ten years, but who knows when it will happen?
- I—I—I would like one day to leave the Upper Valley. I really don’t like living here at all, mostly because of the weather, and—and I do miss being in cities. And, you know, so living where I do over the past twelve and a half years has definitely felt a little bit oppressive to me. My partner does not want to leave that house, so I don’t know, I think either both of us or else I would become a winter bird. But that’s—that’s for the far-off future, when I’m a retired person.
- FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Maybe that’ll be a little bit easier for you now that you’ve, you know, gotten better at making these, you know, sorts of connections that you seem to have once struggled with.

DeSANTIS: Perhaps. But then again, I—you know, I don't know. How—how do people make connections or—or meet one another? As I said, I mean, here, it's—it's never been that important to me because I'm already partnered, but I—you know, I've never really made any friends here, you know, within the library, so I don't know. If—if I moved to Palm Springs [California]—I don't know. How do you meet people? [Chuckles.] Especially when, you know, as you age—you know, being the age that you are, you know, I'm thinking, *Oh, well, is everyone just going to look at me as just another old man hanging around Palm Springs?*

FISHBEIN: How old are you? If you don't mind me asking.

DeSANTIS: Oh, well, I probably gave it away, if anyone is—is, you know, eager to do the math. Well, let's see, if he was a first-year student in 1974, when he was taking that course with Michael Lynch, then that would—in 2019, that would put me at sixty-two, which is what my current age is.

FISHBEIN: So retirement is probably coming up for you in the next couple of years or so.

DeSANTIS: As I said—no. As I said early, it would probably be within the next *ten* years. I think that a lot of people assume that—that as you approach sixty-five that you're going to retire. A lot of people work past sixty-five. In fact, in—in my age group, the U.S. government expects your retirement age to be sixty-six. That's the age at which you can get Social Security. So I think I'm probably at least in for that long, and probably longer.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. Well—you were asking, you know, how—how did people make these connections, and I guess—I don't know, maybe that would be a good question for me to ask *you* because, I mean, you've definitely said that maybe you haven't made friends through the library, but it seems like you've, you know, become friends with people like, you know, Susan Ackerman, like, you know, Pam Misener, like some other people at Dartmouth. You know, what kind of draws you to those people? How does that work for you?

DeSANTIS: Yeah. Well, it's—it's the same way that I met my partner. You just have to force yourself to get out, to go to things,

go—go to events, meetings, things, you know, where people tend to congregate and—and engage in conversation. I went to a Christmas party in Boston for—it was—it was the holiday party for *The Gay & Lesbian Review* [*Worldwide*]. A good friend of mine in Boston is their literary editor, so she invited me to come along. And I met all these, you know, people that I hadn't met before and then had some, you know, really interesting conversations. So if I lived in Boston, who knows? I—I may have become friends with some of them on an ongoing basis.

FISHBEIN: Hmm. So geography might play a role.

DeSANTIS: Oh, it definitely does, yeah. You know, I—I definitely am—am—I feel like I'm more myself when I travel, when I'm at a conference and I see my friends and we hang out together, and yeah.

FISHBEIN: Do you think you have some nostalgia for the time you spent in a big city like Toronto?

DeSANTIS: [Laughs.] Do I think so—very much so. I miss it every day. Yeah, I miss Toronto a lot, even though in the past forty years it's certainly changed. But I wish I could get back there more often. My sister still lives there, and I have a lot of close friends that are still there, yeah.

FISHBEIN: Great.

Well, do you have any closing remarks you'd like to—

DeSANTIS: Well, thank—thank you for, you know, your—you know, your participation in this interview. I—I think you did a great job in—in—with the questions and being able to pull out comments that I, you know, wouldn't have made otherwise, right? So I'm appreciative of that. And I—I hope it was interesting for you.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

DeSANTIS: But—and thank you. That's about all I have to add.

- FISHBEIN: Well, thank you for, you know, joining me, for joining this program. I think it's really important for, you know, us to be able—
- DeSANTIS: Mm-hm.
- FISHBEIN: —to, you know, make sure that we have a record of, you know, LGBT history here at the library. I mean, I think that, you know, those sorts of, you know, networks that you were, you know, talking about, like the American, you know, Library Association, you know, Stonewall award, you know, things like that. I think that they're, you know, super important and super relevant to history, but maybe sometimes they're, you know, considered marginal or—
- DeSANTIS: Yes.
- FISHBEIN: —you know, less than—and, you know, brushed to the side when, you know, I—I think it's really important that we keep track of them. And to me, the, you know, best way to do that is by, you know, connecting with people like you, who, you know, have that lived experience and have the, you know, stories to tell—
- DeSANTIS: Yeah.
- FISHBEIN: —about them, so—
- DeSANTIS: Do you mind if I—I finish by asking you about your own interest in the SpeakOut project?
- FISHBEIN: Yeah. I mean, I'm a history major. I am really interested in oral history.
- DeSANTIS: Okay.
- FISHBEIN: I am—have done a lot of studies on the histories of different marginalized groups—
- DeSANTIS: Okay.
- FISHBEIN: —in thinking about, you know, how they work, how there are certain technol- —I mean [chuckles], you're, you know, a library kind of data guy, so, I mean, you probably have, you



know, some knowledge, like, you know, how these archives actually get made.

DeSANTIS: Mm-hm.

FISHBEIN: I mean, it's so much easier to just, like, you know, go to, like, a, you know, government agency that's going to, you know, keep track of, like, all of its files, you know, here and then to, like, you know, go there and, like, do that research and, you know, see, like, what the, you know, broad kind of like master narrative is.

DeSANTIS: Mmm.

FISHBEIN: But for me, it's always been, kind of more interesting to, you know, dig a little deeper—

DeSANTIS: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: —and try to, you know, see what the—what the people's history is—

DeSANTIS: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: —you know, try to take a more kind of bottom-up perspective.

DeSANTIS: Yeah. Well, I'm sure this is a very good experience for whatever you'll be doing in the future.

FISHBEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I definitely think it will—it will be. Yeah, I think that, you know, this has been a nice opportunity for me to, you know, sit and engage with, you know, doing that, so I, again, thank you for—for joining me.

DeSANTIS: Oh, sure yeah. I'm—I'm—I'm happy to be able to contribute to this.

FISHBEIN: Great. So I'm going to stop the recording here.

[End of interview.]