

Robert A. Martin '87
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

WOO: Today is May 22nd, 2019. It's 2:25 p.m. This is Nicholas [X.] Woo, Class of 2020, here at Dartmouth [College]. I'm in the Ruth Gulliver Hodgkins Room in the Rauner Special Collections Library.

Thank you so much for having your—for spending your time with me today. Could you just state your name and tell me a little bit about where you are right now?

MARTIN: Yes. Thank you, Nick. My name is [Robert A.] “Rob” Martin, Dartmouth Class of 1987, and I'm currently at my office in Mineola, New York, at NYU Winthrop Hospital and [NYU] Long Island School of Medicine.

WOO: Awesome! So the way I like to start these interviews is if you could just kind of walk me through your—your childhood and how you grew up.

MARTIN: Okay. I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1965, and when I was about five years old, or maybe six years old, my dad's job transferred him to Houston, Texas. At that time, he was selling big mainframe computers, the size of a refrigerator, so he—we were transferred a lot. So we spent two years in Houston, Texas. Then we were transferred to Seattle, Washington, and then we were supposed to go back to Houston, Texas, and my dad resigned and we ended up back in Albuquerque, living with my mom's parents, my grandparents.

And then eventually my dad got another job, and we moved across town, and so in my first, I would say, eight years of school, I must have gone to nine different schools, so I really had to learn to kind of make friends quickly. I was a pretty introverted child, but I had to learn how to become more extraverted just to sort of survive the constant change and adaptation for new schools.

And I became interested in theater at a very young age.

WOO: Okay.

MARTIN: And so that, you know, kind of led me toward high school and college. I did—I did manage to graduate high school at the same school—like, four full years at one school—

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and from there went to Dartmouth.

WOO: Did you—do you remember any of the plays that you did when you were in primary school?

MARTIN: Yeah. The very first one I remember was in second grade. We did sort of a musical revue version of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. And one experience I remember very clearly: In this school in Houston, Texas, I guess because it was so hot, we never went outside. We didn't have recess. It was a large, combined classroom, and so we just moved from different areas of the classroom. But the whole group of four teachers and all their students put on this *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* revue for the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] or something.

And during rehearsals, they would teach the boys their choreography, and then they would teach the girls their choreography. And I remember thinking, *I want to learn both parts*. So when they, you know, put the girls on stage, I sort of stood by the side and tried to learn the same movements. And I got scolded. [Both chuckle.] And I think from then on, the teacher was concerned that I didn't—that I had a learning disability or something because I didn't follow her instructions about, you know, dividing us by gender. But I just really wanted to learn the dancing, so—

WOO: For sure.

MARTIN: —so that was a—a really early experience. I [unintelligible] many other plays. I think I did—I think I was Tom Sawyer in a class play, and I was a pretty good—I was pretty good at reading aloud, so the teachers loved to put me in plays

because I could usually say the words from reading off the page.

WOO: I see. Did you—you mentioned that you had to do—you had to learn how to make friends really quickly. Is that—did you—were most of your friends in play and in theater, at least growing up?

MARTIN: No, there wasn't a big organized theater—or I wasn't involved in anything sort of after school. I was in a Scouting—Cub Scouts group that—that I sort of was always trying to take that into a theater direction. Or, you know, I wanted to put on fashion shows.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And none of the other Cub Scouts were interested in that. [Both chuckle.] But, yeah—no, really, I think when I got to be about ten, my parents put me in some organized sports, and so you end up with friends just from the sports, in addition to your friends from school—

WOO: For sure.

MARTIN: —and friends from the neighborhood and—you know, we moved around a lot, so you always had friends from the neighborhood and next-door neighbors, et cetera. But—but my—my friendships were not very lasting because we were often moving, so—

WOO: Yes. Did you—did you enjoy the sports clubs that your parents put you in?

MARTIN: Not really.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: I think—you know, the first one that I remember was being put into basketball, because my dad had a good friend—in fact, I think it might have been his boss, that he was working for, whose son was in basketball, and my dad and his boss had been high school athletes, you know, growing up, and I think my dad felt like he—that I wasn't as masculine as his

friend's son, so maybe I should be put into basketball in order to help me learn to be more macho.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And I became good friends with that other kid, you know, but we were both really into *Star Trek*, which was somewhat, I guess, neutral territory gender wise. And, yeah, so—no, I—I really didn't enjoy the sports, themselves, but they—they were great places to make friends.

WOO: Yeah. You seem to have noticed a sort of gender binary with the rules for each gender very early on. Is it something that—that you consciously knew of at that time or that you were constantly thinking about? How did you feel?

MARTIN: No. I mean, I think there was what I now know to call gender policing when I was growing up,—

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: —was just this constant sort of, you know, attempt to get you to be more—get me to be more of a, you know, traditional boy. I was, you know, very creative, and I was always doing arts and crafts, and I was, you know, so—and I think my dad didn't really know what to make of me. I also had an older sister, and being first born, she was kind of lavished into all of the things that my dad wanted, and she sort of became more of a tomboy. And I think the two of us were—were very—both trying to be more like the traditional gender stereotype. But you just didn't—and it wasn't just from our parents, it was from kind of all of society. In the sixties and seventies, it was very much, you know, a binary world of gender.

WOO: For sure. You mentioned you have an older sister. Do you have any other siblings?

MARTIN: Yes, I have a younger brother.

WOO: Okay, a younger brother and—

MARTIN: He was a very traditional boy. He was very good—any sport he touched, he excelled at. And so also being followed by a

younger brother, I felt very much like I was sort of a sissy and I couldn't really be, you know, as—I was actually wor- — at one point, I recall being worried. My younger brother, three years younger, was so much more of a boy traditionally than I was, I was worried he might actually enter puberty before I did and that I'd be the laughing stock [chuckles].

WOO: Wow.

MARTIN: But everything worked out. [Laughs.]

WOO: Yeah. Can you tell me more about stories of—well, like the dynamic between you, your sister and your brother? Did you guys get along pretty well, or what are some—could you tell me about some things that you and your siblings did?

MARTIN: Yeah. I mean, we—you know, any group of three kids fight a fair amount over toys and anything else, but—

WOO: Is there any—

MARTIN: —when—

WOO: —that you fight—that your brother particularly?

MARTIN: Well, my brother and I were very, very close. When we lived in Houston, he was not yet in school.

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: He was three, going on four, and he really loved to sort of trail me around. And we played with G.I. Joe figures and Batman and Superman figures, and, you know, we were really close because we would watch all the Saturday morning cartoons together. And we ended up sharing a bedroom together for a couple of years. And that was really before he was into any sports.

And then my parents put him in—or he wanted to be put into ice hockey, and I didn't have any interest in that, and I think that disappointed my dad, who had himself been a hockey star in high school.

WOO: Sure.

MARTIN: And so, you know, that was kind of like—I think something that really concerned my parents. My sister was also very athletic from very early age, and I don't know if that was natural if she was kind of being pushed into being, you know, the older kid. But, you know, at various times I was closer with my sister or my brother, depending on what age we were, what we had in common.

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: When I was in high school with my sister, she was two years ahead of me, and so I was sort of learning the ropes of high school from her, and we rode the school bus together, and we had a lot of common vocabulary and common experiences. But, yeah, you—you do grow apart as you—as you get older and have more differentiated interests.

WOO: For sure. How about with your parents? Did you guys, as a family, go on excursions and stuff? What did you guys normally do on weekends?

MARTIN: Well, my parents had a houseboat. It was not very fancy, but it was—we—we—we hauled it with us every time we moved across the country, and we'd have it in a lake usually, you know, two to three hours away or something. And so in the summers, that was our weekend sort of getaway. And we could bring friends, and we would swim and things like that. But it was—you know, it was—often, they would—my parents would bring a lot of their friends, and we'd have, you know, all kinds of adults and all kinds of raucous behavior to contend with.

And I really—I think I became really aware of sexuality a lot through some of those—you know, my parents' friends and everybody in swimsuits and horsing around in the water and, you know, just sort of—I started to sort of really be aware of what people's sexual identities were.

And, you know, I also often had crushes on my own—on my own friends,—

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: —which was, you know, very difficult to navigate because at in those days you didn't really talk about, you know, same-sex interests.

WOO: Is there any particular friend that you recall having one of these crushes on and how that friendship developed?

MARTIN: Yeah. It was actually—I was in fifth grade, and for some reason, there was not—my class—I think we only had eight girls and about twenty boys.

WOO: Oh, wow!

MARTIN: And it was at the age where people started trying to become, you know, dating couples. I mean, literally in fifth grade. But the term was “going with,” you know. So, you know, “John is ‘going with’ Cindy.” And so it became sort of a status symbol to be—to have a girlfriend for the boys.

And my—it was my friend, Eric [spelling unconfirmed], he was going with a different girl every week and sort of making the rounds. And we became friends, and we would sort of have—I guess he joined my basketball team at the same time I did, so we had a lot of weekends and sleepovers and basketball practice. But he was also a swimmer, competitive swimmer, and he was—he went through puberty much earlier than I did, so I was sort of very aware of his, you know, physical development and just really had a crush on him. I don't think I knew it at the time. I was just really focused on him.

And when I would bring him to our houseboat on the weekends in the summer, as my guest, my sister and her friends were very interested in him, and there were two and three years older, so it was just really interesting to see everybody's hormones going haywire.

WOO: Attention.

MARTIN: Yeah.

WOO: For sure.

Would you say this is around middle school, fifth grade? Is that what you said?

MARTIN: Yeah, it was fifth grade, which at the time—our sixth grade was still elementary school, before they restructured the schools. But Eric was my good friend in fifth grade and sixth grade. And then we moved to a different house across town and kind of lost—lost the friendship.

WOO: I see. Would you say when you were growing up most of your—were most of your friends boys, or did you have friends from all genders?

MARTIN: I think I had mostly friends who were boys outside of school. I had friends who were girls in school, but, you know, there was—there was a firm line about “you don’t have sleepovers with girls.” I do remember asking my mom if I could have my friends sleep over when I was in second grade, and she said, “Oh, no, no, no.” [Both chuckle.]

WOO: Yeah, because you mentioned that the policing of these gender rules was really strong. Was that right?

MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

WOO: And then as you went on into high school, how—you mentioned that you—you kind of stayed in the same high school for the f- —for all four years. How was that different?

MARTIN: So I started out in some of the same sports I had been in,—

WOO: Like basketball?

MARTIN: —soccer—no. By then, I’d dropped basketball, but I was in soccer and—for some reason—I don’t whose decision it was that I go out and run for the track team, and I lasted one year, and it was really a bro culture, a macho culture. The track team had to have almost a hundred boys on it. And so it was just sort of lost in the shuffle. And the—so after my first freshman year, I told my dad, “I’m not gonna run track. You know, I’m done.” And he was very disappointed. I eventually dropped out of soccer.

And the theater department—I had classes in theater, but you also had a lot of after-school rehearsals, and so my excuse to my dad was, “I can’t—you know, I want to do plays, and you can’t be in plays if you have afternoon sports practice.”

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: So that seemed to be okay.

I did then have another experience where there was—I guess it was a competitive dance team that was trying to form, and it wasn’t really a—it was more of a club which was led by students, and I went out and tried out for it, and I was one of only two boys, and so they had to take us. And what I told my parents—I said, “Oh, I went out for the dance team.” And my dad was, like, “*What? Why? What is that?*” [Both chuckle.]

So I just—I sort of got the message, and I didn’t—didn’t return to the dance team practices,—

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: —which was kind of sad because I was very interested in dancing at that age. I did finally—

WOO: Uh-huh. What did your mom think?

MARTIN: You know, I don’t know what she thought. it was one of those dinner table conversations where you kind of cough up the news of the day, and then your parents pass judgment on it. [Laughter.] You know, I don’t think—so I recall that my mom was kind of my biggest cheerleader growing up. If my dad felt really strongly about something, you know, his negative feedback could outweigh, you know, twice as much positive feedback from my mom, so—

And I also think that by that age, by whatever I was, fourteen, fifteen, I had learned to do some of my own gender policing,—

WOO: Oh, for sure.

MARTIN: —so as not—so as to avoid the situations. At that time, I think there was starting to become—this was, you know, the very beginning of the eighties, and we were starting to see a lot of the HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] crisis pop up in the newspapers, and everyone was terrified, and everyone was very much sort of trying to I think blame the gay community for the rise of AIDS.

So if, you know, those of us who were at the time in the closet stayed in the closet and kind of learned to really disguise ourselves. And so I think that was where I had an extra incentive for the gender policing of my own gender, self-policing.

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: Very complex time.

WOO: Were there any out people in your high school at that time?

MARTIN: There was one boy. He was in the theater department, a year ahead of me, and he was the—really a great dancer, and often our drama teacher would let him choreograph whatever musical we were putting on. And so—and he didn't ever really say anything about being gay, but you always—I sort of just understood that he was.

This TV show about, you know, Performing Arts High School [sic; the High School of Performing Arts in New York City] called *Fame*—I don't know if you know that show. But it was—it was always—it was like *Glee*. It was—recently—it was, like, kids always putting on shows. And he'd come in every week—[Both chuckle.]—show us whatever choreography had been done on TV that night. And he'd only seen it once, so—you know, we—we—I was very aware of him and sort of also aware that that was a path. But I just didn't—I didn't think—I guess I didn't think—I didn't think I was ready to go down the path of being out.

WOO: Mm-hm. What were some of the—

MARTIN: You know, I—

WOO: Keep going. Well, I was going to ask what were some of your greatest fears in high school? I think you were probably going towards that direction.

MARTIN: Yeah. I don't—I guess I don't know. I do remember—when was it? It was my junior year? So the theater departments of all the high schools would go to the local university to do a theater fair or theater camp, high school theater festival in January for two days. And we would take a little play and perform a play, and then we would sit around and watch each other's play. And we'd go to classes and learn things like stage makeup.

And the play we took was some Woody Allen play, where everyone was in Greek togas, and I was in—I was the lead. And I had this really short-skirted Greek toga. And the boy who was, you know, really great at dancing had graduated already, but he came back to watch the plays, and he brought a friend, who I didn't know and who I think was older.

And after we did the play, I went back to my seat in the auditorium, and I found a little note sitting on my seat.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.]

MARTIN: And it was from the—from the friend of the dancer. Brent was the dancer, and this guy—I guess his name was Michael, and it said something like—I—

WOO: Yeah. What did it say?

MARTIN: "I think you're pretty cute."

WOO: [Another intake of breath.]

MARTIN: "Do you want to meet sometime? Michael." And I was,—

WOO: Wow!

MARTIN: —first of all, very embarrassed, and I was sitting with a friend of mine who was a girl, and I said, "Do you know who dropped this note here?" And she said, "No." I don't know if she really didn't know or if she was—

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: —just sort of embarrassed and lying.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: So then I sort of stood there, and I was, like, looking around to see who it might be. [Chuckles.] And I think I finally figured out who he was, because he was looking at me from three or four rows away. And then I was terrified. I just didn't know, you know, how to handle it. So I just didn't handle it; I just ignored it. And, you know,—and I—and I had fantasies about, *Well, okay, what we do if we met? Where would we meet?* And, you know, I just didn't—I didn't have any knowledge or sophistication to sort of figure it out.

And it was certainly a very crowded venue when—when that occurred, so all I could think of was, you know, *This is in a crowd. I can't certainly meet this guy at a crowd.* So it was—it was just overwhelming to me.

WOO: Wow. Yeah.

MARTIN: Yeah.

WOO: Is this the first time that someone's shown interest in you, or has this happened in other occasions in high school or before?

MARTIN: That was the first really sort of out, overt and kind of brave outreach anyone did. I think—no, we just—I don't think we really talked about it, although I remember we would—all the boys that I knew would call each other “fag” and “faggot,” as a put-down. So I don't know if, you know, we were probing each other at that time. But it was just sort of a general hazing culture.

WOO: Yeah. Could you—could you tell me more about the—the culture at that time you mentioned, the HIV epidemic? And you grew up in the era right after the civil rights movement. Could you tell me how those movements impacted you, if at all, while you were going through grade school?

MARTIN: Yeah. So I remember, you know, the seventies, we were—everyone was surrounded by what we called “hippies.” You know, in the sixties, we were consciously—little kids consciously trying to copy the hippies and their fashion and the bell bottoms and the peace signs and the peace symbols and the long hair, bandanas, et cetera. Native American sort of inspired street wear.

But then I remember when we would go on our boat on the weekends, if we would see hippies, they were often skinny-dipping, swimming naked. And my father would be furious, and he’d usually, you know, try to yell a hundred yards away that, you know, “There’s women and children here! I don’t want you to skinny-dip.” He just—he was a very conservative Catholic. So, you know, was sort of aware of kind of the culture of freedom and free love.

And then in the eighties, I remember—or I guess it was the late seventies, this group, the Village People became a big pop sensation on I think it was one of the—*American Bandstand* or *Solid Gold*, one of those music shows. And I was very intrigued by—each of them was sort of a fetish character. There was a cowboy, there was an Indian, there was a construction worker and a motorcycle-leather guy.

So those archetypes when I would see people kind of wearing those costumes but not as costumes, just as street wear,—I sort of was tracking people. It was kind of a project I was trying to figure out—you know, who are the secret gays?

And then early on—because I used to, you know, read the newspaper even in high school. I started sneaking the newspaper from the day before down into my room to, cover to cover, go through and try to find out about what they were called at that time “gay cancer.” And it was essentially, literally the breaking news about AIDS first being discovered and then named and tracking the incidents of, you know, outbreaks and—and associating it with sexual behavior.

And then after a while, it became—I—I think—I don’t know if people were saying to me or if I was hearing that “this woman had AIDS because her boyfriend gave it to her, and he must be gay.” And so there was a sense that bisexual

people were a vector for getting—for getting the virus into the heterosexual population, even though the virus doesn't— [Chuckles]. It jumps from whoever has it to whoever is exposed to it.

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: But it was this sense of blaming and finger-pointing. Certain kinds of sexual behaviors were to blame for this epidemic, and it was—and it was really scary because there was absolutely no understanding of the science of the virus, nor any real—there was no epidemiology being done at a government and policy level, and, you know, I've since learned that the White House could have done more in those years, and they were just really afraid of it.

And so really from the ground up, I think activism sort of got some more funding going and things like that. But at the time, for people who were in the closet,—

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: —and not yet sexually active, the presence of AIDS and threat of HIV was a counter-incentive to *be* sexually active or to be out of the closet.

WOO: I see.

MARTIN: And so we—we locked our closets and threw away the key for a few years.

WOO: For you, how did—how did you internalize all this? Did you kind of exactly go back, like, lock the door of the closet even harder and throw it away, or did you kind of—did this—did this inspire you to go into activism, which—or both. Which one—which way did this get you to go?

MARTIN: Well, I—I—I was not an activist early on, and in fact, I—I would sort of find myself falling into relationships, romantic relationships with girls who expressed interest in me, and I just sort of passively didn't resist. But I really wasn't giving them anything back. I was just sort of going along and, you know, had zero interest in dating them.

But I would find myself sort of in these situations where *they* thought I was their boyfriend, and, you know,—and—and I guess I was happy for the camouflage or something, but it—it—it led to some really hurtful situations where—because I wasn't honest; I felt there was a risk in being honest—I actually hurt some of these girls more than I would have if I had not let it take root and then kind of—and then distanced myself from them without explanation, which is more hurtful. And so I realized that, you know, being—I realized later that being in the closet to serve your own needs can actually be a very selfish, hurtful act in certain circumstances. So I—

But at the same time, interestingly, I always had my eye on this or that boy and just completely kept it—completely kept it internal and—and sort of would almost—I developed really good stalker skills for certain boys. That like, I sort of knew way too much about them, and I sort of always, you know, knew how to follow them from a distance. And I just had no tools to break through that and, you know, get to know people one on one, boys one on one. So that really held me back because I—I think I just wouldn't give myself the permission to be open to the world about what I was feeling.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: In terms of the activism, what really made me an activist was—I think I mentioned it in our earlier—or you have it in the notes—some of the political activity on the Dartmouth campus during my junior year really involved—and sophomore year also—

WOO: Okay.

MARTIN: There was a lot of activity that—you know, behavioral stuff that would get kids brought in front of the Committee on Standards, and I was an elected member of that, and we were supposed to vote on discipline for people. And there were, you know, sort of people doing really bullying things. Like, there was a party where a sorority decided to celebrate the death of Rock Hudson. And they wanted it to be a medically-themed party and just a lot of really inappropriate things, like “bring your own IV” and, you know, all these things, essentially celebrating the death of Rock Hudson,

because he was one of the first celebrities to be honest about the cause of his death.

And a group of gay students or the Gay Students Association at the time (of which I was not a member, but I was friends with many of them) decided to protest this party at the sorority, and then it got a little—it got a little violent, and I don't recall the exact circumstances, but both sides—both groups were then brought up to the disciplinary committee.

And both groups lobbied to have their friends come to the hearing and supported them. So we ended up having to move to a larger venue. It was a huge audience. And then it turned into sort of an open mic, and people were trying to testify on behalf of what they'd seen—and, you know, none of which was how the committee liked to work to decide discipline cases.

So they adjourned, and they said, "We'll meet next week in a smaller venue, and we'll make a decision." And in the intervening week, a lot of my friends got to me and said, "Look, you know, I know it seems like two sides are equally at fault here, but you really need to understand one side was really defending itself, and the other—against what the other side had done, which was really quite aggressive and bigoted behavior."

And so I realized at that time I needed to choose a side, and I didn't really, you know, declare my allegiance, because I didn't want to make myself—recuse myself—

WOO: Exactly.

MARTIN: —from—from voting. But I really felt like—it was really clear to me. And after that, I started joining in on a lot of the activism—you know, the Take Back the Night march. And I went from what I would have said was a conservative on paper to being a liberal in—in practice, just virtually in the space of forty-eight hours.

WOO: Wow. So would you say when you—when you first got onto campus at Dartmouth you would have considered yourself a conservative?

MARTIN: Yeah. I was—

WOO: Yeah, why would—

MARTIN: —really a fan of certain kinds of very conservative literature. You know, I loved William F. Buckley [Jr.]. I just thought he was so clever. I—I loved Evelyn Waugh, the novelist Evelyn Waugh, and *Brideshead Revisited*[: *The Sacred & Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*] and, you know, all that sort of old, sort of closeted Catholic homoeroticism that never really becomes sexual behavior.

I was a huge fan of Alexander the Great and in fact took a big freshman seminar on the life of Alexander the Great and his bisexuality in 300 B.C. And in fact, there was an incident—you may have heard of in the Dartmouth history—that one of my classmates in my Alexander the Great seminar—

WOO: Oh!

MARTIN: I probably shouldn't tell her name, but she was a reporter for *The Dartmouth Review* newspaper, and she went undercover in the newspaper to the Gay Students Association meeting and recorded the meeting with a tape recorder in her purse and then wrote down all the names of the students who were there and then outed them in the conservative newspaper the next day. And it was shocking.

Well, I'll tell you her name.

WOO: Yes. This was Laura [A.] Ingraham [Class of 1985] in 1984, right?

MARTIN: Well, Laura Ingraham was the editor who assigned it, but the reporter was Teresa Polenz [Teresa S. Delaney (née Polenz), Class of 1987].

WOO: Okay.

MARTIN: And she—yeah, she really declared her—she chose a side very early, and I was—and I was really shocked because in

our freshman seminar, there were only, like, twelve—twelve kids in the class,—

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: —and we're studying this very renowned bisexual—

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —man from 300 B.C., and so I was really shocked that she would be the one who—who did that.

WOO: Yeah!

MARTIN: But, yeah, I didn't—I didn't have any contact with her after the class ended. But, you know, you sort of had to be on notice that *The Dartmouth Review* was out to find you and label you and shame you—again, another counter-incentive to come out of the closet,—

WOO: So the—wow!

MARTIN: —with all the structural incentives that we had [chuckles], yet another one—yet another nail in the closet door.

WOO: [Laughs.]

Well, how—when you—how about your room- —when—how about your roommates in your freshman year? What were they like?

MARTIN: I just had one. He was a sort of very easygoing computer science major. He—he was dating the girl who lived in the dorm room next to us.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And he is now married to her, and they have—

WOO: Wow!—

MARTIN: —three or four children. But they were very—our dorm, the Motor Lodge [the Lodge, formerly the Hanover Inn Motor Lodge], was very tight-knit, very diverse and kind of an odd

grab bag of kids. But, you know, they were—my roommate was really great. We didn't really pry at each other's business. And I think they probably figured out that I was gay, especially by my sophomore year, when I was—by then I was a dance major, and I was taking, like, twenty hours of dance classes a week. I think people figured it out. [Both chuckle.]

WOO: When did you—when did you, yourself, kind of figure out, at least at Dartmouth or before, that you wanted to come out or that you—or in the first place, that you thought that you might be something other than straight?

MARTIN: I would say I kind of knew that I was gay by about fifth or sixth grade,—

WOO: Mm-hm, what I mentioned—

MARTIN: —when I started having crushes on my good friend. But then coming out was a completely different idea that I didn't—I didn't even consider it, even in—well, I guess there were degrees of out. In college, you know, you might fool around with somebody or you might, you know, tell—tell a friend that you were gay, but that's not the same as sort of letting the world know.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: So in my—my freshman year,—

WOO: Yeah, walk me through.

MARTIN: —I had a good friend in my dorm, and we came out to each other—

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.] Wow!

MARTIN: —early in freshman year. And I think—I think what prompted it was that *he* was—his roommate was a swimmer—

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —and he had a terrible crush on him. And so I was usually not the first person to come out to my friends, but I was

usually the ones that said, “Oh, I’m gay, too.” [Both chuckle.] After they came out to me, so, you know, that—in those days, I think coming out was very much an incremental process,—

WOO: Of course.

MARTIN: —that you would sort of try it with one person, and if it went well, then you might do it—tell another person and practice. But, yeah, I think that was—he was the first person I actually said the words to in freshman year at Dartmouth.

WOO: Freshman year! And can you tell me more about the different degrees of how that developed at your time at Dartmouth?

MARTIN: Yeah. So, I mean, once you’ve told kind of your first person—

WOO: And was he a close friend or just—

MARTIN: Yeah, yeah, he was a very, very close friend. And, you know, then he became sort of my permanent confidante, and, you know, after we were no longer living in the same dorm, we would run into each other, have lunch or whatever, and he’d always ask, you know, “Who are you involved with?” or who you have a crush on.

And I remember toward the end of the year, freshman year, I said, “Well, so we have to pick roommates for next year. Do you want to be roommates?” He said, “No, I’m already—I’ve already picked a roommate. I’m gonna be living in the all-male dorm across the way.” And I said, “What? *You?*”

WOO: [Laughs.]

MARTIN: And it came out years later, many years later, I think after we graduated, that *he* was having a sexual relationship with his roommate, that roommate, the whole year, right under the noses of the all-male dorm. And he, you know, is now an out gay man, but the guy he was having the affair with swore him to secrecy, and I think there was some sort of emotional abuse in that relationship.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: But, you know, it—it just really surprised me that they were—they were going at it, so—you know, I didn't—I didn't have that as a frame of reference, but I think I was always trying to figure out, you know, who there was that I could be involved with. And I guess by the time I was a junior and senior and, you know, I was maybe one of the more important drama majors on campus, you became aware of who was gay and who wasn't. And there was—dressing rooms at theaters are very much like locker rooms of sports—

WOO: Mm-hm. [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —there's a lot of secrets shared and a lot of, you know—you just became aware of everybody's business.

WOO: Uh-huh.

MARTIN: So, yeah, I—I kind of knew who was—who was and who wasn't. I did actually have a crush on a much younger sophomore by the time I was a senior, and, you know, I was trying to start a relationship at Dartmouth, but it didn't—it didn't go so well because this guy that I was interested in was just very, still, in the closet. And he just wasn't ready, so—

WOO: I see.

Well, while you were on campus, what—what communities did you generally frequent? How—how did you generally make friends on campus? Was it—

MARTIN: So I guess my first group was my dorm, the Motor Lodge. We were somewhat remote from the rest of campus, so we kind of traveled together in a pack to the dining hall. You know, and you're a community, an artificial community for that reason, not because of anything you have in common.

I then also was really into—I had a job in the dining hall, and all of us kids who were the financial aid kids working in the dining hall then would stay into commencement and reunions and work the catering—you know, catering crew and make, you know, good money. And that became kind of a group of friends. We sort of called ourselves, like a

fraternity, Delta Delta Alpha after Dartmouth Dining Association.

WOO: [Laughs.]

MARTIN: So—and then—and then the theater group. I was just always in—in a show or on the crew or staff of a show and, you know, just making friends that way.

I didn't have a car, so I didn't really get anywhere off campus for anything social, but the fraternities and sororities, especially the co-ed houses, were a big draw on the weekends, and, you know, you could—I think Alpha Theta was one where you could sort of reliably go and let down your hair and nobody was gender policing each other. And I think everybody sort of had a sense that sexuality was fluid if you were bothering to go to their parties.

WOO: Uh-huh. Yeah. Could you tell me more about what you generally liked to do on the weekends, what you—whether or not you were involved with the frat scene?

MARTIN: I did not actually rush, although I came very close. Almost, I would say, a majority of the boys that lived in the Lodge dormitory rushed—

WOO: Uh-huh. To which?

MARTIN: —SAE,—

WOO: Oh. Mm-hm.

MARTIN: —Sigma Alpha Epsilon. And I nearly did, because my mother's brothers had been SAE back at their university, and I thought, *Oh, you know, it's in my blood*. But then at the end of the day, I just thought, you know, *I don't really—I don't really know what that's about*, and it did seem like it was a threat to my very frail closet door [both chuckle], you know, being opened, so—so I just didn't follow through with it.

But I loved to go to fraternity and sorority parties. You know, anyone—often we would go just to dance, and, you know, my—my time at Dartmouth, I feel like the pop music scene was just unbeatable in terms of really danceable stuff. And

so we would go, and, you know, the fraternities would have moved all the furniture out of their ground-floor living room to create a dance floor and then have a big garbage can full of homemade alcoholic punch.

WOO: [Laughs.]

MARTIN: And so, you know,—I mean, they'd have a garbage can liner, bag, but you don't know that it's very sanitary [chuckles], so you're really taking risks. And we would go and, like, take a big gulp of alcohol and then just go and dance crazy on the dance floor. And, you know, if you were one of the first people there, no one was really dancing early on in the evening, but there were people who were really, really into the dancing. The fraternities and sororities liked it because that usually meant other people would—

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: —would come. And so we—me and my friends sort of considered ourselves like a warm-up act; we'd have to go and sort of get the parties started at some of these fraternities by dancing. And then you'd make the rounds, and you'd go to the next house. I didn't ever stay long at any party. But it was—it was a lot of fun, and it was part of what—you know, what I loved to do at the time, was just dance, dance, dance.

WOO: Mm-hm. Well, who would you generally go out on these weekends with?

MARTIN: So my good friend David, who was the guy I came out to. He was also a dancer. We were both studying dance. And usually a couple girls from the dorm or, you know, girls and guys. Sometimes we'd meet people from theater class or dance class and go together, but, you know, not—not large groups. I would never go alone. That's for certain.

WOO: Yeah. Did you—how about with the theater kids? Did you ever hang out with them after—like, on weekends or after school as well, or was it just—generally just the boy and the other two girls?

MARTIN: I don't—I'm trying to remember what my social life was. I was actually somewhat introverted. If I didn't actually have plans to go out, I would often—oh, I went to the movies a whole lot, probably way too much.

WOO: [Chuckles.] At the Nugget [Theaters]?

MARTIN: Yes, and also the Dartmouth Film Society would put films on at Spaulding [Auditorium] every Wednesday and every Sunday, which was a great excuse not to do homework.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And so—yeah, that was a huge part of my—I think my overall cultural education, was the films. But, yeah, I mean, usually—at the time, Dartmouth social life was very dominated by the Greek system houses, their parties. And, as a result, that's why there were so many disciplinary problems, because there was just way too much alcohol floating around, and nobody was policing it, and we—you know, we'd sometimes have high school kids show up, looking for free alcohol and, you know, would create problems.

WOO: So over all, in the general scene, what did you feel about the—the party scene? You liked dancing, but over all, what would you say was your general feeling about the culture back then at Dartmouth?

MARTIN: So I guess I felt like it didn't have much sophistication, and I—I don't—I guess there *was* a certain amount of cultural programming being done by the Hop[kins Center for the Arts] and by Collis [Center for Student Involvement] and, you know, people trying to get us to have a more richer social life around interests besides drinking. But I don't—I don't feel like it really penetrated most people.

And part of that, I think, is the layout of the campus, that, you know, people could just sort of hunker down in their dorm or their frat house and not see the rest of the world. But I guess—I guess it was sort of a monotonous sort of one—
one-note social life. It was—there was drinking at the fraternities or there was staying home. And it was kind of binary in the sense that you're a boring nerd or you're a fun

person, and there wasn't—there wasn't a diversity within those identities. It was you're either fun or you're a nerd.

WOO: I see.

How about the queer scene and the queer culture on campus? You mentioned that you knew—you kind of knew everyone who was queer, but in terms of culture and events together, what do you remember about the queer culture at the time?

MARTIN: There—there really wasn't. So there was a Gay Students Association. It had an office in Robinson Hall. And I remember, like, walking up and, like, trying to get information and—you know, after hours and seeing—at least seeing where it was. And I was even afraid to walk up to the door—

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —because I thought, *All the—all the neighboring organizations will tag me. "Oh, here's another gay."*

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And, you know, so I never connected with them. My understanding was they functioned equally as much as a support group, and the people who were officers of it were horrendously hazed and treated poorly.

WOO: Mmm.

MARTIN: You know, their dorm rooms were vandalized just for fun by other kids. I think it was—it was just awful. But they were willing to be visible targets on behalf of all the rest of us who didn't have the courage.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: And so that, I really respect and admire, looking back. I don't think I got it at the time, but looking back, I realize that they were sort of creating space for all of us.

WOO: Yeah. Do you remember some of the—any details of the hazing that they had to experience? You mentioned some—

MARTIN: Yeah. One kid—he was—I think his name was Gabe [spelling unconfirmed]. I think he was the president. And he was so nondescript, you would never pick him out of a crowd as being gay. I think he was a computer science major. And he wore glasses, and he was sort of small. But apparently they put baby powder—using a hair dryer, blew baby powder under his door, into his whole room, and covered his room with talcum powder and a hair dryer. Was one—one incident that I heard of.

WOO: Mm-hm. Were there any others?

MARTIN: it was not particularly harmful, but that's the one that stands out. I'm sure there must have been others. There was another guy who used to—Steven [spelling unconfirmed], who used to, you know, wear pink fur coats and dye his hair blue, and, you know, at that time, the music scene was also very punk, so in an urban school that never would have stood out, but at Dartmouth, which was very preppy and very conservative, he was bullied for his—you know, his looks and his—his outfits. But I also think he felt that he was, you know, kind of bearing—you know, bearing a flag for it—you know, being a crusader, in a sense.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: So I think he kind of—I think he kind of liked that he was having the effect of raising awareness that—that he wanted to have.

WOO: For sure.

Well, on a similar topic, I was going to—let's move on to the—the 1984 scandal about when *The Dartmouth Review* outed a lot of—a lot of members in the GSA. Could you tell me about that time and what you remember from it?

MARTIN: So it started with—well, just some context: I think *The Dartmouth Review* would come out every Friday night, and it was distributed free, and they would actually deliver it to every single dorm room.

WOO: Mm-hm. They still do that today. [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: Okay. And at first, I started reading it because, you know, the back, you had all these really interesting sort of quotes from literary figures and epigrams, and really quite a few of them were put-downs. But that was kind of the hook that, you know, got a lot of people to—to open it.

And anyway, so after that reporter went undercover and published the names, I don't think I realized or had any sense that this was wrong to do. I think my sense was they got caught, and it was bound to happen. I had this sense of inevitability about their outing.

At the time. I didn't really talk about it with anybody except I think my friend David, who—we were out to each other, and I think we thought, *Oh, you know, thank goodness that's not us*. But there wasn't even any solidarity. There was so little sense of a community—

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: —when you're in the closet that you—you don't even know how to formulate and process things that happen as a community. And so—and so it just—it kind of got to stand. And I don't know if they were brought before the Committee on Standards. I wasn't a member of the Committee on Standards that year,—

WOO: Which year is this?

MARTIN: —not until—this—I think it occurred my freshman year,—

WOO: Freshman year.

MARTIN: —the spring of my freshman year.

WOO: Okay.

MARTIN: And so I don't know what consequences were faced by *The Dartmouth Review*, but I think anytime it got itself in trouble, it only got emboldened because of the publicity it created for itself, and that—that was what it wanted.

- WOO: Mm-hm. Did you know anyone in the GSA?
- MARTIN: Not well. I sort of knew—knew them by sight. I didn't know them.
- WOO: And I believe in 1984 there was the Tri-Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa] purge as well?
- MARTIN: Oh, yes. Yes.
- WOO: Do you remember?
- MARTIN: Yes.
- WOO: Can you tell me about what you remember from that and how that impacted you?
- MARTIN: Yeah. So I was actually good friends with one of the guys who—Joel [O. Thayer, Class of 1985] who was one of the people who had been purged, but I didn't become friends with him until after it happened. So my sophomore year, I became friends with him because he was taking dance classes, and so was I, and we'd sort of meet at fraternity parties. And I think he by then was a member of Alpha Theta, and I remember having a little bit of a make-out session with him [chuckles]—
- WOO: Mm-hm.
- MARTIN: —in—in Alpha Theta. But he didn't talk about that purge, so, again, I don't know a lot of details, but my—my understanding is that there was a fear within Tri-Kap that the gay members of the house, whom they'd previously tolerated,—their fear was that they were trying to recruit only gays or to make it a predominantly gay house, and so the heterosexual members felt like they had to take a stand and, you know, go the other way. But that's the popular history. I don't know what actually happened.
- WOO: Yeah. Well, with your friend, with Joel—how did you meet him?
- MARTIN: We were both enrolled in a drama class in modern dance.

- WOO: That was the dance class. Okay.
- MARTIN: Yeah, yeah.
- WOO: I see. And do you remember any organization on campus that happened during the time of *The Dartmouth Review*, like, reporting out—out anything and the Tri-Kap purge? Do you remember any organization that happened on campus?
- MARTIN: Uh,—
- WOO: Or protests around that?
- MARTIN: Oh, there—there was—there were little protest organizations popping up—
- WOO: What were they like?
- MARTIN: —a lot. They tended to be kids from, you know, really sophisticated urban backgrounds, and I do remember that there was a group that started building shanties on the [Dartmouth] Green, but that was after the Tri-Kap protest.
- WOO: Mm-hm. I'll get to that.
- MARTIN: I think that was the fall of my sophomore year.
- WOO: Uh-huh. Let's talk about that. This was the shanty protests relating to apartheid? Was this—
- MARTIN: Yes.
- WOO: You said this was in your—1986, I would assume, right?—because this was your junior year or senior year?
- MARTIN: Yeah, year, junior year. So I was—I took fall term off. I'd been elected to the Committee on Standards at the beginning of the summer of my sophomore year. I served on that committee all summer, took the fall off and left Hanover. Came back in the winter, and the shanties were already built on the Green. I guess during the fall, the divestment—pro-divestment students had built shanties in tribute to the types of shanties that most South Africans—

- WOO: Mm-hm.
- MARTIN: —black South Africans were living in in apartheid in South Africa.
- WOO: Yes.
- MARTIN: And the Winter Carnival being such a big draw for publicity as well as alumni,—
- WOO: Yes.
- MARTIN: —there was a committee of I think right-wing students who wanted to get them off—get those shanties off, and I think they tried a few times to pull the shanties down, so the activist students started sleeping in the shanties—
- WOO: Mm-hm.
- MARTIN: —in the middle of winter, to protect the shanties. And the shanty community installation kind of grew and grew and grew until one night, the right-wing students—and I think it was mostly organized by—I think we proved a link to *The Dartmouth Review* in our committee proceedings—went and decided to start literally hammering the shanties down with a sledge hammer in the middle of the night, either unbeknownst that people were sleeping inside or not caring.
- And I think there was even use of fire, but I don't—I don't remember. But it was quite a dangerous incident. I wasn't an eye witness to it at all—
- WOO: I see.
- MARTIN: —but I heard a lot about it in the committee proceedings over the discipline of it. And it was really—it was really—it was a divisive incident because people really chose a side.
- WOO: Mm-hm. Could you kind of tell me more about the side or your perspective, coming from the Committee on—of—Committee on Standards? Could you tell me—could you walk me through the procedure that happened concerning the shanty-bashing incident and how it progressed?

- MARTIN: So as I recall, that committee was composed of four deans, four faculty and four students. So even at our most activist, the students on it couldn't really sway the vote. We could—
- WOO: Yes, I see.
- MARTIN: —we could slow the vote down. We couldn't really sway the proceeding, unless some of the faculty were also kind of on our side. I don't recall exactly what those decisions were, but my overall impression of the committee was it was always trying to be evenhanded to both sides,—
- WOO: Mmm.
- MARTIN: —and that, I realize now, was a problem, because most of the cases that come before it were black-and-white infractions of written conduct rules. In that shanty case, we couldn't actually—it was hard to translate what occurred to written conduct rules. And for both sides. And so that committee bent over backwards trying to mete out consequences to both sides.
- And I think at around the time, before we had made our decision, I think somebody actually was able to get national media to come on campus and interview some of the right-wing students and essentially elevate them to a higher voice for their—for their side. And so that was unfortunate. It complicated things.
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: But clearly, that side, the right-wing side had a lot of alumni help and financing for anything—anything they wanted to do, and so the—the left-wing activist side didn't have nearly the alumni support, so it was uneven—I don't even recall what—what the instance was but—it stands out to me more as—more as a process than as a result.
- WOO: And at that time, while you were on the Committee on Standards, did you—did you consider yourself part of the—the left-wing activist-y side, or more of the right-wing? Did you sympathize—or did you have any side at all, or you didn't know?

- MARTIN: No. At first no, but after the Rock Hudson pa- —the party celebrating Rock Hudson’s death and one of my friends came to me—if that’s the right—anyway, one of my friends, who was in the theater department, came to me and said, “You know, you’re our—you’re our representative on that committee. You—you should meet with us and hear our views.” And that really took me by surprise because I thought, *Oh, I’m just doing this to help, you know, build my résumé for law school. I don’t really want to have any, you know, involvement in government or politics.*
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: But I did take the meeting, and I did listen, and—and they changed my mind, so I then became sort of the secret liberal—
- WOO: [Chuckles.]
- MARTIN: —on the committee. The committee couldn’t—the committee was really trying to be—to show itself sort of fair and—
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: —realistic and—and not political, so it didn’t handle politics well.
- WOO: No. So you would say the rocky—the Rock Hudson party event was kind of like a defining moment or almost like a shift in your paradigm? Is that—would you say?
- MARTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. That was—that was where a line was crossed on berating gays.
- WOO: And do you remember what year this was?
- MARTIN: I believe that was July of ’85, the summer of ’85.
- WOO: So your—was that your sophomore summer?
- MARTIN: Sophomore summer, yes.
- WOO: Yes. Okay. And in terms of, like, punishments that you—that you guys kind of ordered from the Committee on Standards,

what do you remember most about that? How would you deliver them?

MARTIN: So there was a range of conduct that could be anywhere from bad grades—you know, grade average being too low to stay all the way through date rape and acquaintance rape, and then all this political stuff, but the first few cases that I heard were, like, couple- —inter-couple violence and grades.

And I remember that we—a couple people that I knew well were forced to take either a semester or a year off from Dartmouth and sort of go on probation and come back for grades. I don't recall that we expelled, like outright severed anybody from Dartmouth for grades. I know that we considered severing people for the violent political stuff. I—I don't recall exactly what we did, though. I think we came—we came short of severing people, because we knew that there would be backlash, backlash from alumni, backlash from donors, administration.

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: Yeah.

WOO: Did you—were you kind of content with most—

MARTIN: Yeah.

WOO: Are you there?

MARTIN: Sorry about that. My headphones died. Can you hear me?

WOO: Yes, I can hear you. No worries.

I was just asking you what—you mentioned earlier that you seemed kind of discontent with how the Committee on Standards was very intentionally avoiding—

MARTIN: Even-handed.

WOO: Yes, trying—over-handedly trying to do that. Was that something that you realized at your time at Dartmouth, or was this only something that you—in retrospect or—are critiquing?

MARTIN: Yeah. So in retrospect, I realized that it was trying to be very even-handed, but I also think that the deans that ran that committee were not equal vote. They could really sort of push people to voting their way.

WOO: Really!

MARTIN: And I think—and I don't—I became friendly with some of the faculty members on the committee just, you know, by chatting outside the committee, and—and my sense is that they felt like—at least one of them, I recall, feeling like he had to go along with the majority on things. So I—I think it's a flawed body, or it was at that time, because the four deans are there by appointment. The four students are elected. I don't know how the four faculty arrived on the committee.

But I don't feel that it was really the best structure for taking on at least things of a political nature—you know, things that are very much of a black-and-white rule, such as you must have a grade-point average of X. You know, it's easy to do that. But I don't know—I remember being very frustrated because we couldn't have a very fulsome discussion about most things.

The dean that ran it, Dean [Margaret H.] Bonz, Margaret Bonz, would kind of let you have one bite of the apple—go around the table, and each person got to say one thing about a case, and you couldn't—it just wasn't very deliberative, in my sense, in my feeling.

WOO: I see. Were most of these cases concerning—you mentioned couple violence and rape—or what was the make- —general makeup of the cases that came in front of you? Were most of them political, or—

MARTIN: No, no. I would say half of them were about grades; half of them were about some sort of conduct involving alcohol. One boyfriend getting violent with his girlfriend outside of a fraternity house. That one stands out in my mind. I think we did sever him from the college.

WOO: Yeah. Could you walk me through some of the details of—yeah, one of them that's really memorable to you?

MARTIN: So as I recall, the—the boy in the couple had a record of some—you know, some violent episodes, and he was much bigger than his girlfriend, and I think we were all kind of concerned that we sort of had to send him an ultimatum or he wouldn't change his behavior. And that's all I remember, but I don't think that was an actual rape, but I think there were cases of, you know, acquaintance sexual harassment that may have fallen short of rape. I think if it was rape, it would have been referred to the town police.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: I don't—I don't think the Committee on Standards was trying to adjudicate crimes—you know, if they were clearly crimes, they would be referred out. But it was everything that was sort of a grey area, and "What do we want to do about this?" And it seemed like every case was a comment on how far short our written standards fell. [Chuckles.]

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: You know, every case showed that, "Oh, we don't have anything about that written down."

WOO: [Chuckles.] Yeah. So was—do you remember ever adjudicating anything relating with *The- — The Dartmouth Review* outing letters? That was in 19- —

MARTIN: No.

WOO: That was before you joined the committee, correct?

MARTIN: Yes.

WOO: Okay.

MARTIN: Yes, it might have been one of my—one of my motives for getting on the committee. I don't really remember. I just remember thinking I wanted to be on that committee. And it was actually kind of easy to get on, because I don't think there were many people running.

WOO: Yeah.

- MARTIN: But—but I don't—no. That—that one never came before—when I was on the body.
- WOO: What do you think was the most impactful—the biggest impact that the Committee of Standards had on you at your time at Dartmouth, and perhaps afterwards?
- MARTIN: Oh, gosh. Well, I remember at the time, a short- —a short-term impact on my grades because I felt like whenever the committee would meet, only once a week, we'd meet for something like seven or eight hours.
- WOO: Seven or eight hours!
- MARTIN: Yeah, we would meet at, like, three in the afternoon, and they would bring in dinner, and we'd go until ten. But some of them went until two or three in the morning. I think the—the Rock Hudson one went really late,—
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: —because—I think because we were grappling with all sides of the, you know, ethics. So it—it did expose me to the political side of academic institutions, which, you know, I didn't—I didn't know so much of it was committees and politics at that time.
- It also made me realize, you know, the personal responsibility you have when you're in an elected office, that [chuckles] it's not just about building your résumé, which I truly did actually think. And it also—I think it really reoriented me toward, you know, the people who aren't in the dominant majority of society—you know, marginal people, whether they're, you know, racially marginal or gender and sexuality marginal, financially marginal. It just made me kind of really aware of all of us who were brought to Dartmouth [chuckles] for our statistical value.
- WOO: Yeah!
- MARTIN: And—yeah, so—but it was not—it was not a pleasant experience, that committee. It was difficult, and—and I was very conflicted throughout a lot of it.

WOO: Mmm. Well, do you—how about—let's move to some pleasant memories that you had.,

MARTIN: Sure.

WOO: What are some pleasant memories that have kind of really stood [sic] out to you while you were at—at your time at Dartmouth?

MARTIN: You know, I just loved the performing arts program, and it's not really been considered a performing arts school, but maybe because of that reason, I had a lot of opportunities I might not have in a larger program. You know, I—I—it's—truly adored the setting and all the various adventures you could have, you know, climbing Observatory Hill [sic; the hill to the Shattock Observatory] and, you know, wandering around Hanover.

But really, you know, I—arts and culture. For a little school in the middle of the woods, it brought tremendous cultural programming and opportunities to—into my life that I—I would not have had at, you know, a more suburban university or—I wouldn't have sought them out. So, I mean, it was transformational in that sense for me.

It also—you know, I went to school to be a pre-med [chuckles] and came out wanting to be an actor, so it—that was transformational also.

WOO: Do you—were there any dances or plays specifically at Dartmouth that you—that you remember having a great time in?

MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, every year, the dance department would put on a big recital, and those were always just amazing to be in. It was always a lot of costume changes, a lot of choreography. Sometimes you were performing while nursing an injury. [Chuckles.]

WOO: Oh, wow!

MARTIN: And just really—it really taught you how to—you know, what the job of being a performer is. You've got to—you've got to

make it work at all times. And, yeah, they were just—just really great. And we perform at—the dance program had, you know, even kids in it, people who had put their kids in community dance classes,—

WOO: Wow!

MARTIN: —and so we had, you know, every—from I think age ten to adult in that program. And they did really sophisticated work. I mean, we did *Rodeo* by Aaron Copland, and we did, you know, some—some really classical ballet and musical theater and, you know, really—really great stuff.

And the theater department, which was a separate sort of producing program, did great plays. Not very many musicals. But I was in some really amazing plays, especially in the summer repertory program. They usually tried to bring a couple alumni back or some, you know, TV stars or something to be in those shows. They were really the best of what Dartmouth theater had to offer. So, again, very transformational for me. And it really gave me what I thought at the time was a calling to be—to become an actor.

WOO: Well, yeah, could you walk me through what kind of perspired [sic]—what happened after your time at Dartmouth? You were—you mentioned you wanted to be an actor. Did that come into fruition in any way? [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: Yeah. Well, eventually it did. I ended up—I kind of ran out of time at Dartmouth, and I—I still owed Dartmouth one credit to get my diploma, so I—I ended up going back to my hometown and enrolling in a class to get that final credit and mailing it back to Dartmouth.

But as a result of moving back to my hometown, I got involved in my parents' family business for a number of years and did a lot of community theater in Albuquerque and had kind of a newfound confidence about theater because of Dartmouth and because of the skills I had learned.

And after a few years in Albuquerque, I decided I would move to New York City and make the leap and become an actor, and—and I did. I got cast in a number of shows.

Nothing on Broadway, but, you know, a number of smaller shows and showcases.

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: I joined all the actors unions and did some television and, you know, just didn't—didn't get kind of any big break parts that would have made me a celebrity. But I did a lot of really solid work, and I—and I really enjoyed it and discovered the acting—the market for actors is very different from an academic theater setting, where—yeah.

WOO: What—what prompted the move from Albuquerque to New York?

MARTIN: Funny you should ask.

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: Remember my friend from freshman dorm who I came out to?

WOO: Yes! [Laughs.]

MARTIN: David? Well, you know, all throughout our years after Dartmouth, we were in touch,—

WOO: Awww! [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: —and he was living in New York and running a magazine, and he said, “Oh, my assistant is going on maternity leave. Do you want to come and fill in for her and live in New York for three months?”

WOO: [Chuckles.]

MARTIN: And I said, “Yes, I do.” And so I went, at least knowing I had a job. And so I had a friend, and I had a job, and I hit the ground running. And I got cast in a show the very first day in New York, my first audition, so it was—it was good timing.

But, yeah, those Dartmouth connections—they stay with you your whole life, so,—

- WOO: Uh-huh.
- MARTIN: —you know, take care of them.
- WOO: [Chuckles.] For sure. Were you doing the job, the assistant position, while you were in theater, in plays?
- MARTIN: Yes. In fact, I was—I was a really bad assistant because I'd come and punch in in the morning and then run off to an audition.
- WOO: [Chuckles.]
- MARTIN: And I'd come back at three o'clock, and everyone would wonder where—where I'd been all day.
- WOO: Uh-huh.
- MARTIN: So, you know, I—I repaid David's friendship with really—with really poor performance as an assistant.
- WOO: [Chuckles.]
- MARTIN: But he was very—he was very understanding. He was really rooting for me, and he sort of defended me whenever people would, you know, try to—try to take me down, so a true—a true friend.
- WOO: A true friend. What were some of the plays that you remember doing in New York?
- MARTIN: The first play I did was actually directed by a Dartmouth alum—
- WOO: Wow!
- MARTIN: —from—oh, ten years before me. And so it was called—the play was *The Hollywood Pinafore*, and it was a—it was a [George S.] Kaufman and [Moss] Hart rewriting of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and they had set it in a 1940s Hollywood film studio and changed all the lyrics to the songs. But the music was still the [W. S.] Gilbert & [Arthur] Sullivan music. It was really great. The play was originally written in, like, World War II and had closed because, you know, the World War

broke out. So we were the first revival of it, and it—and it actually was published with our names in it, and—yeah, it was a really—really great experience.

And then I got into another play about a year later with that same company, *Godspell*, and they cast me in the lead, which was somewhat surprising, but—

WOO: Wow!

MARTIN: Yeah. So—

WOO: What do you remember about your—over time—like, the overall time in New York? Was—did you like the—the scene and the culture there more than Dartmouth?

MARTIN: You know, it's different. I always had day jobs in New York, and, you know, day jobs usually come with friends and a social life, so I didn't feel like I kind of pursued theater as hard as I could have when I was living in New York, because you also spend a certain amount of your time and energy earning your paycheck.

But, yeah, I mean, being around a lot more theater in New York compared to the few things that can visit Hanover, that was amazing because you see all kinds of good and bad theater being put on, and it—and it really makes you develop a sense of taste. You can't like everything.

And—yeah—I—although I—you know, I—I don't know. I guess I haven't really processed it [chuckles], what—what that whole early phase in New York has meant in my—in my overall development. But it—it—you know, I'm still friends with a lot of the people from every job I've worked, and the city—the city is just over all a much different animal. You have to—you know a lot more people, but maybe you don't know them as well.

WOO: For sure. Well, walk me through what happened after the early stages in New York. How did—how did you mo- — where did you go from there?

MARTIN: So I was—I did a series of shows where I was sort of like one show I would be in, a person in the show would say,

“Hey, I’m doing another show, and we need a guy to play such-and-such,” and then I would go, and it would be me. And so I was doing, you know, shows to show and show.

And I didn’t have the greatest financial situation, and at one point I was living in—I had a live-and-work situation, where I had to be the secretary to the woman in whose home I lived. And so I kind of got myself into a financial mess with that, because I never had any, you know, money to do anything.

But a friend of mine from a show then got me hired in an ad agency that did sort of medical projects. And we were in a show together, and she said, “Well, you know, come temp for us,” and so I did. And then that turned into a full-time gig, which then later—you know, the company went through a lot of mergers and things, and, you know, I held on.

At one point, I got laid off because of all these mergers, and I said, *I’m going to go back to acting full time, and I’m going to actually get all of my actor’s union cards.* So I spent two years doing that. And I did pretty well, but by that time, I was forty or something and in a different category of actor than what I wanted to be. [Both chuckle.]

But, you know, I was actually doing well. I was doing television, you know, one or two days a week and searching out everything else from, you know, print to theater. And, you know, when you’re an actor, you’re kind of constantly auditioning,—

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: —so that was—that was—

WOO: Yeah.

MARTIN: —what my life was for a number of years. And I still always had some sort of a temp job or day job in the medical education area, and when the financial meltdown, the financial crash happened, I was lucky that my boss said, “You know, you’re a temp. Why don’t you go full time?—

WOO: Wow!

- MARTIN: —And we'll give you insurance.” And so I did. But that kind of meant I had to do less auditioning. And at first, I didn't mind because the auditioning was drying up in the financial crisis.
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: But then when it rebounded, here I was, kind of stuck in more of a career track that was more opportunistic than chosen. And I've been in medical field ever since. And I still do a little bit of—I studied voice for years, and I still do stage readings of plays with a couple of reading groups, and I'm on the board of a theater, but I can't really call myself a professional actor anymore because I just don't ever do it for a paycheck anymore.
- WOO: And to this day, you're still—you're doing me- —ads relating to medical—to the medical-healthcare field?
- MARTIN: No, I'm now more on the medical education side. I work in a medical school, so—
- WOO: How'd you transition?
- MARTIN: I went back to school and got a master's degree on the weekends, you know, specifically in this area, and that was helpful because it—it opened a new set of doors that I couldn't get opened before. And then, you know, as—in academic institutions, people retire, and I was lucky that someone retired from a position I was qualified for about four years ago, so I jumped on it.
- It meant kind of leaving the city and orienting everything toward Long Island [New York], but I was a Manhattan resident until last month for twenty years.
- WOO: Twenty years!
- MARTIN: Yeah. For four years, I commuted from Manhattan to the middle of Long Island for my job, and finally last—last month I moved to Queens [a borough in New York City] to cut my commute in half.

- WOO: Wow. What was the—in your twenty years in Manhattan, what are some defining features of the queer scene, at least for you there? What was it like?
- MARTIN: So my personal queer experience went from zero social life—
- WOO: [Chuckles.]
- MARTIN: —to, like, a very serious boyfriend at one point. That didn't last very long. But I actually had the experience where I—my friends were trying to take me to the nude beach in Sandy Hook, New Jersey, to shock me.
- WOO: [Chuckles.]
- MARTIN: —And I, you know, surprised them by not being bothered by the nudity at all and, in fact, met somebody at the beach, and we became very serious. And I was kind of ready to settle down and, you know, see what being a boyfriend was all about.
- And I was still auditioning for theater, and I got offered a tour of *The Sound of Music*, and I said I would take it, and I signed the contract, and then I broke the contract because I thought, *I want to stick around and see where this relationship's gonna go*. And, you know, you close the door. Two months later, the relationship broke up [both chuckle], and I had—you know, said no to the tour, so—
- WOO: Uh-huh.
- MARTIN: All of my friends who were performers at the time said, “You're crazy! You know, why are you saying no to a tour?” But I guess I—I learned the reason that relationship broke up—the person I was dating was from a different culture, where there is no such thing as out.
- WOO: Mm-hm.
- MARTIN: So he wasn't thinking of the future in the same way I was. He wasn't thinking that could be a stable, you know, committed relationship. At that time, there was no such thing as gay marriage, but he was—I think he—the relationship

always had an expiration date in his mind, so, you know, I learned from that that: Don't assume anything, you know?

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: Put everything on the table. Discuss everything. Yeah. So—and then all of my friends, gay friends have become married in the—in this time, and I think that that's a really major part of New York. You know, New York led in that, recognizing gay marriage in 2011. So it's—it's really changed from a culture of, like, irresponsible sort of one-night stands to now a lot of people are looking to settle—gay people are looking to settle down and start families.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: You know, that's a huge shift to go through in twenty years in New York. I'm not really in that orbit, but—but I think it's great.

WOO: Mm-hm.

Well, as we're winding down the—the interview, we like to ask—we like to move in a more reflective—reflect this day of looking back at all these years, from your childhood to high school to college to New York, your time in New York as an actor and now as a medical professional. What do you think are—how do you think your—how do you think your queer identity not only molded as—as—as you progressed through these spaces, but how do you feel your experience has also molded your queer identity, itself, too?

MARTIN: Well, I guess I would say being a member of a marginalized group for so many years, it—it really developed my empathy to other people in other marginalized groups and made me realize sort of the value of the coalition of the marginalized, the value of listening to people and listening for people's stories and experience that defined where they're different from your own and similar to your own.

I'm not someone who believes this phrase that, "oh, deep down we're all the same," because I think, you know, deep down we're all different. We find commonality. Deliberately, we find commonality. But—so, you know, I really treasure

my empathic ability. I think I had trouble as an actor because when I first started acting, and I think my queer orientation taught me early on as an actor: Be who they want to see. Don't be yourself. Be who they want. That's one way of approaching acting.

Then when I got into acting classes—you know, professional acting classes here in New York, I realized you really can't hide who you are. You're broadcasting who you are at all times, especially when you're on a stage, and if you're trying to hide or deny a side of yourself, it's going to prevent you from doing the job of an actor, which is emotional truth and storytelling.

And I had some instances where it was very difficult. People were trying to sort of get me to come out in an audition or come out in a rehearsal. And I wasn't willing to. And it wasn't even necessarily about being gay. One time somebody asked me, "Oh, do you have kids, or do you ever want to have kids?" And I got very emotional, and I just couldn't, you know, do the work that was being asked because I—it was, you know, too much of an emotional wellspring for me.

And—and so I learned that you—your empathic side is what taps you into other people and makes you sort of worth being listened to or—or heard as an—as an actor, but also not just as an actor, as a human being.

And so now I think that queer people are, I want to say, less marginalized than they were. I don't know—I don't know if everyone would agree with that. But that I think we, the queer community, have to—have to stay in touch with the empathy and the marginalized folks around us, whether they're queer or not.

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: That's—that's what we learned as a community. I think we learned that as a responsibility, because it's really about extending civil rights—

WOO: Yeah.

- MARTIN: —to everyone. There are still pockets of people who don't have those rights, and so we—you know, we learned the path that we have to continue paving.
- WOO: For sure. I mean, the whole—this whole SpeakOut Project, we're here to—it was created to listen and to kind of give space and honor those who came before us interviewers.
- Which leads into my next question, is why—why *did* you choose to participate in this SpeakOut Oral History Project? What—what were some of your motives, and what did you hope to achieve?
- MARTIN: So about, I don't know, three or four years ago, I was at a Dartmouth reunion, class reunion, and there was a DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae] mini-reunion, and my—my now very good friend, Brendan [M.] Connell [Jr., Class of 1987], was the president of DGALA at the time, and he led us into kind of a reflection about, you know, why did we come back? Why did I come back to Dartmouth reunion after twenty years of not coming back?
- WOO: Yeah.
- MARTIN: And we talked about—we talked about *The Dartmouth Review* outing students, and we talked about the shanties, and we talked about some of those really what were very—it felt like damaging experiences at the time, but—but were common touch point for all of us, and I realized that only by staying connected can we sort of heal and transform that scar tissue into stronger—stronger tissue.
- And so—and also not to rob people of the history. If—if you disappear, you rob those who came after of the history. So I just didn't want that experience to disappear.
- WOO: For sure. And speaking of those who come after, what are some pieces of advice that you would—that you'd like to leave to queer Dartmouth students on campus today?
- MARTIN: Get involved. Stay involved. Reach across differences. Make a friend who's dissimilar. I would—I would say that not just to queer people but to all—to all Americans. [Laughs.]

WOO: Mm-hm.

MARTIN: That, you know, really make—make friends across differences. I think that's—that's really important. And—and—and probably so obvious, I'm forgetting to say it, don't hide your life. You know, speak your truth. Be who you are. Closets are for clothes.

WOO: [Chuckles.] Wow. I'd like to thank you so much for your time.

MARTIN: Thank *you*. It's been a pleasure.

WOO: And with that, I think—if there's any last words, any last thoughts you have, now's your time. Is there anything you'd like to add about your overall time, sentiments?

MARTIN: No, I'm—I'm really honored that we—that—that you are engaged in this work, and I—I look forward to, you know, the output. And—and thank you for your interest and your attentiveness. I also want to wish you luck, Nick. I think you have been really great to deal with, and I hope this was a good experience for you.

WOO: Well, we hope to hear back from—from you soon. And stay connected as well. And I'd like to thank you so much again, Mr. Rob Martin.

MARTIN: Yep. Thank you, Nick.

WOO: All right. Bye-bye.

MARTIN: Bye-bye.

[End of interview.]