Anthony J. DeRosa ’82; DMS ‘92
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[DESPINA B.]

KARALIS: Hello. My name is Depy Karalis, and I am the interviewer for SpeakOut, Dartmouth’s project on recording Dartmouth specific queer oral history. Today is September 22nd around 10 a.m., and I am calling from Rauner Special Collections Library in Hanover, New Hampshire.

DeROSA: This is Tony DeRosa, and I’m speaking with Depy from my home in Williamsburg, Virginia.

KARALIS: Welcome. Thank you so much for being willing to do this interview.

DeROSA: Most welcome.

KARALIS: So to begin, I would like to hear a little bit, like, where you—about where you were born and what it was like, the city you grew up in.

DeROSA: Okay. Well, I was born in the Bronx, New York, and adopted when I was three months old by my parents. We lived in Brooklyn for a short period of time and then moved out to Long Island [New York], where I grew up.

The town that we were in, Centerport, is a relatively small town, probably similar in population to Hanover, and the high school I attended was a combination of the two local towns, Greenlawn and Centerport. It was a fairly homogeneous environment to grow up in, until I got into high school. So there were no people of color in my elementary or early education, and when I went to the junior high school and then the high school, and kids from the other town were incorporated into the school, that was my first exposure to any minorities.

KARALIS: What was it like to go from a very homogeneous community up until then and then seeing people of color and people different than you?

DeROSA: Pretty shocking [chuckles],—

KARALIS: [Laughs.]

DeROSA: —actually. There was—looking back at it now, I realized how cloistered we were and how racist, I guess you could say, we were. There were so many misconceptions about people who were different than us that I was very fearful when I went to the new school. I just didn't know what to expect. I was—I was afraid that some of the other kids, which in retrospect was pretty ridiculous, but it was something that definitely had to be worked through on my end. And I realized that my family had perpetuated some of that, so it was the first sense I had that I was breaking away from family and becoming a little bit more independent of the thought processes that I was raised with.

KARALIS: Now, it must have been really hard to be working through that and realizing a different self from that your family raised you as.

DeROSA: Well, there were a lot of differences for me. I mean, I knew that I was—something was different about me when I was in first grade. I felt like I was more sensitive than some of the other boys. I was definitely more attuned to social cues. I remember seeing things that were disturbing that I don't think the other kids thought twice about. So I didn't really put a—I wasn't able to put a label on that until I was in probably fourth or fifth grade, and I realized that I was having feelings of attraction to some of the other boys.

And then there was also the adoption thing. My parents—the philosophy at that time was tell your children as early as possible and, you know, incorporate that into a normal discussion about where you came from and that you were chosen, et cetera. So I think deep down the adoption thing, coming to realize that I was gay and then moving from a smaller community into a broader one, were all things that required a bit of adjustment.

KARALIS: Yeah.

Did you have any relationships in high school or middle school with other boys, or were a lot of people [unintelligible]?

DeROSA: Oh. [Chuckles.] No, not in the least. I was extremely closeted. I would pray every day that those feelings would be taken away. I'd feel guilty if I had those thoughts. And my parents found out about them. It was—it was the secret I felt like I carried at the core, this rottenness in the center.

And I had—I had taken a book out of the library without checking it out because I was too embarrassed. It was called *Changing Homosexuality in the Adult Male*[*: Treatment for Men Troubled by Homosexuality*]. I think that was the title. So it was—it was a very old book, and it talked about things that have been since disproven, like domineering mother and distant father and all these things I was trying to relate to in terms of figuring out what made me the way I was and if there was anything that I could do to change it.

And I'd hidden this book, and one day my parents called me into the bedroom, their bedroom and said, "We think you might have something to tell us." And they slid this book out from under the bed. And I thought I had carefully hidden that at the bottom of the closet, and obviously they were looking for something, and they found it. And I was just mortified that this was out.

And they were—they were quite upset about it, and they said, "We want you to go see a counselor," which I quickly agreed to, because I really did not want to—I didn't want to keep talking with them about this, and I was willing to try and change things in myself at that point.

So there was a lot of self-loathing and this thought that if people really knew who I was, the secret of me, that I wouldn't be accepted. So I did not have any relationships with any guys when I was in high school. It was the opposite. I avoided contact with any guys that I thought might be effeminate.

I dated a young woman for my last two years of high school, but it was a very safe relationship because she was Greek. Her parents did not accept me, being non-Greek, so we

knew the relationship wasn't going to lead to marriage. She did not believe in premarital physical relations, so I didn't have to worry about that end of it. And it gave me a companion, a friend, somebody that I could feel more normal with, because we got the typical things in high school, like go to prom and all kind of things like that.

KARALIS: Do you remember her name?

DeROSA: Aris Comninellis.

KARALIS: I see. Did you—do you still talk to her, or have you kept contact?

DeROSA: No, I haven't, and it's interesting because I found out our sisters are friends. My younger sister was in school with *her* younger sister. Same school. And I see that they're Facebook friends now. I know that Aris was very intelligent. She was musically gifted. You know, just a lovely person. And she eventually went to Columbia [University] and became a physician, and I believe she's practicing in New York City now.

But we really—I came home from freshman year at Dartmouth. I came home from Dartmouth to take her to her senior prom, and, you know, we wrote back and forth several times over the remainder of that year, and when I came home over the summertime, we agreed that the distance was something that was difficult to overcome, so it would be, you know, a good time to break up, and that's what happened. And then I lost touch with her after that.

KARALIS: So what—what was it like being adopted? Is your sister also adopted?

DeROSA: I have two sisters, and, yes, they were also adopted. When I was growing up, I thought it wasn't a big deal. I would be embarrassed if people asked about it. I'd say, you know, "My family's my family. I accept that." And I never thought about it. But after I became a physician, I started thinking about it a lot more once the genetic basis of so many diseases became revealed, and I realized that I was still missing something, so I—I, over many, many years, did a lot of research, trying to find out more about my biological origins.

And I think my sisters were probably curious as well. We didn't really discuss it all that much. I know that the middle sister, as I did since joining 23andMe and has found a couple of distant relatives. But she hasn't taken it any farther than that.

KARALIS: Do you want to try to find any biological relatives?

DeROSA: Well, I—I actually did. You know [chuckles], years of looking before the internet, and I even went to Salt Lake City [Utah] to look in the genealogical archives there. They had an organization based out of New York City called ALMA, Adopted Liberties Movement Association, and they had "search angels" who would help you, and if you hooked up with somebody in the area in which you were born, by going to the local churches and libraries and trying to find information on [unintelligible], but that didn't really bear any fruit. I had a list of people. I was fortunate, because I came across some court records that my parents had held onto, which actually listed my birth name, so I had much more information to start with than most people do when they go seeking for their biological roots.

And then later, once I became a physician and was financially a little bit more secure, I actually hired a private investigator, and they were very quick to find the biological family for me. But I found that my biological father had died when he was thirty-four, in a car accident, and my biological mother had died about six years earlier, from a heart attack. But I do have two sisters and a brother who are biologically related.

KARALIS: Do you keep in contact with them, or is that [recording glitch].

DeROSA: Well, you know, it was difficult. I was so excited by the connection that I sent all of them identical letters with copies of the findings from the PI and the—the adoption certificate that I'd found at my parents'—and they—you know, their mom was gone, so they had nobody to confirm this, and they were fairly aggressive in telling me to stay away. So I felt that that was—I mean, at least I knew who these people were, and I'd hit a dead end.

And years later, maybe—maybe eight years later, one of the biological sisters contacted me again. In fact, it was not that long ago this year, and said that, you know, she'd been thinking about things. We ended up being a DNA match on Ancestry.com, which she found, and she said, you know, "How about if we get to know each other a little bit and just take it slow?" So we've been sporadically e-mailing back and forth.

KARALIS: That's good.

If I can go back to something you also mentioned earlier.

DeROSA: Mm-hm.

KARALIS: You mentioned that your parents wanted you to go to therapy, and you agreed. How long did you stay in therapy, and what was that like?

DeROSA: Oh, gosh, it was awful. He was a Freudian and told me that— basically to get over these feelings I was having. I had to have sex with my girlfriend and be as intimate with her as possible. So I would say—

[Disconnection]

DeROSA: —about what it was like being in therapy.

KARALIS: Yes.

DeROSA: I'm not sure how much got—was caught before we were disconnected. But the—the therapist would say things like, "You have to distance yourself more from your mother." And then I would go home and—and fight with her. And I think she [chuckles] was starting to wonder about the value of therapy because she said, you know, "We argue every time you come home from that man." And I said, "Well, that's who you wanted me to go see." So that continued for—that continued for the rest of my senior year, and we stopped over the summer, and I did not go back after that to see that guy.

KARALIS: Did your parents eventually turn around to the idea of you being gay?

DeROSA: Well, yes, is the short answer. But it was a process. When—over the summer of freshman year at Dartmouth—so during freshman year, I was still very much closeted. I was—you know, I played in the Pep Band for—at football games. I ran cross country and was fairly successful at it. I became friendly with a lot of the runners who were at Sig Ep [Sigma Phi Epsilon] the fraternity, and—but I was always in the closet.

And then when I came home for—

[Disconnection]

DeROSA: Hello.

KARALIS: I hate Dartmouth's internet.

DeROSA: Can you tell me when we cut off?

KARALIS: Yes. You just had said about you were close to people from—the runners from Sig Ep.

DeROSA: Oh, okay. Then, when I went home over the summer after freshman year, I worked as a busboy at a local restaurant in Centerport, and there were two waiters there who were a gay couple, and they were very out and comfortable with themselves, and I gradually worked up courage to—to talk with them right before I left to go back up to Dartmouth in the fall of '79.

And it was like opening up a door. You know, here were two people that accepted themselves. They were very out and open at work. And it was for me very freeing, and I decided when I went up to Dartmouth, I was going to do things differently. I wasn't exactly coming out. I was still very much closeted to everybody I knew, but I decided when I went back that I was going to check out the Gay Students Association, the GSA, which was fairly new at the college at that time.

Oh, and I forgot to mention that when I was a freshman, I joined the [Dartmouth] Christian Fellowship because I

thought for me that was about as far away from being out and being gay as I could get.

KARALIS: How did you decide on Dartmouth?

DeROSA: Well, I was very successful in high school. I had a lot of activities. I won the state championship in track in the 3,200-meter run. I was part of the area All-State Band. And I really had my pick of a lot of colleges, so I—I went around to a lot of colleges to look and see what felt like a good fit.

[Recording glitch] the assistant track coaches from a rival high school was a Dartmouth alum, and he kept talking to me about Dartmouth and said, "You really have to go see it. You really have to go see it."

And when I went, it was the right time of year to go, not the winter, for a tour, and I was struck by the geographical beauty of the area. Something just felt very comfortable about it. You know, in retrospect, it probably reminded me a bit of the small town that I was raised in. And Dartmouth had such a great reputation academically. You know, I was really thinking that it was going to come down to Columbia [University], Yale [University] or Dartmouth. And after I visited Dartmouth, that kind of clinched my decision.

KARALIS: So you didn't mind the smallness over your four-plus years at Dartmouth?

DeROSA: No, no. Didn't feel like it was that small at all. It was comfortable. On Long Island, my high school had, mmm, close to 400 seniors in the graduating class, and we were considered a small high school by Long Island standards. One of the other schools that we competed against in track became so large that they had to split into an east and west school, and each school had about 2,000 graduates. So I was used to what felt like a smaller environment, and Dartmouth to me was—was comfortable until a lot of the social issues that Dartmouth had started coming to light.

KARALIS: What kind of social issues are you thinking about?

DeROSA: Well, you know, times were very different then. I was—I was struggling with trying to form an identity as a gay man. I was

not getting any support for that at home from my parents. When we would—when we would go to meetings, there was one member who insisted that we draw the blinds in the room so nobody could walk by and see who was sitting in this meeting. So there was a lot of I think internalized homophobia even among some of the students that were going to this group to get support and, you know, to support each other.

I was—my social out- —outlet at that time was still the track and cross-country team, so [recording glitch]. I drank a lot on weekends, I think as an escape. And, you know, also around that time, if my memory serves, the—the [Dartmouth] Women's Alliance at Dartmouth and the [Dartmouth] Black Caucus were formed and were protesting on campus, so there was some social upheaval going on. Students were protesting and—and pushing for divestment of Dartmouth's holdings in South Africa because of apartheid. So there were—there were a lot of things going on at that time on the campus.

KARALIS: Were you involved in any of the social movements?

DeROSA: No, not really, because the—you know, as I said, the Gay Students Association was so closeted that it was difficult for us to do anything outside of having a room where we could meet and at least see other people that we could identify with. And even then, it was—it was sort of a subverted form of self-identification.

[Disconnection]

KARALIS: It cut off when you said...

DeROSA: I'm going to shoot this system. [Laughs.]

KARALIS: I know. I am so sorry about that. It's frustrating. I wish there was a way to put the internet cable in, but—

DeROSA: It is what it is.

KARALIS: It cut off where you said subverted system.

DeROSA: Subverted sense of identity.

KARALIS: Yes, yes.

DeROSA: People were—people didn't want to be seen going into the room where we met. They were kind of—and I remember the first time *I* went in, I was scared to death. I was looking around and kind of loitering in the hallway, reading posters that were up on the boards and doing anything but looking like I was interested in walking into that room. And, as I said, the blinds were drawn when we went in, so it wasn't exactly a big—it wasn't exactly a socially active group at that time. But over the next couple of years, things slowly began to change.

KARALIS: Do you remember anybody who was—like, the names of the people that were in it with you?

DeROSA: Well, I remember Stuart [M.] Lewan. He was Class of '79. Stuart had helped co-found the group. But from that early time, it wasn't like you met people and then were friendly with them outside of the rooms. Everybody was still so closeted and painfully afraid of being outed that, you know, the discussions were somewhat stilted. It was hard to agree on things cohesively as a group. And that was for me in the fall of '79.

And when I went back home for Christmas break, I decided to officially come out to my parents at that time, so I basically told them over the Christmas break, "Look, this thing that you thought was a phase is really not a phase. This is a permanent situation. I'm gay."

KARALIS: Yeah. How did they—I guess, how did they take that?

DeROSA: Oh, my mom cried for about three days. It was difficult. There was a lot of tension in the house. I don't think that they told my younger sisters what was going on, but they clearly knew that things were uptight and tense. I found out after, the fact that my dad went down and—and spoke several times to the local priest, trying to get some counseling on the situation, and shortly thereafter, my parents strongly suggested I move out of the house.

KARALIS: How did your sisters eventually respond? And hopefully, it was more positive.

DeROSA: It was. My sisters love me, so there wasn't an issue, but I didn't really speak with them. I mean, my—my—the middle is—is almost two years younger, and my other sister is about seven years younger, so, you know, as a freshman in college—actually, I was a sophomore that fall; then my younger sister would have been either a junior or senior in high school , and the one after was still in middle school, junior high, so it wasn't something that we openly discussed at that time. But I never felt like I was being rejected by them.

I was in a bit of a quandary with the moving out situation, so I contacted the college, and I explained the situation, and I said, "I—I can't afford to come back. I'd like to know if I can take a leave of absence for a year so I can work." And the college was very good about that. They said, "Yes, that's fine with us" And they even suggested that if—given the circumstances, if I sat out for a year and supported myself and filed an income tax return after the year, that they would consider me financially emancipated from my parents. So that's what I did.

KARALIS: And where did you find work? What did you do?

DeROSA: I went back to that same restaurant I'd worked at in the summer between freshman and sophomore years. The same couple was still working there. I was bussing tables. Did a lit bit of waiting toward the end of that year. I also got a job, a second job, working at a—a—running shoe store, as a salesperson selling running shoes.

So I moved into a very tiny little, basically one-room—it was like a small house. It was a one-room apartment. But it was the most that I could afford. So for the year I supported myself, I saved almost no money because I didn't have [chuckles] any money left over. And then when I went back to college, I filed an application for financial aid, and the college helped me, based on my own income for that year.

KARALIS: I'm glad that the college helped you out in that regard.

DeROSA: Yeah. In that way—in that way, things were helpful. I felt that I was extremely grateful for that. I don't know what I would have done otherwise. I probably would have had to drop out of Dartmouth and—and go to a local community college. They—they *were* helpful. I felt like the administration, on a one-on-one level, tried to be helpful, and certainly the Office of Financial Aid was wonderful. They increased all of my loans to the max. They gave me outright grants. I was work-study. And I made it work.

KARALIS: That's—that's very impressive, and now you're a physician.

DeROSA: Now I'm a physician. [Laughs.] When I came back, I was—so I had roomed with a guy that was also on the track team. In that sophomore fall, came back. They put me into—I've forgotten which dormitory it was. They put into another dormitory, and I had a roommate who was very homophobic, and so were his football buddies, so I had a hard time with harassment from them. So I went back to the—

Depy, are you there?

KARALIS: Yeah, yeah, I'm here.

DeROSA: Okay. So I went back to the housing administration, and I—I said, "I—I need a single." And the nice women there said, "Well, usually seniors get those. There's a waiting list of about a year and a half, so I can put you on that now." And I said, "No, you don't understand. I'm gay. I'm being harassed in my dorm by the roommate I was assigned. I cannot stay there." And she got up and closed the door and sat back down and said, "Let me see what I can do." And one of the seniors who had a single was vacating that single, and she assigned it to me, so she gave me my own space.

KARALIS: That must have felt freeing.

DeROSA: It was amazing. I wanted to cry when she said that I had a place that I could go. You know, in—in—throughout all of this stuff—you know, what was going on on campus at that time was *The Dartmouth Review* had been founded in 1980, so I got moved into the single in 1981, and I lived there for

just one term. It was—though it was my own space, it was difficult living there. [Recording glitch]

KARALIS: Hello?

DeROSA: I'm still here. Can you hear me?

KARALIS: Okay. Yes, I can hear you now.

DeROSA: In the—in the late spring of that year, *The Review* outed us. At that point—so the GSA was an officially recognized college group at that point. A lot of the members were still in the closet, so they elected officers of the group and filed that list with the college. There were five of us who had different positions. I was the secretary-treasurer for the group.

[Leroy H.] "Lee" Knight [Jr., Class of 1981] was discussion leader. [D.] Scott Coombs [Class of 1983] was the Collis [Center for Student Involvement] rep. [Andre R.] "Dre" [pronounced DRAY] Collier [Class of 1984] was the social coordinator for events. And [Jeffrey N.] "Jeff" Bannon [Class of 1981] had another position; I don't remember what his was officially.

So we were the group's officers, but we were not out campus, and we had a list of the officers' names with some documents that were private, that were kept in the Collis Center, in a locked cabinet, and somehow that list found its way into the hands of *The Review*, and they published an article in May of '81 that outed the five of us.

So after that, I was in the—I was in the dorm, the single at that time, and I had water poured under my door. There were students that lived right—directly underneath me that would blare a song that I think was called "Johnny, Are You Queer?" on full volume. So it was difficult living on campus at that time because of the—of the outing. So I ended up, for the rest of my time at Dartmouth, living off campus and—and living in private housing.

KARALIS: Did—how did—how was *The Review* article, like, accepted by the rest of the Dartmouth community or the Dartmouth College? Because that's a big invasion of privacy.

DeROSA: Oh, it was huge. And to this day, nobody will admit how they got their hands on that—that information. Dartmouth administration has been interviewed about it, and they said, "We certainly did not release any names to that paper. We had kept it in a locked file cabinet in Collis—in a room in Collis." So, you know, personally I think they broke into those files. But they still haven't admitted that.

There was some outrage on campus about that. The administration seemed to be angry about it. But there was an amazing amount of antagonism toward the gay students from *The Dartmouth Review* and people that supported it at that time.

KARALIS: Do you know what was their excuse for doing that?

DeROSA: Well, I believe what they wrote was that since the organization was getting college funding, they felt that all students had a right to know who were the officers of the group, who were the members, what was the agenda for the group, because indirectly they felt, like, the students were contributing to the support of the gay student organization. So that was the excuse that they used for publicizing. There was no—nobody was—was officially out except to the administration, because the administration required a list of the names of the officers. And the amount of funding that we were discussing was probably about $500 for the year.

KARALIS: That's nothing. [Chuckles.]

DeROSA: Yeah, it really was nothing. I mean, I remember we tried to do as much as we could with it at that time, and as the secretary-treasurer I would have to go to the supermarket to buy snacks if we were having a get-together. I remember there was a—a book that had been published—

[Disconnection]

DeROSA: Where did we get cut off?

KARALIS: You said "a book that had been published."

DeROSA: Okay. And I'm trying to remember what that was called. I think it was called *The Gay Report*[*:Lesbians and Gay Men Speak Out About Sexual Experiences and Lifestyles*]. I've got it somewhere. I'm looking to see if I have it. But in any case, the author, the co-auth- —the—the—the gentleman who was the—one of the co-authors of the group agreed to come speak at Dartmouth. And he was gracious and accepted a very tiny honorarium, basically to pay for his travel expenses, and that probably took up about a third of our budget for the year.

We also hosted a movie showing in Collis. That was a romance that—that featured two gay protagonists. So those were the kinds of things that we did. We weren't throwing parties. But I remember—but that's what *The Review* accused us of doing. "Debauchery," I think was the word they used.

I remember going to the—the local supermarket up there, and I had to buy some snacks for the little discussion that we had featuring this author, and we had a check that had GSA on it, and the checkout cashier looked at that and said, "Oh, what's that? Is that General Student Organization—Association?" And I said, "No, that's the Gay Students Association." And she became very—very cold and distant and basically threw our stuff into the bag and, you know, wanted me out of there as quickly as possible. That was one of the first sort of "out" things that I did in the public.

KARALIS: Yeah. How—you said that the GSA changed over the year that you were—like, from the first year that you were there to later. How did it change?

DeROSA: Oh, it changed significantly. I mean, there was not much direction that I—I could see when I first started going there, and everybody was extremely secretive. And then after I took the year off and came back to college, Collis opened. The director at that time, Stephen [J.] Nelson, was very supportive I think not just of the group but of me personally. And we had some space in Collis that was ours, and I think it was a little carrel or cubicle in—in the main room. That's where we had the file cabinet that *The Review* broke into.

But those things that I mentioned that we—that we did as an organization were things that we never would have done even just a couple of years ago, when the GSA was first new. I don't think anybody was willing to even be out there enough to consider attending a talk where a gay author was coming to speak about his book.

KARALIS: What changed to allow people to be more confident and be more public?

DeROSA: Well, you know, there were things that were changing, I think, in the outside world. I don't know—and I think that some of the people that came from more metropolitan areas to Dartmouth probably had a little bit more sense of freedom about them. You know, the whole Harvey [B.] Milk thing had happened already. They had the first Gay Pride parade in New York City in 1979. [The] Stonewall [riots] had happened ten years prior. So I—I think, you know, some of these things externally were—were building upon themselves. And, you know, gradually—

But it wasn't just the—the Gay Students Association that was—that was changing. The [Dartmouth] Women's Caucus and the [Dartmouth] Latino Forum and the [Dartmouth] Black Caucus were also pushing for minority recognition and minority rights at the college, so we were kind of caught up in that—that whole thing as—as things were going on. It wasn't just us; it was other minority groups as well: Native Americans of [sic; at] Dartmouth; that was another group.

KARALIS: So did *The Review*'s article kind of like hold things back or push things back or did it, in the end, I don't know, like, liberate people, in a way, even though it was a very horrible way to come out?

DeROSA: It was. There were repercussions for some of the students. One of the officers of the group came from a family of means, and I believe had those means threatened when he was forcibly outed to his family. I started getting hassled at the dorm, so I had to move off campus. It—it—I felt like it—it was a necessary step for my sanity, but in retrospect, it isolated me more from my peers. I was already a year behind because I'd taken the year off, but I still had some

friends on the track team, and those kind of became much more distant after I had to move off campus.

So there were some immediate negative repercussions, but it also generated support on campus. There were some rallies against what *The Review* did. I remember the adviser for that group, Dr. Elise [M.] Boulding, who was a professor of sociology at the college, organized a rally on the [Dartmouth] Green and invited anybody who felt outraged by the actions of *The Review* to attend as a show of solidarity for what had gone on. And there were a significant number of people that showed up for that.

And, of course, adjacent to it, *The Dartmouth Review* and its unofficial sponsor, were having cocktails under an umbrella and playing croquet on their little part of the Green while we were having a rally.

So I think in a way that it was good because it brought things out in the open that exposed a really ugly side of Dartmouth and some of the alumni body as well. So it aired this and I'm sure it helped to accelerate some of the changes that followed as a result.

KARALIS: Who—you said Steve Nelson. Was he the Collis manager or the adviser for [unintelligible]?

DeROSA: No, he was the director of Collis.

KARALIS: Director?

DeROSA: Mm-hm. Yes.

KARALIS: And you said he was very helpful and supportive.

DeROSA: Well, he was. He was very supportive of us. He was outraged by our invasion of privacy. He made sure that we had space at Collis. But he became a supportive mentor of me. When I had trouble, I could go speak to him. When—when I moved off campus, he wrote me a letter of support. You know, he was—he was the only administrator [chuckles] at the college that I heard from, you know, in the aftermath of—of this stuff, you know, when I was not physically present on campus. I still have his letter. He's a wonderful guy.

And I think that there were these beacons on campus at that time, people that were supportive, you know, in their way. I think administration was besieged at that time. You know, they—they were—they recognized that the actions of *The Review* were heinous, but they also had push-back from a lot of alumni, who were in positions of power and wealth, so they were treading carefully. And a lot of the things that *The Review* tried—I'm sorry, that the administration tried to do in response to *The Review* ended up not being successful.

KARALIS: What did they try to do in response?

DeROSA: Well, there were—there were other in- —

[Disconnection]

KARALIS: Hello.

DeROSA: Where did we get cut off? [Laughs.]

KARALIS: You had just said, "there were other instances," and then it cut.

DeROSA: Okay. *The Review* sent a reporter in, in 1984, to one of the GSA meetings, and clandestinely taped the meeting and the discussion and published that information in *The Dartmouth Review*, and *The Review* tried to bring legal action against her, and it was all ultimately dismissed, because there wasn't a legal ground for the college to stand on, apparently.

I know that in the past, Dartmouth tried to enjoin *The Review* from using "Dartmouth" in its name, but they were unsuccessful in that attempt as well. So there were—there were—I think Dartmouth's hands were tied, in a way.

Another thing that had happened, you know, after this is that the Carpenter—Edward Carpenter [Memorial] Foundation was established by gay alums to help support gay students on campus. This was I think in 1985. And Dartmouth did not want to accept ownership and management of these funds because they didn't want the word "gay" attached to a

source of funds. It wasn't until 2001 that they finally accepted money from the Carpenter Foundation and incorporated it into its—into its management.

KARALIS: Is that—Triangle House was built in 2014, right? So that was—I wasn't sure if that was the same funds that they were using for it or it was alumni, raised by alumni.

DeROSA: It was alumni, because, you know, at that point, the alumni association—gosh!—I'm trying to remember when that came into being. That was probably in the late seventies as well. Edward [sic; Edwin H.] Hermance [Class of 1962] was—is an alum from Dartmouth who had written some articles to the alumni magazine basically coming out and talking about life on campus. And others responded. Other gay alumni responded to that, and they formed a Dartmouth alumni group which later became DGALA, Dartmouth Gay and Lesbian Alumni. ["DGALA" today is no longer an acronym].

So DGALA has a newsletter, and in the newsletter, which I get, they talked about Triangle House and that if we wish to help support it by making donations, we could target those donations specifically to it.

KARALIS: It must feel good to see such change from—like, from people—from Dartmouth feeling very hostile during that time to now their being a space for queer students to feel comfortable.

DeROSA: It—it is wonderful, and it parallels, in many ways, a lot of the social changes that have happened over the last thirty years nationally. It seems like sometimes we have a few steps forward and then a couple of steps back. I think a lot of what's going on politically these days at the national level reminds me quite a bit of what was going on politically with *The Dartmouth Review* back when I was an undergraduate. But, you know, I think momentum is on the side of justice and equality, and things will continue to evolve. I never would have imagined when I was an undergraduate that I would be able to legally marry in my lifetime.

KARALIS: But you did.

DeROSA: I did. We were—[Laughs.] We were watching it. We went to—[Chuckles.] We went to Italy on a trip in 2004, and David proposed to me in Florence, and we walked down to a jewelry shop on the Ponte Vecchio and bought gold wedding bands. And I wouldn't let him—[Chuckles.] I wouldn't let either of us wear them until we could legally marry, so they sat in the drawer for a while.

And then Massachusetts allowed gay people to marry but then [W. Mitt] Romney, who was governor, said, under some old law that said you had to be a Massachusetts resident to do that, so you couldn't go there and get married unless you lived there.

[Disconnection].

DeROSA: Where'd we leave off?

KARALIS: Where you said Romney said you had to be a resident of Massachusetts, so you had to live there

DeROSA: Okay, yeah, to get married there, so you couldn't just travel there and get married. And then in—there were some other areas that enacted domestic partnerships. I think Washington, D.C., California, or parts of California: San Francisco I think enacted a domestic partnership registry. And then in 2008, for a period of time, Dartmouth—"Dartmouth"!—California legalized same-sex marriage until it was put on the ballot and voted down by the public, Proposition 8, in November.

So once it became legal, David and I flew out to California and got married in Sacramento in the summer of 2008. When we got back to Virginia, unfortunately, our marriage was not legally recognized, and Virginia subsequently passed its own marriage act, which only recognized marriage between a man and a woman. So at that time, David and I briefly considered moving out of the state. And little did we know, seven—seven years later that you'd have the right to marry nationally.

KARALIS: The world changed so much.

DeROSA: It's been—it's been incredible. It's been a whirlwind, you know. But for as much change—there's been a lot of positive change. We still have a ways to go.

KARALIS: Right.

DeROSA: We still have a ways to go. There's no protection for—in housing or employment discrimination for gays or transgender folks. So, you know, we still have ways to go, and there's been something of a backlash nationally with this current presidential administration and its supporters. I'm looking warily at the Supreme Court, hoping that we don't lose some of the protections that we've had established over the last decade. Time will tell.

But David and I decided—one thing that changed for us in terms of my local society is that David and I decided to become parents. So we—we met in 2002, and then in 2005 we decided that we wanted to become parents. So we contacted a surrogacy agency in California, because the surrogacy laws were very favorable there, and found a surrogate and found an egg donor and our surrogate, Trish, got pregnant through in vitro fertilization in August, and Giovanni, our son, was born in California in May of 2006.

There were no protections for us, especially in Virginia, because of the Marshall Marriage Amendment [sic; Marshall-Newman Amendment, also known as the Virginia Marriage Amendment] that had been passed here, so one thing that California did that was really pretty wonderful is that it enabled us to go to court and—family court, and have the judge establish a pre-birth order, which legally named both me and David legal parents of our son and directed the hospital to put both our names on the birth certificate.

So when we got back to Virginia, because Virginia did not allow second-parent adoptions—same-sex, second-parent adoptions—we basically could thumb our nose at them and say, "Well, we're both parents, and it says so here legally on the birth certificate, so there you have it."

We found a lot of—we found [Recording glitch]

KARALIS: Hello? I think your voice has cut off.

DeROSA: [Silence.]

KARALIS: I'm going to call back.

[Reconnects.]

DeROSA: Hi, again.

KARALIS: Hello. It cut—like, it started cutting off right—after you said, like, you guys were—you were thumbing your nose at them. You were, like, "Here you go."

DeROSA: Oh, yeah.

KARALIS: Yeah.

DeROSA: At Virginia,—

KARALIS: Yes.

DeROSA: —because we had our legal birth order.

KARALIS: Amazing.

DeROSA: Establishing us as legal parents. It was. David and I were interviewed by *Virginia Magazine*, published out of Richmond [Virginia], and the photographer came and took a picture of us holding Giovanni and talked about the effects of this, the Marshall Amendment, and what it might do to the labor pool in Virginia if people left because they didn't feel like they were welcome here.

We moved into our current neighborhood when Gio was about a month old, and the neighbors across the street came over [chuckles] with a plate of brownies to welcome us.

KARALIS: Wow.

DeROSA: And I found that being parents seems to make us very much relatable. People that might not have spoken with us before

suddenly had common ground, so we started meeting lots of other parents and getting support from people. They had—they had a baby shower at David's place of employment for us before Gio was born. They had another—some friends here in town had a baby—big baby shower for us. We had more stuff than we knew what to do with.

When we eventually enrolled Giovanni in the local daycare, we met some other parents of his peers that are still among our closest friends now. We all laugh about it, that the kids have all gone separate ways, to different schools, but all the families are still close and still get together. In fact, he was at a sleep-over last night at one of his friends that he's known since nursery school daycare.

And I found, too, socially that we are—we're not as unique as I thought we were [both chuckle] when we were doing all this. I mean, it was—you know, it was very different at the time, and it was a very interesting thing that you could create families in different ways. But now it's not as uncommon. You know, there's another family that lives in the development, two women who are married and have two young children. We were not the only gay parents at Gio's daycare. So things—you know, things slowly change.

KARALIS: Hopefully, they will keep changing for the better.

DeROSA: I hope so. You know, one thing that I think *The Review* did was expose what heterosexual privilege, white privilege, male privilege looked like to people, and I think that is something that's definitely going on now politically in the national climate and I think is—and I hope, as it happened at Dartmouth that that will be impetus for things to change. You know, drag it out there, show everybody what it looks like, and hopefully it will motivate people to do better.

KARALIS: I hope so. Who—

DeROSA: One thing—

KARALIS: Mm-hm.

DeROSA: I was just going to say one thing that we didn't talk about was my parents and eventually what happened. So my

parents went from these people that thought I should move out of the house to people that, several years later, ultimately became more accepting. They went to family counseling, themselves. They joined the local chapter of PFLAG.

KARALIS: What is PFLAG?

DeROSA: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [now Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays].

KARALIS: So they came around.

DeROSA: They came around. Slowly. But, you know, I wasn't expecting anything, so for them to—to make progress was really pretty amazing. When I was in—go ahead.

KARALIS: No, go ahead.

DeROSA: When I was in medical school, my dad—and this is my last year of medical school in the fall. My dad was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer, and, you know, through all that time, I had—before, I had used alcohol as a coping mechanism that definitely [chuckles] was in full force at Dartmouth. And I realized that some things had to change, and I got sober in February of that year, and I made trips home to spend time with my dad. When I had the choice of where to go after medical school for my internship, I really—I was offered a position at Dartmouth, and I really contemplated staying there because my parents knew Dartmouth. It was not that far from them. I could get home easily. And he said, "No, no, you want to try something new. Go ahead and, you know, go wherever you really want to go." So I went out to Los Angeles [California]. But they flew out a couple of times to visit.

And then when I was in my residency in Tampa, Florida, they would come down and actually stayed with me during the winters because the winters were so much nicer than New York winters. So they asked me to move out, but then, you know, years later, here I was, hosting them and having them come live with me for those winters. And I got to spend time with both parents that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to have if they had not come around.

And my dad did pass away in the last year of my residency in 1996. And five years ago, my mom decided that she was getting older and needed more help, so she moved down here to Williamsburg, where we are, and lives about two miles [chuckles] down the road. And we get to help her out quite a bit. It's much easier with her being nearby than when she was still living in New York.

And then about a year and a half after that, David's parents, who had not been as accepting of him either, decided that they too were getting older [chuckles], so they sold their house in Richmond [Virginia] and also moved to Williamsburg. And I keep telling my son he just has no idea how fortunate he is, how much has changed in his short lifetime. He's twelve now, and he's got three sets of grandparents that live very close by and love him to pieces.

When we first had him, we were living next door to an older couple that didn't have any children of their own, and they really took us under wing, and Gio calls them Nana and Papa. So he has Mimi, Papa, Grammy, Nana and Papa. So he really has five grandparents, and I said he is a very, very fortunate child. He doesn't realize it yet, but I hope he will come to appreciate it when he's older.

KARALIS: How—was it difficult to, I don't know, take your parents in after they kicked out and just, like, forgive and start a relationship with them again?

DeROSA: Yes, it was incredibly difficult to reconcile. You know, despite everything, I loved my parents, and I wanted to have a relationship with them. And I could see that they were taking baby steps, so I knew that they were trying. I think if they hadn't tried, none of it would have been possible. I had a lot of resentment and anger toward my parents, but, you know, part of the principles of sobriety is forgiveness and making amends to people *you* have hurt and forgiving people who have hurt you back. So I think my dad's diagnosis was definitely a big shove in that direction, because I knew that our time was going to be limited.

You know, as a medical student, I was aware that given his stage and diagnosis, that average life expectancy was about

six months. And he ended up living for about another three and a half years. So it was a gift that we had that I'm very grateful for, because we did have that time to—to make up and to forgive each other and to make our relationship better before he died.

KARALIS: I'm glad you got that time.

DeROSA: I am, too. You know, it's—[Laughs.] The universe moves in mysterious ways.

KARALIS: It does.

I'm going to take you back to undergrad again,—

DeROSA: Okay.

KARALIS: —a bit of a winding path, but I know we mentioned—like, you mentioned before, when we had our preliminary interview, [Jeffrey P.] "Jeff" Hart, I think.

DeROSA: Yes.

KARALIS: If you can tell me a bit more about him and the incident with his son.

DeROSA: Well, Jeff Hart is a well-known conservative and a columnist. He was the unofficial adviser, because *The Review* was not a sanctioned Dartmouth organization, so he was on the faculty, in the Department of English. He was an unofficial adviser to *The Dartmouth Review*. At that time, one of his nick- —Professor Hart's nicknames was Easy Jeff, so if you took one of his English seminars, you were—it was not difficult to get a good grade. He, in my opinion, was extremely arrogant and hurtful.

His son, [Benjamin J.] "Ben" Hart [Class of 1981], was one of the staff of *The Dartmouth Review*. So they had published an article on blacks at Dartmouth and the inferiority of people of color at the college, and incensed people. And Benjamin Hart was out delivering copies of the paper and ran into an employee of the alumni center, and there were words exchanged. I believe that the article referred to people

of color as “animals,” and this gentleman bit Benjamin Hart, and there was a big to-do about it.

KARALIS: It seems like *The Review* was out to harm everybody that was outside of the, quote unquote, “norm.”

DeROSA: Well, you know, there were—you have to think of what the college was like at that time. You know, the first co-ed class came in in ’72, so there were—there was a very long tradition, especially among alumni, of white male privilege. The population of the college, I believe at that time, was about 90 percent white.

I think—I think in some ways—when—when Professor [John G.] Kemeny was appointed the president, he really wanted to make a push for Dartmouth to be more inclusive of minorities, so even though the charter for Dartmouth mentioned educating the local Native American population, there wasn’t much that was done with that through, you know, 200 years. But when Kemeny came, he really wanted to make a bigger push for including Native Americans and making a place for them at the college, to be true to the original charter.

You know, coeducation was happening at that time, and there was a lot of pushback and blowback to what he wanted to do. You know, when you—people who are in power for a long time—they don’t like to see that challenged. They don’t want to see things change. And I think, you know, *The Review* was sort of some of that coming to a head. And it found an audience. You know, even people that hated *The Dartmouth Review* read it, because it was so provocative. And, you know, people like getting worked out about what—what they were writing about.

KARALIS: I remember reading—and I’m wondering if you know Eric [W.] Stults [Class of 1980], and I think he was one of the people impacted by *The Review*, and there were other events surrounding him.

DeROSA: I—I did know Eric during my undergraduate time. He’s a very nice man. You know, some of it is his story to tell, but he was physically attacked or being gay while he was at the college and had some physical disabilities as a result of that

incident. He was the class before me, so he was an ’81, and he was out before I was, so he—people like Eric and Stuart Lewan were the progenitors of the gay students support at Dartmouth and really were people who led the way for what came after.

KARALIS: How did their—how did them being out and their experience impact yours and how you presented yourself and dealt with Dartmouth? Like,—

DeROSA: Well, you know, I was—I was dipping my toe in the water. [Chuckles.] I was trying to come out to a select, small group of people, you know, in a very controlled way. I wasn’t out to my teammates on the track team. I wasn’t out to the musicians I knew at the college. I wasn’t out to professors. But it was very freeing to acknowledge myself as a gay man in the presence of other people who did the same. Suddenly, I had—I had role models. I saw that, you know, other people like me did exist. It wasn’t easy, but they were living their lives. And it was freeing.

I think [chuckles] gay students owe people like that an enormous debt, gay students at the college, for what they were willing to go through. It sure was not easy.

One of the early advisers of the group was Margaret [H.] Bonz, who was, at that time, the fairly newly installed and the—I think her title was affirmative action officer, or she worked in the affirmative action offices, directed it. So she was an early adviser to the college. And it was during that time also that the college included sexual orientation in its non-discrimination statement. So I remember that she was helpful, especially in that—in that new position. I think unfortunately she was really besieged when she came to the college. I don’t know if she knew what she was getting in for, because she was meeting with all of the minority group representatives and seeing that, you know, life as a minority at Dartmouth wasn’t all peaches and cream.

KARALIS: No.

DeROSA: And she was interviewed in—she later became dean of freshmen, and she was interviewed in 2001, I believe, and had mentioned what it was like for—you know, she didn’t

specifically recall much about being an adviser to the gay students group, but she said, you know, just knowing what things were like on campus at that time, it must have been hell for those group of students. And I think she had the right of it.

KARALIS: It sounds like, though,—like, I'm glad you had, like, an adviser, even—

DeROSA: Well, you know, you had to have an adviser if you were going to be an officially recognized college group. And I think that the people who were advisers, you know, gravitated to the group for good reason. They were open-minded, forward-thinking, progressive people, kind people, and, you know, I thank God for them all, that they were there. You know, we were kids. We were kids who were struggling with big things. We were there allegedly to get an education but also to discover who we were as individuals and as people, and there was so much going on at the time that we really needed some adult guidance.

And—but as I said before, those people were beacons of light at Dartmouth. You know, if it weren't for them, I don't know what *I* would have done. I knew that I had a safe place to go if I had to talk to somebody. You know, these were people on the administration. These were people who were professors. And while the rest of the student body may not yet have caught up, we knew that we at least had some support.

KARALIS: Was your major adviser, like, a mentor also, somebody that helped you out?

DeROSA: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I was a psychology major, and one of the last classes that I took at Dartmouth was on sleep disorders, and that was taught by a professor of psychology, Peter [J.] Hauri [pronounced HOW-ree]. And one of the—one of the things that we had to do as part of the seminar was go into the sleep lab and monitor each other overnight, monitor sleep.

I think the task was: Watch for signs of REM [rapid eye movement] sleep, and when we saw those, go in and wake up the sleeper and ask them to discuss what they had just

been thinking or dreaming about. And it was fascinating because I was woken up at least three times when I slept there, and I realized I had three distinct, very memorable dreams that I could recall very easily. And, you know, his point was that we all have this many; we just don't recall them.

But Dr. Hauri was a wonderful instructor, and when I graduated Dartmouth, I was a bit at a loss as to what I wanted to do with myself, and so I ended up going and working for him at the Sleep Disorder[s] Center [at the Dartmouth Medical School]. And I did that for, oh, maybe about four or five years.

And while I was there, because I was an employee of the college, I was allowed to take—I was called I think a "graduate special student." I was allowed to take one course per term for free, as a Dartmouth employee. So what I did, I decided that I really wanted to go to medical school, so I went back and I started taking all of the prerequisites as a graduate special student, for free, and after I got through everything I needed to take, is when I took the MCATs [Medical College Admission Tests] and applied for medical school.

KARALIS: And you got into Geisel [School of Medicine, formerly Dartmouth Medical School].

DeROSA: I did. I was—you know, I'd had a—one thing that we had not talked about is that I was actually separated from the college at a point in time, which was—oh, gosh!—so I spent two years away from Dartmouth at different periods during my tenure at the college. First was when I came out to my parents and I moved out, and then I was back for three terms. The outing by *The Review* happened at that period of time, and academically my performance suffered significantly, and I was separated for academic performance from the college.

So I had a job for the last—work-study did not pay very much [chuckles], so I became an orderly at what was Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital at that time [now Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center]. And that's how I supported myself. So the college allowed me to stay nearby. Normally,

you have to get out of Hanover if you're—if you're separated from the college. So they allowed me to stay and work, and I was seeing a counselor at that time and got it together enough that I petitioned for readmission after just a year. Normally, you sit out for two, but I petitioned for readmission after a year, and I was reaccepted to the college. And I did very well academically after I returned.

So—[Pause.]. I'm—I'm trying to put this all in context again. .. So Dartmouth gave me two chances. You know, the first time, they allowed me to—to go out, and then I was supported financially, and the second time, when I was separated for poor performance, they allowed me back early. And then they accepted me to med school.

So in my journey to get to medical school, it was a little bit challenging, trying to explain a poor academic record for the first two years, followed by something obviously had changed when I did very well. So if you reduced my application to a set of numbers, it didn't look very good. I mean, I did well on the MCATs, and there were some schools, I guess, that were curious. They wanted to know, you know, "Obviously you had the potential. What was going on? What happened?"

So I was wait-listed at a couple of schools. I was accepted at Albany Medical College, and I was accepted at Dartmouth Medical School. In fact, I wasn't accepted at Albany until—I was reluctant to come right out and say what had been going on at the time, but one of the advisers said, you know, "Something happened here. What was going on? I want to know what was going on." And I finally said, "I'm gay, and I was having difficulty at the college, and I got everything together and went back, and everything was much better for me after that." And he said, "Ah, now it makes sense. I understand." And then I got accepted.

KARALIS: What changed after you came back that made it easier to do well in classes?

DeROSA: I was much more secure in myself. I think my parents had started to make some changes during that time. I grew up. There was an organization in the community at that time called Social Alternatives for Men, SAM. And SAM was a

support group for gay men. And even though I was really sort of at college age at the time, I wasn't a college student, so I became active in the group. And they had things like hikes. And one time rented a B&B [bed and breakfast] in North Conway [New Hampshire], and we went up and stayed for the weekend and did some hiking.
So that was definitely a big social support. I got to meet people that were out, successful in the community, and that helped me tremendously.

KARALIS: Did you date at all in your undergrad—after you become more confident and secure in yourself?

DeROSA: Yeah, I did. I dated somebody that was not part of the college. He worked there, and then ultimately left the area to go to UMass [University of Massachusetts] and get his master's degree, so the relationship didn't last.

You know, probably no gay history of Dartmouth in that period of time should fail to mention the Andrew's Inn. Do you know what that is?

KARALIS: No.

DeROSA: [Chuckles.] So there was—opened by I believe a Dartmouth grad. This was a sort—of like a little hotel that was down in Bellow's Falls, Vermont, about a half hour south of the college. And then it was taken over by another alum of the college, [Thomas J.] "Thom" Herman [Class of 1969], and his partner, Jeremy Youst, Y-o-u-s-t. And they ran it basically—so there was a bar, which was sort of like a disco, that was very swinging on the weekends, and people could stay there during the week. And next door there was a little restaurant. And it was sort of a sanctuary away from Hanover. You know, you could actually go and hang out with gay people.

And Hanover was so cloistered that you really didn't have many opportunities for socialization, you know, short of driving down to Boston. So Andrew's Inn was wonderful. People came from all over to stay there. And that was sort of—besides SAM, that was another social lifeline during that period of time. They were open I think from, mmm, '77 to '84 or so. And then they closed. Here they were, a bastion of

gay life in a small, conservative Vermont town. You know, there was some pushback from the town to do away with it that was never successful, but the rest of the townspeople were fairly accepting, which was, you know, also very heartening at that time. It brought business to the town, so they were good. They paid taxes. They were good for Bellow's Falls.

KARALIS: Why did they close? Do you know?

DeROSA: I don't. I'm not sure why they closed. They closed as I was beginning to work at the sleep lab, so—I was—my job was to monitor patients and research subjects overnight. So I would go in at eight o'clock at night and stay up and work, monitoring patients until eight o'clock in the morning, go home, try to get sleep, get up, do it the next day, and then Fridays I got a part-time job as an EET [electronic engineering technology] technician, working at the hospital, doing EKGs [electrocardiograms] on patients.

So I would get out of the sleep lab Thursday morning. Thursday night I'd work, then I'd get out Friday morning at eight o'clock, make myself stay awake for six hours [chuckles] while I was doing EKGs, and then I'd go home and crash and try to have something of a normal weekend. It was—those years were—plus then I was also taking, you know, a class a term, so those were not conducive to doing much socialization.

KARALIS: So it must have been—with it being a very rural, conservative area, there not being a lot of out—students that were out, and your schedule, very difficult to have relationships.

DeROSA: It was a very difficult time for that, you know, but I was more—I think I—SAM wasn't in existence yet at the time, so there was a little bit of a social outlet. You know, we could go over, and they would have, you know, barbecues at somebody's house, so there was something that was there, but on a personal level, it was difficult. It was difficult.

I met a man that I was with for a couple of years, I think in '86, probably about the middle of the time I was at the sleep lab. And he lived in Manchester, New Hampshire, and for the

first year we had kind of a commuting relationship. And then the last year, he asked for a little bit more of a commitment, so I actually moved down to Manchester, and I was living in Manchester and driving up to—to do my work at the sleep lab and then driving back and then—you know, trying not to crash on the road [chuckles] because I had been up all night. You know, it was—there wasn't much time for anything else. [Chuckles.]

KARALIS: That sounds like a very busy schedule.

DeROSA: I'm sorry?

KARALIS: That sounds like a very busy schedule.

DeROSA: It was really crazy. You know, in retrospect, I don't think I could—well, I certainly couldn't do it now. I'm too old. My body wouldn't be able to do it. But it enabled me—I—I had a sense of purpose. I had a sense of direction and goals. I had no idea whether I would be able to get into medical school with my record, but I took it on faith that somehow things would work out, and they did.

KARALIS: What interested you in majoring in psychology and then trying to get into medical school?

DeROSA: Well, I think psychology because [laughs] I was very facile in the terms of psychology. I'd been in therapy for a bit. My family had been in therapy. I was interested in it. I liked some of the professors in the department. But I—I knew—when I was very young probably about eight years old, there was an older—older young man that lived next door to us, and he was pursuing pre-med studies, and I remember he brought home this fetal pig to dissect, and I was, you know, sort of brainy and interested in science, so he asked if I'd like to come over and, you know, watch him as he was doing his dissection. So I did. And it really stuck with me, and I took to saying, you know, "I'm gonna be a doctor when I grow up."

My grandmother worked for a physician in—in New York. She was the housekeeper and the cleaner, house cleaner for them, and a cook. And occasionally if I'd go to stay with her in the city, she would bring me to work with her. And Dr. Collins was a diabetes specialist, and, you know, the

medical and patient environment was very—very different in those days than today. He would—he would let me stand in the room on the side and watch as he was examining patients. And that kind of, you know, further piqued my interest—most probably ten or twelve at the time—to become a doctor.

But those plans really got waylaid as an undergraduate, when all this other stuff was going on and I was trying to come out, and my grades weren't—were suffering. And then when I started working at the Sleep Disorder[s] Center, there were co-directors. One was Peter Hauri, who was a Ph.D. in psychology, and the other was [Michael J.] "Mike" Sateia [pronounced sah-TAY, Class of 1970], who was a medical doctor.

And Mike's wife, Holly [F.] Sateia [Class of 1982], was the direc- —became the director of admissions at the undergraduate college, at Dartmouth College.

Anyway, in speaking to both of them, you know, I would speak about the things I might want to do for a career. They both said that "if you have any interest in research, you really should go to medical school because it might open more doors for you in terms of—of a career." And that's when I decided, you know, maybe the dream wasn't dead. I was going to do it and started taking those pre-med classes again.

KARALIS: And then you made it, and you—what kind of doctor are you? I haven't asked.

DeROSA: I'm an ophthalmologist.

KARALIS: Ophthalmologist. Why ophthalmology?

DeROSA: So I knew that I liked working with my hands, but I liked having continued relationships with patients, so it requires, you know, thought about what areas of medicine can you practice where you get to do both those things. You know, a lot of surgery can be about relationships with patients that are bounded by your interaction as a surgeon. You know, you diagnose them, they need to have a surgical intervention, you do the surgery, you may see them for post-

op appointments, and then you're done, and you don't see them again.

But—and in medicine—you know, medicine is great. It's internal medicine, family practice. It's a diagnostic puzzle. Neurology. You're trying to figure out what's going on. And then you—if you can find the correct diagnosis and treats, you prescribe medications or therapy and help the patient to get better. And you often get to see them and know them over time. But you don't directly intervene and fix things surgically. You have to refer them out for it.

So ophthalmology was one of those nice meetings in the middle. You know, I see patients regularly and often, and yet I can still take them to surgery when they need something fixed.

KARALIS: That's awesome. [Chuckles.] That's a good reason to go into it.

DeROSA: Well, yeah. I thought about it, and there were some great people at Dartmouth. I was thinking about ophthalmology.

You know, one thing that we didn't discuss, either, was the AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] era.

KARALIS: I was going to ask about that.

DeROSA: So, you know, AIDS was I guess discovered or came to light in the early eighties. I think the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] reported on opportunistic pneumonia in a group of individuals. I think that was in '81.

KARALIS: Yeah.

DeROSA: And so there was a tremendous amount of—yeah, there was a lot of vitriol from conservative areas, like *The Review*, about how gays were dangerous because they propagated AIDS, et cetera. But there was also a tremendous amount of communi- —caring from some aspects of the—of the medical community. And there was a lot of intersectionality.

For example, when I was in medical school doing my clinical rotations, I did my psychiatric rotation at the Brattleboro

Retreat. And while I was down there, I met a bartender named Charlie, and over the course of getting to know him a little bit as a friend, Charlie told me that he was HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] positive. And actually at that time, be definition, he had AIDS.

So he would go in for treatments, and occasionally if he didn't have anybody to take him, I would take him to his treatment. He had pneumocystis [pneumonia], and they would put you in this chamber and flood the chamber, and you had to stay in there and inhale the medications, the treatment for the pneumonia.

And later I decided that if I were going to think about ophthalmology, I really needed to do an elective in it, so I did an elective, and I was in with the retina specialist, and he said, "Come on in here. I want to show you something." And I walked into the room, and Charlie was sitting in there, and he had me look into his eyes, and Charlie had CMV [cytomegalovirus] retinitis.

So the AIDS [Memorial] Quilt came to Dartmouth at some point during that period of time. You know, we were in some ways insulated. You know, Dartmouth can be a bubble. I think in retrospect, I was safer being at Dartmouth because it was a little bit cloistered. You know, many times I've looked back and thought if I had gone to Columbia instead, you know, I might have gotten AIDS.

But when I was there at Dartmouth, people were sick, and you didn't know about it until after the fact, so I—I can think of easily six or seven guys that I knew at Dartmouth who have died of AIDS over that period of time.

KARALIS: That must have been a very scary time, to just have friends getting sick and not really know the cause.

DeROSA: It was. I mean, eventually, you know, this whole notion by probably '83 or '84—I remember the guy I had been dating at the time and I decided we were going to get ourselves tested because, you know, who knew? We'd had a couple of partners each. We didn't know. You know, nobody knew. And the only testing that was done—I think it was in Concord [New Hampshire], so you had to drive a ways to go to get

yourself tested, and he results weren't available for a while. I've forgotten at that time how long it took before you could find out.

But per their protocols, they would not tell you over the phone, even if you were negative, so we had to drive all the way back down there again and sit in the waiting room, waiting for somebody to call us in individually into the room and then tell us what the results of the tests were. And that was a real heart-in-your-throat kind of a moment.

KARALIS: How was it as—I guess, like, a medical student to seeing all this?

DeROSA: It was devastating. It was devastating. I don't think—I don't think I cried about anything more than the patients I would come across who were diagnosed with AIDS and were at the last—in the last stages of their life. It was—it was exceedingly difficult. You know, you'd get to know these people, you'd become friendly with them or their partners, and then you'd be going to their funeral. It—it was emotionally very difficult. I remember—

KARALIS: [Starts to speak.]

DeROSA: What I was going to say, that there was a—around about that time, I was an orderly—when I was an orderly at the hospital there, there was a employee health nurse. I think her name was Connie. She was older. And she was absolutely wonderful. I felt like I could tell her anything. And I came out to her, and she decided that—I think they were giving healthcare practitioners the hepatitis B vaccine at that time. And I didn't qualify because I wasn't a healthcare provider; I was an orderly. But she knew that hepatitis B was one of those things that was more prevalent in the gay population, so she made sure that I got that vaccine, and I think skirted the rules when she did that. [Chuckles.]

KARALIS: I'm glad, like, that there were wonderful people like her that actually cared and tried to help.

DeROSA: There were. You know, people were very afraid. I mean, even early in the course of my medical career, you know, when I was a medical student and if I went into the OR

[operating room] to observe or learn, or an intern, you know, people would triple glove because they were so deathly afraid that they might become exposed. As a healthcare worker, you were afraid of being exposed to the HIV virus.

You know, people just didn't understand. They didn't realize that it's fairly difficult to transmit from casual contact. And I remember being in with a mentor in a clinic, who was seeing an AIDS patient, and the patient broke down and cried because the mentor touched him without gloves on.

KARALIS: Was there any sort of support network that Dartmouth offered or the hospital to—I don't know, I guess to the patients, to the gay students, to the providers that had to deal with such devastating experiences?

DeROSA: No. [Chuckles.] Not at Dartmouth. There were—there were—I'm trying to think—you know, I'm a little fuzzy on the history of this. There was a—there was a community network—I'm looking right now to see if it comes up. There was a—there was a group called ACORN [AIDS Community Resource Network] that was in the area, and I think it was Action Community—I don't remember what the acronym stood for, but it was a core group of organizations, and they were—you know, there was an AIDS network, and they were dedicated to helping people out in the community, and they were somebody that we could refer patients to at that time. And I think they might have been partially involved as well as getting the AIDS Quilt up to show at the hockey arena at Dartmouth. So there was that. There were things in the community but not something—anything directly from the college itself—

KARALIS: I didn't know that—

DeROSA: Or the medical school.

KARALIS: I didn't know that there was a quilt made and presented during a hockey game.

DeROSA: Well, it was—it was not—it was shown there because we needed the space, and it was indoors, to protect the panels. And I remember a couple local people who had made panels for their loved ones. Louise I think either worked for the

college or the medical school, and she made one for her brother. And what they did at that time, because the quilt was becoming bigger and bigger and bigger, was they tried to make sure that if there were any local connections, panels that were made by people in the area where it was going to be exhibited, that that section of the quilt would be included in the exhibit. So they came and laid the whole thing out on the floor, and people could come in and just walk around.

KARALIS: Did ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] ever make its way, like, to Dartmouth, or did you hear about it—or involve with it in—like, anybody involved with it in some form?

DeROSA: I'm sorry, involved with what?

KARALIS: ACT UP.

DeROSA: Oh. Not to my recollection. They had a second march in Washington [D.C.] that I think ACT UP was largely responsible for, or—or at least partially responsible for initiating, and that, I think, was in the eighties as well. But we were—we were a bit more—you know, that was in metropolitan areas. We were a bit more isolated from that at Dartmouth.

KARALIS: Mmm.

DeROSA: The quilt—actually, it looks like the quilt came there in 1991. And it was exhibited at [Robert C.] Thompson Arena. So I was in medical school at that time.

KARALIS: When did you finish medical school?

DeROSA: The early summer of '92.

KARALIS: And then you went to Florida for a residency?

DeROSA: No, I went to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] for internship. I did an internship in internal medicine. And in L.A. we certainly saw AIDS patients. And then I went to University of South Florida for a residency in ophthalmology for three years after that.

KARALIS: How was both UCLA and South Florida, like, different from Dartmouth (1) in the queer community and (2) with seeing AIDS patients during that time?

DeROSA: Well, I think the whole face of medicine changed. You know, you—when AIDS, you know, reached public awareness, you would have some doctors—and some of them were gay docs—that opened AIDS clinics because there wasn't anybody else to care for these people. You had a much larger community in Los Angeles, of course, so you had many more resources that were available.

We were at—and the population of AIDS patients shifted a little when I was there. You know, it was "the gay disease" early on, and then you started seeing more people who were IV [intravenous] drug users becoming sick, minority people becoming sick, so—the internship was at the Olive View County Hospital [sic; Olive View-UCLA Medical Center] there, so we saw a different kind of patient there.

And then the other part of it was at—oh, I'm blanking on the name. Cedar Sinai Hospital [sic; Cedars-Sinai Medical Center] in L.A. Cedar[s] Sinai was an interesting place. It was, you know, "the hospital to the stars." Stephen [A.] Spielberg Avenue ran by the avenue, and, you know, people always talked about: "Have you seen anybody in here yet?" Famous people. But they also had a section of the hospital that was for indigent patients, and a lot of that patient population was made up of white, gay male people who had AIDS.

And then in South Florida, the University of South Florida, of course, we saw it there too because—again, bigger community. It was much more of a mixing pot there than at a place like Hanover. I knew many people in the community who had AIDS. One of my best friends had AIDS. Went on out—he worked at Busch Gardens down there in Tampa and had been there for years and went out on disability because he became too sick to work. And sold his car and was ready to die, and that was about when heart therapy came out, and he got a second lease on life, because the medications got so much better, and actually went back to work and eventually died of the disease, but he certainly had, you

know, twelve more years that he wouldn't have had otherwise.

So there were fundraisers, there were clinics, there were community things there. You know, for being at the forefront of the disease, Dartmouth really did okay. I remember when I moved from Hanover to Los Angeles, I had a bunch of furniture that, you know, now would have been called mid-century modern [chuckles]. Probably worth a lot of money. But I donated that for sales to the ACORN group so they could raise money for community support and things.

KARALIS: Were there a lot of people involved in the ACORN groups?

DeROSA: No. I think you had pillars of the community that were, you know, active in it, and, you know, you usually knew somebody that knew somebody that was active with it. You know, I—I—I was not that active with it. You know, in 1988 I got into medical school, so I was so busy with the education that—and I wasn't doing—I was in the classroom; I wasn't doing clinical rotations yet. You know, that didn't come until 1990. So for the early part of it, I wasn't as aware of things that were going on.

I know that one of my advisers, the woman that hooded me at my ceremony, was tangentially involved with the network and knew people that were as well. "Maggie" [Margaret L.] Moore-West.

KARALIS: What—so slightly tangential, but what was it like going to medical school at Dartmouth? What was it like being a medical student? How was it different from undergrad?

DeROSA: For one, I was out, so I—I didn't have—you know, I had no secrets then. I didn't much—as much care what people thought. I was out to the administration. I was out to my peers. You know, it still socially wasn't as accepting as it is today, but the experience was markedly different than the one I had as an undergrad. You know, I mean, family and friends say, "Are you crazy? You're going to stay at Dartmouth for another four years? After what it was like?"

But—but things were changing. You know, in many ways it was what I knew very well, having spent so much time up

there. I mean, I went there in ’78. I left in ’92. I spent, you know, many years up there. My classmates were—and plus, people were more mature. They were older. You know, it was a smaller class. There were about eighty of us in our class, you know, and I said, shortly after being there, and I say it now, that—that my classmates were some of the best people I’ve ever met.

KARALIS: Did it—I don’t know, did people continue being great and, like,--like, in L.A. and in the clinic you interned and in the University of South Florida?

DeROSA: Not so much South Florida. That was a very different environment. L.A., yes, wonderful. They were great. I became close with some of my fellow interns. One of the guys I was friends with had also gone to Dartmouth, and he was from that area, so he—he was there in that program with me as well. He’s a great guy.

I also was—in ninety- —so let’s see, I got sober in ’92, so when I left Dartmouth, I was going to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] in Los Angeles, so that gave me yet another community. And L.A. was so big that they had gay meetings for AA, so it was not a problem to—certainly not a problem to meet people.

At University of South Florida, the chairman that arrived there shortly before—as you’ll find when you go through your med school process, you’re accepted to your internship and residency at the same time. So I knew that I would be going to UCLA for a year and then I would be going to University of South Florida for three years of residency. So I already knew this in advance.

When I got there, I found that the chairman of the department of ophthalmology there at USF was someone that they had recruited from Oklahoma. He is an evangelical Christian—

KARALIS: Mmm.

DeROSA: —and brought with him faculty from Oklahoma that were also evangelicals, as well as some of the support staff—you know, secretary and admin assistants and things like that.

So it was a very, very different environment for me there, I think. You know, if I look back at chunks of time where I—that I felt were the most trying and difficult of my life, I'd have to say, you know, the undergraduate years at Dartmouth and my residency years were personally the most difficult.

But that's not to say I didn't make friends there among the—you know, the fellow residents were fine. It was just the faculty. You know, it was much more difficult being out in that environment. And he subsequently was asked to leave after I left, so he's not there anymore.

KARALIS: That's good.

DeROSA: That was very good. Let me tell you, there were some very [laughs]—some very trying times. There were instances where I'd be in the clinic. He'd be in the clinic. I would know the patient in the chair from social circles outside of my residency. I would know the—the person personally. I knew their beliefs, or non-beliefs, as it were. And he would, you know, look at them, and here was this man who was nationally, if not internationally, respected and would—would grab their hand and say, "Do you mind if I pray for ya?" Or "Pray with you." You know, and then they're kind of like, *What do I say here?* It was very uncomfortable.

I'm not sure how aware he was of some of the people there in the clinic being gay. I don't know how—or even the people that were HIV positive who were in the clinic. I knew they were. He didn't, and I don't know how he would have reacted to that.

KARALIS: Was he very outwardly—like, would he attack—like, was he very outwardly homophobic?

DeROSA: Not so much outwardly in what he'd say, because those were things that could be challenged at the university level, but it was more, you know, who were the—who were the chairman's pets? Who got invited to social things with the chairman? The kinds of things—I mean, it was very well known what the born-again Christian groups stood for. Certainly anti-gay. So in so openly espousing his personal views and—and pushing them on everybody around him, the inference was, you know, "Don't talk to me about things that

you know I'm going to have a negative opinion of." So he was *never* somebody I would talk to about being gay.

KARALIS: It's good that eventually he was removed, because that sounds like a very—to put it lightly, unhealthy environment.

DeROSA: Well, it was extremely unhealthy, because you had some members of the faculty that didn't have personal spiritual beliefs. You had a segment—a decent segment of the faculty who was Jewish, and then you've got, you know, a man that would stand up at the beginning of grand rounds and offer a very public Christian prayer into the microphone before commencing, and it was very fractious and tense.

KARALIS: If I may ask, like, why did you decide on South Florida?

DeROSA: Ophthalmology residencies are very difficult [chuckles] to get into. You know, I did very well as a—as a medical student, but still, they're very completive. It's very hard to get into them, so, you know, you pretty much—you don't have a lot of choices in where you go, typically. My dad was sick with his cancer at the time, so I wanted to—it was difficult being in L.A. for that year because of the time zone difference. You know, somebody would always be, you know, up late or woken up or something when you're trying to talk even on the phone. So I said, *You know, if I can, I want to get to someplace that's at least on the East Coast.*

And it was easy to get there from New York for them. Or for me. You know, if something happened and I needed to get up there, because he became—took a turn for the worse, I knew that it would be much easier than flying out—you know, back home from California.

And I had no idea [chuckles] when I was accepted what I was going to be walking into.

KARALIS: This sounds—you—you have dealt with a lot of things very bravely.

DeROSA: Well, preparing for this interview, I'll admit, was very difficult. I reread some of the old articles from *The Dartmouth Review* that you were kind enough to send me. I tried to look through some old letters, to remember people's names and events

as they had happened, and I realized how much I had compartmentalized a lot of things. So this was really, you know, pulling the scabs off some things and really looking at them again. Which isn't a bad thing, but it—it—it was difficult.

KARALIS: We really do appreciate that you've picked at the scabs and are willing to be vulnerable and remember these events and share them with us.

DeROSA: Well, I think it's vital. You know, we—I mean, I remember what it's like to be an eighteen-year-old kid at Dartmouth. You're stepping into the adult world. You don't have any life experience to speak of. And you're forming your—you're malleable and vulnerable and trying to form opinions and figure out who you are and—you know, history is extremely important. I hope that I—I'm very grateful to people that came before me and paved the way.

I think that—I think the women that first started to go to Dartmouth when it went co-ed were extremely brave. I can't imagine what they went through. And now they outnumber the men at Dartmouth [chuckles], which I think is great.

So things can change, but, you know, it—we need to remember where we came from.

KARALIS: Yes. Yes. I agree. I think it's important to recognize and remember the history and who came before us.

DeROSA: Well, and in some ways, history—in some ways, history repeats itself. You know, I see the kinds of awful things that are being said in public forums now, you know, on the national level, and I think, *Oh, God, this is just like what it was when* The Review *came into being.* You know, people seem unfettered and will say whatever they think, with no fear of any kind of social repercussions. It's like bigotry is emboldened.

I—I can't believe that we are where we are right now, and, you know, the—the saving grace is that it's also rallied people, sort of like what happened [chuckles]—I mean, this is history all over again. Microcosm at Dartmouth and macrocosm here nationally. You know, it rallies good people

who are for inclusion, acceptance and for progressing people's rights to do something and to take action. You know, I and many of my friends have said, you know, after this last election, we can't be complacent. We can't sit on the couch. We have to get out there, and we have to do—do things and take action and be supportive. We have to be the voice for change or things may not get better.

KARALIS: I'm trying to—I—I think you're very right, and, I don't know, what would you, I don't know, recommend to the students, to the people listening to your story and to other queer stories, about how to get up and not be complacent, go out?

DeROSA: Live your life authentically. Don't take for granted the privileges that you have, and help others that don't have those privileges. Make a difference.

KARALIS: So—

DeROSA: I think that's what I'd tell them.

KARALIS: So why *do* SpeakOut, then? I know we touched up on this, but—

DeROSA: Well, I'm hoping that it's helpful. I'm hoping it's helpful for some people that may remember things. You know that I shared time with there. I hope it's helpful for students going forward to realize, you know, that—that others went through things, and it gives them a sense of support. I mean, as we discussed, I was grateful that Eric and Stuart had in some ways paved the way for those of us that came along in the GSA after. It was easier because somebody else did it first.

I did this, too, for me. It helps *me* to remember what it was like and to keep me grateful and to give me motivation to keep giving back.

KARALIS: And I have one final question—

DeROSA: Sure.

KARALIS: —to end on a positive note, kind of.

DeROSA: Okay.

KARALIS: [Chuckles] How did you meet your husband—

DeROSA: [Laughs.]

KARALIS: How did you meet your husband—a romantic note, positivity into the future.

DeROSA: That's a wonderful note. That's a wonderful note. You know, back when we did, it was very unusual, but we met on Match.com.

KARALIS: Wow.

DeROSA: That was in 2001, I think. So I had—let's see, I moved to—after my residency in Tampa, I went and did a fellowship in San Francisco [California], and I was in San Francisco for about a year and five months or so, doing a fellowship there. And then I had some job offers, and Florida [sic; Virginia] was appealing. It was kind of in the middle of the East Coast, so I knew the climate would be a bit more temperate than—I did not want to go back to Hanover winters or anything like that.

It was easy to get up to New York. My mom was living by herself then. My dad had been gone for a couple of years. And so I—I decided to—and I came here, and Virginia is geographically beautiful. If you ever come to Williamsburg and visit, you'd look at William & Mary and think Dartmouth had been transplanted here, because in many ways they're very similar.

So Williamsburg—you know, small town again. I don't know why I keep doing that to myself. Williamsburg is a small town, not as small as Hanover; there are about 12,000 people who live in Williamsburg proper.

And, you know, being a busy physician, it's hard to meet people, so I decided I would try this relatively new thing, this Match.com, and David was also on there, living in Richmond, about an hour away, and [chuckles] he was sort of stealth dating. He would scan through and, you know, was fairly selective about who he was going to try and initiate a

conversation with. And so out of the blue, he contacted me, liked what he read in my profile, I guess.

And I went to look for him, and I couldn't find him because he had inactivated his profile so he wouldn't be harassed by a lot of people, and during the conversation he said, "Oh, okay, look now," and I went to look, and there it was. So he reactivated it so I could see it. And then deactivated it again. [Chuckles.]

But we—we hit it off extremely well. He came down to Williamsburg, and our first date was about eight or nine hours, and we went to an art show and just had a great time. You know, things progressed steadily but slowly, and then after about a year, David moved down here with me. And we lived together then with an eye toward what was happening with gay marriage, and then took that trip to Italy, and he proposed, and four years later we got married.

And in between there, we had a son. So people said—you know, back at the time—it's not so unusual now—"Yeah, this is the new American way of life. You meet on the internet, you cohabitate, you have a child, and then you get married." And that's—that was really the order in which we did things. And we didn't have much of a choice about some of that, but that's how it happened.

So we—you know, we have a great son. We've got a great house. We have great careers. We have a great community of friends. We have gay friends. Many of our friends are heterosexual parents of children that my son has met in school. It's a good life, and we're both very grateful for it.

KARALIS: Thank you again so much for sharing your story and for the vulnerability, the lessons and the hope.

DeROSA: Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it more than you know.

[End of interview.]