Nicholas “Nick” Chamousis ’73
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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[NICHOLAS X.]

WOO: Thank you so much for being here with me, Nick. My name is also Nick, Nick Woo. I am a ’20 here at Dartmouth. It is November 20th, 2019, 3:05 p.m. Eastern time. I am in the Ticknor Room of the Rauner Special Collections Library here at Dartmouth. Could you tell—state your name and tell me where you’re at right now?

CHAMOUSIS: Okay. My name is Nick Chamousis [pronounced chuh-MOO-sis]. I’m Class of 1973. It is 3:06, I presume. It’s the 20th of November, 2019, and I am sitting in my office, my law office, with the door closed. And I’m speaking with my namesake, Nick Woo, or Nick.

WOO: [Laughs.] Terrific. There might be a lot of “Nick” “Nick” going back and forth.

CHAMOUSIS: That’s okay.

WOO: —but I think that’ll be very funny. I thank you so much for your time with me here today.

CHAMOUSIS: It’s my pleasure.

WOO: Without further ado—[Both chuckle.]—I like to start these interviews by asking you about your childhood:—

CHAMOUSIS: Okay.

WOO: —how you—how your family was like growing up and any particular memories that you had, particularly in your early years.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay, and we’re going through childhood up through roughly what age would you—

WOO: Let’s say elementary school.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay.

WOO: How do you remember your years growing up in elementary school?

CHAMOUSIS: Okay. Well, let me just start by saying that as a member of the Class of ’73, I guess I’m a child of the fifties and sixties, and I am a first-generation Greek American. My parents were both born in Greece. My dad was here. He went back, married my mom, and having done the math, I deduced that she left Greece pregnant with me and landed on our shores. And I was born shortly after.

Greek was my first language, until I went to kindergarten. I was brought up in the Greek Orthodox Church, and regrettably, my—my dad died when I was nine years old, leaving a single mom, as it were, with two children. I have a younger sister, in a not-so-very-good neighborhood. So she had a lot on the plate, and I felt that I had—I felt that I had a lot on my plate too.

I didn’t really consider myself an effeminate child, but my dad was a cook, and my mother was a homemaker, so I sort of developed this pastime of playing with pots and pans, which scared my dad, and so I remember—I remember distinctly at one time, I was given a football for, like, my fifth birthday. So I had a very tough childhood—I sort of lived a dichotomy, if you will. I—I grew up in this very tough neighborhood. It was predominantly white neighborhood. I would say we aspired to the lower middle class. And there were a lot of kids in my neighborhood who—a couple of them who ended up in what was then called “reform school,” because they were “juvenile delinquents.”

And I was constantly—I was constantly bullied. I was not bad at sports, but I wasn’t good enough to contend with anyone that I grew up with, so I was always the last guy to be picked, or they would say, “We’ll take So-and-so. We’ll take Nick if you give us So-and-so.”

WOO: Oh, no!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, yeah. So my self-esteem in my neighborhood was—was shattered. And I had—I was physically bullied, too, and I

thought about what I would reveal in this interview, and I just said—I just said, *Go for it*. But there were—there were a couple of times where they—they got me on the ground and pulled my pants down and said, “Ha-ha, he has a cock” or “He has a penis.” So I had some very, very painful experience and memories.

On the other hand, in school, where there was a different population, if you will, a different cohort, I excelled in school. I was highly respected. I was a class officer. And so also school was my key to getting out of my neighborhood.

WOO: For sure.

CHAMOUSIS: So that was—that formed a lot of who I was. Also, growing up in the church and being the only boy—my mom had four siblings, none of whom married, and my dad was substantially older than my mom, which I guess was sort of a nod to the—the old Greek way, as it were. So my—I never met my—my—I never met my paternal grandparents. They had long predeceased—they were long dead before I even arrived.

So out of all of these—all these elders, if you will, I was—I was the boy, and culturally—my sister was loved dearly, but she was sort of—not trivialized, but I was the boy. And so I had to at a really ear- —particularly given the role I had in my family, I sort of took it upon myself to become my mom’s confidant and et cetera, et cetera, and I was writing checks when I was—checks, you know, for utilities and rent when I was in fifth grade.

So I don’t—go ahead.

WOO: Is this what you kind of mean when you said that you felt a lot on your plate?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. You know, that—that’s part of it. But there was also—there was also this articulation, for lack of a better word, that, you know, I would grow up and I would be this, you know, successful young guy, and I would marry, and I would have a family, and—and the name would be carried on, because I was the only—I was the only male in this extended family.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: And I remember clearly, by the time I got to eighth grade, that I had this attraction—I think—I think—yeah, I would say an attraction to a couple of guys in my—in my eighth grade class, who were athletes, et cetera. I didn’t necessarily know—I didn’t know what to—whether I could affix a label to it, but I just—I remember holding them in high esteem, as it were, and reserving my—a couple of pages in my eighth grade autograph book (which still sits in my desk, by the way)—

WOO: Aww!

CHAMOUSIS: [recording glitch; unintelligible] my autograph book. So that’s—so there was no—yeah, so that’s—that’s the—a good essence of my—of my childhood.

WOO: Okay.

CHAMOUSIS: Feel free to—feel free to fire away and ask more questions. I—I hope I’ve been responsive.

WOO: That—it’s been terrific. I kind of want to pry you more on some things that you mentioned. You mentioned the dichotomy between your social life in your neighborhood versus at school. Why do you think it was—why do you think it was like that?

CHAMOUSIS: Just—just because school was a totally—a totally different environment, and there were different kids in my class from the ones in my neighborhood, so school was an escape for me in so many ways. And also I loved school. I loved learning. I was, you know, always the teacher’s pet.

WOO: I see.

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] The teacher’s used to let me write exams. [Both chuckle.] Which didn’t exactly endear me to my classmates, but I could also use that as leverage. Like, if—

WOO: Against the bullies? [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, against the bullies. Literally. So—this is really hard. I open up a lot. I open up a lot. I mean, I’ve been in therapy for a long time, but this is very—very hard to open up in a way where I know that complete strangers will have access to this. But I think it’s a very good—it’s a wonderful thing to do, and I hope—and I hope—I hope my tales, as they are, you know, just help somebody.

WOO: It is, for sure, because a lot of—a lot of queer students even today are facing a lot of bullying, whether in their neighborhoods, in their families or at school and them knowing that there were people who came before them, who also endured similar if not [chuckles] worse things is something that at least for me has been very impactful and influential in how—how I—how I lead this world, with confidence and with—with strength, you know.

CHAMOUSIS: Right, right.

WOO: On the same vein, do you mind—

CHAMOUSIS: I’ll make a point now—oh, I’m sorry. I just—

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: —I don’t want to get ahead of myself, but since you made that point, the most amazing—one of the most amazing gifts that we as human beings could have is a) our physical and mental health, love and friendship, and also the ability to be yourself and to be accepted as who you are. And that took me decades to get to. We’ll see as we go through my narrative here.

WOO: Mmm. It is tough. And it—it’s kind of clear that your childhood, growing up, was equally tough. You mentioned the dynamic between you and your sister, where you, as the male, felt like you had to take on more of a responsibility in the family. How did you think that affected you, and do you think it—in what ways do you think it strengthened you, and in what ways do you think it may have caused some trauma, for lack of a better word?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, some trauma. Yeah. Well, you know, it’s a double-edged sword. It’s kind of nice to be sitting there and feeling

important and writing checks when you’re in the fifth grade and being sort of head of the family in some respects, and to have your mom confide in you and help make decisions and—and things like that.

On the other hand,—and I didn’t realize this until much later—I didn’t really get to be a kid, to some extent, so I always felt—you know, my dad died. My mom didn’t work because she said she wanted to stay at home so that we came home from school, we wouldn’t be out on the street. And by the way, I’m talking about suburban Long Island [New York] here. But the pockets of—you know, there are pockets, and there were back then, which were not exactly desirable, and that’s—that’s where I was—that’s where I was raised.

So, yeah, so it was—it was a two-edged sword. So, for example, when I was only twelve years old, I was asked to be somebody’s godfather, my cousin’s kid’s godfather. And I said, “I don’t want to be a godfather. I want to be a kid.” And everyone—everyone’s, you know, cousins, or whatever pushing me, “Oh, you know, we want him to grow up and be just like you.”

And then by that time, I had started to realize—I mean, I was in seventh or eighth grade, and I’m starting to think to myself, *Well, maybe you don’t.* [Both chuckle.] And not to make light of that, not to make light of that, but—so, yeah, there was this notion of importance.

And also because I—I was the family patriarch, if you will—I mean, maybe not—not too narcissistic, but—that—that led to a need to be fed constantly, you know, with approbation and that sort of thing.

And then, on the other hand, I didn’t want obligations. I wanted to be free and be myself. And for a large part of my life, even into my adulthood, I could not be that person.

WOO: I hear you.

CHAMOUSIS: Which we’ll also get—which we’ll also get through—get to when we go through this chat.

WOO: For sure.

What were—what were some things that your mom confided in you about?

CHAMOUSIS: Her concern about money, because I was—I was raised on Social Security, and I remember we got $250 a month, and I’m not, you know, twenty million years old, but $250 a month didn’t get you very far.

WOO: It is not much. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Right. And thank God she was a gifted seamstress, so she made—she made all of her and my sister’s clothes. She confided in me, you know, her insecurity about what would happen—how—how I would go to college. Who was going to pay for it? You know, all these things, things like that, things mostly about—about the future: What happens if the neighborhood got worse? The neighborhood *was* getting worse. And were we going to be safe in the neighborhood? We couldn’t—we didn’t have enough money to move to a larger apartment, which at that time cost a hundred seventy-five [dollars] a month, et cetera, et cetera.

And I do remember one time, there was a large park behind our apartment, our walk-up apartment, and I remember being—standing there one night as the sun was falling in the summer and thinking, just sort of existentially, like, *What’s gonna happen to us?* So that always sort of weighed on me.

And that also propelled me to excel in school, and I was very, very, very fortunate that school came very easily to me, and I loved it, and I loved to learn, and I couldn’t get enough of it.

WOO: It sounded almost like a safe space.

CHAMOUSIS: I’m sorry, like a what?

WOO: A safe space, the school being a safe space for you could kind of—

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, yeah, absolutely, yeah.

WOO: And you mentioned that the neighborhood—you didn’t feel it was safe. What do you mean by that? Was it—was it, like, a high-crime area or was it the bullies?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, it was—it was—beyond—beyond the bullying, as people started to move out, people—crime began to—to seep into the neighborhood as others—as others moved in. And so I felt—you know, my mom—my mom felt unsafe with these unsavory characters running around and knowing if they had knives.

And, for example, one evening we were sitting there in a neighbor’s apartment across the hall, and we looked out, and there was some guy on the fire escape, like, looking right in at us.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.] Oh, my gosh!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. And there was another guy, who lived with his mother, who was on the floor just beneath us, and he had a shotgun, and one day we were playing in the back, in the park, and we looked up, and he was pointing a rifle at us.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.]

CHAMOUSIS: So, you know, that was the sort of thing that—it—it’s almost—like, I lived on Terrace Avenue, which was the sort of monster avenue of the town [of Hempstead, Long Island, New York]. And so—yeah, so that—that was the sort of thing that—that we had to contend with. And it worsened, and worsened and worsened until I graduated from—you know, went to Dartmouth [College], graduated from law school and began to work in a white-shoe firm, as it were, that I was able to get my mom out of—rescue her from there, so—

WOO: Wow.

Do you—when you were in the neighborhood—you mentioned that you would—for play, you would play with pots and pans. Do you remember any other things that you would—

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, that’s when I was really little.

WOO: Oh, really little. How about when you were a little older? What do you remember doing to play?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I—I did play football and—you know, touch football and baseball, but I just wasn’t as good as any- —you know, as everyone else. You know, they had to be—yeah, so—you know, I wasn’t a total spaz. I was also a pretty decent tennis play- —I was also a decent tennis player, and we did have a tennis court, and they did acknowledge that I was a decent tennis player.

But I remember one day—all these things are coming back to me—

WOO: The more stories, the better.

CHAMOUSIS: —as we speak. I remember one day—like, I wanted Keds. Well, Keds were five ninety-nine [$5.99]. That’s five point nine-nine, not like Saint Laurents today. And we couldn’t afford it, and forget Converse All Stars, Chuck Taylor, and those were seven ninety-nine [$7.99]. And my mother said, “Forget it.” But one time she indulged me, and I got my “Cons,” my high-top Cons. And I went onto the basketball court, and everybody just started laughing at me. I mean, that was—that was typical of what happened to me when I went out there—you know, what happened.

And—and then—you know, now—I keep thinking of these things as we’re talking. I remember there came a point where somehow—I must have been in seventh or eighth grade, and I remember hearing somewhere—becoming aware of the fact that there’s a group of institutions called the Ivy League. And I just went out, and I said to my—a couple of my so-called friends, as it were, “You know, I’m doing really well in school, and I just heard there’s this—this group of schools somewhere called the Ivy League, and that’s where I’m gonna go. And I’m gonna leave all of you behind.”

WOO: The shade!

CHAMOUSIS: There you go.

WOO: Well, it sounds like seventh to eighth grade, around that time, was a very—was a critical year for you.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I know.

WOO: Or time.

CHAMOUSIS: It was. It was. And we’re moving to high school, too.

WOO: Right. Do—how—how do you recall making friends or—when you were in elementary and middle school? You mentioned “so-called friends.” Were they out of convenience?

CHAMOUSIS: No, most—most of my friends—by the eighth grade, I started developing friendships with a couple of kids in my class who—my elementary school was predominantly white, and there was, in my town—my town itself was still, I would say—there was a substantial black population. Very middle-class, black professionals, and working people. My neighborhood, as I had mentioned, was not part of that. But there were some kids in my class who were upper middle class, and they literally lived across the tracks.

And so I—I became friends with them, and I would spend my time and, to the extent I could on weekends, going over to their house across the tracks to hang out with them, to hang out with them, and their parents approved of me, because I was a—you know, I was a decent kid, because I was well brought up, and I was smarter than their kids, or I did better—you know, they were good students, but I—I had it on them, so they thought I was—this was all very loving. They thought that I—it was good for their kids to—to hang out with. And so that’s how I-I started to develop friendships outside the neighborhood.

Did I answer your question?

WOO: You did, for sure.

How—on the flip side of that,—

CHAMOUSIS: But then—excuse me. Then—then—then—oh, and—but the thing is that all these kids—you know, they had their own

rooms. They had a—in their homes, obviously. A couple of them had basketball hoops, and I would play basketball with them. It was a normal basketball game.

But then I—you know, it would be dinnertime, and I’d have to cross the tracks and go back home to Terrace Avenue. And that was—that was—it was hard for me, but I tried to sublimate everything by saying, *Well, you know, I’ve got school tomorrow. I’ll sit here and do my homework* and yada-yada-yada, *and everything’ll be fine.*

WOO: Wow. I was—I was going to ask, on the flip side of—of hanging out with friends, when do you think you experienced the most bullying, around what grades?

CHAMOUSIS: Bullying was fifth through—fifth, sixth—fifth, sixth grade.

WOO: So around, like,—it was, like, early middle school at that time?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. Late—late elementary school, because my elementary school went up to eighth grade. I mean, I guess it was junior high. Ninth grade was high school.

WOO: And do—if you don’t mind opening about it, what besides—I mean, you—you talked a little bit about it. Do you mind telling more about kind of experiences that you remember having?

CHAMOUSIS: In terms of?

WOO: Of—of being bullied.

CHAMOUSIS: It was verbal abuse, being teased. Oh, apparently I ran a funny way, so they used to call me Twinkle Toes.

WOO: Twinkle Toes?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah.

WOO: Oh, my goodness! These kids!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. So I was always Twinkle Toes. And, let’s see, at some point later on, I was called The Head, because I have a big

head. [Laughs.] And then “The Head” became a term for somebody who was—who, you know, 420’d all the time—you know, a pot head.

WOO: Right, 420.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, so couldn’t call me Head anymore. But it was constant name calling. And actu- —the incident that I discovered about—you know, having my pants pulled down—and also one time, I struck out at bat at softball, which is kind of hard to do. [Both chuckle.] But I managed to do it anyway. And so some—some guy on my team took a softball and threw it at me. He could have k- —I mean, if I hadn’t—somehow, I managed to get out in enough time. He could have killed me because it was directed right at—you know, just right at my face.

So it was al- —things of that nature. And I—yeah, so I—I do remember at some point, as school was approaching, not going out, just not—staying in the house, so I wouldn’t—or asked to me—if somebody could take me to the library so I wouldn’t have to deal with these people.

WOO: I see. Is that how you would cope with it? Is there anything else?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I—I would cope with it that way. And—oh, the other thing was that I didn’t want to worry my mom because I felt that she had enough on her plate. And so I had to keep it all inside, because I *figured there’s nothing my mother could do.* That was my thinking. And so—but beyond that, I felt that, especially since my dad had already passed away, *Who’s’—who’s going to help me? Who’s going to help me fight?*

And—and it wasn’t even—you know, my—the parents of the kids in my neighborhood—most of them were—were functioning, if not—functioning alcoholics at best, so they were—they were all involved in their own thing. That’s why their kids really didn’t have much supervision; they could do whatever they wanted to do.

But I—I was—I really hated my—you hated growing up in that neighborhood [cross-talk] for any number of reasons.

WOO: I can tell. [Chuckles.]

You men- —you mentioned—so right before fifth grade, or around that time, you said your dad died at nine years ago—nine years old.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah.

WOO: So that was about the same time that you were experiencing a lot of this bullying. How do you remember your dad’s passing affecting you?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I was—you know, it was—it was really, really hard. I was really scared. I was afraid that we may go on welfare. I was—I was just traumatized. But I—everything rested—my dad was sort of “typical,” if you will, in quotes, European, older father. I mean, he wasn’t—I know he loved me, but he wasn’t the kind of guy who was warm and fuzzy and he’d go out and play baseball with you.

WOO: Right. Stoic.

CHAMOUSIS: He was a lot older. He was sixty years old when I was nine.

WOO: Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: And so—and he was working all the time. And—oh, that was another thing. When I was four, he had a heart attack. And as—as precocious as I was—he was bedridden for six months, and, you know, four years old, you remember something. I have no memory of it whatsoever. You know, I just blanked it out—I just blanked it out.

So my dad was—and was not—you know, he—we didn’t really—he was not—he was not demonstrative, so—

WOO: I hear you.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah.

WOO: What—what memories—of the memories you do have of your father, what—what are some memories that you do have with him?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I remember that we had traditional Sunday dinner—Sunday lunch. So when my mom and sister and I would go to church, he wouldn’t go to church and he’d stay home. He’d stay home and cook because he was—he was a cook. He had—true to Greek stereotype, he owned a diner. True to current Greek stereotype, to some extent, he owned a diner. So he’d stay home and cook. And I remember—I—I—I really liked sharing that meal with my dad. And it was—it was fun, and I looked forward to it.

And I remember when my sister and I—we lived in a—there were four of us living in a small, one-bedroom apartment, and then my uncle had come over from Greece, and he was living with us. So we were all cramped into this apartment. And I remember—you know, I remember on Sunday mornings, you know, jumping into—into my parents’ bed and, you know, do what little kids do.

But I—but I have to say, I also have, which I think is really, really odd, but aside from those, I really—I remember going—you know, we’d go for rides to the beach on Sundays, you know. I—I—I don’t—I can’t remember what happened during the week, like in the evening, when we got home from school. My dad was obviously there, but I have no memory of that. And by fourth grade, I should have memories of that. You know, like what happened on a typical night.

WOO: Right. Was he work- —how lo- —what were his work hours?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, his work hours were pretty normal. I mean, they were, like, let’s say nine to six or something. Oh, you know—and this is—this is—I mean, I don’t know to what extent, if at all, this is relevant to my experience as a gay man—

WOO: Everything is relevant.

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] —but I also remember being— Very good, very good. But I remember being ashamed of him because he was so much older and then feeling guilty about being ashamed. So, for example, I would want only my mother to come to teacher conferences.

WOO: Oh.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, because he looked like my grandfather. So it gives me the creeps now. Even as I utter this, I’m having a—sort of a flush as I utter this now.

WOO: Wow! Was it because the kids made fun of you for that, or was it self-conscious—

CHAMOUSIS: Just not really. It was just an internalized—I don’t—I don’t know how I developed this—and internalized this sense of shame. And maybe it was because by—you know, when I was four and he had his heart attack and he—I guess, you know, my mother also must have felt that, *Oh, my God! What if he has another one? What’s gonna happen to us?* So I must have picked up on all that. So I guess I was aware of his—in some way or another, consciously or unconsciously, aware of his possibly impending mortality.

WOO: Wow. At least you have those Sunday memories with him [chuckles] [unintelligible].

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, yeah. No—yeah, yeah. I mean, listen, I’ve been through a lot discussing this with professionals and how all this shaped me, and, you know, I’ve come to realize that, you know, my dad did it the best he could, and to the extent I was angry, I forgive him, and I thank him for everything he did for me.

WOO: That’s great to hear. A lot of kids even today still need to know that they need to go to therapy. [Both chuckle.] To figure things out, too, you know? So your dad would—

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk]. One thing—Oh, I’m sorry.

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: One thing—I’m just going to keep scouting these things.

WOO: I love it.

CHAMOUSIS: Woe be to—woe be to those who hear this tape. But I do remember—I do remember—I remember a couple of things. I remember my mom remarking to—telling me years later

that she remarked to a friend of hers when my dad died that I seemed to be really not—I seemed to be functioning okay and still doing well in school, and she was wondering at that time, which was 1961, whether I should be getting professional help,—

WOO: Sixty-one.

CHAMOUSIS: —which I thought, for a Greek immigrant woman to observe in 1961, was really kind of profound.

WOO: It is.

CHAMOUSIS: Nothing ever came of that, but anyway—

WOO: I—I—I feel you. I hear you. My parents are immigrants too, and they’re from—they’re from China and Hong Kong, and my dad’s very stoic as well, and I have minimal memory of him, growing up, as well. But it is not about me, but I just wanted to let you know that I—I find everything about what happened—what was it?—fifty, sixty years ago?—very fascinating still.

CHAMOUSIS: Well, yeah. I mean, I guess these days most—a lot of dads are more enlightened, I guess, or they’ve been made to be more attuned to what their role is, at least theoretically supposed to be. So hopefully, times have changed.

WOO: Well, I want to swing back to the church culture in the Greek Orthodox Church. So did your dad never go to the church if he was—if he was cooking?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, he rarely—he rarely—he rarely went to church. I don’t think he ever went to church.

WOO: Was he religious?

CHAMOUSIS: Except when he—when my sister was born, because she was kind of famous because she was born at two pounds and six ounces in 1954, and she—you know, she wasn’t—she was born at five months, three weeks.

WOO: Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: And so she was like a—she was the size of maybe a large egg or something. I don’t know. [Both chuckle.] And so my dad—when she was—she was in an incubator, which magnified her, and they pumped oxygen—so when they took her out of the incubator and the nurse had my sister in the palm of her hand, held her by—in her hand, showed her to my dad, my dad went to church. And that’s the only time I recall my dad ever—and that’s an anecdotal, from what I heard, aside from his wedding and his funeral.

WOO: His funeral! [Laughter.] I’m dead. Okay, so I assume your mom was more involved in the church and religious?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, she—she was—you know, this was, you know, the Greek Orthodox way, and so there was a church in my—in my town, literally on the other side of the tracks, in the neighborhood where my Jewish friends lived. And that was where the Greek Orthodox church was built when I was very young.

There was a predecessor which I don’t rec- —a smaller church, but that was only for two years, so they built this one circa 1959, ’58, when I was then six or seven, and it was the first suburban Greek Orthodox church in the country.

WOO: The first!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, and then became the largest Greek Orthodox church in the country. Maybe still is. And it’s still there. And that neighborhood is still “good,” in quotes.

Anyway, so I was raised in that—in that church, and I went to Sunday school every Sunday, and I also went to Greek school.

WOO: Greek school.

CHAMOUSIS: Greek school, yeah, twice a week, so from first grade—it was first through sixth grade, twice a week, to learn how to read and write Greek.

WOO: Wow!

CHAMOUSIS: And, of course, true to—true to form and in tribute to my narcissism, I graduated in five years. [Chuckles.] And I’d used to cut— Then I’d cut—I used to go to Hebrew school with my friends.

WOO: As well. Wow!

CHAMOUSIS: I mean, just as a kind of [unintelligible].

WOO: Oh, okay.

CHAMOUSIS: Anyway—[Chuckles.] So the church was—the church was inculcated in me when I was a little—ever since I could remember, and I was a dutiful little—I mean, in twelfth grade, I even taught Sunday school. But I remember I—one thing I remember is I just didn’t buy into it—

WOO: Tell me more.

CHAMOUSIS: —because—I’m sorry?

WOO: Oh, tell me more.

CHAMOUSIS: I remem- —I remember distinctly one Sunday morning the three of us—this was after my dad died. Perhaps I was in fifth or sixth grade. My dad died when I was in—the first day of spring, March 21, nineteen sixty- —in fourth grade. So in fifth or sixth grade, we’re walking to church, and my mother is telling my sister and me how much Jesus loves children and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. And I just looked at her. I said, “Well, if Jesus loves children so much, how come he took Daddy away?”

So—so then she’s telling me—she says, “Oh, you know, he’s always testing us and make us better people.” I said, “Why is he testing us? I’m just a little kid. Plus I live on Terrace Avenue. I get bullied all the time. No, literally. I mean, c’mon!”

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: And I remember ever since then, you know, I was—it was really—I just didn’t—I—I—I was a non-believer. And even as I utter—and I have occasion to say I’m a non-believer many

times, and yet there is still this—it was so driven into me that there still is vestigial—now, as I just utter this to you—this still, like, flushing of my face, because it was so inculcated within me, although I notice it diminishes [chuckles] every time I say it.

But I was raised in that church. All through high school too. You know, every Sunday I was in Sunday school through eleventh grade. But by then, things started—you know, obviously things were percolating.

WOO: Right. [Chuckles.] Were the kids nice in church?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, the kids were—yeah, it was—I mean, it was fine. But, you know, I just—I went because I had to go. I had no choice. I had absolutely no choice.

WOO: How about being a Sunday school teacher? Did you have a choice in that? [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I kind of volunteered because if I didn’t—if I didn’t teach Sunday school, I would have to be at the church service.

WOO: [Laughs heartily.]

CHAMOUSIS: And so the Greek Orthodox service—let me tell you, the Greek—you’ve never lived until you—especially if you go to Holy Week. You stand—you stand a lot of the time, and so, you know, like, we’d go—like, Holy Thursday, for example, we’d go, and that service is four hours. The best part of the service is you get there let’s say at six. It begins at seven; you get there at six to get a seat. The best part of the service is between six and seven, when you’re sitting.

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] And as I became—as I became a jaded—now I’m going to jump forward about twenty years.

WOO: Okay, go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I’d still say to my mother, as an adult—I was a working adult. I was an attorney. And I’d dutifully go out, you know, because my mother wanted to go to church, and at least by then, you know, I knew my shit, so I would say, “Oh, Mrs. So-and-so has a new [Louis] Vuitton bag.” And, you know, my mother would, like, elbow me in the side, but—[Chuckles.] Yeah, so that was—yeah, it was either teach Sunday school or go to the church service and have to stand half the time.

WOO: I love the sass. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: [Laughs.]

WOO: Still in you. Did you—how did you wrestle with, like, having seen—like, same-sex attraction with it while within, like, the Greek Orthodox Church doctrine? Was there any conflict, or was there not?

CHAMOUSIS: You know, I—I—I didn’t care what the church believed. So, for example, I didn’t—

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. So I knew—at some point later in my life, I knew that—I learned what the church’s position was, and I’m going to—I’m going to jump ahead a little bit because I didn’t really come out until I was in my—my thirties. The first person I ever came out to, I was—I was thirty-four years old.

WOO: Thirty-four.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, thirty-two, and that’s a crazy story. But I didn’t come out to a friend of mine until I was thirty-four. I had been—I had been sexually active since I was in my late twenties. By then I was out of law school. I was living in New York, and I was—you know, I was cruising, and I would pick up guys—

WOO: Oh! We’ll have to get to that.

CHAMOUSIS: —and we—we’re gonna get to that.

There is one thing, since you brought up the church, and I’m likely to forget it. But there was, when I was—I guess I was

in high school by this time—but there was a very prominent Greek family. You know, the father was on the board of trustees, they were wealthy, dah-dah. And they had—they had a son who was gay, and he was openly gay in my church.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.]

CHAMOUSIS: And he would bring—

WOO: In the sixties?

CHAMOUSIS: He would bring his boyfriend to church. And I’m talking—so I was—

WOO: Badass. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: —maybe sixteen or fifteen, and he was a couple of years older, and his parents—you know, they knew what was going on, and people—I mean, the people who knew just—you know, just didn’t say anything. But that was one brave—brave kid. And I remember—and I remember being so envious of him, that he had the guts—that he had the guts to do that. So that was—

But as far as, you know, being a conflicted Catholic or any, you know, doctrinal, theological stuff, that really didn’t—didn’t really affect me. It made me angry—it made me angry that the church said that it was immoral, but I did have enough sense of self to say, *Well, I’m a good person. I may be fucked up—*

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: *—because I can’t come out. And I <u>am</u> fucked up.*

WOO: Uh-huh. I love it!

CHAMOUSIS: *There are a lot of reasons for it. But I’m a really good person,—*

CHAMOUSIS: *—so it can’t be—*

WOO: I can tell.

CHAMOUSIS: *You know—It can’t be bad. It can’t be bad.*

And then one other thing, since I mentioned the church and I’m likely to forget this:

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: My mom died in nine- —I guess—that was after my sister—now, let me think about this. I didn’t come out to my sister until after my mom died. When my mom died, I was about to turn thirty-six, and my sister was, like, thirty-four. And that’s when I came out to my sister, right after my mom died.

And I did—you know, it’s funny: The priest who baptized me when I was just a few month—he was still—his family—they were still a presence in my life, but sort of not really religiously, but without going into a lot of detail— after my mother became widowed, they reached out and helped us, and I would go to their house—they—they lived close—close to my school, and they would—so I’d go to their house for lunch and stuff like that.

So they became sort of like an aunt and uncle, and I always loved them a lot, and so when I came out to my sister, my sister was going to Florida, and they had moved to Florida, and I did need, for whatever reason, because I couldn’t tell my mother—I’d never come out to my mother. My mother had my number, as it were. But I remember asking my sister to tell Uncle George, Father George, who baptized me—because I did feel that I needed his blessing somehow. And perhaps through him that—if he said it was okay, then maybe my mother would say it was okay.

So I do remember that, and I remember my sister communicating—you know, like, I put my sister in that position, but she did it. And I remember—I remember the message that came back was, “Well, let’s see if we can change Nicky.” I was always “Nicky” until I was in eighth grade, when I decreed that I was “Nick.”

But—and Helen said, “Well, I don’t”—my sister said, “Well, I don’t think, you know, he can change or that he wants to change.” And Uncle George said, “Well, if we”—and this was

1987. So my Uncle George supposedly said, “Well, if we can’t—if Nicky can’t change who he is, then we have to make him comfortable with who he is.”

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.] Aww!

CHAMOUSIS: So that to me was a big deal.

WOO: Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: So—yeah. So—

WOO: I wonder if the priest was speaking from experience. (I’m just kidding.) [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: No. I think throughout this interview as things occur to me I’m going to be hopping through different points in my life, and I’ll try to mark those so that we don’t lose at least some sense of chronology here.

WOO: I’ve marked them as well.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay. Okay, good.

So I think I’m in—chronologically, I’m going into high school.

WOO: Mm-hm.

CHAMOUSIS: So unless there’s anything else you’d like—you know, we can proceed. You call the shots, as it were.

WOO: Go ahead. Let’s move on to high school.

CHAMOUSIS: So I got to high school, and the big concern was, *Should I go to this high school, Hempstead High School?* And— one of your classmates is from Hempstead High School, I discovered, a guy named Pablo [J.] Correa [class of 2020].

WOO: Pablo Correa?

CHAMOUSIS: He’s a ’20.

WOO: Oh! Pablo?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah.

WOO: I—I’m—I’m friends with him. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: You are?

WOO: Well, yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: I’ve been wanting to meet him, and I didn’t know how to do it, because I think he’s the first person since me, perhaps [recording glitch; unintelligible], so I read about him and his story. You know, because my church—because my church is where it is in Hempstead—so I do kind of keep in touch with Hempstead. And so I know, for example, he was accepted, and there’s a classmate of his that went to Princeton [University], and I kind of know all that. And I—I’ve been wanting to reach out to him for three or four years, but I just didn’t know how to go about doing it. Anyway,—

WOO: I can connect you.

CHAMOUSIS: Well, if you would. I don’t want to weird the kid out, but I would love to—I would love to help him. If you tell him that I grew up on Terrace Avenue [chuckles]—

WOO: He’ll know.

CHAMOUSIS: —which in Greek means “monster”—

WOO: Really!

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] Terrace means “monster.” Yeah. Because now Terrace Avenue is the murder capital of Long Island. Anyway, I don’t want to get too far off the mark here.

Yeah, so—so my high school was—let’s—I’ll just put it bluntly—is predominantly black, and you—you hear all things—you know, “the big bad high school,” and, you know, here I was, going from the one predominantly white elementary school to this big black high school. And I was scared. You know, my mother was scared. Lots of—there were black parents who wouldn’t let their kids go to the local high school, the public high school. They sent them to private school, one of whom is Kenneth [I.] Chenault, who

later became—until recently was the CEO of American Express.

WOO: What??

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, exactly. So I went to—so I went to the high school, and, you know, you go into high school and it’s different, you know. And one thing that I feared was that I would be physically hurt some way. So—this is true: The first gym class I’m there, this—this kid comes up to me, a black kid, puts a knife to my throat and asks me for money.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.] Okay.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay? So I don’t know how I deescalated it, but at some point he said, “I really scared you, didn’t I?” And I said, “Yeah.” So—right? It’s, like, my first or second day there, and already, you know, my worst nightmare is realized, and I don’t have anybody to—I never told anybody. And that’s the start I got in high school.

But I really adapted well, and, you know, I went through normal teenage stuff. But then by high school I started noticing there were some guys that I really felt attracted to. I mean, there was a very—a very strong attraction. And one of them was my—my friend’s—one of my closest friend’s brother. He was an older brother, his older brother. And I will tell you that I would position myself outside—when my bio class was over, just to follow his butt as he went to the locker room.

WOO: [Laughs.] I love it!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, so I had—yeah, there were a couple of guys like that. And I couldn’t—you know, I certainly couldn’t act on it.

And—and the other thing was people in my high school didn’t really date. There was some dating across—across racial lines. And there were some—yeah, there was some dating, but there wasn’t that much across racial lines. And in *my* case—you know, I was pretty friendly with everybody, and every- —my past, as it were [chuckles] on dating, was knowing my family background and everything, everyone

thought that I was waiting to meet the right Greek girl. [Both chuckle.]

And that carried me well into Dartmouth, too, you know, which we will soon get to. So my high school was—you know, it was just working hard. I was into a lot of activities which I enjoyed. I was ultra- —I was very competitive, and there was one black girl who was my competition, as it were, and I couldn’t fathom being second. And I remember we got our first-year report cards after—you know, we’d get a report card every quarter, as I remember.

And then I remember at the end of the year, I turned my report card over, and there’s this one—this little number—tiny, tiny inked-in “2” on the back of my report card. And I interpreted that, with no basis whatsoever, as meaning that I was second in the class. And it ruined my entire summer.

Now, I will add, and I hope this is not too much of a digression, but I will add twenty minutes later, when I was valedic- —I was first—

WOO: No big deal.

CHAMOUSIS: She had not forgiv- —she had not forgiven me. And at our twentieth high school reunion in 1989, she wouldn’t talk to me.

WOO: Oh, my gosh!

CHAMOUSIS: Anyway, so high school—high school was a lot of—I really—you know, I had the normal thing, like, *Does this person like me? Does this person like me?* You know, that was important to me. And as far as, you know, sex and being attracted to—to boys, young men—I mean, it was just something that I lived with.

And, you know, I couldn’t—it w- —I’m just thinking out loud—I—I—I remember a couple of times in high school I was groped by one of—one of the kids that I was friendly with in elementary school and another kid that I met in high school. And we were wrestling. In both cases, we were wrestling, and they both groped me.

WOO: Like, is this the wrestling club or is this just like wrestling—

CHAMOUSIS: No, no, no. This was at their—at their respective houses, like after school. And we just started wrestling, and they groped me, and I, like, freaked out. Like, but only because, like, *Oh, my God, what if—what if—what if somebody finds out?* I mean, I did not grope back. I was so fucking repressed that I—I was terrified. I was just terrified. And I—and I tried to overlook it, and I tried to change the subject, and whatever.

And then nothing came after that. As it turns out, one of them later became one of my close friends, and it was—that incident was never discussed. And he grew up, and he ended up marrying a Dartmouth woman, who was a—who was a ’78. And then they had a bitter divorce because he came out after—

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] they were married and had—they had two adult children. He came out later.

WOO: Wow!

CHAMOUSIS: Anyway, so I can’t—I can’t—I remember feeling an intense attraction—an intense attraction to certain guys, but certainly I couldn’t—I couldn’t do anything about it.

Oh, and I went to—I did take a date to the junior prom, who was a friend of mine, and then senior prom, I took a date, and then afterwards we all went back to—a friend of mine’s parents were away for the weekend. We went back to his house, and we all split up into bedrooms and nooks and crannies. And I started to make out with her, and I really wasn’t into it. And I felt that—like, I felt that I *had* to, you know, touch her breasts and—and all that stuff, and it just—you know, I just didn’t—I mean, maybe I was, like, marginally aroused, but it—I was just really uncomfortable, and I didn’t want to—I liked her a lot, and we were classmates, and she was really smart and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. And I just—you know, I had no interest in dating her. So that was the—that was the extent—the extent of anything I ever did with anybody.

You know, everyone seems to have—even people my years—like, I was—I happen to take Fridays off now, and so I—I meet with a couple of friends of mine, and we have lunch. We go to the movies. And they had—you know, in their teens, you know, they fooled around with their friends and I was just too—I was just way too terrified, too scared you know, that something would—something would—would leak out.

And I couldn’t fathom—you know, in high school, even in college and after college, I couldn't fathom coming out to my family. It just—it just freaked me out. But, you know.—but I was certainly—you know, by the time I reached my late twenties, I certainly was a bad boy.

WOO: What do you mean?

CHAMOUSIS: You know, I was very, very sexually active, as it was back in those days, where there were lots of chance—well, we’ll—we’ll get—we’ll get to that. Okay.

So now I’m in high school, and I’m first in my class, and I have really good board scores. Before, you know, SATs—before the scales were re-centered, I might add [chuckles]—and—and so I—I just tried to emulate—you know, my mom couldn’t advise me.

But I did have a family friend, a woman who my Uncle George, the priest, and his wife introduced us to, and she was an upper-middle-class Jewish woman who converted from Greek Orthodoxy. And I met her when I was in fifth grade. I forgot to mention her. And she became, until she died fifteen years ago, perhaps—aside from my mom the biggest influence in my life in terms of intellectual development, cultural exposure, being able to be open to her.

So—now I forgot where I was going with this.

WOO: You were talking about how in late high school she was a big influence to—

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I don’t remember what I was talking about before—oh, yeah—so, yeah, right. So I was in high

school, and—so I just—there was a guy—every couple of years, the valedictorian in my high school would go to Dartmouth. And I knew of three such incidents. And there was a guy in my class whose brother—when we were freshmen, his brother was a senior, a senior. I mean, to this day I remember his—this guys GPA [grade-point average]. That’s—that’s my OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder].

WOO: [Laughs.] I can tell.

CHAMOUSIS: When it was announced—when it was announced at—at—at the honors assembly, you know, my jaw dropped, and, you know, I knew this guy. You know, he was this and he was this, so I—I had no role model, no direct role model, so I—from afar I emulated him. And so when I got to my senior year, you know, I did all these good things. I played lacrosse, I was—yeah, locker rooms are another story. We can talk about if you want.

WOO: *I’d* be down. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: I was co-captain of the tennis team. And so I said, *Well, if John [L.] Tully [Class of 1970] is going to Dartmouth*—maybe he’ll hear this tape—he, he’s a straight guy—*then—then—then I’ll go to Dartmouth.* You know, that’s just how I did it.

And then I remember when I went to see my guidance counselor, he said, “Well, I’ve got a great school for you” and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And by this time, my high school had declined precipitously in three years, and he said, “I think you should apply early decision to the University of Virginia. And I remember, like,—like, the whole earth beneath me caved.

And, you know, my mother’s sitting there, in her, you know, handmade suit, from the tenement, and I remember saying, “What do you mean? You know, I’m going to Dartmouth.” [Chuckles.]

WOO: Yeah!

CHAMOUSIS: And so he said, “Well, you know, you know, that’s an Ivy League school, and it’s expensive.”

WOO: Ay-yi-yi.

CHAMOUSIS: And yeah, and yeah, yeah, yeah. And I said, “But look, you know, I’ve got these great grades,” and I—I *did* do some amazing things in high school. I won’t go into that. But—and “I got this, and I got this, and—and I wanna go!” And he said, “Well, okay.”

So—anyway, so I applied, and I got in, and I got into a bunch of other places, and then—you know, I knew it was an all-boys school. I never ca- —I never went to visit. And then I just started to get—you know, as the time approached, I got my—oh, when I got my acceptance letter, I—I’ll never forget—tuition, room, board and expenses for the fall semester of ’69 fifty years ago, on the dot, was $4,125. And my mom said, “You can’t go.”

WOO: Even back then. Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: And she said, “We’re shy two hundred dollars. And I remember—and I remember saying, “I don’t care if I have to crawl up there with my tongue—dragging my tongue on the asphalt, but that’s—that’s where I’m going,” and that’s where I went. With Mrs. Friedman’s encouragement along the way. And an offer—an offer from her to make up the two hundred dollars, which I didn’t expect.

But before I went up there, I got a letter from the financial aid office telling me that I had been named an Alfred Sloan scholar from the Alfred [P.] Sloan Foundation at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. And they picked ten kids from each Ivy League school, and they pay for everything.

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath.] Oh, my gosh!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. And then I—and then get this: I—I won the Greek-American Boy of the Northeast Scholar-Athlete Award, which was an extra five hundred bucks. So I will tell you that my—when I got up to Hanover, my next-door neighbor, whose father was the COO [chief operating officer] of a major steel company, borrowed that money so he could buy weed.

WOO: [Laughs heartily.]

CHAMOUSIS: And he repaid it. He repaid it. But anyway, so that’s—okay, so that takes us up to getting to Hanover [New Hampshire]. Shall I just continue? Do you have some questions, or—

WOO: Yeah. I’ll just ask one question about your late high school years. Do—besides—what was the aunty’s name, Mrs.—?

CHAMOUSIS: Mrs. Friedman.

WOO: Mrs. Friedman? Do you remember having other role models you would look up to, whether media or else—otherwise—maybe even, like, queer models—role models at that time that you had?

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, no, no. There was—there—no. I mean, we’re talking way before Harvey [B.] Milk.

WOO: Right. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: So, no, there were no—there was *nothing*. I mean, I’m just thinking out loud. No one—it just wasn’t—it—you know, I don’t even remember knowing—I remember when men landed on the moon, because that was the summer of ’69, and June ’69 was [the] Stonewall [riots]. I don’t remember anything about Stonewall. I don’t remember—it wasn’t even on my radar. So all I remember is the man on the moon. And all I—and I—I do remember knowing that there was something within me, you know, that I was attracted to guys, but it was just completely sublimated.

WOO: Okay. Well, that’s good to hear. Let’s—let’s move on—[Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Aside from—yeah. So—yeah, aside from role models, there was the guy—you know, my—my role model for Dartmouth and my mom’s support. You know, ultimately my mom’s support. To her credit, she thought I should go *away* to school because it would help with my gaining independence and becoming an adult.

WOO: Mmm. For sure.

I just—I—[Chuckles.] I love hearing about all of your, like, humble-bragging. It gives me life. [Chuckles.] Let me—

CHAMOUSIS: I mean, you’re talking the sixties! You’re talking the sixties,—

WOO: Right. Uh-huh.

CHAMOUSIS: —the fifties, the fifties and the sixties. So—okay, let’s move on.

WOO: Freshman year. Dartmouth.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh. Very unhappy. And feigned happiness. One thing that I will say about my really bad high school was that we had phenomenal teachers, because as the quality of the school declined, the old-time teachers stayed on, and I had the most amazing teachers, several of whom were black, and it was a black man and a black woman teacher, English teacher, who taught me how to write.

WOO: Do you remember their names?

CHAMOUSIS: Yep, Mr. [Sterling S.] Keyes and Mrs. [Constance] Evans.

WOO: A shout-out. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: And they were tough. And basically, I went to Hanover, and I “pro-ed” [tested] out of, you know, foreign language. I basically had enough credits to be a sophomore, which they would let you do at the time, and I declined it because I said, “Well, that’ll put me in the real world a year earlier than I would like, and I don’t think I’m ready for it, so as long as somebody else is paying for it—

WOO: Right!

CHAMOUSIS: —even though I’m not happy right now, I think I’m just gonna stay here.” So freshman year was very hard. I felt really isolated. I considered myself—even though I considered myself—even though I knew—by this time, I knew that I was gay. I don’t think they called it—I don’t even know if they called it “gay” at the time.

WOO: “Homosexual”? [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: No, “fags.”

WOO: “Fags.”

CHAMOUSIS: “Fags,” yeah. I mean, how—how horrible is that? There was so much to get used to. I thought I was the only one who was nervous about being in college. It wasn’t until twenty years ago or fifteen years ago that I actually learned—a friend of mine said, “Oh, when I was a freshman, I was really nervous about being in college.” I mean, I thought I was the only one. I guess I thought I was the only one about so many things.

And back then, there were no women. There were fifty exchange students. You probably heard of this.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: Heard this. By my junior year, there were a hundred and fifty. Let’s see, we had—Meryl Streep was there when I was a sophomore. She was an exchange student from Vassar [College]. But there was—it was a very unhappy time for me, and I pretended that I was happy and told everyone that I was happy, but I was miserable. And looking back, having experienced clinical depression in later life, I think I was depressed without even knowing I was depressed.

But there was a tremendous pressure on—because women were imported, you know, from—from the Seven Sisters and the—the local colleges, and they were imported en masse on weekends, and I had no interest in being with them. I had no—road tripping was really big, so you would—a bunch of guys would pile into the car and, like, go to Smith [College] or Mount Holyoke [College]. And a couple of times, I went, and I felt really uncomfortable sitting there, you know, trying to talk to—you know, trying to talk to women, you know, for sexual fulfillment.

I was also—the atmosphere—you know, it was a big—there’s something called “raging,” where they put out a—you know, you would get drunk and you’d literally rage around, so it was called “raging.” You know, I thought I was a pretty,

you know, normal person, and I was gregarious and—but I just had—I couldn’t connect with these people on my floor.

And I—I did—I had an Af- —I had a black roommate, and we both kind of chuckled because—he said, “Oh, I wonder why they paired *us* up.” And, you know, I’m wondering whether they—they probably did it because of where I went to high school. And we got along—yeah, it was very difficult for him, and it was very difficult for me—

WOO: I could imagine. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: —because even though—you know, one was race and one was sexuality—you know, we ended up in the same place. We experienced the same emotions. And, of course, I remember being very attracted to guys and not being able—you know, not doing anything.

I parti- —I—I participated in gay bash- —you know, homophobic jokes. “That guy’s a fag.” “That guy’s a fag,” knowing full well that I was gay. And then I felt bad about myself.

I will tell you that—oh, I also thought it was really weird being in class where there were no women.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, it was just weird to me. And I will tell you, I had—there was also a tremendous pressure not to study or not to be seen studying, called—which was called “booking.” “Booking” is studying. You almost wanted to hide the fact that you were studying. But I was taking science courses and math c- —you know, so I had homework, you know, And if you were caught: “Oh, he’s a weenie.” We were called “weenies.”

WOO: Weenies?

CHAMOUSIS: I didn’t consider myself a weenie, but I—you know, I’d hand in my math problem set. What am I supposed to do, go to math class and pull it out of my ass? I have to sit at my desk and do my math homework.

And there was a guy on my floor—he was—he was a little sketchy, but he—but everyone thought he—they said, “Oh, do you think he’s a fag?” And he had a roommate and everything, who was his antithesis, as it were. But I—I was pretty—I was pretty unhappy my freshman year. And a lot of it was who was in my dorm. You know, there was one guy who proclaimed himself the Pied Piper, and if you wanted to be cool, you know, you’d go down to his room and he’d have a keg, and then you’d all get drunk. And I thought, *Yeah, you know, it’s fun to have a beer and talk to everybody, but I’m not gonna, you know, puke all over—all over*—you know, this was in the River Cluster. I think only one of those dorms remains, maybe French Hall or something?

WOO: French Hall? Yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. Okay. And so I just wasn’t into that. Because I wasn’t into that, I started keeping more to myself, and so, you know, I just wasn’t one of the—the cool people, which made me—you know, it was—it was self-reinforcing.

I will tell you two horrible things. One was the first week—the first big fall weekend, where they had, like,—you know, it was a big concert, and we got Sly and the Family Stone. Okay, well, this was the fall of ’69, and the only reason they came was they—they committed contractually before they became famous. And so everyone’s looking forward to Sly and the Family Stone. And I was, you know—and I certainly wasn’t the only one, but I felt that, you know, I didn’t have a date, and I—I reached out to a couple of friends from my high school, women, and they—you know, they couldn’t come.

And then I say to myself, *Well, if they <u>do</u> come, where are they gonna sleep*? So that weekend—that weekend, I feigned having the flu. And I went the whole weekend without shaving, without leaving my room, in my bathrobe, and I—my next-door neighbor, with whom I got friendly, who was very gregarious—his girlfriend—my five hundred dollar scholarship also paid for his—him to fly his girlfriend.

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: And so he wanted me to meet her. And here I was, in my bathrobe, and I went out in the hallway, and I had people bring me food from Thayer [Hall], which is now the [Class of 1953] Commons, the ’53 Commons. And, you know, like, like, I had 102—and I think my fever was actually, like 98.2, which is, like, below normal, and I remember feeling that literally—and this makes me really sad—that I would be—especially when I met her and I thought I discerned in her face, like, some sort of disapproval of my appearance. I thought I was the ugliest guy in the world. That’s how bad I felt about myself.

And I think in general, when I got down to it, that’s how I did feel about—not about myself, because I—it’s almost that, you know, I knew who I was as a person but that maybe I’d made a mistake going to this school or something. And—and similarly, my first Winter Carnival, I didn’t—of course, didn’t have a date. And rather than stay there, I took the bus from Hanover, you know, which is, like,—White River [Junction, Vermont] was, like, eight hours to New York. And went back to Hempstead for the weekend. And by the time I was home, it was time to turn around and go back again.

And that—I think that summarizes, you know, my—my emotional experience of being isolated and feeling out of place. I did—I will tell you, my freshman year I had nine A’s. [Chuckles.]

WOO: Hell yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: In advanced courses. And I sent my transcript to my guidance counselor.

WOO: Just to rub in his face. [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: And I said—no, I just said, “Don’t ever tell—you know, don’t ever discourage anybody.”

WOO: Hell yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: But—but, you know, once people found out my grades, like, I didn’t go out—as a matter—I was kind of ashamed of them, but that made things even worse. And—so there was no—nobody talked about being gay or—I—I remember there was

a guy who was in French Hall, and I was in McLane Hall [now Judge Hall], which was one of the three then called Wigwams [now River Cluster].

WOO: They’re the nice ones!

CHAMOUSIS: That’s what they were called.

WOO: Huh?

WOO: McLane is one of the nice ones, right?

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, not—not the new McLane. I think there’s a new McLane.

WOO: Oh. Oh, yeah, there’s new McLane.

CHAMOUSIS: No, this one was down by French Hall.

WOO: Oh, okay.

CHAMOUSIS: They were called the Wigwams until the early eighties, when you couldn’t do that anymore. Then it became the River Cluster. But I remember there was a guy—he wasn’t even really my type, but he was gorgeous, and I would stand by my window in my room, and he would be sunbathing in his palm frond Speedo. And so—you know, that was the only—you know, that’s basically how—how I lived my freshman year.

And in sophomore year, it got a little better because I moved off campus, and there were more guys in that dorm who were more “normal.” I use that in quotes, in the sense that, you know, they were a little more driven, they were a little more—you know, they weren’t just flat-out, groupie, alcoholic drunks. And so I felt a little more comfortable. But still, you know, there was all this pressure, and, you know, I was living behind this veil of, “Oh, well, Nick hasn’t met the—the nice biology major from Mount Holyoke yet”—you know, Greek biology major from Mount Holyoke.

And that’s—that’s sort of what it was, although I did make a couple of friends from the Seven Sisters, through my other friends, my male friends. And so that was—so I got to—you

know, but they were still at Mount Holyoke or Smith or whatever. And so that was—that was a little better.

And I did end up—just as an aside, I ended up—I’m probably one of the only people on full scholarship who ended up with a two-room triple in Wheeler [Hall] with a private bath and a functioning fireplace, as a single, because both my roommates got thrown out.

WOO: Oh! What was—

CHAMOUSIS: For plagiarism and having an oh point oh oh [0.00] cume two semesters in a row, two terms in a row. Imagine getting oh point oh oh?

WOO: I have never heard of that before.

CHAMOUSIS: Well, welcome to our chat. I felt bad for—I felt bad for the guy. He was a really nice guy. He was a football player, and he was a mess. And he was bright, too. But anyway—

WOO: Right, sure he was—

CHAMOUSIS: And things began—by the way, you know, just interrupt—

WOO: Right. Okay.

CHAMOUSIS: Because things—things got better junior year, much better.

WOO: It’s—thinking of freshman year—it’s sad for me to hear what you had to go through. At the same time, it’s a little comforting because I know a lot of queer and people of color on campus like myself, who were—during our freshman year, who were very isolated and nervous, unhappy ourselves, and kind of it’s nice, comforting knowing that, well, there were people here way before us who—who know of this experience as well, and it’s not something that’s—like, it’s easy to put the shame on yourself, and I—it sounds like you did a similar thing when you were a freshman, saying that—kind of placing the blame on yourself?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. Well, you know, it’s—it’s—it’s not only that you feel that way, but also to your point, it’s that you think you’re the only one who feels that way.

WOO: Right. Uh-huh.

CHAMOUSIS: Because everyone around you seems so happy, and—

WOO: Exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: —and they’re, you know, they’re drinking their beer, and they’re—you know, they used to do some crazy things back in the day. One night, they—there were, like, fifteen or twenty guys in the Commons Room, and they were jerking off, and they wanted to see how could shoot the furthest.

WOO: Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: I mean, this was the kind of hyper—I mean, all sorts—you know, like, *I’m not gonna do that!* But, yeah, I mean, as long as—anything that could—oh, and also sophomore year was pledging for fraternities. And so—and—and so I went around to fraternities, and when I met people, you know, I think I—I—I was fine, but then they were other people in my dorm—I mean, there were some people in my dorm who were really, really made fun of, and, I mean, I was not one of those people. But I was—I was viewed as someone, I think, who was—you know, got good grades and maybe was nerdy, even though I didn’t think I was nerdy. And, you know, just—just not one of the boys—just not one of the boys, not one of the frat boys, although—

And I will just throw this in, and maybe we’ll remember to talk about it at the end: One of the most amazing thing about going back to reunions over the years is discovering what people who you thought couldn’t stand you or thought this of you or thought that of you—in fact, didn’t think that at all. [Chuckles.] So, anyway—

Yeah, so fraternities was really bad, and I distinctly remember, you know,—I don’t know how they do it now in terms of your finding out, but—

Are you in a fraternity?

WOO: I am not. I did not pledge. I’m just like you. I did not get involved.

CHAMOUSIS: That’s good. Yeah, I mean, I didn’t mean good, yeah. I didn’t mean “good.” But, you know, back then they would send—like, if they really wanted you, you’d be waiting in your dorm, and you knew that they would be—like, let’s say, the aft- —Friday afternoon, stay in your dorm because wherever you went, they’d be sending some of the brothers over, and if they sent three brothers over, they really wanted you. And if they sent two brothers over, then they wanted you. And if they sent one brother over, it was a ding. It’s called a “ding.”

WOO: A ding. What’s a ding?

CHAMOUSIS: A ding, an outright reject- —an outright rejection. You got [cross-talk; unintelligible].

WOO: Oh. I see. That makes sense—

CHAMOUSIS: So I remember there were four fraternities, and I—I got dinged at all of them, and I remember one guy—one guy telling me, “You know, you know I really thought you were a good guy.” And I thought I had a really good conversation with him. But he said, “You know, when the house voted, you came out really low in the vote.” I mean, what more do you need to hear?

WOO: That is not a confidence boost. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: So that—that was very painful. And then I joined this fraternity, just to join a fraternity because I felt I had to, and my roommate joined it. And it was kind of—well, what I will then—what I will call [The] Tabard-ish. [Chuckles.]

WOO: Which frat was it?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, it was called Phoenix.

WOO: Oh yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: It didn’t even have a Greek name. But it was, like, Tabard-ish. You know, I know what Tabard is, The Tabard. But, you know,—and I—you know, I de-pledged after, like, two terms because I never went. And the more I didn’t go, the more anxious I felt when I went, and—you know, so—

WOO: Not good.

CHAMOUSIS: So that was—yeah, it was—it was not good. So—so on balance, when I’m being really honest with myself,—

Oh, one other thing that was very important,—

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: —which—which counterbalanced all this, was I said, *Oh, my God! I am at Dartmouth. I went from Hempstead, that neighborhood. I am at Dartmouth College. And this is where the Rockefellers went.* And when I was at Dartmouth, the Rockefellers were all still alive. [Chuckles.] *And Nelson [A.] Rockefeller, Class of 1930, walked across the [Dartmouth] Green, where I’m walking now, so I can be whoever I want!*

WOO: Oh, my gosh!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, so that was really important to me, to be—yeah, to be in a place where—it was a sort of an equal—you know, an equal footing, even when things weren’t really that equal. [Chuckles.] Socioeconomically.

Which—and which brings up one other thing, which I may forget.

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: The thing that I was most profoundly ashamed of, profoundly, was if I got—if I were to get a ride home, let’s say, you know, for spring break or something, then people would see where I lived, where my family lived. And so I would—you know, I was a pretty bright guy, so I put myself in these positions where, “Oh, you can just drop me off here, and I can call So-and-so and they’ll pick me up.” So there I was, with a suitcase I couldn’t move because it didn’t have rollers, and I was stuck a mile away from my apartment with no way to get home.

But the thought, as we were driving home—you know, we were leaving Dartmouth. This was my junior and senior year, when, you know, I—I—I sort of hit a groove, as it were, a

good one. But the closer we got to Long Island, I could feel my stomach tensing, and the anxiety and the knots because of the profound shame that I felt, because of where I lived, where we lived.

And then I almost killed myself when, my senior year, my next-door neighbor’s dad, who was an alum, and my next-door neighbor and I were pretty good friends—you know, they were upper middle class, and they came to drive me to school, and I said, “No, you don’t have to drive me. I’ll meet you, you know, downtown,” duh-duh. They said, “No, we’ll come up.”

And his father wanted to insist on helping me with my suitcase, and he actually walked up the stairs of the three-story walkup, and I thought I was going to go flying out the fucking window. I—I was so ashamed that we, you know,—I was poor. So that weighed on me a lot.

And so one thing that did inform my Dartmouth experience in a very meaningful way was the fact that, in a way, I had arrived and that I was, like, “movin’ on up,” as it were, from that old black comedy [television] show, *The Jeffersons*, which you might want to Google. [Chuckles.]

WOO: *The Jeffersons*.

CHAMOUSIS: *The Jeffersons*, yeah. it was about—the theme song was “Movin’ On Up to the East Side, to the Deluxe Apartment in the Sky.” [Both chuckle.] That meant a lot to me. That meant a lot to me.

WOO: When did you have this epiphany that, *Oh, well, I’m here at Dartmouth* and that—was that, like, a turning point for you in terms of your happiness?

CHAMOUSIS: The turning point for me in terms of my happiness was my junior year, when a hundred and fifty women arrived, and—and a few of them were my friends—you know, I had known, and we became fast friends. And I felt like I was—like I was having a normal experience, and I could go out to dinner with them or I could spend a spring week- —you know, I could spend Winter Carnival with them, in the company of women, who brought a different perspective to the school,

who were all sorts of wonderful blessings, even though I was closeted to them. I was still closeted. And I couldn’t ima- — you know, I still—I was just like a—I was a sexual eunuch. But—but I still—I *was*! You know, I hadn’t had—finally, in my ju- —well, I’ll get to that in a second, but—but, you know, they were really good friends, and we—we used to have fun.

And also I moved into—every year, I lived in a different dorm, so my junior year, I lived in Woodward [Hall], and the guys on my floor, it turned out, were—the old term was, like, a BMOC, a Big Man on Campus. But they were—they were really nice guys and the kind of—you know, I always wanted to be accepted, even—I guess even in high school, since I knew what I was really about. I always wanted to be accepted by guys who were, like, more—you know, the more respected guys, who were more athletic but academically—academically inclined and who were good people.

And I had two or three of those guys on my floor. And I got to—I really got to be good friends with them, but for the fact that I still couldn’t be who I am with them. And years later—after all these years, we’re still good friends, and I’ve come out to them, and, you know, they couldn’t be more supportive now, and they feel bad that I went through what I went through.

But that was a big thing, and also having the women on campus. And I never, ever dissembled. Like, everyone would say, “Oh, we know you’re fucking her.” And I—and I wasn’t. You know, I wasn’t. And I was just—it just felt so—it was such a relief to feel “normal,” even—“normal” in quotes—even though I couldn’t be myself, and that sounds a little oxymoronic, but—

WOO: I hear you.

CHAMOUSIS: —to me it was—yeah, to me it was really—it was such a change of pace that I feel like I was blossoming. And I would say to myself, *I will deal with this, with the gay thing, when I’m twenty-six.* You know, arbitrarily, twenty-six. So that was—that was a turning point for me, my junior year.

But there were still—oh, on campus, we did have—and this was junior year and senior year—we did have, in the classes

of seventy- —and there were a couple of guys in my class who hung around, but there were a couple of really flamboyant, openly gay guys, who were—they were Caucasian, and one of them, in the Class of ’74, and he wore midriff—you know, midriff tops and clogs, and he was viciously, verbally abused and physically abused.

One night, the frat boys broke into his room and suspended him outside of his window feet first, something like that, something like that. I mean, he was physically brutalized, and they messed up his room. You know, he had a chandelier and velvet drapes and—

WOO: Uch, yes!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. It was really—are you familiar—there—there is a—there’s a thesis by Allen [A.] Drexel, Allen Drexel, Class of ’91, Class of ’91, and it’s on file at Rauner. And it was his senior thesis. He’s a lawyer in Manhattan now. His senior thesis, on the history of homosexuality at Dartmouth College. It was something—something of that title, but, you know, if you look under Allen Drexel, D-r-e-x-e-l.

At one of our all-class reunions in the early 2000s, Allen is recounting the story. He was speaking to a guy who was Class of ’75, who is a Pulitzer Prize winning author, who covered AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. And he, Allen ’91, is recounting his conversation with this ’75, and ’75 is telling him about the guy, Lewis [P.] Lazare [pronounced luh-ZAHR] Class of 1974], who was physically abused and hung outside of his, you know, dorm room and everything.

And the ’74 who was so abused was Lewis Lazare, and so at our reunion in—all-class reunion in 2004, Allen is recounting this to the assembled multitude. There were about a couple hundred people who were listening to this. And this hand shoots up, and I looked over, and I start to laugh, and this guy stands up and says, “*I* am Lewis Lazare.”

WOO: [Laughs.] I love it! [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: And indeed he was!

WOO: Dramatic! [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: It was *very* dramatic. And he, you know—I mean, that poor guy was—you know, he—he had more balls than all the frat boys—you know, it goes without saying how brave he was, how brave he was. And he was, you know—

And just another little trinket: I also found out years later that while I was at Dartmouth from ’69 to ’73, the gay alums would come up during the fall or in the spring—oh, they come up in the fall for football games. And they would just all happen to congregate in the Commons Hall of the Choates, like the Commons room—

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: —at Brown, to meet people. And apparently there’s a whole, little underground thing that people knew that’s where you would go to meet alums and hook up.

WOO: Gay alums or just, like, any alums?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, yeah, no, gay alums, gay alums.

WOO: Oh, my gosh!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, this gay little subculture, which I had absolutely no—I had no inkling whatsoever.

WOO: That’s where the new LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] Center is right now funny enough.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, okay.

WOO: In the Commons at Choates. That’s funny.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh really? Isn’t that funny?

WOO: Maybe it was intentional. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Isn’t that a historical coincidence?

WOO: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Because we’re talking fifty—almost fifty years before that.

And I did have—I don’t know, I shouldn’t just throw this in, but I—I did have a sexual experience with a woman my junior year.

WOO: Was it your first?

CHAMOUSIS: Yes, it was my first—

WOO: Do tell.

CHAMOUSIS: —intercourse with a woman, with a woman. And it turned out—I mean, I knew this ahead of time, and it turned out she *was* a nice Greek girl from Wellesley [College], and it turns out that I *didn’t* know when I first asked her out, but as we began to talk, she—her family went to my Greek church in Hempstead.

WOO: Yeah, the [crosstalk] first and largest [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: And my mother—and my mother—my mother knew her mother.

WOO: Uh-oh!

CHAMOUSIS: And if my mother knew that I had slept with her. I mean, at some point maybe she would have said, *Thank God*, but some other—

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: —[cross-talk] she would have said—she would have killed me, you know, because I—I slept with her. And I really liked this girl, but I couldn’t—I just couldn’t—I couldn’t pursue it because I knew what the deal was. You know, I knew—you know, I just didn’t want to hurt her and hurt myself, so I just let go.

WOO: Wow. Was that the only relationship you’ve had on campus?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, yeah, the only—the only sexual experience. Except for one time later on, I had a girlfriend.

Oh, I did—I did—I was friendly with this woman from Mount Holyoke, who came up a couple of weekends, but it was—you know, we didn’t have sex, and she was—you know, she was—she was a really—she was a really—a really good—she was a nice kid. She was a good person. And she ended up marrying, years later, one of my classmates. But there was no sex there whatsoever.

WOO: Okay. So would you say at this time, junior, senior year, you were—you were more comfortable with yourself after, like, the hundred fifty women came onto cam- —joined the college, but you weren’t quite—you didn’t quite identify as gay yet?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I knew that I—I knew that I was gay, because I knew I was attracted to men, but I couldn’t—I couldn’t acknowledge it to anybody else. I was terrified. I was so terrified of being rejected and being an outcast like I had been pretty much my whole life. And now that I had achieved a certain amount of acceptance, and these guys—also when I—after I de-pledged my fraternity, I couldn't—I couldn’t afford to—to—I just didn’t—I couldn’t afford to join another one. I didn’t really want to join another one.

But these guys, who were, you know, like the more—like, the guys I was talking to were all in Palaeopitus [Senior Society]—you know, secret societies they had been invited to join. You know, so they were the more respected, you know, popular guys on campus. And they would—they would invite me to their fraternities. So back then—

WOO: Oh!

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. So back then, for example, the—Heorot [Chi Phi Heorot, now Chi Heorot], Sigma Nu, Bones Gates were, like, the real cool—they were pretty cool fraternities. The gay—the so-c- —oh, people did make fun of Alpha Chi [Alpha], because that’s where all the [Dartmouth College] Glee Club guys were. And—and so everyone would joke that they were—they would say, “That’s where all the fags were, and they pretended they weren’t fags, but they were fags.”

And you do know the story about 1985.

WOO: I do.

CHAMOUSIS: How—you do, okay.

WOO: That was after your time there, though, but that—

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I know. So I don’t want to—I don’t want to step on anyone else’s parade, but I just wanted to make sure you had heard about that.

WOO: Right. I had—

CHAMOUSIS: And there was a guy—yeah, and you did hear about—because this—this became—I—I got very involved in DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association, or Dartmouth LGBTQIA+Alum Association], starting in the mid- to late-nineties, and have remained ever since until about three years ago, when I resigned my position.

So I would hear a lot of these stories. And there was this one guy who was on the DGALA board, who was Class of ’82, who was beaten and stuffed in his closet with feces all over him.

WOO: Uh-huh. It was funny—

CHAMOUSIS: You heard that? Yeah,—

WOO: From one of my other interviews, mm-hm.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. I don’t want to detract from the veracity of these stories by—you know, this is how I’ve heard them—you know, how I’ve heard these stories.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: So anyway, let’s stick with my experience. There’s enough there, I think.

WOO: You were just about to talk about what the gay frats were.

CHAMOUSIS: I’m sorry, what the gay?

WOO: What the—where—was it just Alpha Chi that you said that everyone thought all the gays were?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, it wasn’t—you know, it just—Alpha Chi was the zinger, so there was no concept—you know, there was the very, very, very tiny—you know, five people, eight people at most, who everyone knew, you know, were gay, but no one had any- —you know, they—they were just—apart from them, there was nothing—there was nothing else on campus. I mean, it wasn’t until the eighties when all that, you know, started to—to manifest itself, its ugly head, as it were.

But—for example, three of the guys on my floor sophomore year—three *other* guys on my sophomore—my sophomore—in Wheeler, second floor—it turned out they’re gay. But no one—you know, we didn’t know.

WOO: At the time, right.

CHAMOUSIS: At the time, yeah. I mean, forget it. I mean, when I say “forget it,” I’m talking about myself, but obviously all these other guys were—were gay, and they didn’t come out, either.

WOO: Yeah. I feel like—[Laughs.]—I feel like it’s even the similar case today, too, in some ways. I’m sure not in any way the same culture, but even in my class of the ‘20s, like, we know, like, eight people—everyone knows, like, eight people, and then I’m sure there’s a ton of people who are closeted. [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I’m surprised it’s only eight that are, you know, out. I mean—

WOO: No, there are way more. I meant, like, people that we—at least within my class, that you kind of know of. [Chuckles.] But that’s anoth- —that’s anoth- —that’s a—it’s not about me. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, right, right.

WOO: How about—were you involved with any senior societies?

CHAMOUSIS: No. No, I wasn’t—I wasn’t asked to join any senior society.

WOO: But your friends invited you to a lot of their events, right?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, right, they invited me to a lot of their events, and I felt good because, you know, these were, like,—it sounds so—it sounds so, you know, cheesy [chuckles], but, you know, these were, like, the cool guys, and it was nice to be accepted by cool guys, you know, who were good guys, solid, had some ambition, who were accomplished academically, and they were just good—good guys and fun to be with.

WOO: Did you—

CHAMOUSIS: So I felt good that I—go ahead.

WOO: Did you ever find anyone—like, any other gay or queer friends on campus? Even, like,—even, like—

CHAMOUSIS: Aside from people who I knew?

WOO: Right, among those eight people that you said. Did you ever have any attraction with them?

CHAMOUSIS: Absolutely not.

WOO: Absolutely not.

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I—one—one guy was in what I would say—he was in one of my French classes, and from that group of five or eight guys, he was sort of on the per- —there were only, like, three of four who were, I will say, hard core, as it were—I mean, who were really out there. And this guy was sort of on the periphery. So I would talk to him, but we didn’t really associate—yeah, I didn’t really—he wasn’t among my friends, but it—it—it wasn’t because—it wasn’t because he was gay and that I was—that I might be afraid to be “branded,” if you will. And I use that term intentionally, that word intentionally.

WOO: Branded.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. Identified—you know, marked as—as gay. It just wasn’t—you know,—

WOO: Like a scarlet letter.

CHAMOUSIS: I’m sure that—I’m sure that—yeah. I’m sure that—yeah, these guys wore scarlet letters, for sure. But that’s just the way it was.

WOO: Mm-hm. Do you—do you remember what their names were?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. Do you want me to tell you their names? I mean—[Both chuckle.]

WOO: Wait, I’m not sure what the protocol is for this.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I mean, I—I frank- —yeah, I mean, I think a few of them died of AIDS, but Lewis would have no problem—Lewis Lazare. You know, he wears his scarlet letter proudly.

WOO: Right, for those who you think who are—who are publicly out.

CHAMOUSIS: And he writes for the *Chicago Tribune*, and so—

WOO: I adore Lewis.

CHAMOUSIS: Of course, he—he—well, until recently he did—of course, he did the theater reviews, so—

WOO: Do you remember—you were kind of leading into one of my next questions, was about how did the AIDS crisis at that time—do you remember reading about it, and how did it impact you?

CHAMOUSIS: The AIDS crisis. I graduated from Dartmouth in ’73. I graduated from Columbia Law School. I went right there after Dartmouth, in ’76, which is another interesting little interlude. I first had sex with a man in 1979.

WOO: [Chuckles.] You have that marked on your calendar. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, yeah, because he was—he was one of the top Ford models. [Laughs.]

WOO: What?? A Ford model?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, he was—yeah. I mean, he was a big deal.

WOO: Okay!

CHAMOUSIS: So I said, “Well, you know,”—I said, “All right!”

WOO: Accomplishment after accomplishment. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: I said, *I can’t—I can’t be <u>that</u> ugly.* Yeah, so AIDS did not—I remember—I remember AIDS didn’t hit really until ’81, and I remember distinctly reading the little article, the little article in *The* [*New York*] *Times*. I was on the bus, coming home from the East Side, where I had been cruising in front of gay bars because I was too scared to go in, for fear that somebody would recognize me. So I was thirty years old. Even though I was sexually active, you know, I’d meet guys and have anonymous sex, basically.

So I was—I was a working lawyer at the time. I was a young associate, and there was this little item in *The Times* about this—that gay, homosexual men—I don’t know if they said “homosexual,” as opposed to “gay,” but—were—it had been reported that there were these opportunistic infections that physicians San Francisco and New York had reported and that they were highly unusual, and that these infections seemed to be limited to gu- —men who had sex with men, although that’s not the terms they used back then.

I remember reading that article and becoming—and that was at the time where I was thinking of coming out. I was maybe approaching thirty. But I was—by that time—we passed law school and my—my job at my first law firm, but I was at a new job, an ad agency as a lawyer, and I said, *Oh, my God, you know, if I come out, what if they*—later on, maybe within a couple of years after that, when AIDS became known, I said, *Oh, my God, if I come out now, everyone will think I have AIDS, or I can get AIDS or that I’m carrying AIDS, and I don’t need—and jeez, I have that to worry about now.*

WOO: Another thing, yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. So I don’t want to get ahead of ourselves here, so—so AIDS came way later in my life.

WOO: Uh-huh. That was, like, when you were around thirty?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, that was the first inkling, as it were, of AIDS, so 1981, 1981.

So we skipped over law school.

WOO: Yes. Let’s go back to that.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, I was in Colum- —I was at Columbia Law. No one in my class was out.

WOO: No one. Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: No one. No one in the whole law school was out. I had an adviser—each first year student was assigned a second-year adviser, and it was pretty obvious to me that he was gay. He was—you know, in all the stereotypical ways. Plus, back then a clear—a—a big giveaway was having a moustache.

WOO: Oh!

CHAMOUSIS: Uh-huh. So—and his name was Doug, and he was a sweetie, and he’d gone to Columbia College, but I never broached the subject with him. My classmates were always wondering why I wasn’t dating. And, you know, so then I kind of had a girlfriend for a bit whom, it turns out, I had met at Dartmouth.

WOO: Really? Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. I thought she was—she was an exchange student, and I thought she was sort of out of my league, you know, if I were straight, even if I were straight, because I was still under the “ugly” syndrome. And anyway, so I just dated her a few times. But, you know, you’d walk on the Columbia campus, and you would see—you’d see signs: “Queer Dance.” Now, this was before the—the advent of the, you know, generally—of “queer” as it’s known today. But it was “Queer Dance.”

WOO: “Queer Dance.”

CHAMOUSIS: And I couldn’t—yeah, “Queer Dance.” You know, there’d be a sign posted on the gate as you entered the university on Broadway and 116th Street, the main gate. But I couldn’t fathom, you know, going to—going—going to it.

WOO: Right, for fear of being outed?

CHAMOUSIS: Well,—oh, yeah. So—so my law school experience, from ’73 to ’76, was—was also completely asexual. One time, this guy started—you know, back in the days when tennis shorts were short, basketball shorts were short?

WOO: Right, uh-huh.

CHAMOUSIS: And so I was on the subway, and this guy started, like, rubbing my leg, and then as the subway doors opened, he departed and kind of beckoned to me. But I was too—I was too—I was tempted, and I got horny, and then I was freaked out.

WOO: Wow! On the subway. How romantic.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. How romantic. Right. Yeah, so—so I—unless you have any other questions,—

WOO: So—

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, go ahead. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t, —go ahead.

WOO: So how do you think—well, I guess there was no one out in law school either.

CHAMOUSIS: Right.

WOO: Did you feel a similar isolation that you felt your freshman year at Dartmouth as well, or—or—or was something different?

CHAMOUSIS: By then, I—I was feeling more—I didn’t feel as isolated. First of all, we were all first-year law students and we were suffering and we were miserable, and we were trying to adjust being first-year law students. And, you know, who had time? Who had time—

WOO: [cross talk] For all the this other stuff, yeah. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: You know—yeah, for—yeah. But I did feel—you know, I got to be pretty good friends with two or three guys, and it just happened that they were guys. I had a couple of female friends too. But they were—they were like my—like my brothers. And I did feel—yes, I felt isolated, but it was—

Then I started experiencing more anxiety, because, you know, they were—one of them had a girlfriend, and another one—another guy—another of the two of them was fucking everything—you know, every w- —every girl in sight, every woman in sight. I mean, just, like, nonstop. I mean, he would borrow—he would borrow money from his doorman to pay off hookers, and—I mean, it—it was out of control.

And I always felt, you know, this pressure that they would ask me—or they *would* ask me, like, “What’s going on with you?” And—and I felt tremendous pressure, you know, that it was nothing or that I had to lie, because it takes a lot of pressure to lie and to lie consistently over time.

WOO: Right. Exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: The problem with lying is that you have to remember all your lies,—

WOO: Exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: —which—which came to be a big factor even in my professional life, when I moved to a law firm and—and thereafter. But I started experiencing more—in addition to the isolation, the anxiety, so that now that we were more adults and people were, you know, out of their pre- and post-pubescent, you know, girl crushes and everything, the people were, you know, starting to establish relationships. You know, ultimately they may get married. Because we were, you know, out of college by then.

And so I felt that I had to control—I had to be vigilant. I had to be vigilant, to control the conversation so that it wouldn’t drift off to, “What are you doing this weekend?” or “Whom are you seeing?” and duh-duh-duh-duh-duh. It would—it

would cause a lot of anxiety for me, because that was a topic that I just didn’t want to—I didn’t want to touch.

But I don’t think any—I don’t know if people had an inkling that I might be gay or, you know, whatever, or maybe they just thought I was asexual. But—but that—I started to develop a lot of anxiety about my sexuality.

WOO: Right. For sure. I mean, you had a similar anxiety of people finding out that you came from a low-income background, and a lot of things. It’s just clear that you’re—you’re—you were kind of good at keeping secrets and—and avoiding them, would you say?

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I would say that.

Oh, the other—and that harkens back to one thing in my childhood, since I’m being a little peripatetic here, but—

WOO: Go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: My mom would always say—my mom would always say, “I’m gonna tell you something, but you gotta keep it a secret. You can’t tell anybody.” So, I mean, this was—

WOO: You were trained from young. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, this was—to me, I mean, this was quite a secret, so—yeah. So, I mean, that was pretty much it through law school. You know, so—I don’t know, the difficulty of getting through it and also, maybe, who knows? I mean, a lot of the times in law—I mean, I really enjoyed being in the classes, and once again, I said, *Gee, I’ve made it from Hempstead to Dartmouth to Columbia Law School, and this is pretty cool*, you know?

You know, everybody from Columbia gets a really good job, multiple jobs, so—so I felt—you know, aside from that one thing, as it were [chuckles], which I continued to sublimate, to the extent I could—maybe I didn’t, because of course there were periods during law school when I was down, too, and I didn’t know whether that was because I was—you know, because of the environment, because Columbia was also such a depressing environment back then. You know,

the students seemed really unhappy, and they lived in these vermin-infested dorms. I mean, it was true! You know, and coming from Hanover—

And by the way, I spent my junior and senior summers, after junior and senior, in Hanover as a TA [teaching assistant] in organic.

WOO: Oh! Yeah, I—I saw. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: So that—that was pretty. And a couple of women offered themselves to me, because I graded the exams.

WOO: To, like, bribe you for a better grade?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. [Both chuckle.]

WOO: That’s hilarious. And you were, like, “No, ma’am.” [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: “Wait. No, but what about him?” [Chuckles.]

WOO: Yeah. [Chuckles.] “He looks like he needs some help on his homework.” [Chuckles.] That’s great.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. But that would—you know, that—that would never happen.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: But anyway—

WOO: Did you—you mentioned that—did you have—how’d you make friends when you were at Columbia Law? Did you—were they kind of gender balanced as well, like when you were at Dartmouth?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, see, we were grouped—we were grouped alphabetically, so there were two sections, so basically—you know, and you even—you—you—you had assigned seats, for purposes of the Socratic method—called on, which was a terror, but—you know, to me it was, anyway. But apart from—but beyond the scope of this interview.

But yeah, so you met people in your section, and they tended to be your friends, you know, unless you knew—there were—there were some Dartmouth guys in my class, whom I knew. We were always—

WOO: Were you friends with them?

CHAMOUSIS: I kn- —well, one guy—yeah, one guy was a big—he dealt a lot of weed, and years later, he actually was an adversary of mine in a matter, and I got angry with him. I said, “You know, you were a lot nicer when you were a fucking drug dealer.” And another guy was—I knew who he was. And then another guy—yeah, I just turned around, and there he was, you know. I had met him two years before that. He was two classes ahead of me, and there he was, in my section.

But I didn’t really hang out with them. I made new friends, and I made a lot of friends. But there was always this—this—you know, this secret that I had, and the secret that really almost killed me until I was able to work through it. I—I have to say that. I mean, it really almost killed me psychologically.

WOO: Uh-huh. This is, like, from ages twenty-two to around thirty?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I kept pushing it off and kept pushing it off and kept pushing it off, but then what happens is, you know, there’s a time, at least for me—this I the way I experienced it—I wanted to be free, and there came a time in my life where—after I started practicing, you certainly couldn’t be gay in a—there was one openly gay man in my law firm, and—and I went there in 1976.

WOO: What was he—what was he like?

CHAMOUSIS: And he was openly gay, and sometimes he—even—I mean, you could tell that he was gay, and unfortunately for him, his name was Mr. Darling. And he—he was brilliant, but there was no question—there was no ques- —it wasn’t even on the ta- —it wasn’t even on the floor to go up to the table that he could ever be made a partner. But when he left, one of the partners who was more open minded gave him a fantastic going-away party in his townhouse, you know, with all the bells and whistles. And, you know, it was really sad.

And, as a matter of fact, my office mate at the time, as a first-year, was a guy who was deeply closeted, and years later he said to me—you know, he didn’t know about me nor I about him. Years later he said to me—I found out that he was—we got to be friendly when I came out to him. He—he was one of the founding members of the UVA—he was three years younger than I—of the UVA Serpentine Society, which was the gay society, and a founder of the gay student group at Yale Law School.

And as soon as he came to, you know, a Wall Street type firm, back into the closet he went. And there were several gay lawyers in my firm, and they were all closeted. And then he told me one story—and I guess this is, you know, not Dartmouth specific, breifly, but just, you know, indicative of the times and maybe would help the listeners have a more—have more flavor of what was going on back then.

Where he—there was another associate who was attracted to my friend, and he feigned having to review an old memo with him, so they went into a conference room, and the guy who feigned having to review the memo with my friend closed the door, and in the meantime he had gotten a straight male associate to stand as guard at the door, and he put the move—he tried to hook up with my friend on the conference room—you know, in the conference room. [Chuckles.]

WOO: That is so hilarious.

CHAMOUSIS: And that’s what happened. And everything was really secret. And there was one guy in my firm, a partner—a partner who was—he—everyone knew he preferred to work with young, fair-haired associates—

WOO: [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] He could never work with a woman. And everyone would say, “Oh, it’s because he doesn’t—you know, he can’t work with women.” But everyone knew—you know, people suspected he might be—I—I knew he was gay because I saw him coming out of a gay bar. At least he had the guts to be in it.

WOO: [Laughs.] Right.

CHAMOUSIS: I didn’t ha- didn’t have the guts to go in. Anyway,—and I remember saying to myself, *You know, if you don’t do*—he was just really nasty. And he would ream people for, you know, like, having—like, a spot on a memo, like, a pen spot. He’d make you do the whole memo all over again. Before the days of—you know, they had to be typed—retyped on an IBM Selectric. And I remember saying to myself one day, *You know, if I don’t do something about who I am, I’m gonna end up like him*.

WOO: Like him. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Like, being just a miserable, cruel—you know, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. But it’s still took time after that for me to do anything.

WOO: When was the first time you went to a—a gay bar?

CHAMOUSIS: The first time I went to a gay bar, I had just turned thirty-two. Now, I used to hang outside gay bars—

WOO: Oh, so this is way later.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. I used to hang outside gay bars on the East Side, and that’s how I would pick up guys, because I would pretend to be waiting at a local bus stop—

WOO: Oh, so I see.

CHAMOUSIS: —or something like that.

WOO: Mm-hm.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. You know, I mean, it was really—yeah. And so that’s how I would—now, this is *my* story. Obviously, there were guys in—let’s say in advertising, who were—well, even though I was in advertising after that, I still didn’t come out for a while, but, you know, there were other—you know. Like, one of my friends, with whom I go to the movies—he’s eighty-one years old, and he said, “Twenty-five years old, I was running all over the city, and I never encountered any

prejudice, and I was doing this and doing that.” And that was his experience.

Now, you—you have to bear in mind, you know, that my experience was also informed by the way I was brought up, the religion, the—you know, the boy who had to continue the family name—you know, all these other pressures, which—which informed *my* experience in a very, very big way.

So the first time I went to a gay bar was in Paris [France], and—and I walked in, and I—I looked around to see if I knew anybody, which I didn’t, and I looked at the bartender. Now, I had been very sexually active for three or four years by then, and I looked at the bartender, and I said, *Oh. My. God.* And so to my amazement, he—basically what happened was—I guess it was mutual, and he got somebody to—to take over for him, and there was the beginning of—of just an amazing night.

So I went—so I went back the next night, and he wasn’t there, and I got onto the dance floor, and this guy—and this is a true story. [Chuckles.] This guy—

WOO: A true story. [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: —this guy—yeah, I haven’t lied . When I reflect back on what I’ve said in this interview, I won’t say, *Oh, my God! My name’s attached to it, but what the fuck?*

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: So this guy—this guy steps on my foot as we’re dancing, and I looked up, and I said, “Oh, wow.” And he—you know, so we continued—I was dancing with some guy, and stepped on my foot again. And I looked at him, and I said, “Excuse me, sir,”—you know, I said to him in French—I said to him in French—I said, “You know, the words are ‘excuse me.’” And he said, “Do you know who I am?” And I said, “Yes, you’re [the Russian ballet dancer] Rudolf [K.] Nureyev,” and I can say that Rudolf Nureyev is a rude asshole. Now, do you know who Rudolf Nureyev is?

WOO: I do not know. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, my God! Alright, N-u—

WOO: Rudolf.

CHAMOUSIS: Rudolf Nureyev, N-u-r-e-y-e-v. He was the greatest male ballet dancer from the Soviet Union, who had defected to the West in the early sixties.

WOO: Ah. And then now he was at the gay bar.

CHAMOUSIS: And he was at the gay bar. You know, he was gay. He tried to keep it closeted, but he was—he was world famous. He was the most—he was probably one of the greatest male dancers of all time in classical ballet. And he was stepping on my fucking foot [both chuckle] and not saying, “I’m sorry.” He died years later of AIDS, in the early nineties. But anyway, that’s the first time I ever went to a gay bar.

WOO: Wow. Can’t spell Rudolf without “rude.” [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, right. [Chuckles.]

So—but then, you know, I came back to New York. I resumed my normal—so-called normal abnormal life of just—you know, just hooking up and—it wasn’t until later—or I went to this ad agency after—I spent five years at my law firm, and I was—I spent two of those years loaned out to our biggest corporate client. And there were all sorts of really hom- —they were—it was a very straight-laced, like, Nazi-like company, a big corporate conglomerate here in the city.

And there was one guy there who was on staff, and he was very effeminate. I’m sure he was openly gay, you know, but you could tell—I mean, you could tell. I hate to use a word like that, but he was openly—he was very effeminate, and you—you were almost positive he was gay. And everyone used to make fun of him and call him Skippy.

WOO: Skippy.

CHAMOUSIS: So I had that kind of environment there. Yeah, Skippy. You know, it was a totally pejorative—you know, they might as well have called him Twinkie. A totally pejorative term. And then one day, the—the male model whom I met that night—

of course, I used a false—I used a false name with him, because, you know, obviously, as soon as—if I told him my name was Nick, you know, I’m the only Nick in all of New York City, so he could clearly identify me.

WOO: Right. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: And one day I hear—so I’m out with my buddies during lunch, with my colleagues, my lawyer colleagues, and I—I hear, you know, some guy—I look over, and that guy is standing next to me, standing next to us, waiting for the light, and he’s wearing clogs and, you know, whatever. And I—I—I almost had a bowel movement, like right on the spot. He gave me this look, like,—like, “Don’t worry, I won’t—you know, I won’t blow your cover,” as it were.

But that—that was my experience with my law firm. You know, just—you know, it just—things didn’t really start to change until I got things moving when I went to the ad agency in ’81, and I was there from ’81 to ’87. And that’s when I sort of decided that I had to do something.

Am I on the right track here? [cross-talk] I don’t remember the question.

WOO: You are. I—I—I wanted to ask if—

CHAMOUSIS: This—this is a lot of history, a lot of things that, you know, students or whatever won’t—I guess they don’t know about.

WOO: I—exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: It’s—it’s not Dartmouth specific, is what I’m trying to say. And is it okay to you that it’s not Dartmouth specific?

WOO: It is—it is fine, because—because you’re—because you’re a Dartmouth grad, and so everything is relevant, and—

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, because an experience is an experience, whether it be, you know, at the college on the hill or elsewhere. [Chuckles.]

WOO: Uh-huh.

CHAMOUSIS: So, yeah, and that’s when I said, *Oh, I’m at an ad agency now.* And so, you know,—and so I’m walking down the hall, and, there was a creative department and the media department and the account execs, and so, like, one of the guys in the creative department—he had a model—the old—I don’t know if you’re familiar with the old Calvin Klein underwear ads?

WOO: Oh, yeah.

CHAMOUSIS: From the eighties, that you may have seen around or that you can Google? And so—you know, this was one of my first days in the office, and I’m—I’m being shown around by one of my colleagues in the legal department of six people. And I said, “Oh, I didn’t know we did the—I didn’t know we did Calvin”—you know, the Calvin ads. And she said, “No, but he does the model.” [Chuckles.]

WOO: Damn.

CHAMOUSIS: So I thought that, you know, once—once I was there, you know, that I could be liberal, but then my boss—somehow it came up that the guy whom I had been hired—I had been hired to fill a vacancy, and one of the problems that the guy—it was mostly work-related that my predecessor had, but my boss really couldn’t accept the fact that the guy was gay and that the—a senior executive had made a comment to my boss about the lightweight that my boss had hired. And this was back in 1981.

And so my boss, in telling—in relaying this to me, said, “You know, I’ve become”—he was a very conservative guy, and in many ways he was a very good guy. He said, “I’ve become liberal in many ways, but when it comes to homosexuality, I’m not there yet.” So that was like a big *Mmm.*

And then I had to dissemble, and it was really hard for me. And he’s telling me stuff—you know, cause I—I came across as a very, you know, straight—I’ll say mascu- —you know,—

WOO: Yeah, straight passing.

CHAMOUSIS: I didn’t—I didn’t—yeah, straight—straight acting—you know, whatever. And I mean, one day he said to me,—we had a

couple of guys that we use a outhouse lawyers, who were both totally heterosexual men, but they like to wear, like,—one of them had, like, a little Italian purse. And my boss would go *crazy*—you know, go *crazy*. And the other one wore a pink tie. And my boss went *crazy*. He'd even been to the guys' weddings, and these guys were not—you know, they weren't—they didn't get married to be—to dissemble; they were just the way they were.

So my boss says to me, “Now, I just want to make it clear that it's okay for you (i.e., me) to wear a pink tie because you can pull it off. And while I'm at it—and while I'm at it, I don't want you fucking any of the secretaries.”

WOO: [Sharp intake of breath. Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: So—so I had to live in that environment, and—I mean, so what happened to me was—to move this along a little bit because there are some Dartmouth things I want to get to—

WOO: Yes.

CHAMOUSIS: —was that I, you know, started to feel—I—I met this guy, and it turned out he worked at my company, and I'd used a fake name with him and everything, and they were going to move his division, which was across town, into my division, and he was going to next door to me. So that, of course, sent me—and, you know, I would be exposed. So that's when I really started to feel like *I have to do something about this.* And for each—you know, the Newtonian laws—you know, for each force there's a counterforce?

WOO: Exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: So part of me was being pulled one way, and the other part of me was being pulled diametrically, one hundred eighty degrees the other way. And I had to keep, you know, the secret, and people in my department—it was a small department, and we all got along pretty well. People started to get married, and people started to have babies and talk about their weddings and talk about their babies. And I began to feel more and more isolated, and I started to get depressed. And people were asking me, like, what I did on weekends, and I'd have to watch my pronouns.

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: And [cross-talk; unintelligible], but it was real- —it was really, really taxing.

WOO: Right, to keep up all the lies and everything?

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. And also—I will go back to one thing when I was in my law firm. I mean, I was—I was really, really good at what I did, and I could write, you know, the best memo and do the best research, and I had the best written work product of—of the people in my associate class, and it was acknowledged, and it was true, and I’m not ashamed to say it.

But I always felt that in conversations, especially with male partners, I always felt—I became very withdrawn and very self-effacing, even though I was gregarious and social with my peers and everything and I was very well liked, but somehow there was this male authority figure, and I didn’t know whether it was because I didn’t have a role model, a gay role model growing up, you know, in terms of my dad. But I think what it was and what I think I had learned in therapy was that I felt that I was less than a man because I am gay. And I felt that.

And so around these guys who were the big decision makers, even though if we were at a cocktail party and we were joking around, I could joke around with them, I always felt that I was a “less than.” And so I also held myself back, and I—I was reticent with them because I was also, I think, afraid that if I—if I showed—I could help shining in my written work, but if I shone in any other way, also I would stand out, and if I stood out, people might want to bring me down. You know, I wasn’t being paranoid or anything, but people would somehow be—be talking about me. And if they were talking about me, one thing may lead to another, and they may somehow start speculating and somehow uncover my secret.

WOO: Exactly.

CHAMOUSIS: And that’s—that’s the way I lived my life for several years. I mean, professionally. So it really—the fact that I didn’t come

out and I couldn’t be who I was hurt me in that way. And also if I can’t—as an attorney, I don’t do litigation, but I still am in adversarial situations. If I’m an attorney and I cannot—not advocate for myself and be myself, how the hell am I going to advocate for anybody else in an effective manner?

So, you know, I started realizing that, and I said, *I really have to do something about this.* Ultimately what happened was, you know, I started to go through the process, and I came—I came out to a couple of my friends, and they were very shocked, but they were supportive. Unfortunately, at the same time—

WOO: Was this at the corporation, at the law firm?

CHAMOUSIS: Yes, at the corporation, from ’81 to ’86. It was around eighty-—it wasn’t until the end, around ’86—yeah, because I said I was almost thirty-five. Yeah, I was thirty-four and I came out to my closest friends, a few of them. And then at that time, by the end of ’86, my—my mom had—was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and she was terminal, and I also lost my job because of a takeover. So I had those three things going on all at the same time.

WOO: And that’s kind of what pushed you?

CHAMOUSIS: That pushed me into a deep clinical depression, where—and—and—and as worse as that is—you know, losing my mom, which happened in a matter of months, and losing my job, which I—in which—a lot of my identity was wrapped up in my job, if only because I loved it so much and it was really interesting. But then, you know, coming out and having to—it was just absolutely searing, absolutely searing. And I was bedridden for months. I couldn’t get out of bed until I was able to get myself some professional help and get back on my feet.

So that—I sort of threw that in at the end, but, I mean, I’m happy to talk—I talked out—about that—I talk about that openly, and I don’t hide any of that, but that was a big turning point for me.

WOO: What got you out of the depression?

CHAMOUSIS: Well, I had to be—I had to be medicated. You know, I took an antidepressant. I had been in therapy, you know, and the stuff started to come out—you know, going back to my childhood and everything. But it—it—I beat—it was going through therapy and living—yeah, and just—I mean, there were certain other things that pop out, you know, like my mom. I found out—I told her that I was in therapy, and she suspected that that was the reason that I—I started coming out before she passed away, obviously, and she thought—I think she knew that I was gay, but we ne- —it was never discussed. It was just never discussed.

And at one point, when she was dying, there is an icon—you know, Greek Orthodox believe in icons—you know, pictures of saints? And this icon had passed from Nicholas to Nicholas in my—in my family. And so my mother’s giving me the icon, and she’s a few months before death. And she’s bedridden, and she said, “Well, I’m turning the icon over to you now, should you ever get married.”

So, of course, I’m saying to myself, *Well, you know, the icon stops here,* and I can say jokingly that, well, that was good for another three years of therapy right there, that—you know. So I—I just had to go through all of that.

And in the meantime, you know, I met someone around that time, just as I was coming out, who was a successful investment banker, of course. And he—he had been out—he had been out for a long time, and he decided that I was the one, but I wasn’t ready for it. And so I embarked on this crazy relationship, where—like, one time he took me to a—to a gay bar, and by then I was going to bars, and he said, “You see this?” He says, “Look at how unhappy all these people look.” You know, they were all having cocktails in their suits and everything. And he said, “So now you’ve seen—so now you’ve seen gay life, and you see how unhappy these guys are.” And they didn’t look really unhappy. He said, “So this is why you should spend the rest of your time with me.” [Chuckles.]

Anyway, so that relationship ended, and then I—after that, by—by ’89 I—I was—between ’86 and ’89, I went through this phase where I couldn’t work because I was working through all these issues, and I said, *I can’t go back into the*

workplace. I’m too scared. They’ll think I’m gay. I mean, this was really heavy stuff for me.

And—and my therapist at the time said, “Well, your problem is that you have money,” because I’d saved up money, working. And so, you know, you can’t—you know, you can afford the luxury of not working, but—so finally I got back into the workforce, and I met somebody, and we were together from eighty- —I’m really going fast here, so—I feel like I don’t want to leave anything out, but we can go back, obviously, and review.

So from ’89 to 2002, I was with someone. You know, my sister knew, my—you know, my friends knew. My friends met him, yada-yada-yada. And in the meantime, one of the ways I—to help me come out was I got involved in DGALA in the mid-nineties.

WOO: The mid-nineties.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, where it had just started—DGALA was founded in ’85 by a guy who—he was one of the co-founders, and he’s still a good friend of mine, and he was a graduate of the [U.S.] Merchant Marine Academy, and he went to Dartmouth to get his degree in computer science. And while he was on campus, he started this group. And that’s when the college first had to—had to grapple with—and I—I say that intentionally—the college was forced to grapple with—to begin grappling with gay people. And—and that’s when the incident happened at Tri-Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa], where the president was thrown out and yada-yada-yada. So—

I don’t want to go too fast here, but—but—

WOO: Okay, go ahead.

CHAMOUSIS: Was it—was it [Edwin H.] “Ed” Hermance [Class of 1962] who was the one who initiated the DGALA? Do you remember him?

CHAMOUSIS: I’m sorry, was it what?

WOO: Ed Hermance who you’re talking about?

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, no, he—yeah, no, Ed—Ed was, like, Class of ’62 or something?

WOO: Mm-hm.

CHAMOUSIS: And he—he is known for, if you will, writing a letter to the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* in ’83, saying, “Hey, I’m gay. If anybody’s out there. You know, I’m gay. Contact me.” But that’s how we started. And I don’t think DGA- —you know, there was some effort in the late eighties to rec- —you know, the college just didn’t want to have anything to do with us. And in ’95, I just—you know, I had met [Charles T.] “Chuck” [Edwards A&S Class of 1986], and as a matter of fact, the first time I—

WOO: Chuck Edwards?

CHAMOUSIS: Chuck Edwards, yeah. I’m still in his guest book in his apartment. The first time I went to his place was ’92. And I guess I got—I met him through some—yeah, that’s right, there were these informal Dartmouth get-togethers, and there was “a list,” in quotes, “a list,” and the college had—now—so this is—I want to be careful here because I don’t want to speak inaccurately. But around that time, the college was aware that there were—there were these—there were these men who had never married and lived in San Francisco.

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: I mean, that's—you know. I mean, that’s a—that’s a—that’s really not very charitable, but that’s some of the essence of it, or that’s the w- —that’s the folklore that’s been passed down. So we—we started having, in the early nineties—I said, *Well, I’m gonna go.* And I brought my then partner, who—we’d been together since ’89. And I had met him on the predecessor to the internet, which was a phone sex line.

WOO: The phone sex line.

CHAMOUSIS: You may have heard about those. Did you ever hear about those?

WOO: I have not. I’ve only heard of, like, online gay chat rooms. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Well, yeah, that’s kind of what it was, but there were these numbers you could call. And by the way, you know, I’m happy and would love to stay in touch with you,—

WOO: [Chuckles.] Of course!

CHAMOUSIS: —and I could tell you more—

WOO: Off the record?

CHAMOUSIS: Off the record, yeah. I mean, you know, off the record, on the record. I mean, you know—

WOO: Either. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: So—so I got—so I got—you know, so I met Chuck, and—and Dartmouth guys would come over from the sixties, and we’d do these mail-outs, and I don’t know how—I’ll have to ask Chuck, because I’ve forgotten now how this—the first list was generated. And once the list was generated, of course the college wanted the list, to solicit contributions. So that wasn’t going to happen.

WOO: Right. No.

CHAMOUSIS: But that’s how we started. And by ’95, we—there was a core of us, and I was—somehow I became the secretary, and we would meet at [Peter C.] “Pete” Williams’ [Class of 1976], Pete Williams was still on the board; he’s a seventy-six. He’s a lawyer. And he would have meetings at his law firm, in the conference room.

And then we kind of went silent, and then we became active again in or about the year 2000, and then—that’s when everything sort of took off, and I be- —I became really involved because that was a way for me to get involved in an environment where I felt more comfortable, although even at that time, I couldn’t imagine coming out to my straight friends at Dartmouth, let’s say. But I was on—I was on my way.

And I became very active in DGALA, and I—I mean, I went—I went through this whole—between my depression in ’86-’87 and the early nineties, I forced myself to, let’s say, go to a gay organization where there was a meeting. Like, I wanted to volunteer at the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC). You’ve head of GMHC?

WOO: Yes, I have.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay. So, for example, I wanted to volunteer there. Well, I couldn’t imagine just walking in, saying, “Hey, guys, I’m here.” So what I did was—the first time, I—I sort of did behavior modification therapy on myself. The first time I went, and I stood—I stood across the street and looked at the building. The next time, I went and stood in front of the building. The next time, I went by myself, and I went into the lobby and asked for a brochure. And that’s how I did it. And I sort of desensi- —I sort of desensitized myself to lessen the anxiety, to abate the anxiety.

And then finally what I did was I called up a friend of mine, and I said, “I’d like to go upstairs to the volunteer office. There’s no way I can do it. I’m afraid I’ll have a panic attack. And I would like you to come with me and—and support me.” And he did. And that’s how I did it.

So I did all sorts of stuff like that between ’86 and ’90. In the meantime, I was dating someone. You know, we were in a relationship, and he couldn’t be more out because he was in the fashion industry. And he was—he was a well-known—he was a well-known woman’s handbag designer. And, you know, and we traveled—you know, his company would send him to Europe to source goods and this and that, and we traveled all over Europe together, and they all knew about me. And so that was one part of my life.

And then there was this other part of my life where I was still working it through. And so that’s how—and it wasn’t until—you know, by then I was approaching, you know, forty, and I began to hit my stride, and I was grateful that I had begu- —because it was a goal to be—to be well along the way, you know, by the time I got to at least forty. And so that’s when I became involved in DGALA, and all sorts of good things began to happen after that.

WOO: How did you—in each of these partnerships or, like,—not partnerships but partners that you had—were they—did you meet them all through this phone sex line?

CHAMOUSIS: No. The first guy, the banker, I met at a bar.

WOO: Right, at the bar.

CHAMOUSIS: In ’86. Yeah, at the bar. No, not in Paris, at—at the bar in New York.

WOO: Oh, in New York. Okay.

CHAMOUSIS: So, yeah, we just happened to be sitting next to each other, and we just started talking, and, you know, that was—so that sort of took off. And I broke up with him, and then Larry, I met on the phone line, which was funny because all my friends thought I was so—you know, so—I can’t imagine *you* being on a phone sex line. And I—and then I quoted them, like an old—there’s an old Greek expression: “It’s the slow rivers that you have to watch out for because they could be the most dangerous.”

So here I was, you know, [cross-talk] everyone thought I was this—

WOO: The slow river.

CHAMOUSIS: —shy little—slow river, shy—you know, dah-dah-dah-dah, when I was out there. I—I was a big bad boy. [Both chuckle.] Nothing in size in terms of my—my scope whatsoever.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: So I’m sorry. Go ahead.

WOO: Could you describe to me a little more how those phone lines worked? [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Sure. For the record, yeah. You’d—this is kind of—okay, I’m mindful that—okay, I’m going to just utter this, because I’m mindful that one or—at least one person is going to hear this, and, you know, so—so I’ll just—I’ll just—

WOO: Okay, whatever you’re comfortable with.

CHAMOUSIS: No, no, no, it’s fine. You’d call up, and there would be—one would be—I remember it was, like, 1-900—you know—550-FUCK, let’s say.

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: And so you’d call up, and there’d be this recording, and it would say, “Oh, you’ve reached, you know, 1—yah-dah-dah—500-FUCK.” The only number you’ll ever need to know. Forty cents for the first minute. Fifteen each one thereafter. And then, you know, you get hooked up, and there’d be all these guys talking on the line, and these people—these people would just—just say all this stuff at random. You know, they’d say,—“Hey”—well, I’m going to censor myself. “Any- —anybody into so-and-so out there?” And someone would say, “Yeah, I am.” “Well, whadaya look like?” “Oh, I’m 5’-11”, 170. I’ve got brown eyes.” “Oh, sounds really hot.”

WOO: [Laughs.]

CHAMOUSIS: “You know, let’s go private.” There’s a way to go private, and it was really—and it was real- —and it was—so that’s, you know, how we met, and then—but, you know, this—and it was really funny because, you know, forty cents a minute, and I wasn’t working at the time, and so I—I had to—you know, I was lonely—I was bored.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk] Let’s face it. And it became a—it became a compulsion. So what happened—at one time, I get my phone bill, and, you know, in 1988 or whatever, I have this phone bill for fourteen hundred dollars! For one month. [Both chuckle.] So—so I called the phone company. I said, “Oh, I got this phone bill,” and duh-duh-duh. And I said, “I don’t know what happened.” It must have happened a lot because, like, they instantly forgave the whole phone bill.

WOO: Oh. Wow!

CHAMOUSIS: It was really funny. And then the next time, when I did the same thing, because one night I fell asleep with the phone still on, but I fell asleep and, you know, the receiver was, like, in my bed, and the line was still open, so I must have—God knows how much I racked up that night. And I called the phone company again, and they said, “Look, you know, we know there are all these guys on this phone line,” and it was really funny. It was really funny. I mean, it was also sad because, you know, it was—I was addicted. You know, I didn’t have anything better to do. I wasn’t working.

But all that—all that came and went, and—and I became very involved in—in Dartmouth as part of the Dartmouth—you know, the Dartmouth guys, because I felt I had something in common. We could talk about our experiences. And I joined the board of DGALA in 2000, and the president was David [M.] Eichman, who was Class of ’82, and he did a great job. He still is, like, the mayor of West Hollywood [California]. He’s a lawyer. He’s very active in the community. For years, he came back to the college to teach German in summer school.

By that time, in the late nineties, President [James E.] Wright was president of the college, and he did a lot to really bring the college up to speed and was very welcome. And he started—we—we always had a—a breakfast up in Hanover. It was alumni reunion weekend. And so, you know, the first couple of years, it was ten or fifteen people, and he would come and talk to us.

And gradually it—it grew. And through—as—as people became—society became more accepting, we had an all-class reunion in 2002 and 2004, and they became bigger and bigger. And then the college—you know, then they—you know, they’re not stupid. They wanted to be supportive and supportive of students, but they also wanted money.

So—and I’m compressing a lot of things now, and you can stop me or, you know, whatever, and I’m happy to stay on the phone as—as you are able.

WOO: Right. [Chuckles.] Keep going. I’ll—I’ll cut you off when I need to. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Okay. So, like, for example, I decided that—in 2005 there was—you may have heard about him, Andrew [S.] Goldstein [Class of 2005], who was the—

WOO: Yes.

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk; unintelligible] lacrosse player?

WOO: I did.

CHAMOUSIS: And he—and ESPN did a whole segment on him.

WOO: I saw. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, okay. You know, and all these macho—you know, like the Princeton coach, I remember in particular: “Oh, Goldie. You know, he’s, like, the greatest.” You know, so for the Princeton coach to concede that about a homosexual, because of Andrew’s prowess, you know, that—so I said, *Well, I’m gonna—I’m gonna*—I—I was on the—oh, I was also, at that time, not only on the DGALA board, but I volunteered to the DGALA liaison to the Dartmouth—the mainstream Dartmouth Club of New York, to be the liaison to that board for—and I did that until I resigned from the DGALA board a couple of years ago. Now I’m just a regular member of the board. But for fifteen years I—I did that.

And so I proposed to the committee, the Dartmouth Club of New York,—I said, “How about—because the college is encouraging this, so how about we have the first ever Dartmouth LGBT mainstream combined event at the Yale Club [of New York City] ever?” First ever such event.

And so in the summer of—in June of 2006, I organized that event. I brought back—I said, *So what’s gonna get people, you know, from the mainstream, if you will, community interested, possibly?*” So I—I organized an event called “Wearers of the Green: We Are Gay Athletes”.

So I got gay athletes from the college to come down to talk about their experiences, a panel discussion, and it was [Pamela S.] “Pam” Misener [pronounced MIZE-ner], who, from the early 2000s till about 2010, thereabouts, was assistant dean of the college and adviser to LGBT students.

And she was the first—made her—they gave her a full-time position ultimately, the first such position in the Ivy League for gay kids, for gay students.

And so she brought—she selected the panelists, and we had an event, which attracted well over a hundred people, including people who hadn’t had anything to do with the college. There were classes going to back—going back to the forties, classes of 1947,—

WOO: Wow.

CHAMOUSIS: —I mean, who—who came to the event. And it was a—a monstrous hit. And then the college invited—you know, when I went up for the next reunion or whatever, I was invited to speak on a panel about integrating the gay group with, you know, all the local clubs and nationally and internationally. So that was a—a big thing that I did.

And to do one more thing, just to talk about this, is that Pam began introducing me to then-current Dartmouth students, so early on, it was students in the early 2000s, and I started informally mentoring them, the kids who coming to New York. And so that grew, and for me, for about—I don’t know, they ranged from the Classes of 2003 to the Classes of 2011, thereabouts. And they were my kids. They all came to New York. And most of them were kids of color. And initially, my design, if you will, was to be there for them to work with them in terms of coming out and facing, you know, all the problems that I had faced so that they would not have to suffer as I suffered.

And it quickly became—it quickly became apparent that most of them were out at Dartmouth, which doesn’t mean that—I mean, they were all out. They were all out. Some of them were athletes, and some of them were this, and some of them were that. And I became YLM, Your Loving Mentor, and they became YLM, Your Loving Mentees.

And so I mentored them from—I got a core group of about eight or nine that were here in New York, and they were mostly Classes of—oh, the very first one was a student, a Malaysian student, who was transitioning from female to male, and as she went back to—you know, it’s a Muslim

country, and so she went back—you know, her passport said: “You are a male—you are a female.” And she would show—and she came from a prominent family, and a family of academics, and both of her parents had taught at Colum-—or his parents had taught at Columbia University. So if she went back to—and presented at passport control in Malaysia, as a—as a male, she would be—she was subject to the death penalty. So that was my first mentee. And that ultimately turned out okay for any number of reasons.

But I—I did get this core of Dartmouth kids, my kids, who have now become my friends because they are in their thirties. And it was—I said, “Okay, well, you’ll still have issues coming out, coming out at work, you’ll have relationships issues, but one thing I really want to impress on you is, you know, we’re in New York City, and, you know, so much started in New York City (and San Francisco), but you’re here in New York, so I want to teach you your history—our history, our history.”

So I took them to AIDS exhibits, and they had never seen, you know, pictures of—the New-York Historical Society, did—you know, a mainstream cultural institution, did a major and a most wonderful exhibit on the AIDS—the start of the AIDS epidemic. And I took them there, and I—and then I also took—you know, we went to the ballet, and we went to gay this and gay that and straight this and straight that.

And they be- —and so we really, really bonded, and that’s the thing that became clear to me, that that’s why I was put on this earth, I think. And that’s frankly something that I’m trying to—since that cohort, if you will, has graduated,—the—the initial deal was “I’ll mentor you until the first of two things: a) you stop doing fucking stupid things and b) the fifth anniversary of this meeting.

So of course what occurred first was the fifth anniversary of the meeting, because they still kept doing stupid things. But anyway, each and every one of them is wildly successful. One guy, who grew up in Compton [California] is the press secretary of the [Joseph R.] Biden[, Jr. presidential] campaign. And as a matter of fact he was—before that, he was—he did some great legal work in Boston with the

Boston gay rights group. And then he was President [Barack H.] Obama’s deputy adviser on LGBT rights.

They—they’ve all been—they’ve all done really, really great, and—

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: [cross-talk; unintelligible] themselves. And so that was my greatest—you know, I can’t say that I’m—I’m certainly *not* going to say that I’m responsible for it, but it—it was just so wonderful to work with all these kids. And I’ve done some formal mentoring—formal mentoring on the side, in other programs that are not LGBT related, although it happens that my mentee turned out to be gay.

So that’s—I don’t know, that’s—and it’s through that, you know, over all these years, that this has made me more comfortable with who I am and yada-yada-yada. I don’t know, it’s been a long—a long, long, long, long story.

WOO: It’s really inspiring. I—I read in one of the articles on Jamal Brown [class of 2008]—I think he was one of your mentees as well.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, you know Jamal. Okay. Yeah.

WOO: And I think it’s really important having people like you in here, telling your story because I think a lot of times, institutional memory is lost,—

CHAMOUSIS: Right.

WOO: —particularly among—within the LGBTQ [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer] community and a lot of other communities on campus as well, and so I—everything you’re saying—it—it’s very powerful. [Chuckles.] I wanted to—

CHAMOUSIS: Very what?

WOO: Powerful.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh. Well, thank you. And I—I—I do want to say—and I think I said this earlier—I—I know that I may have—I won't say stray you off topic, but I—I just didn't want to keep this a—a necessarily Dartmouth thing because I think—I think everyone needs to know—all of us need to know these things.

WOO: Right.

CHAMOUSIS: And so—and a lot of—and I can't couch a lot of what I said. First of all, I do want to qualify yet again that, you know, this was my own personal experience that was informed by so many other things in my life, socioeconomic and others, that other kids, other students, you know, won't have.

I will also tell you one thing, that one of my mentees—and this is not a secret, but I'm not going to name any names, but when one of my—my mentees said to me, “You know, when I came out to my dad, you know, he said it's just a phase, but he was accepting” and duh-duh-duh. And then a couple of years into our relationship, he said, “You know, my dad just came out to me.”

WOO: Oh! That's interesting.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah.

WOO: That's interesting.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah. I mean, you know, so—and he—he handled it really, really well. I mean, he's, you know, a mature ki- —I mean, he's the mature man. Not his father, the son. [Chuckles.] But, yes, you know stuff like that. I don't know, it's just really great to—it's funny. The college, you know, picks—picks you guys, men and women, and I'm just amazed—you know, I'm sure—I mean, I know there's some exceptions, but I'm just amazed at how they manage to pick people who are so—whose potential they recognize early on somehow. And it's really, really wonderful.

And I goof around—I spend so much time goofing around with these kids. I write these odes about them and, I don't know, and then they all wanted an ode a month, and— [Both chuckle.] I'm getting a little—I think I'm getting [unintelligible].

WOO: It’s—it’s all terrific. I’m going to have to wrap things up.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay.

WOO: But I—oh, before I wrap things up, I wanted to give you the chance to talk about—[chuckles]—about the reunion—of when you—of having reunions with all the alumni who came back and what they said about you.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh! Oh, yeah.

WOO: I want to give you that last chance to—to make a comment on that before I wrap things up. [Chuckles.]

CHAMOUSIS: Well, it’s interesting because, like, people who—who I thought were—

WOO: Like, in retrospect.

CHAMOUSIS: —like, complete—I remember thinking at the—I remember thinking back at that time—and I say to my- —and—and part of it was I guess maybe just envy, because of my own personal situ- —my own personal circumstances. Like, they get to do whatever stupid thing they want, and frankly, I think that some of these guys should be sterilized, you know, lest they bring in progeny [chuckles] just like them.

But, you know, over the years, my classmates—first of all, a lot of them are dead and have died of AIDS. A lot of them—a lot of them have lost children, and, you know, life has taken them all over the place, and I have yet to meet anybody who wasn’t accepting and, “Gee, you know, we—I always thought you were such a great guy, and I always”—one guy said, “I always remember your ready smile.” And the guy who was captain of the hockey team said, “I remember seeing you walking around campus, and I was too shy to talk to you.” I mean, it was crazy!

And people talking about how—how they—even though they were straight or whatever—they had other things going on in their lives, where they were depressed when they were there. They were straight jocks or, you know, just—it’s just

the commonality of human experience, and there was nothing unique about it at all.

But the most—there are people who have come up to me and have said, “We have a gay son.” And this one woman said to me, “I—I was just so freaked out that I could produce a kid who was gay, I couldn’t wrap my head around it. I—I thought I was gonna kill myself”—you know, yada-yada-yada. And she said, “I’ve come around, but I still want to talk to you about certain things.” And so that was great.

And so, you know, the biggest concern is you go—you go to reunion now, and you—you’re amazed at how time has passed, and then—like, I think I’ve aged pretty well, so, you know, a couple of us give each other high fives. Cause you look at some of these people and you say, *That can’t be.* [Chuckles.]

But I—I—I always try to—I make sure I go every reunion because there are certain things I did even out of the reunion context, but I try to—even when—the later reunions—like, I—I didn’t go to my fifth, and then I didn’t—I went to my tenth, but I didn’t go until the twenty-fifth the next time, so I was forty-seven. And I’ve noticed—I like to go to the reunions because the twenty-fifth, thirtieth, thirty-fifth, fortieth, forty-fifth—I am very mindful—I try to be mindful of how much I’ve evolved since the last one and how at peace I am with myself.

Or I remember that even at my twenty-fifth, I couldn’t tell so-and-so, you know, that I’m gay, and that I had to wait another five years—I mean, it’s not true, but—you know, that—how—you know, I—I use it as a marker and—just to think and just to be self-reflective, which I tend to be anyway. But that’s—that’s one of the things that—that I like about reunions and how accepting and—and welcoming everyone is, and how, in most cases, the people that I speak with, I can reciprocate that feeling genuinely.

WOO: I’m sure this conversation with me has been helpful, has been a reflective exercise for you as well.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, wow! I mean, you sound like a really—you know, I happen to think—like, around the office here, I’m the—

WOO: All right, I—

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, you got to go? Okay.

WOO: I have to—I’m so glad I could get this call. I’m getting yelled at because the library is closing.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, okay. I’m happy to pick this up—

WOO: I—I could have spoken with you—

CHAMOUSIS: —any other time.

WOO: Right. I could have spoken with you for many hours more.

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, you’re too kind.

WOO: But you are—you are very pow- —like, your story is very powerful. It—and it—I think the wisdom that you bring is invaluable, and I’m going to wrap up this call, but I want to thank you again so much for your time and for opening up your life to us—

CHAMOUSIS: Thank you.

WOO: —and be able to pass this time.

CHAMOUSIS: I was happy to open up my soul to you.

WOO: I have a good feeling I’ll be speaking more with you [chuckles] in the future.

CHAMOUSIS: Yeah, let’s—so do you have a—do you have a couple of exams coming up?

WOO: I do. Well, not really.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay.

WOO: I’m basically done, so this is kind of like—

CHAMOUSIS: Oh, okay, so you’ve got papers and whatever. Okay. Well, all the best to you. And I probably won’t speak with you at

Thanksgiving, but I—I’m going to be in touch with you between—during the intersession or whatever it is. I’ll drop you an e-mail.

WOO: For sure. I’ll talk to you later.

CHAMOUSIS: Okay.

WOO: Goodbye.

CHAMOUSIS: All right. Take good care.

WOO: Take care.

[End of interview.]