

Leroy H. Knight Jr. '81
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

ARJUNE: I'm Leanna Arjune, Dartmouth Class of 2019, and today I'm here in Rauner [Special Collections] Library [at Dartmouth College] in Hanover, New Hampshire, interviewing Leroy [H.] Knight Jr. from the Class of [19]81, currently in San Antonio, Texas. Hey, Lee.

KNIGHT: Hi.

ARJUNE: So let's start off with your life before Dartmouth College. Let's go way back into what was your childhood like?

KNIGHT: Well, I was actually born here in San Antonio, and what was my childhood like? I would say it was probably more difficult than most. My parents argued—you know, had a difficult time. They argued a lot. Some of my earliest memories is of my parents arguing and they wound up getting divorced. We came from sort of a lower middle-class neighborhood, and actually that neighborhood is still economically depressed, even to this day. But my mom—she was a registered nurse, and she moved us up to a better part of town, I guess a more affluent part of town, and that was—I think really changed my direction and really made it possible for me to wind up at a place like Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: And how do you think that influenced your change?

KNIGHT: The move, you mean,—

ARJUNE: Yes.

KNIGHT: — or going to Dartmouth?

ARJUNE: The move.

KNIGHT: Well, I wound up at—going to a public high school here called Winston Churchill High School, and I had a really

superb education there. I was very, very well prepared for—for Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Okay. And why did you end up applying to Dartmouth?

KNIGHT: Well, I did very well in high school academically, and had some friends who were applying to Ivy League schools. I really didn't think I had a chance of getting in, but I had one close friend who was going—was going to Dartmouth, and he sort of encouraged me to apply there. So that's how it happened,—

ARJUNE: Okay!

KNIGHT: —and to my great surprise, I was accepted. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Oh, that's great! So let's fast-forward a little bit to being on campus. What was your first impression of being there? How did you feel?

KNIGHT: Well, there was a really big—it was a really big culture shock for me because I had grown up in San Antonio. I hadn't traveled. I had never been to the East Coast. And when I got there, I was—well, I was housed in the Choates [the Choate Cluster], which is sort of—as you know, it's sort of on the outskirts of things.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: And my first impressions were really very disori- —I was really very disoriented and a little bit scared. [Chuckles.] I didn't have—I didn't—I hadn't gone to the—the early—I hadn't—I hadn't been to Dartmouth before my first day of arrival—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —so I didn't have any chance to orient myself. I didn't know anyone. So it was a bit of a lonely, kind of scary experience at first.

ARJUNE: Yeah. And the Choates were still the freshman dorms back then, only freshmen?

KNIGHT: No, I don't believe so.

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: I think—I'm pretty sure it was mixed back then.

ARJUNE: Okay, got it. And did that isolation play any role into your first years, really? Like, how so? Could you expand on that a little bit?

KNIGHT: Sure. Well, in a way it was a pos- —it was a positive in that I think that people who chose to be in that—in the Choates were maybe people who didn't—hadn't—who didn't fit in in the more sort of mainstream Dartmouth communities, and so they kind of—I think they kind of migrated out there. And so it was a really diverse kind of—a little bit of an outsider community. And I think that was good, in a sense, for me because, you know, it helped me get myself—

ARJUNE: Yeah!

KNIGHT: —oriented and grounded.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Did it help with your identity at all, as a student or just in general?

KNIGHT: I think so, yeah.

ARJUNE: Okay. Yeah! So were there any formative experiences in your first year in that area that helped with your identity at all?

KNIGHT: Well, I should say when I arrived at Dartmouth I was deeply closeted.

ARJUNE: Yes.

KNIGHT: And I never—never thought that I would ever be able to come out because that was sort of the—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —my experience in—you know, from growing up in Texas, San Antonio, which was very conservative back then.

ARJUNE: Yup.

KNIGHT: So one interesting thing that happened sort of by chance was that when I moved into Bissell [Hall], which is one of the Choate dormitories, —

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —I'm not sure how they're—if it's changed since then, but they were originally set up with these tiny rooms, where they were literally the size of a closet.

ARJUNE: Yup, they're still the same.

KNIGHT: It was just big enough for—yeah, that's just big enough for a bed and a closet. And the idea then—

ARJUNE: Yup.

KNIGHT: —was that these sui- —there were these suites, and there would be sort of a common room.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: And that's—you know, that would sort of make up for the lack of—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —you know, space. Guys would live in these little, you know, closets, and then you could come and hang out—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —in the—in a common room. But unfortunately, there was a housing crunch at that time, and so the common rooms wound up being—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —used for—as dorms, so, you know, we were basically stuck in—

ARJUNE: Oh!

KNIGHT: —in these [chuckles]—in these little rooms. So—

ARJUNE: Wow.

KNIGHT: —getting on with it, just by chance, living right—directly across the hall from me was a guy. I think he was maybe a year or two ahead of me, who was kind of unusual.

ARJUNE: Yeah?

KNIGHT: He sort of walked around campus with a leather jacket, and he seemed very sort of urban and worldly and confident, and I was very curious about him.

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: I kind of gathered that he was gay, and he was openly gay, which was kind of an anomaly there at Dartmouth at that time. You just didn't see people like—like that around. So gradually I made—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: —you know, I made friends with him, wound up coming out to him. He was actually the first person that I came out to. And—

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: You kind of went from there, because once—there was a very—there was kind of a very tight, small—tight-knit, small community, and once one person—you know, once somebody came out, it was—it was like a grapevine.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: You know, it was like a communications network. So suddenly everybody knows. So, you know, people would show up at my door [chuckles], you know, introducing themselves and saying hello.

ARJUNE: Yeah. [Laughs.]

KNIGHT: And that was kind of—

ARJUNE: Wow!

KNIGHT: It was kind of interes- —you know it was kind of cool in a way. And so that's how I started meeting gay people at Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Oh, okay. And I know Stuart [M.] Lewan [Class of 1979]—your freshman fall was 1977. Am I right?

KNIGHT: Nineteen seventy-seven.

ARJUNE: And he established a G- —yes, 1977, yeah. And he established the Gay Student Support Group around the same time, so were you connected to that at all? I mean, early on is what I'm trying to ask.

KNIGHT: It didn't—that didn't really—I didn't really connect with that until the end of my freshman year, so that—I guess that would have been—

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: —spring of—

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: —'78. That was also—

ARJUNE: Got it. Okay.

KNIGHT: That was basically when I came out, at the end of my freshman year. And then sort of—

ARJUNE: Okay.

KNIGHT: —meeting—meeting gay people, I felt a little bit more encouraged to join the Gay Student Support Group.

ARJUNE: Okay. And how familiar were you with the—the founder?

KNIGHT: With Stuart Lewan?

- ARJUNE: Yes.
- KNIGHT: I'm sorry, with—by founder, you mean Stuart Lewan?
- ARJUNE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- KNIGHT: I just knew him very casually. Yeah, we weren't good friends. I think he—
- ARJUNE: Okay.
- KNIGHT: I think his last year was in 1979.
- ARJUNE: Yep.
- KNIGHT: So just casually.
- ARJUNE: Okay. Okay. So—
- KNIGHT: Here's a really co- —I should say he was a really—
- ARJUNE: Did your involvement—
- KNIGHT: —cool—cool guy. I'm sorry. Go ahead.
- ARJUNE: No, no, you go ahead. Sorry.
- KNIGHT: Oh, I guess we had a little bit—a tiny bit of a delay. Yeah, I was just going to say that Stuart was a really cool guy, and was just very—you know, he was confident, and he was out there at a time when—that was a very, very difficult—I mean, it really took courage at that time. And for him to be, you know, out there in public and starting these support groups—I mean, that was just—that was just really awesome. I really looked—looked up—looked up to him.
- ARJUNE: Okay. So then moving forward—now, you had bigger involvement in the GSSG, which later became the GSA [Gay Students Association]. Can you speak on behalf of the transformation of the club at all? The name, at least?
- KNIGHT: Yes, it—my recollection is that the GSSG became the GSA, which stood for Gay Students Association, and I was—yeah,

I was involved through that period, through that transformation. I don't really remember—

ARJUNE: Yeah, and how were you—

KNIGHT: —who—who—I don't remember really who was in charge during that transition period. I don't know. My memory is a little bit fuzzy, but at some point, I—

ARJUNE: Okay, and then let's talk about—

KNIGHT: —became—go ahead.

ARJUNE: No, no, you go ahead. I'm sorry. There must be a delay within the call.

KNIGHT: Yeah, we have—we have a little bit of a delay on the call. I was going to say that at some point we needed someone to be the face of that group, and so I volunteered to do it. I know that I was co-chair at a certain point, and at some points I was the chair, but I don't remember who the other—who the other chairperson was.

ARJUNE: Okay. And—wow, that's amazing! What did that entail exactly?

KNIGHT: Well, we had some officers, and we wound up getting a little office in the Collis Center [for Student Involvement], along with sort of other groups. It wasn't—it wasn't—I believe it was just a cubicle. It wasn't actually a—sort of an off- —it was an office space, in other words. And so we had regular meetings, and we planned social events, and we had speakers. We had arranged for movie screenings. We tried to do—we tried to organize events that would just bring people together, reach out, get people talking.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Okay. That's great! So were you familiar with other incidents that happened on campus around the same time you were involved in this? I know Eric [W.] Stults [Class of 1980] was—had an incident. He was supposed to be Class of '80, I believe. Have you—do you know anything about that incident to speak on?

KNIGHT: I do. I know—I did meet Eric early on. He was involved in the group. And he confided in me about the incident that happened to him.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Okay. Can you expand on that at all?

KNIGHT: Sure, sure.

ARJUNE: From your point of view.

KNIGHT: My understanding—sure. My understanding from him was that he had been openly gay or at least talking—telling—letting people know that he was gay—you know, sort of comfortable in his identity. Somebody, either someone he knew or someone in the circle found out about it and drugged him, and he—I believe he was sexually assaulted and left—basically left for dead.

ARJUNE: Wow.

KNIGHT: I'm not sure whether—where he was left, but he was found. He was rescued. But, you know, he had—some serious health issues came from that. And I have to say, when he told me that, I was—I had—really had trouble believing him. I mean, I was incredulous because I thought, *How could something like that possibly happen at Dartmouth?* And I think other people sort of had the same feeling. They thought, *Well, is he crazy?* But, no, I don't believe he was crazy. I—I—I believe that really happened to him. You know, somebody—somewhere out there there's someone who got away with attempted murder. It was a different—it was a different time, I guess.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Did that shape the community at all, or the organization, the GSA in particular?

KNIGHT: You know, I don't think it did. I think it was so horrific that people either didn't believe it or they didn't want to believe it. It just—it just seemed to—it was just too much, and I think—I think—I think many of us just didn't believe that something like that could happen, and so we just kind of went along our—along the way. I don't think any—many of us didn't realize how—how dangerous it might have been to be openly gay at Dartmouth at that time.

And I have another incident to relate, which probably hasn't been told before.

ARJUNE: Yeah. What's the incident?

KNIGHT: So this was—I wish I could narrow—I wish I could pin down exactly when it was, but it probably would have been in 1980, would be my best guess, but we had—we had regular meetings. I don't remember they were—whether they were—they might have been as often as weekly, but the Gay Students Association had regular meetings, where—and they were sort of like talk groups. People could talk about any- —anything they wanted to, and usually there was—generally—used to be personal things, so it was a little bit like—a little bit like a group therapy, although I was not—you know, obviously not trained to do something like that, but I think I was a good facilitator in terms of getting people to talk and so on.

So at any rate, we were at one of our regular meetings, and I was sitting in such a way that I could see the front—the entry—the hallway that—that entered into the room where—we were in. It was a pretty large room. And I don't think—no one else—everyone else was sort of seated around me in the semicircle, and I looked over at the entryway, and I saw three guys, and at least one of them had a baseball bat. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Wow!

KNIGHT: They were—they were big guys. I don't know if they were students or not. I didn't recognize them. But they sort of, you know, lingered there in the hallway, and they looked like they were about to do something, but I think what happened was they—they didn't find what they expected. In other words, I think they expected to find, you know, these flaming gay—gay people, you know, outrageously dressed, but we were basically just, you know, some normal looking students. There were women there, too, which they probably didn't expect. And so I think they were going to come and [chuckles]—and inflict some damage, and they were just—they were flustered, and they just left, so nothing—nothing happened.

I think I confided that to probably a couple of close friends, but, again, it was sort of—I don't know, I—I—I didn't know—I didn't know how to handle it. I mean, I didn't—should I have gone to—you know, gone to the administration? I mean, what—what can you do, really? And if I had—I felt that if I had told people in the group, you know, they'd never show up again. So it was sort of a—it was a dilemma, I guess.

ARJUNE: Yeah. So were you the only one able to actually see the people with the bats, then?

KNIGHT: I'm pretty sure I was the only one, yeah. I mean, that was another thing,—

ARJUNE: Okay. Wow.

KNIGHT: —is I didn't really have any way of corroborating it.

ARJUNE: Wow. That is—that's pretty disturbing. And you said this was in 1980, right?

KNIGHT: I believe it was in 1980.

ARJUNE: Around 1980. Was this, by any chance, around—I know you were also—you relocated out of the Wheeler dorms around that same time, 1980. Was it around the same time you relocated out of the Wheeler dorms?

KNIGHT: I don't know exactly—I don't know—I don't know the timing of it. I think when I was—during my involvement, I know that we were really making an effort to be kind of out there, to be public. We had put—we put posters around. There were, I think, you know, editorials—not editorials. There were stories in *The Dartmouth*—you know, the college newspaper. And so we really—that was one of our goals, is just to try to be out there. We wanted to kind of make it—people who were closeted feel like a little bit safer, like there was maybe a little more visibility so maybe they could get up the courage to come to our meetings or maybe talk to someone outside of our meetings.

And so I think because of that, there was a backlash, so, for example, I remember one incident where we put—there was

a poster that was put up in—I believe it was in Baker Library [Fisher Ames Baker Memorial Library, now Baker-Berry Library], and I came by and looked at it, and someone had written, “Kill”—someone had written “KILL GAYS” on it, in big letters.

At any rate, as I say, I think there was a bit of a backlash, and I wound—I had—I wound up moving into Wheeler, which was more of a mainstream dorm. I had a roommate at first, but he wound up moving out, so I had—I had sort of a—you know, a big room to myself, and I had at least one sort of social gathering there with the GSA. And I think there were repercuss- —there were repercussions around that because people in the dorm knew about it, and they were really afraid of—people had a fear of sort of contamination. They were afraid that Wheeler would—would get this reputation of being a place—a gay—you know, a gay place, a place where—you know.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: And there was a lot of—so there was a reaction to that, and the reaction was people would scrawl slurs, sort of hateful things on my door. People would bang—people would bang on my door in the middle of the night, wake me up. At that time, there was a communal phone on each floor, and so the phone would ring and, you know, whoever was around would answer it and then go knock on someone’s door, so I would get—you know, that’s how my mom communicated with me. And I found out that people weren’t—would answer the phone and not—not communicate that my mom had called.

So it was a pretty hostile—it was a pretty hostile environment, and I was very, very stressed out. I don’t know how long I was there, but I wound up going to the housing agency, the campus housing agency, and I told them—wrote a letter, told them about my situation, and they moved me into Foley House.

ARJUNE: Okay. And how was that?

KNIGHT: That was—that turned out to be a pretty good fit. Foley House at that time was on Frat Row [Webster Avenue]. It

was—I believe it was right next to Phi Delt[a Alpha]. So it was right in the middle of Frat Row, but it was sort of a countercultural fraternity. I think they had—it had started out being a typical fraternity, and it wound—it attracted—it wound up attracting people who were sort of countercultural and progressive, diverse and so on. And I think—I believe they wound up dissociating—disconnecting from the national chapter and sort of became their own thing. And so Foley House was the—it was sort of an alternative living—living community. It's probably similar to the way it is today. I was just looking online at how it is today. Although the house physically has been—it's a different house now, so it's not—it's not on Frat Row anymore.

ARJUNE: Yeah, definitely. No, it's not.

KNIGHT: But it was a good fit for me because people were very accepting and—yeah, I felt pretty—I felt comfortable there. I felt accepted there, so it was a good—good experience.

ARJUNE: Okay. That's great. It's good that you were able to resolve that situation somewhat.

I want to circle back a little bit to when you mentioned the incident with the baseball bats. You mentioned that there were women at the GSA meetings. Can you speak a little bit about how the gender balance was at these sort of meetings?

KNIGHT: Sure. From the beginning, I—I think my evolution in terms of gay libber—gay liberation, gay activism was influenced by feminism, feminist ideas. That went way back to when I was in high school. I remember—you know, I—had a single mom who, you know, was—worked very hard, and she was a really strong figure. And so I had—I had kind of feminist leanings as far back as that. And so that kind of shaped my—that was really important to my political—I guess the evolution of my political identity. And then, of course, the civil rights movement was also a part of that, so from the very beginning, I had a strong kind of feminist bent, and I was determined to try to get women involved in the Gay Students Association.

And I think that around that time—around that time, it wasn't that say because I think lesbians tended to be—feel separate from the gay male community, and I think they were a little bit distrustful of us, so there was some distrust on both sides. So I—I—I know I did, and other people who were in—active in the group at that time really made the effort to reach out and make women feel comfortable there. And we were successful. We had a good—good results there.

As far as the balance, I think maybe—my recollection is maybe we would have a quarter to a third of members would be—would be women, on average.

And keep—keep in mind—keep in mind also that at that time, Dartmouth was not completely co-ed. I believe it was still one—about the same proportion. I think it was still about one quarter to one third women. So women were still slowly being integrated into Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Okay. I didn't realize it was a slow integration.

Also, in regards to meetings, I know in *The Dartmouth* you were referred to as the rap leader. Can you expand on that at all?

KNIGHT: I'm sorry, as the what?

ARJUNE: The rap leader. I'm not exactly sure what that means.

KNIGHT: Can you spell that? W-r-a-t-h, you mean?

ARJUNE: R-a-p and then leader.

KNIGHT: The rat leader.

ARJUNE: No, no, r-a-p.

KNIGHT: Oh, rap leader. Oh, okay. Yeah, what that refers to [chuckles]—I had completely forgotten we used that word. Yeah, that just means that I was—we had rap sessions. And that's—that's what I was describing before, was where we had these meetings where—"rapping" meaning just talking, people just kind of—it was an open meeting. Anyone could

talk. Yeah, so that's where that—that's where that—that term came from.

ARJUNE: Okay. Great. I know—moving forward, let's go back to more of the incidents that happened on campus while you were there. Tri-Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa], in 1980, banned gay dancing, and you wrote a letter to the editor on—reflecting on this. Can you expand on the incident and how you feel about it?

KNIGHT: Sure. So I know there was at least one per- —I mean, I've been told from other people who were involved in Tri-Kap that there were quite a few gay men in that fraternity around that time, and one of the—one of the guys was starting—was involved with the Gay Students Association, and I think he might have been at one of their social events. He might have been the one who was dancing with another guy, so this caused a big uproar in the house, and I guess they had a meeting, and they decided, you know, "We can't have this. It's bad for our reputation." And so they—I think they actually wrote it into their constitution that dancing and other—other overtly—quote-unquote—"overtly homosexual" activities would not be allowed.

So I thought that was pretty funny because I didn't think that dancing was an overtly homosexual activity. [Chuckles.] I mean, it was just—it was just dancing. And so I kind of, tongue in cheek, suggested that, "Well, if dancing with a member of the same sex is homosexual, then so is being in a fraternity, so it is playing football," et cetera, et cetera. So I don't think that went over very well. It was a little bit—maybe a little bit—I don't know. But anyway, it didn't go over very well, and I think there was a lot of animus towards me for that.

And I actually—we used to have—they used to have these events called Hums every year. Do you still have Hums?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: Probably not. Oh, you *do* still have Hums.

ARJUNE: Hums. I don't think so. Yeah. No, I don't think so.

KNIGHT: Well, this was sort of—this was sort of an event where the fraternities would get together, and they would make up songs, usually satirical songs, and they would sing the songs for, you know, sort of big—big groups of people. And I found—I didn't go to Hums, but I found out that they—that they had mentioned me in one of their songs, in a very unflattering way. [Laughs.]

ARJUNE: Wow. Oh, wow!

KNIGHT: Yeah, so that was kind of—in a way, being openly gay, being the face of that group was—was alienating, and it kind of prevented me from making social connections with people that I otherwise might have made. But it was also very empowering because I felt like I was doing something good, you know?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: And there weren't a lot of people who had the wherewithal and the sort of passion, even to the point of obsession, I guess, to—to carry—carry through with keeping that—that organization going.

ARJUNE: Yeah. It seems like the organization really relied on you in those years as the face—

I wanted to ask about another incident that happened a little later with the GSA. *The Dartmouth Review*—this was probably right before you graduated. They stole names of the GSA officers.

KNIGHT: Yes, that—

ARJUNE: Are you famil- —you were—yeah, you were interviewed for this, yeah.

KNIGHT: Yeah, I was—I was the chair at that time, and as I recall—I think I mentioned before, we had a little sort of office area in Collis, and we kept our meeting notes and administrative papers and things like that there. And one day I remember one of the other members telling—telling me that our fi- —someone had broken into our files and taken some of our papers, our materials. And shortly thereafter—shortly

thereafter, come to find out *The Dartmouth Review* had published excerpts from those materials and printed the names of officers.

So this was a pretty nasty [chuckles]—this was a pretty nasty thing to do, and some of those people were kind of in that twilight area of being—you know, they were op- — they—they didn't feel they were—by being officers in the Dartmouth Gay Students Association, they really didn't feel that anyone was going to go back and tell their parents about it or, you know—and so on.

And some- —and at least, you know, a couple of those guys really weren't even out among their immediate friends. So it just wasn't expected that something like that would happen. And so it was pretty nasty thing to do because, you know, you could be disowned by your parents, you could be ostracized by your friends, you could be attacked. You know, it—it really put—put some of us in physical danger.

So—but I guess, you know, on the other hand, we were—we were officially—we were officially officers, so I—I don't know what the rules were, but I suppose maybe we *were* public. Maybe the information was public. But certainly there was information that was published that was—that was private, so it was a violation. And it was—it was pretty traumatic. And I am sure—I'm sure it, you know, made some people turn away and, you know, not—realize that they could not become involved and not be openly gay.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Were there other ways for these people to possibly feel comfortable in, at Dartmouth or was this it?

KNIGHT: Well, I imagine that it was kind- —I—I—I imagine it was kind of like an expanding network, so—in the sense that there was a core group of—there was a core group of people who kept that organization going and did all the administrative stuff and the organizing and so on, and then there were people that weren't active, who would come to meetings. And those people obviously had friends, and their friends had friends, and so I think it probably kind of—the support kind of radiated out, in a way, in the sense that, you know, some—say—

Someone who came to our—one of our meetings was—they weren't open, but coming to the meetings helped them feel more confident, and eventually they were able to come out to their friends, and so I think in that sense it—it was kind of slowly working—we were slowly working our way in, and I—by the time I left, I—I kind of felt like there was more support growing for gays—gay activism, gay rights among the broader Dartmouth community.

ARJUNE: Okay. Let's look at, then, the bigger picture outside of Dartmouth, itself. I know you graduated in '81, and the AIDS epidemic started around '80. How did that—did that have any impact on your time at Dartmouth?

KNIGHT: Well, I'll tell you—I can say that—I'll tell you a story. [Chuckles.] I believe in 1980, circa 1980 I and some other—a few other people in—in the GSA wound up going to a conference at UVM, University of Vermont. It was a gay conference. There were gay—gay activists, speakers there, Karla Jay and Allen Young, who wrote a gay history.

And at that conference—it was very empowering. It was very exciting. And I wound up meeting a guy who was then a student. I believe he was a pre-med student at UVM. And we became very close. We had a romance that went on two or three years. And he was an older guy. He was maybe almost ten years older, and so he was really important in terms of my emotional development and learning how to be intimate with someone, how to talk to someone, how to—how to be in a loving relationship and so on.

And he was—he wound up doing his residency in San Francisco [California], and I spent a term over there. I believe it was perhaps in 1981. It was, in other words, an off-campus term. I think it was a summer. And I spent the time with him, and that was the first time—since he was a physician, he was really—and also, he was very activist in the gay—gay movement. He learned very—he learned very early about what was then called “the gay cancer,” and then it became GRID [gay-related immune deficiency] and then eventually it became HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome].

And so I—I guess I started hearing about it probably sooner than most people did, but I think it was still—by the time I graduated, I think it was still kind of on the—on the fringe of our—we—we had the impression that it was just very, very promiscuous or sexually active guys; it was happening to people who were just really, you know, very, very sexually active. And we thought drugs might be involved and whatnot.

So when I left Dartmouth, it was kind of—I didn't feel really affected by that. But shortly—it was just shortly thereafter that, you know, boom! It just hit—hit the community. And it was kind of like—during my period at Dartmouth, I had—I was kind of like—I felt like, *This is a brave new world, and gay liberation is happening, and—and nothing is going to stop us.* And then suddenly I got out and—and boom! There was this huge, you know, roadblock and this huge catastrophe that—that was happening to the community.

And it was very frightening, and it was very depressing, and, you know, it went on for a long period. [Chuckles.] It was really, like, 1980 to 1988—1998, when—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: So—yeah. But, you know, another thing that I always remember is this doctor guy that I had the relationship with—he said that—“If—if only there were—if only there were a magic dust that—like a fairy dust that you could sprinkle on everyone, and you could see that they're gay.” So in other words, we thought, *If only everyone could come out and you would know that they're gay, then everything would be okay.*

Well, in a very sinister way, HIV/AIDS was that fairy dust, in the sense that, you know, people—people—gay men—people that—you know, gay men, who had been able to be invisible before suddenly were very visible, and they were ostracized, and they were pariahs, and it was, you know, a horrible, horrible thing. But, on the other hand, you know, there were people who could see, “Well, wow! That—that was—you know, that was a really good guy. He was a family member. He was a friend, you know. And that—that was not fair. You know, what happened to him was not fair.”

And I think in a sense that sensibility kind of permeated the greater community and—and communities in America. And so in a very kind of horrible and sinister way, HIV/AIDS, you know, helped our community, helped strengthen our community, helped strengthen our acceptance. That's my—that's my feeling. I don't know.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Okay. Wow! That's something!

KNIGHT: That's intense.

ARJUNE: So then after—yeah, it is intense, indeed. So after graduation, then, were you connected to still to people on campus? Did this at all have, like,—did you know, like, how it was affecting maybe people back in New Hampshire, or were you then from that point disconnected from Dartmouth post graduation?

KNIGHT: I was pretty disconnected. You mean before graduation or after graduation?

ARJUNE: After.

KNIGHT: After graduation—I'll tell you, I can remember the day that I finished my last class, and I was sitting—I went to sit out on—on one of the Greens, and I just felt this huge, this incredible weight just almost physically, literally rise from—from my body. [Chuckles.] And I—I just hadn't realized how—how tense I had been. And so I think I kind of felt like—at that point, I felt like Dartmouth was a really traumatic experience, and I wanted to just get away from there and kind of restart my life and get reoriented and regrounded.

So I—I think mentally I just kind of turned—turned off—turned off Dartmouth. I did—I maintained friendships with other people, you know, a few friendships.

ARJUNE: Okay. So did—what did you—do you want to go into, like, what did you do after Dartmouth, what you started doing, and how your time at Dartmouth had an impact on what you started doing after?

KNIGHT: Sure. Well, when I started at Dartmouth, I had the idea that I was going to be—get a Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] in

English literature. That's what I was interested in. I was also interested in creative writing. That was one—one element of it. But I got—I got kind of disenchanted with my perception of what academic—academia would be like, and so I kind of felt—I also felt financial pressures. I didn't really have—you know, I didn't really have a lot of financial resources, and so I was kind of in the dark, in a way, when I got out of Dartmouth.

You know, I had had these experiences with gay—gay activism, but, you know, I couldn't—there was really nothing for me to do with that in terms of—I couldn't make a living being a gay activist [chuckles] at that time. So I had to figure—I had to figure something out, and I wound up—had some sort of friends of friends in Boston [Massachusetts]. I wound up going there, staying with them, and it was actually pretty random, but I just—one of these guys had—worked at a department store. It was called Jordan Marsh. I'm not sure—I guess it still exists. I'm not sure. But it was a big—it was a big department store, and I wound up just falling into that.

And so that did not turn out well. [Laughs.] And I—I was really kind of—you know, I—I think Dartmouth—Dartmouth was a wonderful experience. I got a superb education there, and I'm, you know, just so thankful for that. And I got—I had—I was on full scholarships. And, you know, in a sense, I was the—I was an example of the American dream. You know, I was a, you know, lower-class kid who was able to go to, you know, this amazing school and get this amazing experience and get—get this amazing education.

But I was really kind of, you know, blindsided by this whole process of coming out, this whole process of being in an intense kind of feeling, like I'm in an antagonistic relationship with society, feeling like I couldn't—at that time, I didn't feel like I could be openly gay and get a corporate job. I just didn't feel like it was possible. And I—I really didn't feel like that was where I was, you know, or where I wanted—where I wanted to be.

So I really wound up drifting for quite a while after Dartmouth. I spent a couple of years in Boston. And then I met a guy, fell in love, and he was—this was after a couple

of years. And he had been accepted at Columbia School of Social Work, and so I moved there with him to New York [New York], and that was the start of new era.

I remember when I first arrived in New York just feeling like, *This is home*. I just—it was a really, really great feeling. I felt—for the first time in my life, I felt like I was home, where I was somewhere where I belonged. And I was in a relationship, and—and so that was—that was a happy time.

But I never really—you know, what you were supposed to do with a Dartmouth education was, you know, get a job on Wall Street or get—you know, get some sort of corporate job or go—or go back to your—go back to your home community and become a lawyer or become a doctor. And none of those things really—I didn't—[didn't] really work for me—I didn't really know what to do.

So I wound up working in a law firm. I got a job in a law firm, because I was really—I was a good typist, and I liked computers, and so I got a job as a word processor. And that's—I did that for many years. I was really—that was how I supported myself. And it was good in a way because it—it allowed me a lot of freedom. It was not particularly stressful. You know, I made enough to—enough to live on. And I could play—I could play a lot. I could go—I could go out. I could go to parties. I could go to bars. That was a period for me of becoming social, or learning how to be social.

ARJUNE: Yeah. So I want to go back a little bit, since you're talking a lot more about class. Do you think your socioeconomic status had an impact on you within your other identity at Dartmouth—or just your time at Dartmouth in general?

KNIGHT: I think so. I know when I—I remember when I first arrived at Dartmouth, I didn't have the right clo- —you know, I was coming from San Antonio, Texas, and I didn't have the right clothes, and I didn't have—my clothes—my clothes weren't warm enough, and I didn't have a lot of money to spend on clothes, and people dressed differently, and I didn't have—you know, I was going to a public high school. I didn't really have a lot of experience with people who were sort of upscale affluent, and so I'm pretty sure that I stuck out. So I think—I think it did—I think it did make things more difficult

my—my socioeconomic status. But, you know, I learned. I picked things up. I started wearing khaki pants.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

KNIGHT: [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Okay.

So let's go back to—let's fast forward a little bit more to today now. So looking back on all of that, how do you feel—how do you feel *now* about your LG—about your identity?

KNIGHT: About my gay identity?

ARJUNE: Yes.

KNIGHT: Well, I feel great. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

KNIGHT: You know, it was—it was a long process, but I—well, let me—let me back up a little bit. I—one thing I found out much—you know, really decades after I left Dartmouth was that I have a diagnosis of dysthymia, which is sort of a low-grade depression and sort of—and also some anxiety. And I didn't—you know, I—I—I'm pretty sure I had that from—at least from adolescence. And so that was a part of myself that—it was hard for me to sort of distinguish between my I guess illness, my—my diagnosis and the pressure and the stress of trying to be an openly gay man.

And I also had self-esteem problems, very—pretty intense self-esteem issues. And it was a very—it was a very, very long process for me to get integrated. [Chuckles.] And it was really—it was really decades, and I think that it was—what it—what it took was me finding a really good psychiatrist, a really good talk therapist and then getting on some—some meds. You know, I—I—I still take some pretty kind of mild medication, but it's—it just completely changed my life. It just made me much more balanced and kind of like gave me a ground on which to be—be together. [Chuckles.]

So it was a long process. It was a difficult process. But I could—I would say that happened when I had the—the psychiatric sort of breakthrough. That was probably ten to fifteen years ago, so it wasn't that long ago. But, happily, right now I'm a very happy, well-adjusted, integrated person. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Okay. [Chuckles.]

And looking back on your time there, at Dartmouth, or just, like, all your experiences now, would you say that those shaped you into who you are today?

KNIGHT: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I you know, I used to think, *God—I used to think, Gosh, if I hadn't been so dumb and naïve, I never would have come out. I would have made some really, you know,—made some really good connections, social connections at Dartmouth.* You know, I graduated magna cum laude. I was really—I had distinctions. You know, I had high distinctions in English. I had citations. So I had, like, a really great academic record, and I could have turned that into a really great job, and I could be retired right now. [Chuckles.]

But, you know—but then I—but then I think we—*Hold on. I think, Hold on a minute. I mean, that—that's just a different path—you know, that's a different path, and who knows what—what would have happened?* And I really think that, yes, Dartmouth did shape me. And yes, it was difficult. Yes, it was traumatic. But you know what? I survived it, and I learned a lot, and I was a much stronger—I'm a much stronger person for it. And, as I said, I had just a superb education.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

Have you done any, like, activism work or anything related to the LGBTQIA [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual] community recently or just in your life since you graduated Dartmouth, since you were able to become comfortable?

KNIGHT: Yes. In—let's see. I lived in San Diego [California] before—I—I moved back to San Antonio a couple of years ago, and I

lived in San Diego about twenty—well, let's see, from 1992 for about—I moved there in 1992 or '93 and lived there for about twenty-three years. And I wound up meeting some—I went to Los Angeles [California] a lot, maybe just to kind of hang out, and I wound up getting connected with the Dartmouth alumni community there.

Actually, it was a gay alumni—Ivy League gay alumni group, which was based in Los Angeles. And so I became active in that group for quite a number of years. At one point, I was president of that group.

ARJUNE: Wow.

KNIGHT: And it was mainly a social—pretty much a social organization. We did some political activism, but it was more like a networking—I think—I think people joined that group because they—they just wanted to meet other people who had intellectual interests, who had a cultural interest, who had gone to Ivy League schools and had kind of a similar experience, and I think that might have been a little—it might have been a little difficult in Los Angeles, greater Los Angeles area. So that was one thing I was involved in.

And more recently, I became somewhat involved in PrEP activism. And by PrEP, I mean pre-exposure prophylaxis. I hope I got that term right, pre-exposure prophylaxis. And what that is is—you probably already know, but I'll go ahead and—and explain that.

ARJUNE: That would be great.

KNIGHT: It's the use—the use of Truvada, which is an HIV medication, use of Truvada for prevent—to prevent HIV infections. And so this—this started, I believe, in about 2012, this—I believe it was green-lit by the FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration]. And I—it was sort of—I didn't really find out about it until years later, and when I did, I got involved with a Facebook community, which is called PrEP Facts [: Rethinking HIV Prevention and Sex]. And this was sort of a Facebook group that I became involved with.

And I discovered that here we had this amazing medication that gay men could take with very—you know, very little or

no side effects. Most people have no side effects whatsoever. And yet there was this huge resistance in the medical community. There was even a huge resistance in the gay community to this life-saving—you know, potentially life-saving, epidemic-ending medication.

And so I became involved in that. I—pretty much locally in San Diego, I did some advocacy and did some outreach there and wrote—wrote letters to medical—to medical providers. And then I was involved in the Facebook group as well. The Facebook group was where anyone could come and—could come and get information about PrEP or if they—if they were in some remote, you know, rural community in the U.S. or really any- —anywhere in the world, they could get help. You know, they could get connections. There were a lot of medical people involved in that group. There were advocates, social workers, researchers. It's really an amazing community that developed. And so I—I was involved with that.

When I came to San Antonio, I wanted to continue to be involved in that but just sort of wound up drifting away and pursuing other interests. You know, so it's still—it's still of interest to me, and I still, you know, talk—talk to people all about it whenever I can, and I'm—very likely will get involved with that again. But something I'm really excited about, because I think—you know, it could mean the end of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and that's—that's a pretty exciting thing for me, for someone who, you know, lived through the dark years.

ARJUNE: Yeah, I can imagine! Wow! That's fantastic!

Is there anything that you feel we didn't touch on today that you really want to touch on in this interview?

KNIGHT: Well, let's see, I made some notes here. Let me look through and see if there's anything. [Pause as he reads the notes.]

ARJUNE: Oh, I have a question.

KNIGHT: Sure.

ARJUNE: So how did you end up getting involved in—so you were involved in the alumni network in L.A. Was that connected to DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association] at all?

KNIGHT: Not directly, but there were people who were in DGALA who were also in that group

ARJUNE: Okay. And are you involved at all currently, or in the past were you involved with DGALA?

KNIGHT: I was involved for a short—short period. I just kind of participated in some phone conferences and—and so on, and I'm on the mailing list. I'm not active in it right now, but I'm in con- —you know, I'm in touch with Stuart Lewan via Facebook, and he has let me know that things have really changed at Dartmouth. And he—he went back there and had a really great experience going to an LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] reunion. And so it's something I'd like to do. I would like to go back there and reconnect with Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Okay. Otherwise, how did you find SpeakOut? How did you find us?

KNIGHT: Through Facebook. There was a—I belong to the DGALA group on Facebook, and there was a notice that came up about SpeakOut.

ARJUNE: Got it. Okay.

KNIGHT: But I don't see any—I can't think of anything else offhand that I haven't—that I haven't covered.

ARJUNE: Yeah. I feel like we've really covered a lot of your time on campus, before, during and after.

KNIGHT: Yeah.

ARJUNE: So, yeah. Okay. Then that's all I have for today. Thank you so much for participating in this project. I'm going to stop the recoding soon,—

KNIGHT: Thank *you*.

ARJUNE: —but I just want to say once again—yeah, thank you. I'm Leanna at Rauner Library. Today is May 18th, 2018, and I just had an amazing interview with Leroy Knight, Class of '81, and he is located in San Antonio, Texas. Thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording now.

[End of interview.]