

Alexander K. "Alec" Scott '89
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[SOPHIE M.]

WHITTEMORE: I'm Sophie Whittemore from the Dartmouth Class of 2020, and today I'm here in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, interviewing [Alexander K.] "Alec" Scott from the Class of 1989. The date is March 6th, 2020, and the time is currently one p.m. Eastern.

Alec, would you like to introduce yourself and where you're located in terms of holding this interview right now, like building, state, et cetera?

SCOTT: Sure. I'm in my home in Oakland, California, although I'm originally from Canada, and I'm doing the interview late on a relatively overcast morning.

WHITTEMORE: Awesome. And just a reminder: This project is to maintain an accurate oral history of the LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and plus] community at Dartmouth, so please try to remain as accurate as give as full of an account as possible and as you feel comfortable doing so. And, again, Alec, I just really wanted to thank you so much for participating in this project.

SCOTT: Well, thank you. I'm really glad the college is doing this. It's—it's—it feels important to me.

WHITTEMORE: Thank you. Now, to get a better sense of background, can you tell me about where you grew up?

SCOTT: I grew up in southern Ontario, a small town outside of Toronto called Oakville [Ontario, Canada], and I was the first—I might be getting ahead of myself [chuckles], but I was the first kid in my public high school to go south for college, and that was because I had an American mom who encouraged us at least to look at the schools—schools south of the border.

WHITTEMORE: And what high school was that?

SCOTT: It was called Oakville Trafalgar High School, a big public school. It reminded me of some of the schools in the John [W.] Hughes [Jr.] films, sort of affluent, pushed to—sort of academic and sort of big, not—intimate.

WHITTEMORE: And how would you say your sense of identity tied in with your place growing up?

SCOTT: It was hard. I was—I knew from probably around age ten, maybe earlier, that I was more—I was—that I was gay, that I didn't fit with the other boys and that my best friends were mainly girls. And at that age, people started dividing up more into gender, sort of different sides of the gender equation, so high school was tough. I really loved being a child in that town before I realized [chuckles] what the hell was up. And—but high school was tough.

And I think one of the reasons I thought of going to the U.S. was that I could really get away. I would be able to reinvent. I'd read a lot of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and this idea of reinventing on a campus like Dartmouth was a really appealing one for me and—as a—as a gay—as a gay guy.

WHITTEMORE: What books from Fitzgerald kind of inspired you?

SCOTT: *This Side of Paradise*, I loved. And—I mean, although rereading it, it's crazily obsessed with popularity, but anyway [chuckles], I loved it. And, of course, it's about Princeton [University] rather than Dartmouth, but still it—we'd gone on vacation in New Hampshire once, near Dartmouth, and I came to the campus, and I thought, *Wow! This is so beautiful!* And so I applied, and that's—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: You mentioned it being kind of like a Johns Hughes—a John Hughes type of scenario, or—

SCOTT: Yeah. The—the school was very much—so—and the films were coming out at that time, and they—they—they felt a little bit silly but also sort of on point with the—and, you know, it wasn't a community with huge—it was middle class and upwards, so it was a community where kids were obsessed with, you know, the prom or the football games

and stuff, where they didn't have to deal with a lot of more substantive concerns about, like, having enough money and that sort of thing. And I had—I had really lovely parents, so that also helped, so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any particular passions you had growing up?

SCOTT: I worked on the newspaper. I loved to read. I was a big racquet sports guy. My dad was a real jock, and he loved rugby, and he played rugby for England, and I tried to play hockey, but I just—just—team sports generally—I just couldn't do them, and I realized that a lot of other people like me had the same experience.

But I remember him sitting down with me in a doughnut shop and saying kindly to me, after a hockey practice, "You know, it's okay if you don't want to do this. It's—it's all right." So—so I—I did the more individual things. I skied, and I played tennis, and I played badminton. And those were the things I did. And I don't know what else I was interested in. I guess those were the main things.

WHITTEMORE: And I suppose were there any significant moments you had growing up when you did—or where you did?

SCOTT: Well, you know, it was—I realized there were a lot of times where I would fall in love with someone, with a boy, and I couldn't really express that, and I wasn't sure where *they* were at on—on that. And—and that was very depressing and very hard. And I felt very alone.

There were—there were—there were versions of me in books, *Brideshead Revisited*[: *The Sacred & Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*] and—and— there was also a miniseries of that, but all the gay characters ended up really badly. They either died or they were in exile in Morocco.

Or they were—or they—you know, Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde's [fictional] hero, who's a crypto-gay. It's not clear in the text. But when you read it as a boy like me, you know what he's talking about. And Dorian Gray is just an awful character, and finally all—all of his—all of his stuff catches up with him.

And so there was some stuff that I could see, but it wasn't positive, and [recording glitch; unintelligible]. You know, some of the films—

WHITTEMORE: I'm sorry, you cut out really briefly. Could you just repeat that?

SCOTT: Oh, sorry. When did I cut out?

WHITTEMORE: Lack of positive representation is when you cut out.

SCOTT: Okay. Sorry—sorry about the cutting out. That makes it harder for you. But—but, yeah, I guess—I guess the other thing that was tough was that you had to be—you had to read between the lines.

So there were films, some Tennessee Williams films, where you knew the subtext. You knew that—like, [*The Glass Menagerie*, which was a play we saw and also a film, and the boy is leaving a home. He feels terrible about it because he's got a handicapped sister who he—who he tries to look after, but he has to leave. And it's not clear in the play why he has to leave, but as a gay kid, you know. You know enough about the playwright. You know why the boy is leaving, because he just has to find his own way, so—

So that was—that was sort of—it was both a window towards who I might be, but also it didn't provide a lot of hope. All the gay characters either had unhappy lives or they died or they caught syphilis or, you know, they weren't—and they weren't happy. And—and none of the things presented a happily-ever-after scenario for them, so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other books or media that you felt like you couldn't a hundred percent identify with but that there were aspects that felt slightly more positive, or—

SCOTT: Well, I guess—it was hard, because I had so much internal stuff. Like, I remember seeing a gay activist on television, and I remember scrutinizing his face to see what was wrong with him. Like, was there some mark on him? Because I'd grown up fairly religious, in an Anglican tradition, and I just assumed that there was something evil or immoral about

being that way. And so I remember seeing that guy and— and thinking, *Look at his face. Is there something—you know, what's wrong with him?* [Chuckles.] And that's, of course, not a very good way to be, and—but that's where I was, so—

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember anything about, like, the gay activists or, like, what activism have meant that this person was a part of, or—

SCOTT: There wasn't—it wasn't really penetrating where I lived, you know, cause I was growing up in the eighties, and already a lot of stuff had happened: [the] Stonewall [riots] and [the assassination of] Harvey [B.] Milk and—and—

But there was some stuff happening in Toronto. There was a big raid on the bathhouses, one of the biggest mass arrests in Canadian history, and the gay community took to the streets and just protested really hard. It was Canada's Stonewall. And so—I've interviewed those guys since, some of them who participated in that, and I'm so proud of them.

But I—it didn't reach me in—in the suburbs. And—and—and—and there was a lot of shame, like, discussing it. My parents are pretty open-minded people, but they would never discuss things like that, and—and oddly, in my family background, a great-great uncle was a lover of Oscar Wilde's and his—and his great friend, and he looked after his—his estate after Oscar died and started getting his plays put on again and just did a great job and was a great friend of his.

But we never talked about him because it was viewed as a shame in the family, you know. And this guy was really interesting. He wrote a lot of really cool stuff. He was one of the leading art gallery owners in London [England]. He knew *everyone*. Every single person of interest in that time, he knew. And yet we never spoke of him, so—so you'd think he would have been a light for me, but I had to find him later, so—

WHITTEMORE: Would you say it was—could you, like, elaborate more on that as an experience, or—

SCOTT: Well, I—I mean, I don't know. It just was—I shouldn't have felt alone, but I did. And I guess without the internet also there wasn't a lot of easy proliferation of stuff, and all the major news media were very careful about what they wrote about that. They didn't—they didn't want to do too much on it because I think the idea was that it was still pretty immoral and so forth, so—

WHITTEMORE: So you mentioned kind of this drive and this pull to, like, reinvent yourself. How did finding out about Dartmouth factor into that?

SCOTT: Well, I mean, I guess—I guess—I didn't—as a Canadian and the first person in my high school to apply, I didn't know that much about Dartmouth, although my mom knew some stuff, so I didn't realize how, among the top schools, how conservative, small "c" conservative it was and also how wedded to the fraternity and sorority system it was.

And so I also was admitted to Amherst [College], and sometimes I think, *Gosh, that would have been a much better choice for you. You wouldn't have had to deal with as much really bifurcated gender stuff as there was at Dartmouth or—*

And *The Dartmouth Review* was also very nasty about gay stuff. I remember being on a radio program at the campus radio station. I was on a weekly commentating program, and mainly we'd talk about the federal politics and issues that had come up, but he—he'd run a piece in *The Review*, a jokey piece, called something like "A Hundred and One Creative Ways to Be Homophobic." And I—this—I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself, but I was just—I had just come out at that point, and I just thought, *Enough. You know, enough.*

So on the radio program, I really went at him, because—you know, I have a good sense of humor, but I just didn't think, with everything going on, with the AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] crisis full brown, that that—that they needed to write that, you know? So—but—sorry, I got ahead of myself there.

WHITTEMORE: No, that's—that's fine. What radio program? Was this Dartmouth's, or—

SCOTT: Yeah, it was the—the—I can't remember what the call—the call numbers were, but it was the campus radio.

WHITTEMORE: So, sorry, we're going to have to rewind a little bit, but thank you.

What were your first memories of the college?

SCOTT: Well, the campus really hit me, and I still dream about it, so—we had a—we had a—from our dorm, our undergraduate—the group that's all advised by the same undergraduate adviser sat around a tree out in front of Dartmouth Hall, and—because our dorm was just behind Dartmouth Hall, one of the Fayerweathers. And—and we just chatted and introduced ourselves.

And actually—so—sorry, but before that, the Freshman Trip [Dartmouth Outing Club First-Year Trip] made a big impression, and—and how they taught us sort of the—some of the songs. They taught us "Men of Dartmouth" [now "Alma Mater"].

And our Freshman Trip leader told us that there was a place where people would yell about the Indian symbol, something in support of the Indian symbol, which I also knew nothing about before coming. And the Freshman Trip leader said, "Don't do that. It's—it's offensive." And there was a big discussion about the Indian symbol on the trip, about whether it should have been axed as Dartmouth's symbol, which of course it should have been.

And—and so those are my first two memories of Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any particular, like, relationships that stood out?

SCOTT: I guess not from my Trip, but I had really great roommates, who were—one from Tulsa [Oklahoma], one from New York City [New York], both Jewish and both, when the time came for me to come out, we were still friends, and both couldn't have been nicer to me and more supportive. And so out of all the roommates I could have been assigned—first of all, I

didn't know many Jewish people growing up, and they were—they were both marvelous people. And so that was a door opener to—to know more and—you know, now—now, I guess, probably so many of my friends happen to be Jewish, although I don't think of it anymore [chuckles], but that was a door opener. And also I was so happy that—that when the time came, they were so kind to me about it, so—

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember who they were, or—

SCOTT: Oh, yeah. [David E.] "Dave" Gluck [Class of 1989] from— from New York City, whose family opened their home to me for freshman year Thanksgiving, and that was amazing, because I'd never been to New York with natives, and then Eric [C.] Schlezinger [Class of 1989] from Tulsa, Oklahoma, an all-American swimmer and a very funny, smart man.

WHITTEMORE: Are there any other early, significant experiences you can remember of your time on campus?

SCOTT: The other big person for me first year—I mean, I loved my dorm. I made a lot of friends there, and I loved the newspaper. I made a lot of friends there. But the other big person for me—

WHITTEMORE: *The Dartmouth*, right?

SCOTT: Yeah, *The Dartmouth*, the daily [*The Daily Dartmouth*] rather than the rancid *Review*.

The other big person for me was a fellow named [James J.] "Jamie" Kershaw [III, Class of 1989], whom I mentioned in the note to you, who was this incredible man. He was an IBM [International Business Machines] brat from upstate New York, the valedictorian of his class. He was outrageous and—you know, I met him at the Moosilauke [Ravine] Lodge, and he was telling stories about their Trip, and the stories were so vivid that I almost forgot about my Trip. And even now, when I think of that—of that time, it's his stories about his Trip that I think of.

And he was—he was like me. He sort of wanted something more mainstream. He wanted to belong. And so he wasn't ever a radical. He just wanted Dartmouth to take him in. And

somehow he managed it. He was—he became, like, the first gay big man on campus. He was, like, on the football field blowing his trumpet to bring the walls of Jericho down. He was—he was sort of in [Dartmouth College] Glee Club, in student government. He was doing plays and skits. Everywhere you went, there he was.

And also he was, like, on the dean's list every year. [Chuckles.] You had no idea how he managed that, but I remember—I remember with him, hearing him cross examine a math student about a problem he was having troubles with, and it wasn't enough for him to sort of get it. Like, the cross examination went on until he knew everything about it. And that was inspiring to me as a pretty good student. You know, I always got A's, and at Dartmouth I was cum laude, but—but that—the difference between an A minus student and dean's list was clear to me in that—in that cross examination, although you never saw him studying, which was also very annoying.

WHITTEMORE: [Chuckles.]

SCOTT: So—so—and he was just funny, and I had—I was careful with him because he was so clearly gay, even though he had years to come out, and I didn't know what I—what to do with that exactly. He—like, I was still watching—I'm more of a watcher than a doer, and of course I was writing for the newspaper, but, you know, I was watching him. And—and sometimes it felt too much, but once he decided you were going to be his friend, there was really—you really had no choice [chuckles.]

And I was really lucky to be a friend of his, because he was funny and—and—you know, I'd see him at a fraternity party, and he'd be carrying around Sociable crackers and saying, in this sort of decadent, weird basement—he'd be saying, "Have a Sociable. Everyone likes a Sociable." And—and he'd be doing this gesture from *The Price Is Right*. There was this model on *The Price Is Right* called Carol Merrill, and he'd—he'd Carol Merrill big monuments. He'd splay his fingers and, like,—like the woman would do when there was a new car on offer on this game show.

And so I have all these photos from this year of him Carol Merrill-ing the Wild—the Wild Things' Snow Sculpture or Carol Merrill-ing Dartmouth Hall or—and he was a total delight. And some how he brought almost everyone on campus on side, even though he was clearly, you know, an outrageous, queen-y, brilliant guy, so—

WHITTEMORE: And he also shared your same class year, right, the Class of '89?

SCOTT: Yeah, he was '89 too. And he was—he was—they placed him in an all-male dorm, which he hated, so he sort of adopted our dorm, and—and he was always around.

WHITTEMORE: What—you mentioned you were in Fayerweather, was it?

SCOTT: Sorry, what's that?

WHITTEMORE: Yeah, you mentioned you were in the Fayerweather dorms?

SCOTT: Yes, North Fayerweather.

WHITTEMORE: And how was, I guess, since he was in an all-male dorm—how were the co-ed dorms getting—or co-ed dorms getting set up at that time?

SCOTT: Well they had—our—ours was co-ed by floor, so my floor was all men, and we shared a bathroom in—in the center of the floor, and then the floor below us was all women, and then the first floor was all men, and the top floor, there were these glamorous upper-class women—upper-class men—upper-class—women from the higher classes. I have no idea whether they were upper-class or not. And—and so it was altern- —it—it alternated by floor.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other particularly, like, significant experiences you can remember from your time on campus?

SCOTT: Well, I guess the newspaper was big, and that was good for me because it was involved in the campus but it wasn't the fraternities or sororities, and they—they were my people. Like, they were wry and observant, and—and I'm still in touch with a lot of them.

I guess—I guess it was through the paper that I first sort of came out more broadly, because at the time, there was a debate as to whether to have the Reserve Officer[s] Training Corps [ROTC] on campus, because they—they wouldn't accept gay—gay students. And obviously they provided a lot of scholarship money to students to go to—well, maybe not obviously, but at the time, they'd provide a lot of scholarship money to people who agreed to go into the military.

So I wrote a small op-ed about—or, no, it was a letter to the editor because someone had written a—an op-ed in favor of ROTC and—and attacking the people who would try and get it off campus. And I wrote a letter to the paper, coming out and going at the things that they'd raised in the op-ed, saying that they were false and so forth.

And—and what was—you know, what was really special about that was that, you know, it was hard, and I was worried about it, but at a dinner with my parents at the very end of—end of the time there, we invited one of my history profs, [James E.] "Jim" Wright, who became the president of Dartmouth later, and his wife, Susan [DeBevoise] Wright, who was a family friend of—friend of—friend of ours.

And they came to dinner, and before a dinner, Jim took me aside with my—you know, my parents were in the general mix, but he took me aside and quietly said to me, "You know, I was really proud when I read that—that letter of yours. I think, you know, you did—you did really great." And that's all he said, but this figure of authority taking me aside, doing it softly so that I didn't have to worry about my parents hearing it, because I hadn't come out yet—it made a lot of difference to me.

And then—and then as a president, looking from afar, I thought—like, he was tough on the ROTC until they—until they started to deal with—deal honestly and honorably with gay and lesbian and trans- —and—and you know, they're still—right now, the trans stuff is terrible with the president of the U.S., whose name [chuckles] I try not to say, rescinding the—the—the allowance for, you know, trans people to serve this country, which they've been doing honorably for years, so—anyway, so I got into a whole—

The other thing that was striking was I rushed the fraternities, and that was a really dreadful experience. I remember the first night from Zeta Psi—they came to my room in the Fayerweathers. Three people would come, and they'd tell you whether you were dinged or whether you got in or whether you—and they came, and they said, "You know, you did really great the first night, so why don't you come back and do more of that?" And I thought, *I'm not like a performing seal, you know?* Like—so I did go back, which humiliates me. I shouldn't have gone back. And then they—then they decided not to have me.

And that was okay because I had my dorm, and I had my squash team, and I had my newspaper things, but it was humiliating. I remember all these people sort of hugging me, expressing great sympathy for—for my failure to do it.

And it also was a departure from the F. Scott Fitzgerald script, which was that the boy goes to university, he reinvents in a way that is totally successful at this place. And what interested me was that Jamie also got dinged. Jamie—Jamie—this is as good an act of activism as I can think of: He rushed the football house. [Chuckles.] And when his photo came up in the reviews, there were, like, catcalls about how idiotic it was that he rushed there. But he just often just did his own thing.

Anyway, he didn't get into that, but he eventually joined a co-ed house and became the president of the fraternity, sorority whatever, the Greek system and tried to make reforms to it, and, you know, they weren't—he was just too determined. They weren't going to—they would—they could turn him once or twice, but they weren't going to—they weren't going to win turning him away [chuckles] totally, so—

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember what house or what Greek house that Jamie Kershaw ended up rushing and joining?

SCOTT: I think it was Alpha Theta, which was—which was sort of low on the—it was sort of low on the—students had a—students knew which houses were the most socially viable and which ones were less so, and it was—but, you know, all the co-ed houses were low on the totem pole because of being co-ed, and it was, like, second last in terms of prestige.

But it had—as it turns out, it had tons of interesting people in it, a lot of people from the newspaper, Jamie, and so my— one's ideas of what was socially correct were—were idiotic because that would have been—I never—I never did join a fraternity or a sor- —well, or co-ed one. But it would have been quite an interesting place to be, so—

WHITTEMORE: Wait, that's crazy. I'm in that house.

SCOTT: Oh, nice! How nice!

WHITTEMORE: [Chuckles.]

SCOTT: Yeah, there were all sorts of amazing people in it, and—and I don't know—I—I gather reputations change so much from time to time, and probably co-ed is now the thing to be. I don't know. What's it like now? If you don't mind me asking.

WHITTEMORE: No, it's fine. So, the co-ed houses are definitely moving towards becoming gender inclusive as, like, the language around gender identities change.

SCOTT: Great.

WHITTEMORE: And over all—I mean, it's not as big a space as, like, traditional Greek life would be, but it's definitely growing, in comparison.

SCOTT: Well,—well, good. And, you know, I—other—one other person I've spoken to has also talking about Greek life generally diminishing at a presence on campus—I mean,— which is not to take anything away from Alpha Theta, but I think that sounds positive too. I don't know, but—so—

WHITTEMORE: Yeah.

SCOTT: Like, people spending all their time in Collis [Center for Student Involvement] and so forth rather than—rather than in the house. Anyway, that's not—that's not the point of this interview, so—

WHITTEMORE: Could you tell me a little bit more about, like, carving out those alternative social spaces during your time at Dartmouth?

SCOTT: Well, for me it was—it was the arts-related stuff, so—but mainly as a critic rather than as a performer, but the [Dartmouth] Film Society and the Hopkins Center [for the Arts (the Hop)] were my homes away from home, and I wrote a lot of reviews of plays and so forth for *The Dartmouth*, so that was something.

The squash team was something, and the newspaper, as I mentioned earlier, was also important. And, you know, I was working maybe twenty-five hours a week at the paper. I mean, in my third and fourth years anyway, in my junior and senior years. So—so it was ramshackle, but it was intense, and I learned a lot about writing, and that's something I care about, and so to do that with other people was great. And we would go to print the—print the paper at this plant down in—anyway, it was—it was fun.

So those were my main other outlets. And my dormitory. Like, those were—the people I met in my dormitory became a real network for me, so those were my main outlets.

WHITTEMORE: I can't remember exactly when this happened, but, like, a shift in Greek life for going—or for the co-ed houses, et cetera, but the Tri-Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa] incident, where they kicked out members who were openly gay. Was that during your time at Dartmouth, or no?

SCOTT: I think so. I don't remember much about it. But—but, yeah. That was—and to me it was extraordinary that there was a house which had held onto the—the letters KKK as their—as their letters. I mean, you can call it Tri-Kap all you like, but to me it was shocking that there was still a place that had decided that they should hold onto those letters, so—but I don't know much about the—the kicking out of gay members.

WHITTEMORE: And then during this time, you mentioned also, like, *The Dartmouth Review's* power was also, I guess, like, a big presence on campus?

SCOTT: Huge. And they'd—they'd throw the things on our door- —on our doorstep each Friday, and they legitimized a whole swath of opinion that we've really seen—we've really seen the [President Donald J.] Trump era is the total apotheosis of this stuff, so white guys pretending to be victimized by society was—was—was their standard pose in the writing, so—and ad hominem attacks—so not attacking people's positions but going after them personally, which we also see all the time with Trump et al.

So there was, like, this lovely, very gentle feminist professor on campus, Carla Fratero [spelling unconfirmed] and the reason I remember her name is because they would go after her almost every week, you know, whether she—you know, alleging that she had armpit hair or that she—or that she did this, that or the other. And they went after her not in terms of—I mean, it was very personal, what they did.

And they would set up this stunt, and the college would respond to it, and then they would claim total persecution. And, of course, the biggest one, which was a totally formative experience for me, was when they knocked down the shanties. In my first year, they knocked down the shanties that were built on the [Dartmouth] Green to protest the college's investment in companies doing business in South Africa. And—and some of them got expelled, some of them got disciplined, and—

But the big deal was that there was a moratorium, a campus moratorium to—after the protesters sat in the administration's office, they finally accepted that there was a need to have a campus discussion of it. And for me, it was this total eye-opener, having grown up in this small town in Ontario, not a very diverse town, and people just spoke their truths.

And it was—it was tough, because as a WASP [White Angle-Saxon Protestant] I'd grown up that you just said polite things and you didn't really rock the boat, and these people were outraged about what it was—and they were talking about what it was like to be a black woman on campus or what it was like to be a Latina or—and—I—I think there were some gay speakers, but I don't remember. My memory often has these huge blocks because of things that made me

uncomfortable. I sort of block them. And it may well be that that Tri-Kap thing was something that I blocked because it was just too hard to—to—to handle.

But—but that experience was totally formative. And actually the best education I got—the newspaper and that were the best education I got at Dartmouth, although—although I *loved* my classes. I mean, I just loved my classes.

And that—I mean, that was the other great haven for me at Dartmouth, was these incredible, committed professors in these small groups, teaching us about books that I loved, about history, about—we had one English professor who was one of the world's leading [James] Joyce experts, and he taught us the First World War [World War I]—

WHITTEMORE: Can you remember what the name of the English—sorry, do you remember what the name of the English professor was?

SCOTT: Peter Bien [pronounced like BEAN], was his name. And he was a total star and totally interesting, and he taught us the First World War poets, and having been a veteran, himself, I think of the Korean War, he looked at us after we'd read these incredible, moving poems about these people dying in the trenches, and he looked at us, and he said, "Don't let that happen again. Just don't let it happen again."

And I'll never forget that, and that combination of someone admirable and brave as well as learned in things that I admired, it was just such an opportunity to get, so—so, sorry, I waxed—but that was something great. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Question: So in reference to *The Dartmouth Review* members, you said?—

SCOTT: Yes.

WHITTEMORE: —knocking down the shanty towns. Was that in relation to—do you remember what year that was? It was a protest against apartheid, correct?

SCOTT: Yes, it was a protest against apartheid, and the college still had lots of money in companies that were, you know, getting rich from—or that were—anyway, they were operating in

South Africa. I think it was in the winter of '86 when they knocked down the shanties, and—and the student body was all over the place about it, because a lot of people thought the Green is our sacred space and the shanties shouldn't have been there, and Winter Carnival was coming up and it looked ugly. And anyway, South Africa is a long way from here, so—

But anyway, I guess it wasn't—the people who knocked down the shanties—some of them happened to be *Dartmouth Reviewers*, and some of them were not, but they—but that's—that's what they did. And I think there were two people in the—in the shanties when they did it, although I think there's some dispute about that, so.

WHITTEMORE: And then one more question about *The Dartmouth Review's* just I guess time during this time in the eighties: Were you on campus, or do you remember anything about *The Dartmouth Review* leaking names of LGBT, I guess, students?

SCOTT: I—I was not, but—but—but—it was before my time, but it was certainly in the air still, because there was a sense of unsafety when I first went to the lesbian and gay groups, and—and, you know, you'll—you'll confirm this from other sources, or the project will, but the person who went on to become a Fox News broadcaster, Laura [A.] Ingraham [Class of 1985], was reportedly sent under cover to the meetings and then reported on the identities of people in them as well as—so—so— [Note: Laura Ingraham was editor of *the Dartmouth Review* at the time of this incident. Teresa S. Delaney (née Polenz), Class of 1987, was the reporter].

And—and the other thing you have to understand is that—or one has to understand is that AIDS is happening at this point, so we are so—I mean, I'm com- —all of us are coming out into that, and we're terrified, but at least we know how to have safe sex. And coming out and being gay—they were su- —you felt like it was an all-or-nothing thing—like, you could lose everything.

And so to have someone else do that for you or force you to do it—it was bar- —absolutely barbaric, and—and to think this person actually had a career [chuckles], let alone a—

one where she's speaking to millions of people is just appalling to me. But anyway, she did, and she—that's what she did. And so—and I don't know what happened to the people that she outed, but—but—but there it is. I hope this project looks at that, so.

WHITTEMORE: And these groups that you were a part of that were LGBT+[lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual plus]-centered—was—would that include DaGLO [Dartmouth Area Gay and Lesbian Organization, pronounced DAY-glow]? Any others?

SCOTT: It was DaGLO. And—and I remember being so scared to go to the meetings in Robinson Hall. Would I run into my other members of the newspaper? And—and it was a mix of lesbians and gays. Usually about fifteen people would show up. And—and I wanted to—there was someone who was kind enough to want to give me advice, and I wanted to meet him off campus so that I wouldn't be known, and he quite rightly said, "Listen, you know, we're gonna meet here, in my dorm, and just, like, chill," so—yeah. And then I did come out, and I did—I started to behave a little more admirably, a little less terribly, so—

WHITTEMORE: You mentioned coming out I guess at—in writing for *The Dartmouth Daily*.

SCOTT: Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Was coming out personally, like, separate from that or a separate experience?

SCOTT: It—it was. It was. I sort of spoke to a bunch of different friends, one by one, and—and—and that went okay, you know? People were quite supportive.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any names of people who in particular, like, you felt like were your rock or your support?

SCOTT: You know, there was a woman who's also since passed away, named Chesley [H.] Adler [Class of 1989], who was a philosophy student, and she was from this southern family. She, like, pulled up to Dartmouth with this, like, crazy sports car, and she became Arthur of Casque and Gauntlet, the sort of—you know, that weird senior society, and she was

the—the person elected as their top officer. And she did winter sports, even though she'd never seen snow growing up in—or she hadn't seen it that much growing up in New Orleans [Louisiana], and she just threw herself into the campus. And when I needed someone, she was totally my rock, so—

WHITTEMORE: And were these people all members of DaGLO?

SCOTT: She was not. She was just an ally, and—and Dave Gluck, my first-year roommate, was also a total rock, a particular and total rock. And DaGLO was important for me, but no one there—I didn't really become close with anyone there. And I was still figuring out how to become close with fellow gay men in a way that felt safe and—you know. And I hadn't had sex yet, so I needed to figure out that too.

So it was—it was really Chesley and Dave Gluck who were my real—my real rocks. And Jamie was complicated because he wasn't coming out yet, even though you really only had to meet him for ten seconds to—to realize that that's where he was at. But he—he—he didn't want to lose everything by going that route or lose his future, which is how it felt. And when you're as brilliant as he is, you—you have [chuckles] a huge future to lose.

And he—he told me when I la- —when I saw him the last time I saw him that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] had interviewed him when he was leaving Dartmouth because he was one of our top students, and he had a great facility with language, including Arabic, and that they eventually told him they weren't going to hire him because of concerns with his sexuality and the fact that—I don't know quite how he put it, because I think their concern, he said much later, was not that he was gay but that he wasn't out and that if you aren't out, then you can be subject to blackmail more easily than if you are. But I—you know. But anyway, the thing was he wanted to serve his country in that way, and because of issues in this area, it was decided notwithstanding his brilliance that they wouldn't—that they wouldn't do that, so—

WHITTEMORE: Could you elaborate a little bit more about DaGLO's acronym and its mission statement if there's anything you can recall about it?

SCOTT: I don't—I don't remember anything about that. What was it? One thing that was interesting to me was that there were some community members involved, which was sort of nice but also a little bit scary because they were a lot older, but—but it was nice in the sense that the town-gown separation at Dartmouth is so strong, and this was good because it—it gave some resource to people in the community, and it gave a great resource to us. And so that's—that's one thing I remember about it.

WHITTEMORE: Oh, sorry, that's just to elaborate for the oral history, what DAGLO, like, the acronym.

SCOTT: Oh, Dartmouth Area Gay and Lesbian Organization. And I think the area was small. The capital D, lower case a, capital G, capital L, capital O. [Laughs.]

WHITTEMORE: Awesome. Thank you.

SCOTT: And it was a ridic eighties color that—you know, the neon yellow was something that was very eighties, so—

WHITTEMORE: You mentioned just like overall tension over campus considering the AIDS crisis was in progress at this time. Could you elaborate a little bit more about that?

SCOTT: Yeah, that was hard. You know, there weren't a lot of people dying there, but—but, you know, it—it—one thing that was amazing, speaking of my liking for the arts, was that they put on [Laurence D.] "Larry" Kramer's play, *The Normal Heart*, which was searing drama written in a white heat right in the middle of it about conflicts between activists as to whether to try and be in the room where it happens or whether to be on the streets and changing people's minds that way.

And I remember seeing it at the Hop and weeping copiously and running across the Green because it was so terrifying and yet so beautiful, what the playwright had done and what the actors, student actors had done and that they brought it there right then. It was amazing that they did that and really important.

And the other thing was I think there was this lip syncing competition where they were raising funds to do—something to do with—with AIDS research, which was also cool at that area. And, of course, Jamie, whom I've mentioned a lot, did—did—did an amazing thing with the woman who went on to become the ambassador to Greece or, sorry, the ambassador to Hungary, the U.S. ambassador to Hungary and who is now California's lieutenant governor, Eleni [Tsakopoulos Kounalakis, Class of 1989]. And Jamie played Cher to her Sonny [Bono], and they sang "I Got You Babe" at a campus event, and it was crazy and lovely, so— [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Eleni?

SCOTT: Tsakopoulos Kounalakis.

WHITTEMORE: And, sorry, what pronoun does Eleni use?

SCOTT: She.

WHITTEMORE: And was she also an '89?

SCOTT: She was an '89, yeah.

WHITTEMORE: So could you—

SCOTT: She worked at the newspaper with me, and she was lovely.

WHITTEMORE: So you did a lot of work with media. You mentioned radio broadcasting briefly. Sorry. We've come full circle.

SCOTT: Yeah.

WHITTEMORE: And also working with media at *The Dartmouth Daily*. How do you feel like—just kind of like your identity intersected with that in, like, representing, like, you in your entirety?

SCOTT: Well I guess—I guess I loved writing. And I mentioned earlier this observing thing, you know.

The other thing that was maybe interesting in terms of LGBT stuff was that it was a way where you didn't have to totally commit. You could be involved in something but keep

yourself out of it somehow, and the style of journalism then was very much the Associated Press style, where, except on the op-ed pages, you—the person writing it was as absent as they could be. Of course, we know now that even then, you can tell where—where the person is a bit, and this idea of objectivity is just really I think almost impos- —well, it's—to me, it doesn't exist. I think you can be fair, but—

But anyway, we were—we were trying to be objective. And that was something of a—a crutch for me because it meant I could be involved in things but still I was the writer standing back a few degrees, and I didn't have to commit to anything myself, so—

WHITTEMORE: And you mentioned a little bit about your experience with Greek life. Was there anything else that you can recall related to that?

SCOTT: No, I was—I went out a lot, and I—I drank too much, and I've had to manage that since then because alcohol is a—is a problem for me, but—so I think I trace some of the roots of that back to being uncomfortable in social settings at Dartmouth and drinking to self medicate. But—but it was—often they were quite fun, those evenings, going from one house to the next.

And, you know, I just didn't fit. It was sororities, fraternities, and the co-ed houses were too alternative for who I thought I was, and so there was nowhere on that side of things that I fit. But it all—it worked out okay because there were other places that I fit: the classroom, the paper, my dorm, so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: And also radio broadcasting?

SCOTT: Yeah. I mean, I just was a guest on the radio show. The main—each week. The main thing was the newspaper, and that was—that took up a lot of my time, and I loved it.

WHITTEMORE: And you also mentioned that you were in—on the squash team.

SCOTT: [Chuckles.] Yes. Just the first year. And just junior var- —and just junior varsity.

WHITTEMORE: And were you also a mental health center volunteer?

SCOTT: Yes, there was a mental health center not too far off campus, and I would go there and lead—lead activities a couple of days a week and just watch people trying to recover from their various ailments, some of them very serious. You'd see the marks on their arms. And others, apparently less serious but still—you know, obviously, they were hospitalized in there for a reason, so—

It was—it was a facility that people could be involuntarily committed, but also you could commit yourself to it, so it wasn't one where everyone was involuntarily there, if you know what I mean, so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other outlets, I suppose, that you had for expressing yourself?

SCOTT: No. No, I don't. I'm sure there were, but I think we've covered the main ones.

WHITTEMORE: And did you have any professors who acted as your mentors—like, as mentors during your time at Dartmouth? You mentioned James Wright, who was the history professor, right?

SCOTT: Yeah, he was amazing, and Peter Bien. I guess Brenda [R.] Silver, who was an expert on Virginia Woolf and taught us—and a feminist, and just a brilliant scholar. She was—she was someone I admired and who took great care with her—with her feedback and was—was very good on gay stuff. And I wrote a paper on Lytton Strachey for her, one of the members—a friend of Virginia Woolf's, who was also a writer, and he wrote a great book about the Victorians, mocking them, called the *Eminent Victorians*. And I wrote a paper about him for her and about his homosexuality, and she was great in giving me feedback on it and supporting the idea of me being gay, so she was—she was excellent.

WHITTEMORE: And Brenda Silver was part of the English department?

SCOTT: Yep.

- WHITTEMORE: And you were an English major, right?
- SCOTT: Yes, and I did a Russian—I did a Russian minor and a Foreign Study Program over in St. Petersburg [Russia].
- WHITTEMORE: What was your time like there?
- SCOTT: Amazing. Yeah, it was—we were studying in Russian, and communism was falling apart, and, you know, it was just—it was an amazing—we were watching history—history happen.
- WHITTEMORE: With all these overlapping—just everything happening at once during your time at Dartmouth, with relation to, you know, the apartheid movement or anti-apartheid movement, the AIDS crisis, with relation to Cold War tensions, I think the [Space] Shuttle *Discovery* ended up getting launched also during your time on campus? Are there any more—
- SCOTT: Yeah, I remember—I remember that day. We were watching it on our dorm. Yeah.
- WHITTEMORE: Are there any more just, like, I guess global movements that ended up just kind of also impacting campus in that way?
- SCOTT: The other thing was Tiananmen Square was happening [the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests] just as we graduated, so the—the citizens standing up to the communist regime, and so a lot of people wore black armbands or white armbands?— I can't remember—armbands on their—on their grad- —on the robes that we wore to graduate. So that was the other big global thing happening.
- WHITTEMORE: And—sorry for bringing this up again, but, again, in relation to the AIDS crisis, is there anything else that you can recall for, like, how I guess Dartmouth campus deans were handling it?
- SCOTT: Not really. You know, I mean, [C.] Everett Koop [Class of 1937] was a Dartmouth graduate who was the surgeon general, and he was behaving very admirably around it, giving the best information that he had and speaking without—without animus toward those who had it, and so that—that felt good from a Dartmouth point of view, that

this—that unlike with the corona[virus, Note: COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019)] stuff at this moment, that you had someone in the top job handling it who was concerned mainly with health stuff, who was an expert and who was going to give the patients the care and the—and the support, the moral support that they deserved.

WHITTEMORE: And were there any other key figures and role models you looked up to during your time at Dartmouth?

SCOTT: No, I—I—I don't think so. Yeah, no, I think that's got it.

WHITTEMORE: And you've brought of Jamie Kershaw in the Class of '89 a lot during this interview.

SCOTT: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Is there any other—are there any other experiences that you can remember that really impacted you with relation to Jamie Kershaw or—

SCOTT: Well, unfortunately, I guess about seven years ago now, he—he decided to take his life, and, you know, everyone felt there was a real mix of reasons for that. He'd—after Dartmouth he'd won a Fulbright [The Fulbright Program] and studied Arabic the Middle East and then gone to Stanford Law [School] and then become a real player down in Los Angeles [California]: a producer and a lawyer, entertainment lawyer. And he always wanted to be talk show host, but anyway, he went the other direction, and he would always say—

Anyway, he—he—he decided in what must have been a wretched times to—to exit, and there was a big gathering of his—of people who loved him on the campus of—of one of the studios where he worked. Seven, eight hundred people came, a lot of Dartmouth friends, and I went—David and I—my partner David and I came down from—from northern California to be there.

And he wanted it to be chipper, so it was very chipper, but it—it—it—it was also very sad, and for me, one of the things I took from it was that I'd seen—Parents Weekend at Dartmouth, I'd seen his parents reacting—interacting with

him, and his father was so unhappy with him, even though he was brilliant and amazing, and for me, I just felt like there were some wounds that were too deep in him to really—to really heal.

There's that lovely Elton John song about his—about Daniel, and obviously the lyrics were written by someone—someone else, but—but there's a line about how some scars—there's scars that won't heal. And I felt like with him, there were some of those, and although he was brilliant and he just pushed ahead in his life, there was just this wound in him that was never going to be cured, and—

Anyway, there were lots of reasons why people thought he might have exited, and for me, the bottom line was that he was marvelous, and he didn't really—he knew it, but he didn't—it didn't go very deep, and—and that was very sad. And yet we were—everyone was lucky to have him for forty-five years, because he was the funniest, he was—you know, he was just amazing. And so—so that's—that's what I have to say about Jamie. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Any other experiences that you can remember that just had kind of a deep and profound impact?

SCOTT: I don't really think so, no. I—I came out to my parents the year after I left Dartmouth, after they'd finished paying for it, and—but then, you know, I supported myself in my own education after that. But—but—so—and that didn't go great, but—but—but we muddled through, and—and—and no other experiences. It was this rich, complicated time, and I'm really happy I went to Dartmouth, even though there were things that were really tricky about it, but it—it—it—it still is important to me, and in my dreams I go there a lot, and so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: What was it like after graduating Dartmouth?

SCOTT: Well, the AIDS crisis was still going strong, and it was still a death sentence if you got—if you seroconverted, and I moved to London, England, which seemed like a more congenial place to be gay than—and it was far away from my family, so that was good, and I had a good year there.

And then I went to law school, and I was always out in law school, and I helped run a gay group there, and I worked on some of the litigation that—that eventually helped Canada turn the corner on a lot of gay stuff, whether to have gays in the military or the differential age of consent. I just worked on one of those cases, but—but I was close enough to witness these amazing lawyers going at, one by one, all the obstacles, and there are still a lot of obstacles left, but Canada was totally transformed on this point, so I felt very proud of my generation of—of people, that they pushed so hard on it and won so many victories.

WHITTEMORE: How would you say that times have changed since you went to Dartmouth?

SCOTT: Well, you know, in the culture, when I was growing up, as I mentioned, there wasn't a lot to look at in terms of LGBT content, and obviously there's a lot more of that. Pop culture in the nineties brought us *Will & Grace* and lots of movies, and—and—you know, I think—and this here Poses [sic; POSE], a show about trans. The members of these amazing houses, about which someone a long ago did a documentary, the houses of gay and trans people of color in the eighties—I guess it's mainly eighties New York.

WHITTEMORE: *Paris Is Burning?*

SCOTT: What's that?

WHITTEMORE: Sorry. The documentary, *Paris Is Burning?*

SCOTT: Yeah, *Paris is Burning*, indeed. And so—so that is—is exciting to me, and I feel positive, and that wasn't around when I was young. The legal situation in the U.S. is still only partially—it's still a mess, where religious freedom is being used to discriminate, where the trans military stuff has been a big step backward, and a lot of states, you can still be fired, as you know, for being—for being gay. And so—and the Equality Act that made its way to the [U.S.] Senate got killed by the Senate or just left not—it didn't get passed, anyway.

So—so—but—but there's been a lot of developments, mainly, you know, positive developments, a lot of hate—

there's hate crimes legislation on the books, and there's gay marriage, and—and the triple—the combination therapy that they discovered saves a lot of my friends' lives, who had—who were—who were HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] positive and thought they were going to die, and then these—these drugs converted—converted what was a death sentence into a chronic condition. The drugs have lots of side effects, but—so that was something.

And those are the—the main—the main things, from my point of view.

WHITTEMORE: And are there any alums that you keep in contact with in particular?

SCOTT: Not—not a lot. I guess Facebook keeps—and various other forms of social media keep me in sort of passive touch with a lot of people, but—but, you know, the other—the other person who was my rock that I mentioned—she also—she also is no longer with us, so my two—my two best—two of my best Dartmouth friends are no longer around, so—yeah.

WHITTEMORE: How—I guess how has your concept of identity changed since leaving Dartmouth?

SCOTT: Well, I've become out and more proud, although I, like, Jamie, have a lot of angst and an inner voice that is always self-assaulting. But I'm very happy to have been an activist and part of—part of this generation's push to—to change things and happy, still, to be a writer, because I loved that Dartmouth. And—but I'm just shocked at where the country is right now, and I'm depressed and angry almost all the time, and so—

And a lot of—as I mentioned earlier, a lot of what we're seeing is stuff that I saw first hand at Dartmouth, and it was almost play acting. They thought it was all in play. But now we're seeing it played out on the big stage, and it's shocking to me.

WHITTEMORE: How else, I suppose, have you seen change as regards to the LGBT—like, LGBT+ identities within your community and, like, attitudes?

SCOTT: Well, I guess my family has shifted, and my younger brother, who was also at Dartmouth, came out as gay. And they adopted a little girl, he and his husband, and that was really not—not on the radar when—when I was coming up, the fact that someone could adopt in a public—they adopted in Vermont—that someone could adopt in a public setting. That just was not possible, and so very happy that that person has come into our lives and that [William R.] "Will" [Scott, Class of 1992] and Stephan [Jost], who are great parents, are—are—are parenting her. And so that was something. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Do you have any other memories that I didn't touch upon from your time at Dartmouth or related to afterwards?

SCOTT: Well, you know, I guess my final year, I had my first relationship with a brilliant fellow, and—and he went on to become valedictorian of Dartmouth and was just a really—just a really nice and fairly heroic person. [Chuckles.] And so I was lucky that my first relationship started there, and we were in a small seminar, and I remember after one meeting him following me across the—the Green, and I knew he was following me, and I was, and—anyway.

And he asked me out, and it was just really nice. And it wasn't a long relationship, but it was really great that my first relationship was—was like that. And he was a year behind me, so he was staying, and I was leaving, and there was no future for it, but still it was very nice, so— [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Are there any other closing remarks or anything else that you want to say?

SCOTT: No. That's got it.

WHITTEMORE: And if you had any, I suppose, advice for LGBT+ students going through Dartmouth right now, what would you say?

SCOTT: Oh, gosh, no. I—I don't—I do not have any advice. [Chuckles.] I—I—I—I've got more learning to do, I think, than a lot of—well, you know, I just—I just—I don't know. I mean, I guess—I guess I liked what [Peter Paul Montgomery] "Pete" Buttigieg [pronounced BOO-dih-jej] had to say to young Zachary [Ro] on that campaign trail [for the

Democratic nomination for president in the 2020 election] about how finding out who you are can give you a center of gravity, and life has so much chaos, and things aren't easy, but if you have that center of gravity, it can make a big difference.

And that certainly was the case in my life, that—that coming out was really hard, but I knew—I knew who I was, and I know who I am, and there's lots to learn, and there's lots—lots of changes to—to make and lots of improvements I can make, but—but—and, you know, I don't think—it may not be as big a deal. This is what I read. I read that it's not as big a deal, some of the coming-out aspects are not as—but I still think that Pete's advice sounds pretty good to me. And that's—so I'm just borrowing someone else's advice rather than [chuckles] giving any of my own, so—

WHITTEMORE: I just—Alec, I just wanted to say thank you again for participating in this SpeakOut project. I know that topics can be difficult to share or recall, but everything you shared has been extremely invaluable, and I hope you have an amazing day ahead.

SCOTT: Well, thank you. You did—you did a very excellent job with interviewing. You know, I do it professionally, and I was just—I just loved how you—how you did it, and I love that you're doing this, and it seems probably pretty great that you're the one doing it, so—

We didn't talk about your side of things very much at all, but—but I felt very—I felt in really good hands, so thank—thank you very much for that.

[End of interview.]

