Charles T. “Chuck” Edwards School of Graduate and Advanced Studies ‘86
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

PINKNEY: Good afternoon. It is August 12th, 2019, and I’m interviewing [Charles T.] “Chuck” Edwards for SpeakOut. My name is Anne Yates Pinkney. I am located in the Rauner Special Collections Library in Hanover, New Hampshire. Chuck is located in New York, New York.

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the SpeakOut program.

EDWARDS: It’s my pleasure.

PINKNEY: I think if you could tell us a little bit about where you are right now and what you do, and then we can jump into year early life and how you got to where you are today.

EDWARDS: Okay. You’re speaking to me from my home in downtown Manhattan. I’m in the West Village, and on 10th Street. And I am—my early life. Let’s see. I grew up in the Midwest, the rural Midwest. I went as an undergraduate to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point [New York]. It’s one of the five federal academies, among the smallest of them. And I went to Dartmouth [College] for grad school in computer information systems, in the arts and sciences between Tuck [School of Business] and Thayer [School of Engineering], sharing classes there.

PINKNEY: Wow. Okay. So to back up just a little bit, you mentioned you’re from the rural Midwest. Where exactly were you born?

EDWARDS: I was born in Ohio but raised most of my life in Missouri.

PINKNEY: Missouri.

EDWARDS: Yeah. Yep, yep. Which is—probably—probably informs a lot of my tendency toward having a household full of plants.

And, you know, having a little bit of dirt to dig in keeps me in Manhattan.

PINKNEY: Gotcha. Did you grow up with any siblings?

EDWARDS: Yes, I have a sister, who is in San Francisco [California], a brother, who is just recently retired as being a sheriff in our home town—county, and we had a younger brother who—a youngest brother, who actually had a truck accident after he graduated high school and he passed away. And—yeah. So that’s—

PINKNEY: Gotcha. What—what did your parents do for a living?

EDWARDS: My mother—all right, so my—my brothers were half-brothers. My mother had remarried after her first marriage. She—she met my father when she as flying as a flight attendant for TWA [Trans World Airlines], and he—and my father was becoming a pilot for TWA.

And my stepfather, who I grew up with, was more or less my daddy in Missouri, worked for the Selective Service [System] and also had his own farm operations there. So we had several farms when I grew up, mostly cattle and corn, soybeans and wheat.

PINKNEY: Gotcha. So if you were to describe the world view of your parents or, like, the world view that you were raised in, how would you talk about that?

EDWARDS: I would—it’s interesting. It—it—it has been informed differently over time. I always felt that my family was I think pretty much firmly centered on American constitutional and religious values, probably. So now, in the current political climate, I find the fact that we were long-running Democrats to become more of a polarizing thing, that we really are much more progressive than a lot of folks back in Missouri.

The state itself has changed a bit since I grew up there. It used to be a—more of a Democratic state; now it’s much more [Donald J.] Trump-ist.

And I think that our values have remained consistent, I’d like to think. On the other hand, I also know historically, looking

at the foundations of the Democratic and the Republican parties, I can—I am aware now—much more aware than I had been about, you know, being the county seat and having the central square of the town of 700 or so at the time having a Confederate general statue was—was political charged. Let’s put it that way.

And I didn’t get that much when I was growing up, but it’s also very obvious that forebears of mine or the family were—were involved in the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony, and, you know, it informs me as, like, the role of slavery and, of course, the backlash of, you know, race. Race is something that, you know, we always felt, you know, we were all good with each other. But in hindsight, I think that I can see a lot more issues in dealing with race than what I—what was whitewashed when I was growing up. Does that make any sense?

PINKNEY: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for sharing that.

I think what I’m curious about, before we kind of jump into maybe the more heavy-hitting topics, is what you were interested in school and how it kind of led you to go to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. Yeah.

EDWARDS: I would say in high school I—I was fortunate to be selected to a summer with the National Science Foundation. I had already had an interest in, you know, marine biology and such because my father lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, and—with the born-again Southern Baptist stepmother. And my sister and I had spent summers going to Florida, and I had spent a lot of time snorkeling and such and realized I quite enjoyed—I entertained the idea of marine biology as a pursuit for—for profession.

And doing that—being selected in the three-week program doing marine biology, salt marsh ecology and oceanography in Wallops Island, Virginia, made me more receptive to the fact that the—and thinking at that time, after my junior year of college—or in high school, realizing, *Oh, I—you know, there is this thing called the United States Merchant Marine Academy. If you could get a nomination and get accepted there*—you know, you get to travel the world, see a lot of the

world, make more money than most every college graduate in the country, and get, you know, six weeks on, six weeks off, that type of—or six months on and six months off—different types of schedules for travel and vacation. And also you don’t have to pay for it, meaning that taxpayers are paying for it, but you have an obligation following it.

So I saw that as a boon, and I figured being the eldest of four children, I wouldn’t have anyone to pressure me about paying back things from the family. So I figured that would be a good thing to do.

Let’s see, I probably—I read *Moby Dick*[*: or, The Whale*] by that point, and I had—and I thought that, you know, it would be a good way to go get an education, and then I could branch off and do some cool research and whatever.

Flash forward. I got nominated. I went to the Academy. Realized that it was—even though it had the reputation as the most academic of the five federal academies, it appeared to—it seemed a lot more regimented than even what was considered the most regimented at that time, was [the U.S. Military Academy at] West Point, and was a lot more hazing and everything else going on than we’d ever imagined.

But it was a good place—like the rural Midwest, it’s probably a good place to come from, so after, you know, leaving there I sailed a bit and whatnot.

Also from Kings Point, just carrying the trajectory there for you, we were on the Dartmouth Time-Sharing System, and we had the—we had Avatar terminals and, you know, BASIC [Beginners’ All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code] computer language, I think, was what was being taught then at that time. Also coming from Tom [Thomas E.] Kurtz and [John G.] Kemeny.

Which, of course, later, they started the program in the computer information systems program, so—and I’d also taken a trip with the Academy. A bunch of us did a—from my computer club—we did a field trip to check out the Kiewit [Network] system.

So I had seen Dartmouth, and therefore Dartmouth was one of a couple of places on my list of places to go for grad school.

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

So just a couple of clarifying details. What years were you in attendance at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy?

EDWARDS: I was the Class of ’82.

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

EDWARDS: And with Dartmouth I was the Class of ’86, which seemed like a long internal in between, but I guess a couple of years isn’t that much in life. At the time, I thought, *Oh, I guess I’ve got great work experience*, because I had sailed the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico after that, and—but, yeah, it’s—it’s [unintelligible]. As a very, you know,—with great seniority as being a graduate student, so when problems developed at the school, particularly provoked by *The Dartmouth Review* and getting *The Dartmouth Review* in the Hinman Boxes and then seeing stuff from *The Daily D* [*The Dartmouth*] and finding out what was going on with a lot of little scandals, I figured it was important for me, as a graduate student, to, you know, stand up and be counted for and be—get involved in a group and *who knows? I might meet somebody that way*.

So I—I dutifully went about as a very, I don’t know, experienced grad student. You know, in hindsight, of course, some of those kids were probably a lot more further along in their coming out process than I was, and—and it was a very symbiotic relationship for a—in a lot of ways.

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

So I hope you don’t mind if I backtrack a little bit.

EDWARDS: Go ahead.

PINKNEY: I think—you mentioned that you were involved in the computer club in your undergraduate years. You graduated

with a degree in computer informational systems, I think—information systems, right? In 1986.

EDWARDS: No, it was actually—my—I got a minor in computer engineering from the Academy.

PINKNEY: Okay.

EDWARDS: You basically have two tracks for a major. You can either go into nautical science and marine transportation, which is what I did, or go into marine engineering. I did—basically, you’re either a deck officer or you’re an engineer. So my perspective was I’d rather be on board the ship and seeing the iceberg come at us than being in the engine room and watching it come through the hull. So I—but I also—I did augment mine with a minor in computer engineering,—

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

EDWARDS: —which was kind of wasn’t easy to do because at the time, this required a lot of extra courses and whatnot.

PINKNEY: Right.

I think—I’m wondering—so you came from a rural background in Missouri, and then you went to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. And you mentioned that there was a little bit of hazing during that time, so I’m wondering, after your years there in 1982, when you graduated, what your world view was like, how it had shifted during your time at the Academy. And we could even go into those two years before you matriculated into the graduated studies program at Dartmouth, if you’d like, but just some—anything within that kind of broad sphere of ideas, I guess.

EDWARDS: Okay. That sphere would—I would say the main things that happened from Point A to Point B—and when you graduate from an academy—the Academies, you know, are a very homophobic environment, misogynistic. My class was the—the years before I gra- —the year before I matriculated at Kings Point, they had just graduated their first ever female graduates, so there was a similarity, I suppose, with Dartmouth in that regard. Dartmouth—Kings Point being

among the first to admit women, and I think Dartmouth being one of the last of the Ivies.

But it was—the maritime industry in itself—I suspect back in Herman Melville’s day, it was a lot more—heteronormativity was not—I think the phrase is the ships are made of wood and the men were made of steel, and now it’s the other way around, because people get vacation time, they’re able to go home and raise families and have, you know,—and then they go back to sea again.

And I think that that type of environment makes it a lot more—there’s a lot of issues of misogyny and homophobia in the maritime, probably now than there would have been a hundred years ago.

PINKNEY: Did that affect—oh, sorry. Continue.

EDWARDS: And that—my—I didn’t really—I think I probably walled up off any issues of my sexual orientation until about the time of graduation, in which case I heard on—we were hearing on National Public Radio, on *All Things Considered*, probably, a radio story from Yale University, where they had a Gay Student[s] Association. And they were talking about things, and they talked about bisexuality. And I thought, *Oh, my God! That must be—you know, maybe that’s who I am. You know, maybe that’s what I am.* That explains the issues about being in a gang shower when—you know, being fine with everybody else, but then one or two individuals come in and, like, I’ve got to turn the cold water on fast and get the hell out of there with the towel. So that made me realize—you know, that put a word on things that I’d never quite understood.

Then I grad- —after graduating, I—I think, you know, things aren’t suppressed as much, and you’re in the real world and you don’t have to worry about getting thrown out and losing your education. And so that made it easier for me to kind of figure things out, I suppose.

And I came out probably a year or two—you know, the first time I ever figured things out more completely and articulating to myself that I was, you know, possibly gay was, you know, the couple of years following the—graduating,

and then while at the Academy, I was actually able to officially come out for the first time to a classmate of mine when she came on to me.

And then I told myself that I—you know, I needed to come out to my family, and at least I told my mother, and I gave myself a deadline of turning twenty-five: Like, *Okay, I'm gonna be twenty-five. I'm a quarter of a century. I need to really move on with my life and come out to people.*

PINKNEY: Gotcha. Okay. So let's—

EDWARDS: I went off on a couple of tangents there maybe.

PINKNEY: Oh, no, no, no. It's all wonderful, wonderful information. Thank you so much. I in general take a couple of minutes to process things [chuckles], so that's why I'm kind of like pushing forward, is because it'll take a little bit for it to percolate in my brain, for these follow-up questions.

EDWARDS: Great.

PINKNEY: Yeah, yeah. So I guess I'm wondering: It's 1984, right? The Teresa Polenz [Teresa A. Delany (née Polenz) '87] taping incident, I'm guessing, occurred—it occurred in the spring, and I don't think you would have matriculated yet as a graduate student?

EDWARDS: Right. I heard about it in *The Dartmouth Review* and in *The Daily D*.

PINKNEY: Right.

EDWARDS: And then I got called—either I needed to show up at one of these Gay Student[s] Association meetings, and I went to Collis [Center for Student Involvement] to attend one. And—and then the rest kind of becomes history. Then I get more involved and so forth. And in fact, at one point, I don't know, probably the first year, maybe that spring, the following spring of Teresa Polenz, either that point or the—yeah, it was probably then.

I remember at one point they didn't have enough people to be openly gay—you know, to be sticking their names out to

be officers, and so the undergrads, because of funding issues—I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but whatever—it’s totally safe now. They ended up—they needed to have enough—they needed to have an extra officer on the—on the roster for funding from Collis or whatever.

And so I think I was secretary? And—but they made a fictional name for me and put a year on it and hoped that that would pass because it had to be an undergraduate, but they didn’t have an undergraduate to do it, to get the funding or whatever, to get the official status, so I did it, but I had a—they made up a name for me, and they just threw it in and figured, *Let’s see if this’ll stick and if they accept it.* And it happened. I can’t remember what the name was now. It was a joke.

PINKNEY: Were there other graduate students involved in GSA at that time, or were you one of the few?

EDWARDS: I was amongst the few. There were two or three that I an think of offhand. There was a Tuckie [Tuck School of Business student]. There was definitely a med student who was quite involved and then somebody from the [Dartmouth] Medical School, who was on staff, I believe. Probably a couple of other peripheral folks, but they weren’t quite as involved.

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

So just to backtrack just a little bit, what were your first few months like at Dartmouth? Like, what were your first impressions of the school as a graduate student at that time?

EDWARDS: I was a graduate student, there was a lot to absorb and try to get my orientation, literally. But the—when I got involved with the GSA, I had—everyone was bemoaning the fact about what a horrible place it was if you were gay to be in Hanover, New Hampshire, et cetera, et cetera. And from my perspective, it was truly a liberal liberal arts institution. It was, like, *This is nirvana. This is the promised land. Everybody is accepting, blah-blah-blah. It’s really cool.*

From the—you know, from the perspective of a lot of the undergraduates, however, it’s like, *This is the worst place to be stuck. Oh, there’s—you know, oh, my gosh, it’s really horrible.*

So I had a slightly different perspective. And probably because of that, I put my shoulder to things more, to help out. You know, for instance, we did—in fact, we’re just talking about a schoolmate here yesterday. A couple of folks that I met up with, and they were reminiscing about me having had, you know, wheels, because I was a grad student, and I had a car, and we did road trips to a gay bar in Brattleboro [Vermont].

And, you know, one of the friends—you know, one of the folks from way back then is actually now working in London [England] with Citibank, and he’s—anyway, back in town, back around this week.

So, yeah, there are—it’s—it’s—my perspective is that it was a—it was a great place. On the other hand, a lot of folks had a lot of issues with it. And, you know, I’d never—you know, I’d been to a gay bar once or twice before, so it was, like, “Oh. Well, we can get a car. Let’s do this.” Or, “You want to go to a gay bar? Let’s—we’ll find one now, and we’ll go there.”

And for me, I found it to be positive. On the other hand, it—it—it definitely made a—there was a stark contrast happening at that time. The impact of the funders of *The Dartmouth Review* actually creating a lot of hate-filled environments against a lot of the folks who were against apartheid in South Africa or who were—who were gay or—so it created opportunities for those of us who were in the minority to—to solidify together and—and fight back and stuff.

PINKNEY: Were you on campus for that anti-apartheid demonstration that was put on by Divest Dartmouth [sic; Dartmouth Community for Divestment]?

EDWARDS: The shanties on the [Dartmouth] Green?

PINKNEY: Yeah, yeah.

EDWARDS: Yep. Yes. And we had a lot of crossover there, of course. Occupying Parkhurst [Hall] occurred. Also, the president’s office. The destruction of the shanties by, you know,—what’s her name? I’m trying to push these names out of my head. Well, the whole cast of characters in Dartmouth, unfortunately that we hear more of.

Don’t hear much from Teresa Polenz these days, but Dinesh [J.] D’Souza [Class of 1983] and Laura [A.] Ingraham [Class of 1985] certainly have continued on their careers of hate since it’s propelled them from back in those days.

And there were definitely *Dartmouth Review* staff people who were—who were gay. You’ve probably gotten this from other people if you’ve interviewed a few others, but “[JOIN] XYZ,” the—the Dartmouth timesharing bulletin board network, was an amazing conduit to connect to people. A bunch of us used it to recruit homosexuals for the GSA. And we’d get people to come and attend meetings.

And it also—you know, more than—more than—on multiple occasions, when you turn over the rock you find out, “Oh, So-and-so—yeah, he actually works with them. He’s on the staff of *The Dartmouth Review*. Okay.”

PINKNEY: Now, the Kiewit XYZ is something you mentioned, I think, in your initial write-up, on something you want to talk about, so could you explain briefly how that worked or, like, what it was, actually, for—

EDWARDS: Yeah, “JOIN XYZ” was a command line to get onto a chat room, if you will, which basically is a text-based, open forum where you could talk to people, and then, in talking to people, you could actually create your separate chat rooms and meet up with them.

In my particular case, there was a library of da- —of files for different organizations there, but the GSA had a library called “Gay Lib ***.” So I oftentimes used that moniker to—to recruit. And it’s a twofold thing. Was, like, you know, they could—they would know that I was gay, and then also, you know, it would point people—people to that library, that they

could actually look up information about the organization or about being gay and so forth.

And that led to lots of interesting conversations. And I think—I know there were a couple of other folks who would do that occasionally and use that as a—it's not quite like a hashtag, but using it as a handle, if you will, a pseudonym to—to go on and get some publicity about stuff.

So a lot of people—you know, the current vernacular would be that a lot of people hooked up that way, kind of the contemporary-at-that-time version of GPS-based apps, although there—I should probably not say GPS-based because it was all about being on the time-sharing system. So if you were on DTSS [Dartmouth Time-Sharing System], you could—you could end up having been in the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy or you could have been University of Maryland, I believe, or [the University of] Delaware. It covered quite a bit of territory. But the bulk of folks that we talked with were Dartmouth students.

PINKNEY: Wow. If you don't mind me asking, what do you think is the most interesting conversation that you had that came out of that platform?

EDWARDS: Out of that platform?

PINKNEY: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Oh—oh, people who were bisexual, people who were working for *The Dartmouth Review* but wanted to meet in a clandestine location and talk, people that—you know, kind of—kind of a wide variety of stuff.

PINKNEY: Did you ever meet with someone in *The Dartmouth Review* in person, who was bisexual?

EDWARDS: I don't know if he was bisexual, but he was certainly—

PINKNEY: Or questioned their sexuality?

EDWARDS: He was interested in more than just talking to me about joining the gay student group. He wasn't as interested in talking about joining the gay student group as he was, you

know, interested in me personally, which sometimes you don’t get—you’re just not gonna get what you want.

But the—but, yeah, there were that and, you know, people actually— you know, people met, people hooked up, people got involved with the gay student group. A lot of different things happened. You probably talked to Lee [A.] Merkle[-Raymond, Class of 1986] already, or maybe [James C.] “Jim” McCann [III, Class of 1986], or hopefully someone who’s talked to one or two of them.

Another thing we did was, like,—we did a gay road show, where we basically offered to—I think it was after we had a cessation of classes, and there was a meeting at what is now Rauner. I forgot the term that’s used for it, but a moratorium on classes? No. There was a day dedicated to deal with issues of, you know, homophobia and, you know, apartheid—anti-apartheid, et cetera, on the campus.

And from that, the GSA decided it was good to go out and offer services to explain homosexuality and things like that to people. And we ended up—Lee Merkle[-Raymond] was recruited, if you will, from one we did at Tri Delta [Delta Delta Delta, now Chi Delta]. She was a sorority gal there, and she ended up coming back with Jim McCann and I, back from a—she walked with us across the Green afterwards, and we couldn’t figure out where she—you know, why she was going to walk us back to the gay student meeting.

Halfway across the Green, she goes, “Well, I figured out that I’m gay, so I need to be there, in the meetings, and join you.” And we were both—Jim and I were stunned. Like, “What? What? You’re gay? Did we just recruit you?” [Both chuckle.] Like, “Yeah, I just figured—you know, I’ve been thinking about these things anyway, but I figured I might as well, you know,—I need to get involved and help out too.”

So those were fun. But, yeah, a number of folks got involved with the group. Or, you know, sometimes I’d be playing a little more hard to get and, like, “Yeah, I’ll meet you, but I’ll meet you at the G- —you know, at the Gay Students Association meeting “ and recruit them that way. Most folks would rather meet up individually, in person, otherwise, because they wouldn’t want to be seen anywhere near Collis

at that hour on a Sunday night, I think it was? Whatever. Because it’s obvious, if you were paying attention, what time the gay students group meeting would be and who would be going in that building at that hour otherwise unless you’re in the Dartmouth Outing Club, which ironically has a connection there, in a way.

PINKNEY: Mmm.

I guess—so more broadly, how would you define the work that you did with GSA? Or, like, what you believe its mission to have been on campus? Or even—even more abstractly, like, what you feel like it accomplished. During your time there, what you saw change.

EDWARDS: My time there was to make—a multiple thing. It was—as the only entity on campus, it had to be everything, so it had to be creating—fostering a welcoming environment where people can be comfortable to talk about things about coming out, as well as talk about ways to raise a stink and have issues made known in a wider forum on campus—you know, protests, demonstrations.

A few of us actually, in my last year there, we were—it was a two-year program—I had—a few of us—a couple of us had been to a student—a couple of student organization conferences, and we realized, “Oh, we can—let’s try to get condoms for distribution. Let’s write to, you know, whoever it is that manufacturers Trojans. We’ll get them to—we’ll ask if we can get them sent to us and have them distributed for free on the campus,” which, you know,—because we’d seen something happening on a smaller scale at a student conference, and thought, “Let’s just do this campus wide here,” not just for a gay student conference but for everybody on the campus.

And lo and behold, by the time of graduation, we happened—we got notification that there were large boxes that had just been delivered. We were marveling. [William M.] “Will” Rogers [II, Dartmouth Medical School Class of 1989], the med student, and Jim McCann and I were, like, “Oh, my God! We’ll never use this—we could never individually use all these condoms in our lifetime.” And he’s, like, “We asked for it.”

But we didn’t even know that we’d get anything at all, let alone this volume. And “How do we distribute this? And this is going to be amazing. This is going to make an impact on the campus. It might save a few lives.” So this one.

I—so, yeah, that would be an example of something practical. But we also did direct action stuff, and we had a lot of folding over of—you know, overlapping Venn diagrams of interests. Like, there were a number of folks of us who were also—helped out in the anti-apartheid movement, specifically the occupying of shanties on the Green.

There were events that we did in the theater and having, you know, tie-ins with the Hop[kins Center for the Arts] to do, you know, gay student parties, where we invited other campuses to come to—other gay student groups to come in town, kind of like mixers [unintelligible] that we were putting on on our own to create a greater sense of unity and also knowing that we’d more likely get more people coming out from campus if they knew there would be people coming in from other campuses, because people are always thinking they’ve met everybody locally or that they don’t want to meet anybody locally. And then if you’ve got people coming in from the outside, they feel more comfortable about that. So—

Yeah. So everything from a welcoming center to practically like a bake sale type of thing, like that type of attitude of, like, “Okay, we gotta do something to support this. How do we get—how do we get funding from the school, or how do we get—? We know that we need—there are things we need to get done. How do we—you know, how do we do it? How do we afford it?” And sometimes it’s a matter of writing a convincing letter, like doing grant writing. Sometimes it’s pleading with the administrative powers that be about what you need to do.

We provided office hours. I’m thinking of a number of us who did that, where we had—we figured: Okay, if people aren’t comfortable with coming over during the GSA meeting hours, we can make office hours available just to let people know that it’s open and they may come—it’s easier to come by Collis on a—you know, on a Monday afternoon, and you can just be going by there for the DOC or something. But

then you can stop by and actually talk to somebody and—you know, what it’s like being gay or, you know.

And sometimes they’d come by, and they’d be, “Oh, like, oh, I’ve got a roommate who might be gay, and you know”—blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And then as the conversation progresses, you realize, *Okay, it’s not the roommate.*

Yeah. So it was a wide variety of things we did. You know, we had a newsletter. We had—the time that I was there, also we got the Ralph [B.] Elias [Class of 1932] money coming in, which created a different thing, because actually having a chunk of money coming in from someone wanting to establish a fund while he was alive brought in a lot of people that had been more peripheral. So I—I got the—I learned the lesson that when there’s money involved, sometimes, you know, when you had the bigger budget, a lot more people all of sudden take notice and want to be involved and have a say in that.

PINKNEY: Could you talk a little bit more about what the Ralph Elias fund [sic; The Edward Carpenter Memorial Foundation] was?

EDWARDS: Ralph Elias reached out and wanted to give money specifically to—for the betterment of life for gay students at the school. And the school would not let anyone target money. You weren’t allowed to—what’s the word? I can’t think of the word. You weren’t allowed to have earmarked money for a specific cause unless it was, like, you know, the football team or—or the, you know, the lacrosse team or something like that.

And we had a lot of pushback about that. We were told basically, yes, we could put it into—we could—the money could be given, but it would all go into the student activity fund and be distributed amongst everybody, including, like, the chess club or whatever. And we had a problem—and Ralph Elias had problems with that. No, he wanted something separate, which forced us to help figure out how to set up an outside corporation to hold the money. And once that money did come in, all of a sudden, Dartmouth became very interested in bending over backwards if they could, especially once they sensed that more money was coming in.

He had left in his bequest a number of things, including every, like, first editions of Oscar Wilde’s books and things like that. It became—they realized there was a lot more money than he initially gave when he was alive, that when his—in his Will, he put a lot more money into it. So—and that’s when Dartmouth itself got to be much more interested in helping figure out a way how that we can make this work.

And I know subsequently there were—there was money coming in from other alums, including those who were alive still, that probably exceeded that, but mostly because of their, you know, tech startup funds and so forth, greater largesse was possible. But—

PINKNEY: Do you know—oh, excuse me.

EDWARDS: I think it was, like, $50,000, and it became $100,000 with Ralph Elias, and it was also set up to be the Edward Carpenter [Memorial] Foundation. He wanted it to be named after someone who most of us had never even heard of, who was an English, openly gay liberation writer, et cetera.

PINKNEY: That was going to be my next question. Someone I interviewed mentioned the Carpenter Fund, and I was wondering if that was related in some way to Ralph Elias.

EDWARDS: Yes. Ralph Elias, for whatever reason, didn’t want it named after himself, and I think—at first I thought that he simply was wanting to be closeted. He was a doctor. From San Francisco. But he—I think it was probably out of great respect for Edward Carpenter, feeling that he wanted this guy recognized for, you know, stuff he’d done and helped with his life, perhaps. That’s my theory.

There was a guy from San Francisco, and he was going to die, and, like, why would you not want—you know, be okay with having it under your own name? So anyway, that’s—that’s how it kind of came to pass that it was the Edward Carpenter Foundation.

PINKNEY: Gotcha. Were you involved in any discussions with the administration about this money, or was it other individuals in the GSA who took that on?

EDWARDS: I believe that that was—from the GSA, that was largely—and I may be wrong about this—[Scipio C.] “David” Garling [Class of 1986], also known now as Scipio Garling, and Michael [R.] Williams [Class of 1986; now Michael Évora or Michael Dias]. That was interesting. Yeah, they both have changed names. Michael Williams changed his name to something else, I think twice.

Both interesting characters. I don’t know if you’ve talked to them or not, but Michael—David Garling, aka Scipio, got involved in—I know in [Washington] D.C., he got involved with U.S. English, which was to get English to be the only official language in America, and kind of—a lot of us would view as kind of a right-wing, reactionary thing. But he was very particular about being very articulate and grammar proper, et cetera, and also felt that any other language that was being spoken in the United States would not really be helpful unless you were a classics major like he was, for Latin and Greek.

Gosh, this is all going on the record. Sorry about that.

PINKNEY: Oh, no worries. [Laughs.]

EDWARDS: Oh, what the hell? Michael Williams I would describe as a very live, effete man of color, with an Azorean background, I think maybe from New Bedford, Mass., but I don’t know. But he—he—he dealt with a lot of persecution because he was, you know, seen easily as being effete and effeminate. But he was also very smart and articulate and did a lot of pushback.

So the two of them were friends, but they also had—because I think everyone knew about them being gay. I think that kept them as friends, but I’m sure they must have had things going back and forth, but they were I think more involved than I think most anybody at that time with that stuff.

Another person peripherally would be Steven, aka “Fester” [A.] Carter. And another one—oh, [unintelligible] the other name, for Michael Williams. Oh. And speaking of Michael Williams, he is—he is actually now the human rights commissioner for the state of Rhode Island. So he’s done—

PINKNEY: Wow.

EDWARDS: [cross-talk] well for himself. He’s doing more work. The trouble is, when you change your name,—I’ve got to figure another way around this, navigating social media to—because I saw only recently that he changed his name. Nah, this is me, scrolling through things trying to—Michael Dias, D-i-a-s. And he lives in Providence [Rhode Island]. And I’m wrong; it’s not New Bedford; he’s from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. He used a different name, Évora, Michael Évora. He had changed his last name from Williams to Évora, which was actually I think from his mother’s side. Because I remember that name sounds like Cezario Évora, who was a Cabo Verdean. I think he’s from the Azores, but it may be Cabo Verde. Or his family, that is. And—anyway, so on social media he’s—now is Michael Dias, I noticed recently, D-i-a-s.

PINKNEY: You’re very good with the names. I’m pretty impressed, actually. You’re pretty—you’re very, very good with the names of everybody.

EDWARDS: Oh, I—it started off, like, I’m not going to name names, but now I’m thinking, *Oh, yeah, why didn’t I out a few of these others earlier?* Because honestly most of them are—you should be speaking to—everybody that I name should be on record with you.

Steven Fester—Steven, aka Fester Carter will be a whole vault of information because he—he was the first Dartmouth student that I recognized the second time I’d seen him, and that’s because I’d seen him on the Green, and he had a—either a green or a lavender Mohawk. And kind of sticks out on the Hanover campus. And, yeah, so he was definitely out there. He was a guy from Indiana, I believe. Or Iowa. Iowa, I think. Regardless, he—he’s someone who could probably, perhaps pass, but he was just, *To hell with it; I’m gonna be totally out there.*

And so a lot of people knew him. And he was a Green Key Society member, so that’s why he had the green Mohawk the first time and then later it turned different colors, I think.

But the—yeah, I’m slowly there are people and ideas and things, people to mention to you, but, like, I—this is the hope to have a cadre of folks together at a reunion, because I’m thinking, like, *Oh, what about that kid who was a freshman and he wore a kilt, and he was from Jamaica or something?* And it freaked everybody out that he was wearing a dress. And he just had the cavalier, *I don’t fucking care, you know, and I’m bisexual, and if people can’t deal with it, too bad.* And he was from—he was black and—and slightly built and—and short. And it created quite a stir.

Anyway, other people, things you should know. Unfortunately, we just lost Kanani [L.] Kauka [Class of 1988]. She was a Native American from Hawaii. So there was another crossover with the AND [Native Americans at Dartmouth] group in the—in the GSA. And she had been living in San Francisco for quite a while, but she passed away in the past six months or so.

When learning that this SpeakingOut [sic] thing was finally being launched, I was thrilled, because years ago I pushed for something like that to be done on video, which is probably why I was thinking—which is why I was baking for you, Anne.

PINKNEY: [Laughs.]

EDWARDS: I did bake a tart to go with the coffee that I would have made for you, but I’m—

PINKNEY: Oh, that’s so nice of you. That’s so, so nice of you.

EDWARDS: I didn’t turn on the air conditioner, so you’re probably better off at Rauner with the A.C. on.

PINKNEY: Yeah. Oh, believe you me, New York would be much more interesting than Hanover right now, but—

EDWARDS: Rauner—speaking of Rauner, I do have—there were two or three boxes of stuff that I—that are deposited at Rauner that came from me, that was supposed to be kept in Special Collections there as early DGALA and GSA history. And there’s probably more stuff I should get rid of, including some 3-1/2-inch floppy disks that need to be moved over

because I fear we’re losing that stuff, and I suspect Dartmouth doesn’t have copies of these Dartmouth newsletters—of the GSA newsletters that might possibly only exist in a digital format. But anyway, I’m not going to think about that now because I’ve got too many other things to do. But, gosh, I could sure use—that would be good to get off onto Rauner as well, if—if they were interested.

PINKNEY: Oh, I’m sure they’d love to have that. I’m sure they would. They’re always looking for things like that from involved alums.

EDWARDS: And as the tech guy. I’m fully aware of the digital dark ages, the fact that, you the 3-1/2-inch floppy disk stuff that went on a Mac Plus can’t be read by most machines today, so that’s why media has to keep changing and things reformatted to different ways, because basically this stuff is not going to be viewable in another decade unless somebody has an archived computer of that nature and a operating system of that nature in the MacWrite or whatever we used at that time to craft that, you know, document.

And that paper, acid-free paper still is much more amazing because it can last for centuries, even though people thought for the longest time that oh, no, it’s on a CD; don’t worry, it’ll last forever. And, like, nope, paper I think can last longer.

PINKNEY: Yeah. Well, wouldn’t you know, you know? [Laughs.]

EDWARDS: I probably don’t need—I’m preaching to the converted if you’re doing anything for library and archiving there. I don’t know. What’s your connection with Dartmouth?

PINKNEY: I’m a current student.

EDWARDS: An undergrad?

PINKNEY: Yeah, I’m an undergraduate student. I’m in the Class of 2020, and I’m a history student primarily. I also study Hispanic studies. But that’s my deal here. And I can probably tell you more after the interview, but this is mostly about you and your experience

EDWARDS: Okay.

PINKNEY: I was going to ask you about the level of discourse on campus when you were there in relation to the AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] epidemic and the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] crisis, and if there was any—if—I'm sure the GSA was talking about it, but if broader campus was aware of the crisis, if there was any sort of rhetoric surrounding that or anything within that vein, I guess.

EDWARDS: There definitely was concern about it. There was testing happening then, I believe. I'm trying to remember. I—I—I don't know—I don't think there was rapid testing, but I think sexual health in general—there—there was—there was a connection with Dick's House [Dick Hall's House]. You know, people knew to go there to get tested for things.

I do remember—I think the time that I was there, they came out with a vaccine for hepatitis—I hesitate here—B, I believe it was. Yeah, hepatitis B became a vaccine based on some gay man on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, who actually was able to develop antibodies to it, and they used that, I know, scientifically to help create the vaccine. And so I remember somebody at Dick's House saying, "You know, there's this vaccine. We should get you this. And it comes with booster shots. And it just became available."

And it's, you know, something that was predominant in the gay male culture. You have to be careful about it.

So, yeah, that—HIV in general—you know, AIDS and HIV were in the vernacular, and probably at that point in the headlines. I know that I got involved in things. I did an internship in New York, and I guess it would be—you know, the summer of '85. And at that time, GLAAD was—was just coming about, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. And I got involved while doing an internship in New York with—with GLAAD on issues with HIV as well as Rupert Murdoch, who at that—you know, ended up buying the *New York Post*. Or owning the *New York Post*.

And how much was HIV an issue? It was—you know, there was a lot of really hateful, probably uninformed stuff coming

from *The Dartmouth Review.* And I think—even as students we felt we didn’t quite know everything. I know, myself, actually going to New York, uttering—you know, two folks in the gay student meeting how—that I was going to go to New York for a summer, and gosh, you know, “What happens if I ever—if I actually would meet somebody and fall in love with them and they would have HIV? You know, and, like, I don’t know if I can deal with that.”

And, you know, I remember reflecting back on that many times thereafter, my life in New York, and thinking, *Yeah, okay, well, the world’s changed a bit, and we’ve all learned a little bit.*

So I probably learned as much about—no, I—I take it back. I was going to say I learned as much as a budding activist in New York in ’85 as I did on the campus from—we had some good people there. We had—was it a master’s in public health? We had an MPH—a woman who was head of master’s in public health who was involved with, I don’t know, I guess it was Dick Fauss [spelling unconfirmed].

She was a good co-conspirator with us on some things about, you know, how we can get the word out, and she definitely—this is in—from ’85 to ’86. She was—she was encouraging of our effort to inform the campus as a whole about safer sex and things like that.

We put things—in fact, I also now remember we—we actually had done something where all the Hinman boxes got mailings about safer sex and whatnot, and I think we specifically talked about the GSA and how that we had condoms available for distribution.

I think, however, most of the stuff that I learned about HIV and AIDS activism probably came from the Northeast Lesbian and Gay Student Union Conference in Brown University during that spring of ’85. And a lot of the people that I met then—in fact, I was just talking about some of them a few days ago. The—a lot of them became—a lot of these folks from different Ivy—mostly Ivy League schools ended up being quite involved in ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] and other HIV-specific action organizations.

And—so, yeah, I think it was kind of, you know, everything from how to put on a condom, using a banana or a cucumber, to eroticizing safer sex. Those were workshops we did in a, you know, kind of self-taught but with—sometimes with—must have been with—I think maybe GMHC [Gay Men’s Health Crisis] may have had somebody there at the time. It would have been a very nascent organization that was around in ’85.

But, yeah, we did most of the educating of ourselves together there, collectively. We didn’t have—I suppose we had the internet, but we must have—you know, stuff was not available on the internet. We had it, you know, through things like the *Gay Community News* newspaper from Boston, and scientific periodicals, because we’d have—you know, Will Rogers, again, a medical student, would, you know, keep us abreast of things from—from a Mary Hitchcock [Memorial Hospital, now Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center] perspective.

I’m trying to think of any specific—I don’t think we did any in-your-face activism work while I was there in Hanover, for—for—specifically AIDS oriented, because it was enough to be openly gay, but then the—we didn’t do a lot of talking about it, incorporating it, but we—it wasn’t like we were protesting for drug treatment protocols or anything like that. I don’t think anybody was at that point.

I can’t—a large chunk of this is lifting by your own bootstraps, collectively. And that’s what we kind of slowly realized in life in general: There’s not ever really a singular leader that comes out and saves the world. It’s a group of people form a community and a fabric and helping support each other and—in different ways.

PINKNEY: Gotcha.

Just to shift gears a little bit here: So when I was preparing for this interview, there’s not a ton of information about the genesis of DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association, or Dartmouth LGBTQIA+Alum Association], but there is—there is talk about how you were pretty critically, it seems involved in getting DGALA recognized formally by the college. And I

was wondering if you would be able to talk to me a little bit about that: what it was like when you started getting involved with the organization and what that process was like, to get President—I think it was [James O.] Freedman?

EDWARDS: Yeah. So our issue was—okay, the quick—the quick dossier on this is [Edwin H.] “Ed” Hermance [Class of 1962] wrote a letter to the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*. I’m thinking it may have been in ’84—’83 or ’84. I can’t remember which. And basically saying—announcing that he was starting a group called Dartmouth Lambda for gay Dartmouth alums. And that’s the genesis of all that.

He got a lot of names that got passed along to a guy named [Ronald L.] “Ron” Hufham [Class of 1959], who—by ’84, ’85, Ron Hufham had the list and—and had been—had about a hundred names on it, I think. And—but they hadn’t been doing mailings, and so when I got the list, only, you know, fifty of them actually did not get Return to Sender’d.

And they—I helped them—he basically hit me up. He asked me to be the representative to the Ivy League/Seven Sisters Gay and Lesbian Alumni Network, and after I’d been doing that for a while, Ron said, “Chuck, they’ve got this—I heard they’ve got these things called computers. Someone told me that you do something in computers, and it might help us get this stuff done better than doing it on the mimeograph machine, because I have to keep mimeographing new mailing labels for all these people, and it—I hear it’d be easier otherwise.”

And I’m like like, hell yeah. So I set up a database and whatnot, and next thing you knew, I ended up being in charge of the database and being in charge of the newsletter and everything else. So a lot of people have said that I started this thing, and I absolutely did not. I was the third person with the reins. And I made it clear that, you know, you got to do a regular mailing; otherwise, you’ll never get the mailing order update from the postal service. So if you don’t do it four times a year, you’re going to lose track of people.

And then we did our own mailings. Stuffing envelopes I think was very helpful in New York because at envelope stuffing

parties, people would sit around and gab and have pizza and—I don’t know if we had beer with pizza but we probably did. And then share information. And if I had two people mentioning somebody’s name, I made sure they got on the list and the got a mailing from DGALA, if we could find them, track them down that way.

So I needed the triangulation of one or two people saying that they thought someone was gay, and that’s all I needed. Only twice—and I’m telling you more than I—than you asked for, but it’s kind of some interesting anecdotes. Only twice in my history had I ever had any pushback from the mailings we did. And we grew the list from, as I said, fifty to being about five hundred or seven hundred names, through the number of years of doing things like that with everybody getting together to—to, you know, stuff envelopes.

And only twice did I have pushback. In one case, a guy said that he was no longer gay, that he’d gone through conversion therapy and “please take me off the list.” And the other one was someone saying that they only—you know, parents saying, “We only wish that, you know, you—this organization could have reached out to our son earlier, because he passed away a year ago from—from AIDS, and it would have changed his life so much to know a group like yours exists.” So those are the only two pushback, if you would. You know, “Take us off the list, please,” type of thing that I got.

The organization—flash forward: I ended up at some point getting more structure because I realized I just needed to make sure transition could happen, because I ended up being asked to help head up the national network of gay and lesbian alumni groups, which at that time was headquartered in Washington, D.C. So, you know, volunteer wise, I didn’t really want to be doing two different sets of reins.

So I got folks into the—on a board of directors supporting me and so that we could get, you know, some transitions happening. And at that point, my push to get us recognized officially kept getting—falling flat. [Michael] “Mike” Choukas [pronounced CHOO-cuss; Jr., Class of 1951], who was the head of the alumni office at Blunt [Alumni Center], had called

and wanted to set up a meeting with me, and I said—at the Dartmouth Club—at the Yale Club.

We met on the rooftop for cocktails. I—I told him I'd be happy to do that, and I asked if I could bring a couple of my officers from the board of directors, and he had no problem with that, so we all went up there. [James R.] “Jim” Gibb [Class of 1967], David [S.] Hamilton [Class of 1985], and probably two other—two or three other people—it seems like I had a lot of folks, but those two individuals in particular were with me.

And Mike Choukas proceeded to explain that he didn't have anything wrong with the gay student—with the gay alumni group, and he wasn't homophobic himself; it's just that, as he said, “If we were to recognize Dartmouth GALA, you know, then what's going to be”—you know, what's going to keep him—there's already a Black Alumni of Dartmouth [Association], and Lawyers of Dartmouth [sic; Dartmouth Lawyers Association] or whatever. But if we invited—if we recognized Dartmouth GALA, what's going to keep us from—from having—from being forced to have to recognized more groups, like Women of Dartmouth or Hispanics of Dartmouth?

And I dutifully kept quiet and took copious notes, and then submitted them to *The New York Times*, reporting from our meeting.

PINKNEY: No way!

EDWARDS: And written up in *The New York Times*, and created a little bit of a stir. And then—because I, you know,—because I'd done a bit of work as an activist with, you know, media and whatnot, and I knew that, you know, ”Okay, if you're going to say that, I'm taking notes and everything here.”

And then probably—it may have been three weeks later, I don't know. At some point later, I got a call from Professor [Arthur S.] “Art” Leonard of the New York Law School, and he said, “Congratulations, Chuck.” And I'm, like, “Why?” He said, “You're written up in *The New York Times* again.” I'm, like, “What are you talkin' about?” He goes, “Get your *New*

York Times. Look in the education column. They fired Mike Choukas, and you’re quoted again.”

I’m, like, “Holy shit!!” He goes, “Why are you”—and he said—that was—the [unintelligible] thing was, like, “You’ll get an obit- —congratulations, you’re getting an obituary in *The New York Times*.” And I’m, like, “What do you mean by that?” He goes, “The *New York Times* has quoted you twice. If they quote you twice or you’re a celebrity otherwise, you get an obituary when you die.” I’m, like, “How cool is that?”

But, yeah. And then I, you know, felt a bit terrible because I thought, *Oh, my God. You know, I don’t—you know, what if he has a wife and kids and whatnot and there’s gonna be an impact on his family.* And then it’s, like, *No, no, he’s already—you know, he’s a son of a bitch, and this is not the type of person you need to have running the alumni office anyway.*

But it was—yeah, that was an interesting experience. I didn’t deal with—I mean, we had—President Freedman came and spoke to us during one of our, you know, gay Dartmouth I think we called it a “Homocoming.” It was probably around Halloween, I think? Years ago. And he did come and speak at that point. But I never had any direct arm twisting or anything at all with him there. And I don’t—he seemed to have been friendly in general, not—not a—you know, not against us.

But I—I felt that the pushback came from Mike Choukas, personally. I mean, I got it directly to my face. It was, like, “Hey, nothing with you. It’s just that if we recognized you, we’d have to recognize other groups.” I’m, like, “What do you mean?” “Oh, like, women or Hispanics.”

PINKNEY: What a terrible excuse.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

PINKNEY: A terrible, terrible excuse.

EDWARDS: There was a—there was someone I knew—what was it? I can’t remember where she was. Someone that I knew, I think who headed up the Gay Student—yeah—no, someone

heading up alumni affairs at Oberlin College. And I remember she was telling me, like—before this—this is, like, “That’s so stupid. Why wouldn’t Dartmouth recognize you? Like, you *want* to recognize smaller groups because that means you reach out to people who feel disenfranchised.”

And that had been one of the things I’d had with Choukas, was, like, “Listen, you know, you got a certain number—you know, you have—you have a certain num- —percentage of Dartmouth alumni that never, ever reconnect with the school, and I’m sure that if you overlay this, you’re gonna find out that a large chuck of these people are—happen to be gay.” And I’m still certain of that fact because I know Michael Williams, that I mentioned earlier, has never returned to the campus. To me, it would be a major coup, victory for Dartmouth alumni if he were to come back for a reunion. And he should, because, hello, he’s—you know, why not have the commissioner of human rights from the state of Rhode Island come back and talk about issues?

PINKNEY: Do you go to your reunions?

EDWARDS: As a graduate student alum,—all right, so this is—yeah, this—we’re going to footnote this item. As a graduate student alum, we are the bastard children. In fact, a number of times, I tried to do things with the alumni magazine, and the editor of the alumni magazine, you know, was happy to—all right, they—they wanted to do a story on us, but they were afraid to do a story on us because we’d appear—you know, they don’t want to make it look like Hanover has changed, to the people who are older and perhaps able to tithe a lot of money in their—in their Will.

They would take letters to the editor, but they were—they always shied away from anything that made it seem like things have changed on campus. Now, they did do stories on people like—all right, I’m having a problem now. It’s somebody whose last name begins with a Z, first name begins with L, and he’s a writer for the *New York* for the *L.A. [Los Angeles] Times.* Zonana. Victor [F.] Zonana [Class of 1975] was a AIDS activist and writer for the *L.A. Times*, and they did a story on him.

But they felt like, “Ah, well, he’s an alum. He’s not on the campus now, so it’s fine to talk about HIV and dealing with alums, but, you know, as long a people feel like everything is exactly the same as when they were in school, we’re okay.”

But, yeah, my issue was I did not get copies of the alumni magazine, so—and the editor’s approach was, like, “Listen, you can always—if you—you can—you can actually subscribe to it and pay for it to be delivered.” I’m like, “I don’t want to do that when everybody else who’s ever matriculated that school as an undergraduate can’t avoid getting it sent to them. And, you know, here you guys are saying that I’ve done so much to help out, but I get nothing. You know, you tell me I can get the alumni magazine if I want to pay for it.”

I’m, like, “My undergraduate finds people also. They’re the same thing. They will track—you can’t escape it. They will find you and make sure you get that alumni magazine.” And also I get—for me—for me to be on my soapbox about being a grad student alum, I get tons of Dartmouth mailings from the alumni association about, you know, all sorts of events and ways to contribute or go on a cruise or anything like that. I get all that.

However, the Dartmouth alumni magazine is technically a separate corporation, and budget wise, I guess they’re not budgeted for sending mailings out to alumni from grad schools. And actually—because it is a—you know, it’s a small college.

PINKNEY: [Chuckles.] There are some who love it.

EDWARDS: Exactly. And that whole—the small college thing is great, et cetera, but, you know, then realize—realize how it falls upon the ears of people who get all the mailings for fund raising but don’t get included as alumni.

PINKNEY: Mmm.

EDWARDS: Maybe alumni magazine. Like, you can hit me up to go on an alumni cruise. You can hit me up to go to Lincoln Center [for the Performing Arts in New York City] for the 250th anniversary fundraising kickoff. You can invite me to the

Dartmouth Club for this, that and the other. All that, no problem at all. The optics are really not good, though, when the alumni magazine isn’t sent to graduate student alums. And there’s a tremendous disconnect there.

Anyway, personally—yeah, personally, like, I only spent two years at Dartmouth. However, in the coming out process, it’s a lot easier to have gone to Dartmouth, and I have a lot of friends and affiliations that way. I do have a lot of friends from—from the United States Merchant Marine Academy, and, you know, attended weddings of young kids—I’ve actually been a sponsor there for—this is totally tangential, but I’ve been a sponsor of plebes there for quite a number of years, and I’ve attended weddings of some of the kids that have stayed at my place through the—you know, as young midshipmen cadets.

And I just had one of my former plebes and his wife, who’s also a classmate, both marine engineers sailing on ships come visit this last week. They flew in from Colorado on their vacation, wanted to spend a couple of nights here and go see *Harry Potter* [*and the Cursed Child*] on Broadway.

And so we did lots of drinks. That’s another thing that Dartmouth and Kings Point have in common: There’s a lot of drinking involved with these people.

PINKNEY: [Laughs.]

EDWARDS: The sailors—

PINKNEY: I can only imagine.

EDWARDS: —and the peo- —right? But anyway, that’s—did I answer that question? I really took off on that one. But you asked me about—

PINKNEY: Oh, no worries.

EDWARDS: Yeah, you asked me of the early history. I wanted to get those anecdotes in, and certainly the Mike Choukas thing I think informs as to how recognition actually came about. I suspect there was a sea change when Mike Choukas

stepped too far, and then there was enough reason to change things in a different direction. And I did feel guilty.

On the other hand, I think it’s kind of cool that, you know, I could die and—you know, at least people are looking at *The New York Times* obituary column might actually see that I’ve died.

PINKNEY: Hey, you never know, you know?

EDWARDS: Right. Exactly.

PINKNEY: Oh, I wanted to ask you—forgive my ignorance, but what is a plebe?

EDWARDS: Ah. All the federal academies have—your first-year students are—your freshmen, the frosh—it’s equivalent to frosh, if you will.

PINKNEY: Oh, okay.

EDWARDS: Your plebe is—technically, if you’re at the United—if you’re at the Academy today, you’d be told—because they’ve started in July, I think, the beginning of July or so—plebes are basically—the response is that they’re not a plebe yet, they’re just a plebe candidate, and that plebes are lower than whale shit. So you get—you know, you’re the lowest rung of the ladder. You’re in charge of, you know, taking out the garbage. And if an upperclassman comes by and asks you, “What time is it?” you have to turn around, brace against the wall and shout out, “Sir—sir midshipman.” And then they give their name, whatever. “Sir, my—you know, it is—the time is blah-blah-blah. The date is blah-blah-blah.” You know, “Well, how many days till graduation?” And they have to tell you that too.

Yeah, so it’s a regimented and—a plebe is basically a—yeah. Oh, the—all right, so why the hell do I get the plebes? Okay. They have a system there that they started, like a—that—it—the plebe sponsor program basically covers people who don’t live in the immediate area. So if you didn’t live in the tri-state area, around Kings Point on Long Island, then you get a long weekend, it’s not too likely that you’re going to

be able to afford to go fly back home to, say, Colorado or Michigan to—to hang out with your folks.

And if you’re stuck at the Academy, then you have to continue wearing uniforms and marching and squaring the corners and so forth. And this just affords you to have a—like, a foster parent, some place you can—you can go to and crash and actually put on civilian clothes when you arrive.

And in my case,—my pushback was, like, when they asked me to, I was, like, “What is required?” “Oh, you just need to have a couch and a TV. You’re all—no, that’s all they do. They like to vegetate and watch TV.” And I’m, like, “Well, I have a day bed, not a couch, and I have no television.” And they’re, like, “Don’t worry. You’re in Manhattan. You are—yours would be a plum assignment. They would—you know, they’re gonna—they’re gonna have all of New York around them.”

I’m, like, “You think so? You think they’ll like that?” “Yes.” Of course, it still happens that when I get plebes the first couple of times, the first couple of weekends, they do sleep forever because you’re highly regimented and physical—a lot of physical workouts and everything else when you’re going through indoctrination. And you come back, and it’s just, like, totally—they’re dead to the world for twelve hours at least.

So anyway, through the years, I’ve—a lot of the folks that I’ve sponsored—you know, usually I would be given, you know, two a year, but sometimes I’ve had as many as four, which really sucks because they—like, it’s like, *Oh, my God, they eat so much! How am I going to afford this?*

PINKNEY: [Chuckles.]

EDWARDS: But it’s fun. And I have to say that I know that—hell, I was given testimonials last week when they came to vis- —these kids came to visit, and—“these kids”—these kids who are now in their late twenties and, you know, whatever. But, yeah, they’re telling me, like, “You—you helped change my life. You opened my eyes to so many things, and, like, I was so lucky that I was assigned to you as—you know, as a plebe.” That feels good.

It was an issue, in a queer sense. The first time I started, I actually had a—I was in a long-term relationship, and I thought, *Boy! Technically it’s a one-bedroom. I mean, it’s a big one-bedroom for New York, but, you know, I’m not really out to them,* and “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was still happening. And I didn’t know how that would pan out.

But, you know, I’ve had—it’s—it’s not been an issue. At first, I didn’t want to tell them, so, like, *They’ve got enough shit going on in their lives. The last thing I need to do is tell them, “I’m gay.”* And then they’d freak out, or, worse, that they might be gay and then have even more things to deal with, like, *They’ve got enough clues. Nothing’s hidden. There’s a fucking rainbow flag or two here and there, and there’s other shit going on. Like, they can accept it.*

And it’s worked out well. In a lot of cases, I get told—you know, I got—I got one kid who graduated as president of his class, and at the graduation, he made comments—this was a couple of years ago—he said, “You know, I have to”—he gave recognition to the admiral and to the general who came in from Washington as a keynote speaker, and said, you know, “But before I say anything else, I have to give my—my—my most heartfelt thanks to Chuck Edwards, my sponsor—you know, my sponsor as a plebe. And he opened up my eyes to so much about the world and New York City and”—blah-blah-blah—“than I’d ever have, and if I could be a quarter of the man that he is by the time I’m his age, I will have felt like I’d been very successful.”

And, yeah, I’m, like, got my classmates on either side of me, and I’m feeling really kind of embarrassed, but they’re both elbowing me. Like, “What the hell?” And I'm, like, “You don’t understand. His parents are here. He needs to thank his mother and his father. They’re undergoing a divorce. This is not cool.” And later, at the end, of course he did acknowledge both of his parents.

So anyway, as a metaphor that’s kind of the nurturing quality about me, I think, that I like to help things out. And grow, as I’m looking outside and seeing all the plants and whatnot.

So I am—yeah, and, like, in the case of Dartmouth, it’s, like, okay, it’s so tone deaf to do an alumni magazine that only

goes to undergraduate alumni, and, you know, you’re pushing against a rope there, Dartmouth, even though you have a graduate—whatever some special name for the graduates of arts and sciences alumni group e-mailing that I get now and an occasional postal mailing. It’s still like, “Okay, bastard children, we still love you too.”

There is your long-winded answer to the one about—

PINKNEY: [Laughs.] Oh, I appreciate the long-winded answers. Usually there’s a lot in there to think about, you know?

And I feel like that sentiment about the separation of the graduate students and the undergraduate students is still true today. Just---even with housing stuff. They had to divert a lot of resources from graduate students to undergraduate students because they accepted a record number of ’22s or something.

EDWARDS: Wow!

PINKNEY: Yeah. Yeah. So it still goes on. We’ll see if anything happens, I guess.

EDWARDS: That’s amazing.

PINKNEY: Yeah.

I’m wondering on—so I think one of the threads that I picked up on in this conversation is that you have—I don’t know how you would label it, and that’s part of the question, but it seems like by perhaps today’s standards, you would have been seen as quite the activist, not only during your time at Dartmouth but also in the years afterwards.

EDWARDS: Sorry, could you repeat that again? I guess the other phone’s ringing. I’m going to ignore it now.

PINKNEY: Oh, yeah, no worries. I think that one of the threads I’ve picked up on throughout this conversation with you is that, at least from my perceptions, and maybe you disagree with this, is that you seem to have quite the activist, by your time at Dartmouth and also afterwards. And I’m wondering if you feel like that rings true for you or if there is a different sort of

way you would situation yourself within kind of queer histories.

EDWARDS: I definitely feel that Dartmouth—the situation of the world or our society at the time and the fact, perhaps, that I went to a federal academy where, you know,—and—I don’t know. Maybe—I was going to give credit to Kings Point, but to be honest, Kings Point took me probably because I headed up the Methodist Youth Fellowship and the 4-H, you know, back in, you know, Missouri growing up. So maybe I have that built-in thing that, you know, *If nobody else will do it, I’ll—I’ll take the reins.*

So definitely at Dartmouth I felt compelled to help out. There were problems. There were things happening, and I—and it—it needed—it’s what’s happening now, to be honest. Sometimes I feel like I’m pushing a rope, trying to get friends to get agitated and not normalized about shit going on in the world, and telling them that, you know, it’s one thing to post things in social media but it’s another to show your butt up on the street, where it really is important to be counted, to make an impact on change.

So I think Dartmouth really kind of sharpened my focus on those issues. Certainly, it made—that gave me—they fostered a time and place for me to get comfortable with being gay and to realize that this is how I fit into the arc of history. And I think—I definitely know—I recognized that—I mean, today I’m—I’ve teased folks, you know, with last year being the fiftieth anniversary of [the] Stonewall [riots], like, I’m so post-gay. Like, honestly, I really don’t want hundreds of thousands of people showing up in my neighborhood again that all of a sudden are out for the long weekend and then they go back home, they’re closeted. So, over that shit.

But I’m kind of—you know, I know that it’s important and still part of the process and blah-blah-blah. I do also feel that it’s—I’ve had—my—my patterns—I’m more involved now with dealing with sustainability and democracy in general, I think. I’ve been thinking about this a lot because I’ve—you know, I’ve been involved with this group called Transportation Alternatives—you know, promoting biking and helping, you know, pedestrian crosswalks and so forth.

And this is—you know, it’s important to me to—I—I realize my bicycle activism has kind of filled in that space that I used to be more of a queer activist. And—and my—definitely now, with issues in this country, issues with nationalism everywhere, actually, fascism—those are—these are both things that concern me. So there’s a fairness issue that overrides—that I get involved with whenever I see unfairness, something that’s unfair. I will—I—I feel compelled to speak out against.

So there’ve been, you know, like, Black Lives Matter, for instance. You know, I got a lot involved in—in protests and such then that folks were, like, “Why are you doing that? You’re not black.” I’m, like, “Don’t you see the issues here?”

And so I’m—I’m compelled by a need for speaking out and stepping up when things are unjust, in general. And, I don’t know, I hope that answers the question, but I—I do feel like—in particular now, I can see my current arc of concerns that I—sustainability and democracy here and abroad are great concerns to me.

PINKNEY: Yeah, that leads very well, I think, into my—the next question I had for you, which was kind of how your perception of LGBTQA+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual plus] activism has shifted over time, as well as maybe why—more specifically, like, why your concerns have shifted to sustainability and democracy preservation writ large. You know what I mean?

EDWARDS: Yeah. All right, I’m going to use—I think a lot more people—I’m going to invoke two “white males,” in quotes, here. [unintelligible] will do it wrong, but let’s see if I get them right. Harvey [B.] Milk. You know, if everybody were to come out on Thursday or tell their families that they were gay, then we’d have no more problems. It’d be—it’d be over by Saturday or Sunday. And so a lot more people have come out and it’s made a lot easier. And I think social media, despite its terrible setbacks to society in a lot of other ways, social media has really helped a lot where kids came out in high school and whatnot.

So that’s my—the Harvey Milk one is, like, yeah, if you go home—if you come out—you know, if everybody came out, this stuff will be finished. It’ll be so much better.

The other being Congress- —Congressman [Barnett] “Barney” Frank. And I remember one or two occasions being with him in New York for stuff that I set up, where he had commented how he felt that homophobia and misogyny are two things that society will eventually be able to overcome because we have—however, that race issues will be the most tough challenge to—to deal with. And from his perspective, it’s because, you know, most every family has someone who is gay. One in four families have someone who’s gay. Most every family has someone who is, you know, of a different gender.

And—however, race wise, people can live in an isolated way in this country, where they don’t really rub elbows that much with people—you know, like, you know, Sunday afternoon is, as they say, the most racially divided time in American—as America as people go to their churches for their separate race.

And I think that that’s been—that informs me for—I don’t know, did I get too far off on a tangent here?

PINKNEY: No, no, no, you’re all good.

EDWARDS: Okay. So, yeah, I—I—I kind of feel like I—as far as me and queer issues, we got—we got marriage in this country, and it was a hell of a lot sooner than a lot of us expected. Some people I know were against it, but I think it really opened a lot of doors, and it—and the other thing that’s really helped—tied in with that, I think, is really, you know, kids coming out in high school so that most—a lot of the electorate now have known kids who were gay all their lives or have,—you know, have had no problem with their dalliances and figuring out, *Oh, no, I tried it once or twice, but I’m just not gay.*

And so people don’t—people also—you know, to be honest, it’s, like, most of these people see it as a choice. Hello, it’s a bell curve, and if you seeing it as a choice, that means your bisexual. Hello.

PINKNEY: [Laughs.] Yeah.

EDWARDS: So it is so telling for some of our legislators, who make these comments. But, yeah, I—so I feel like—in my case, I feel, Yeah, we’ve kinda got this one on gay issues. Yeah, we’re going to have setbacks. And I honestly—I had, you know, a conversation at dinner last night, hearing about stuff that’s going on, and I’m like, Jesus Christ, it’s, like, the Weimar Republic of Germany. There is shit going on in our gay community that—you know, if homophobic folks were to find this stuff out, it’s, like, as if they—as if they need any further triggers, but this will be—this could be a force used against us, and will be—they’re going to do—cages are not going to stop with, you know, separating children [at the southern US border] and putting them in cages. You know, it’s—it’s—I don’t feel like we’ve made it through the full darkness of the current period yet.

I don’t think that it’ll affect people who were gay, certainly the ones in power, some of whom we may be hearing a lot about—Larry Wexler [spelling unconfirmed] or whatever. But I think that—I think the social-economic thing, too—it’s, like, people see it as a potential customer base, and so corporations that were getting class action suits against them for firing homosexuals are now spending, you know, forty or eighty thousand dollars to have a float in the New York Pride parade because they want to make sure they have a contingent marching because they need to have rainbow everything on everything.

And the world has changed because, “No, no, we see you as our—you know, you’re our people.” So economics makes a difference there, and sometimes it’s not read properly because there’s a lot of gay people who are having difficulties financially, but the storyline works. We’re getting a lot of advertising attention and whatnot.

So, yeah, for me it’s, like,—I do find myself increasingly looking around and imagining, like, what are the next issues that I really—that no one else is speak- —or not enough people are speaking out about that really will make a difference in another generation or two?

PINKNEY: Yeah. I mean, the climate is a pretty glaring one, you know?

EDWARDS: Climate is huge.

PINKNEY: Yeah.

EDWARDS: And that’s what we need to take care of immediately, but—and it’s probably why I—I’m known—I’m a tech guy, but I—you know, I’m kinda—I’m known to—I have plenty of friends who are constantly flying around the world with their investment banking business and whatnot, different cities—Hong Kong. This one, London three days later, et cetera. And me? I get to my clients by bicycle. And I’m kind of notorious for having—you know, showing up with a bike helmet for whatever meetings because I want to—I *do* like to travel; I just want to help my—you know, feel less guilty about my carbon footprint when I do go to Beirut [Lebanon] later in the year for another vacation—or a vacation somewhere I’ve never been.

But I—I do think—I increasingly feel like if we—we need to have a more democratic society, where we have the—have an educated electorate and we have more people thinking and engaging about important issues, because if we do that, then climate change will be taken care of. We’ll all recognize it. Right now, we have too much corporate interest in the status quo, to milk out as much money as we can from, you know, the petroleum industry. And it’s financially inconvenient to shut that faucet off now if you have—if you own stuff.

So I—yeah, I think that there—climate change is a huge thing, but I also feel like we’re not going to fully get that unless we have a more democratic process and more engagement and less PAC [political action committee]-money-funded—have more—you know, get rid of Citizens United [v. Federal Election Commission, 558 U.S. 310 (2010)], make sure that, you know, there’s more—you know, we can see more about where money is coming from and what’s happening.

PINKNEY: Absolutely, absolutely.

I think—hmm. My question right now, before I forget, is if there’s anything that we haven’t talked about that you wanted to mention in this interview.

EDWARDS: I think—all right, I will say that Dartmouth from my day to today is—is—Hanover is entirely a different place. There were—like, ten years ago. I was remarking to folks, “Hell, I live in Greenwich Village, like a block from Christopher Street. Dartmouth has gotten more, you know, gay media makers, entertainers, activists going up there to speak than I’d be able to see in a year in New York. Probably a little bit of an exaggeration, but I do think that—I’m sure it’s tied into funding and whatnot, but it’s a much more welcoming and affirming environment than when I was there before.

So progress has been made, and it’s heartwarming. You know, there are issues, like being a graduate student alum—hello!—that are—you know, there’s a lot of tone-deaf qualities that Dartmouth has not taken care of that they could have on their behalf.

I can’t think of anything else.

PINKNEY: I guess in that case, my final question would be: What do you hope SpeakOut will do?

EDWARDS: I wish I could turn back time, and the SpeakOut that you’re doing now could be—could have been done some long time ago. I was hoping this would happen with videotape interviews of some older alums, who unfortunately are no longer around. There’s a couple I know who would be pretty—they probably are pretty close to 100. Let’s see, William McGee Wynkoop was the Class of 1938, I believe. I haven’t done the math there. But he and [P.] Roy Strickland had been in all sorts of media around the world—you know, RAI [Radiotelevisione Italiana] from Italy, Japan media—you name it, everybody had either done, you know, paper stories or video interviews with them as openly gay folks living in the Village.

William was a class of ’38. He was a Quaker, and a conscientious objector during the war, but he did go to serve as a medic in London and has amazing stories about that. And I feel like we lost a chunk of history that should have

been recorded, and I’m really glad it’s happening now, because I’m probably now amongst the old farts that, you know, will be peeling off shortly too.

But the—yeah, I would say if at all possible, SpeakOut should probably reach out to some of the older alums or the ones who, you know, may be—you know, may have been living—surviving with AIDS for a very long time. There are a lot of stories out there that are worth getting—

Stuart Michael Lewan, another one. He’s in San Francisco. He was on the Dartmouth plan of, like, instead of a five-year plan, it was more like the seventeen-year plan. He was working at the Kiewit Computing Center and did, you know, a very slow—after he was—after he dropped out of school, he back, I think, and was working at Kiewit for the longest time and then taking classes, so he was, like, this really long, long plan that he’d laugh about. But he would have a huge arc of history: different people that he knew from there.

[Nicholas H.] “Nick” Newman [Class of 1978]. He was more—closer to the Vietnam era. He lives in Omaha, Nebraska. But he has a lot of stor- —I want to say Student Homophile League, it wasn’t that, but he—something [recording glitch; unintelligible] Socialist, Young Socialist or—I don’t know, some sort of a queer/left-of-center stuff that he did at Dartmouth. Anyway,—

If any of these names trigger someone that you think, *Oh, I should follow up with them*, I’d be more than happy to reach out and connect if you don’t have their details.

PINKNEY: Thank you so much. I’ll be sure—I think my supervisor will take note of all the names, I’m sure, because we’re always looking for more participants.

And thank you so much for setting aside the time to talk to me today about your experiences and your thoughts and your opinions and your beliefs around everything that has to do with not only this [cross-talk] history. Oh, I’m sor- —

EDWARDS: I’m going to quickly add three more names.

PINKNEY: Oh, perfect.

EDWARDS: Ingrid [F.] Taylor [Class of 1986]—Ingrid Taylor, Ingrid [L.] Nelson [Class of 2005] and Carol Cosenza [Class of 1986]. One—actually, a couple of them had been involved with—specifically with HIV activism. Carol Cosenza is straight identified but knows tons of people and kind of the earth mother, if you will, of our era.

The other two—one of them is black, a black alumna, and she—again, a different subset of people connecting into. I haven’t seen her for a while, but Ingrid Nelson, I’ve connected with through social media, and she’s—you know, she definitely has a separate arc of—of work that she’s done in San Francisco, dealing with queer and HIV issues—that would be interesting to talk to.

PINKNEY: Awesome. Thank you once again so much for talking to me. It really means a lot to all of us here.

EDWARDS: I’ll look forward to the chance perhaps to meet you some day, but your tart will not be fresh, so I’m going to share it with somebody else instead tonight.

PINKNEY: [Laughs.]

[End of interview.]