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A Conversation with Tim Mooney

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**GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project
Conversation with Tim Mooney (1992)**

April 13, 2015

Conducted by Sarah Gullong and Yadalis Peralta

Location: Holy Cross campus

Length: 47 minutes

Keywords: academics, campus, coming out process, conservative, family, friendship, heteronormativity, Jesuit, LGBT, relationships, religion, stereotypes, Worcester

Transcript:

Sarah: OK, so today is April 13th, 2015 at 5:45[PM] and you are being recorded. That's like a Massachusetts state law thing. Um...so how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

Tim: Um...it was around this time of year... in 1988. Um...when I was looking...well I mean had been looking at schools and I had um applied to Holy Cross, and to Dartmouth, and to Tufts, and some other schools. And um... I came up here around this time of year and um, hadn't made a decision yet. There must have been some organized open house or something, there must have been some sort of reason to come. But I remember it was this time of year, it was a day just like today, and everybody was outside and I felt just such an energy about this school that I knew immediately that I wanted to, that this was the decision. I left...I got in the car with my parents knowing that I had decided where I was going to come to school. Um...the, I mean the campus was just...you know, everything was, just starting to turn green. Um...so I mean it was a really, it was a beautiful place, but also um...there was such an infectious energy um... that I felt from the students here that um...and I just felt like I had come, like I had found, I was going to find a home here. And that's what cinched the decision for me.

Sarah: Yeah, I felt the same way, myself (all laugh)

Tim: It's funny, I hadn't thought about until you just asked me, it was literally right around this time of year.

Yadalis: Um, what was your transition like from high school to Holy Cross?

Tim: Umm, well I went to high school, I..I grew up in Cumberland, Rhode Island, which is only about 45 minutes from here, south. Um...and...I went to um...yeah I went to public schools and my high school...[sighs]...um...I had exhausted the experience of my town, of living in my town by the time I was eighteen and uh...wherever um...I was not interested in a fifth year, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth year of high school. Many of my classmates were interested in another four years of high school just like the previous four years. I couldn't wait to be done, ugh...I couldn't wait to get out of Cumberland High School and I couldn't wait to, um...I couldn't wait to be with a bunch of people who didn't know who I was. Um...and...um...and start fresh. And gain new experiences so I

was super excited when I left high school. Um...academically though...I didn't have a clue what I was getting into (all chuckle) by coming here.

Yadalis: Like most of us. (all laugh)

Tim: Right...I really did not have a clue and I thought, you know I had always done really well in school um...and without a whole lot of effort. I mean I worked hard, I guess, you know in high school. I felt like I was working hard in high school and I brought that effort here to my freshman year and it did not cut, that effort did not cut it (chuckles). Um... and... you know I did ok, uh...my first semester but I wasn't getting A's anymore. And that was the first time that had ever happened to me. Um...and a...it took me probably to half way through my second semester...of freshman year that I realized...oh it's not the school, it's me (all laugh)...and the school, the professors, it's not the classes or any of the professors, its not my, you know, classmates, they're not gonna come to where I am. Like I've got to step, I really have to pick this up. Um...and um so that so it was fun to be, to go back to your question about the transition, it was fun to be away from home, it was fun to be independent and on my own or sort of. Um...but it um... it was a bit of a bumpy ride, uh...academically.

Sarah: Yeah, we totally understand that (all laugh). Um...so...we're asking this to all the alums who were here before 2010. So you were a student at Holy Cross from 1988 to 1992?

Tim: Mhm

Sarah: Um...so what was happening in the world then? Whether that like that be related to LGBTQ issues or just anything that you think is pertinent?

Tim: Uh...what was happening? Uhm... lets see, well, President H. W. Bush, George H.W. Bush was the president for the four years I was here, he was elected in 88'. Uh...and it's funny uhm...you know we college students, or many of us, not all of us, but many of us as college students you know, found him to be very conservative and uhm...not particularly progressive and uhm we had no idea how good we had it (chuckles). Under a genuinely moderate republican President. Uhm...the republican party has shifted so far, they wouldn't even recognize Bush 41 as a republican today. So uhm...so anyway we had our republican president um...the...uh...the economy wasn't very good, it was um...struggling and most of the years I was here and by the time I graduated there, you know, it was not a thriving economy that we graduated out into. Uh, Worcester was a struggling city um...it was in, for many students, it was an unsafe city, you know physically unsafe. There was a lot of, uh it was not, we, we here on the campus were more or less isolated from the greater Worcester, except, except in certainly SPUD was a presence and all of those um...you know...um organized, school-organized, outreach efforts were in place for the homeless or people with disabilities or um...you know other social service areas but it was all, you sort of went under the wing of Holy Cross, did your business (chuckles) downtown, and you came back here. There wasn't a whole, there wasn't, you know there wasn't, I mean I've been in Worcester a little bit since then

and it's, wow, it's night and day. Um...so we didn't have, uh we were in a city but we weren't really, uh...we were physically in a city but we didn't have any, or we had very little...routine day-to-day connection with the city of Worcester. Uh...which is probably different from now. Um... that, is that good?

Sarah and Yadalis: Yeah, that's great .

Tim: I can't think of, I'm trying to think of anything else that was going on. Um...eh well, I'll see, I'll see what the other questions are before, I have other answers in my head but I'll see if it fits to another answer, (Yadalis chuckles) another question.

Yadalis: Alright, so um...the next set of questions are more about um...coming out and like being LGBT at HC um... we recognize that coming out isn't a one time event um...and we were just wondering.

Sarah: Can we backtrack for a sec, sorry, we just have these follow up questions.

Yadalis: Oh, sorry. (both interviewers giggle)

Sarah: So did the global context have an impact on your experience at Holy Cross?

Tim: Global context, um...

Sarah: I would say by global context just means like...the things that are going on outside of Holy Cross. Like in the world.

Tim: Yeah, um...I (laughs) the fact that I struggle to answer this question means probably not, um I guess not, not that um...not that I'm thinking, not as far as far as I'm thinking back on. Um...the Persian Gulf, the first Gulf War happened while we were here. Um...and that, there was a lot of attention on that while we were on campus. Um... but we were pretty safe and sound behind the gates, here then, I would say.

Sarah: Yeah, um, so what was Holy Cross like during that period? I would say more of like the social climate.

Tim: Um...what was Holy Cross like then? It um...it was not a very diverse place. Um...it um...well I'll start with the good news, the happy news. We had an awesome football team while I was here...the football team (both interviewers laugh and in background Sarah says "that's definitely different") only lost a handful of, maybe they lost, I don't know you can check the records, but maybe it was two or three times the whole, in the four years that we were here. So um...so that was...that was a lot of fun for everybody. Um...but having said that the school, a, the student body was very white, and from my, you know from my perspective was pretty, pretty affluent to very affluent. Um...very Catholic, very Irish, uh...very New England, um...there would, you know a heavy Massachusetts, heavy New York, some New Jersey, and then you might have one person

from California, one person from...Florida, maybe two from Florida. Um...my class was 700, of 700 students, people of color...I'll say 50 and that'd be high, I bet that's on the high end (slightly chuckles). Um...what else? And the, sort of, the elephant in the was...you know, was overwhelmingly straight. Um...and so I don't know whether this is another, whether to get into this now or later but in terms of, eh...well I guess I'll leave that there. Um...and socially it was um...a lot of drinking. Um, our, I don't know if still or of they've started doing it again but um... when we, the night before classes started in the fall was the Easy Street night. Um...and there were, you know, I came here as a totally naïve eighteen-year old, you know had never seen a party like that, eh I had never really seen a real party, let alone kegs up and down Easy Street.

Sarah: Oh my gosh (all laugh)

Tim: I'm serious, I'm not making this up, this isn't just like thinking back to the olden days, no seriously the kegs up and down Easy Street (all laugh). And...uh...you know parties on halls, um...parties up and down halls and um kids going to the hospital because of how much they drank, and not just a couple kids, like I don't know how many, but enough that I remember it 25 years later. Um...and...in fact, that was the last year that, as far as I know, I think that was the last year that that happened. The school shut that down. Um...

Sarah: Yeah, that's still shut down, definitely.

Tim: So...socially so it was hard, so everybody, I mean everyone finds they're niche, I suppose, but um...uh...there were, there was definitely a, you know when you have a lot of sameness um...along the lines of what I described, there's a lot of pressure to be same and... so um...you know and if you didn't really sign up for, if you weren't really um...you know, for students who...not to say that we were teetotalers but for students who didn't party a lot um...it, you know, I think socially we were pretty limited, looking back on it. But um...so I don't know how that compares to how it is now, but I would say that um...anyway.

Yadalis: So now going into coming out and being LGBT at HC, um, we recognize that coming out isn't a one-time event um...we were wondering when and how did you first come out?

Tim: Um...to anyone...or?

Sarah and Yadalis: Yeah to anyone. Professor Crist had told us that you described you came out "much later in life," right?

Tim: Yeah, I was 38. Um...yeah, and I guess to finish, to go back to the other question, to finish the thought on that. So there wasn't um...you know a...LGBT was not spoken, that was not an acronym that was spoken out loud at the time. Um...there were not, I noticed when I came in here I noticed, first thing when I walked in the door I saw the ally rainbow sticker and then I noticed that they're on all the doors here, does, there's...no

way. There was no rainbow flag, of any kind (laughs) that was...um...was flown or stuck on a door anywhere um...the rainbow flag was uh...would have been an alienating symbol. Um...we weren't ready for rainbow flags (laughs) when I was in school here. Uh...so anyway, uh I, first time I came out was to a woman who is still a very good friend of mine, a work colleague, we didn't work, we were um...we were colleagues of...I worked for the nature conservancy, which I still do, oh no sorry. It was at my old job, I was working for a U.S. Senator, Lincoln Chaffee and she was working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And um...we so we came in contact through work, um, became great friends and ultimately became such great friends and became so comfortable and I was in the right place mentally um...that she was the first person who I came out to. Um...and...it had...without going into all the details, it had, our friendship had come to a place where I had to either come out or pull the plug, we had come, you know, we were, our friendship had, by my being closeted we had, our friendship had gone to a dishonest place. Uh...and that was starting to, you know I could feel that was causing friction. And so...it was either lose the friendship or be totally honest and I...so valued the friendship that it pushed me to be honest. Um...and then but that was in probably 2000 [prepared to say another number]...so...yeah I said 38 but that conversation was earlier, that was probably 2004, so I was 34. Um...but, so I didn't, yeah I didn't start dating until 2008, and I came out to my family in 2009. So...I and Holy Cross friends who were, so in the middle, probably started in 2009 my college roommates in 2009.

Sarah: OK, great. Um, so when you were at HC did you personally identify as LGBT?

Tim: No...um...I don't think I had, it was not, my identity was not fully formed in my head, um, at the time. Uh...I mean, and uh...it wasn't fully formed in my head the attraction, you know same sex attraction was clear but I didn't really know what to do with it and there were no role models for how this worked...um socially. There were in and like wise when I, so coming from my home town was a lot like, you know the demographics of my home town were very much like the demographics of Holy Cross. And...so I had no examples then either um...I didn't have, there weren't any, you know the only, this sounds kind of like cliché, but the only who was gay in the 1980's was Boy George (laughs), you know, they were, there weren't, there really were no role models that I could relate to. Um...there were just, you know, there were some, the role models of the time tended to be a little extreme (chuckles). So...it, ok, so if that's gay and I'm not that well then I'm not gay, so. Um...well you just keep yourself busy at school and this will sort itself out eventually. That's what you tell yourself, that what I told myself. Um...so, um...and like I said there weren't, it's, so when I came to school there weren't...there were not, that I can remember, there were not broadly open same-sex relationships on campus. Certainly they had to of existed, but they were very discreet, I mean super discreet. I mean so it's not like, you know, you just didn't, if you were kinda clueless about relationships as I was, you know it's not like you would have a couple friends, not like I would have a guy friend who had a boyfriend or a female friend who had a girlfriend. You know I've said this kind of over and over again but there's this um...there wasn't a whole lot to draw on, so then, I then left here and went to Washington D.C. for

my first job...and wow my head almost exploded when I got to, what was, what is you know, a gay friendly city now, but was for it's time was also a gay friendly city in the early 90's. And I...Oh my god! I had no...uh...you know I saw things there that I didn't...(laughter)...I didn't even imagine before. Um...so...I forget now what the original question was, but did I relate, did I identify as LGBT at Holy Cross no...no I didn't and I didn't know how many other people did, I bet it was a handful. I know, looking back, I felt, I don't, I don't know that I processed this immediately but a couple of my friends came out, I would say, within the first year after graduation. And for those two guys, in retrospect, it feels like they came out as soon as they were out of the shadow of Holy Cross, as soon as they left Holy Cross, started they're careers, you know got an apartment, you know, in another city and then...you know, kind of went on from there. But um...but no one said anything about it when we were here at school.

Yadalis: So who would you consider was your support system at Holy Cross...in general?

Tim: In general? Um...you know, family from an hour away, and...um, you know I think the usual suspects. You know your roommates and close friends and...um...you know the Chaplain's office I think on occasion. Um...you know I was gonna say professors, sort of, but not really I didn't...I didn't have, now that I look at it, I don't think I had, you know, particularly close relationships with any professor. Um, I'm sort of envious. I feel like that's more common, maybe that's more common now, or maybe I just missed the boat when I was here. I don't know. But I can't remember, I can't remember keeping in touch with a single professor after I left Holy Cross. Not even like a little bit, not even in the first year. I was just, I was done. Um, you know, I have come back and I have seen professors from that, who I had in class since then. And it's nice to see them. And you know, connect and um, but not so much of the time. So I would say friends and family. Um, but really by the time we were seniors we had developed a really, small close circle of friends rather than, you know, there wasn't support broadly... it wasn't a broad support.

Sarah: Ok, great so um, were you involved in any teams or clubs or campus organizations while you were here?

Tim: Not really. I didn't play any sports; I guess I think I remember playing some intramural sports. I think I played intramural volleyball at some point. It was really all I could do to, you know, I think, um, it was really all I could do to keep up academically and, I felt, you know, I'm looking out now at the Library and thinking how many hours I spent in that building, how many nights I spent in that building, um how many Friday nights I spent in that building and how many Saturday mornings I was right back there. So anyway, that took up a lot of, really took a lot of time I would say, maybe not as much now, as is built up in my head but I feel like, you know, I read the alumni magazine and I read about students who are doing half a dozen things they're like you say they're academic rock stars, they're captain of at least one sport, they have an internet startup in their dorm room and [laughter] you know? And when they leave here they're practically half way to a Nobel prize by the time they graduate [laughter] and I'm like where do they get this, when do they have time for all of this? [laughter] We just never had the time! [laughter]

Sarah: Yeah I feel that too, sometimes though I'll hear about my friends doing things, all the things they're doing and I'll just be like wow, I'm very inadequate.

Yadalis: I agree 100% [laughter].

Tim: I mean I worked, I had work study jobs when I was here. I had to work otherwise I had no money whatsoever so I worked in Kimball when I was a freshman and then I worked in the Career Planning office the other three years I was here.

Yadalis: If you could do your Holy Cross experience over would you do anything differently?

Tim: Um

Sarah: It's a tough question.

Yadalis: Yeah that's a tough one.

Tim: Would I do anything differently? Um, well, having just complained about how much I studied I might have, um, taken a break, more of a bit of a break, here and there. Um, I think I would have tried, I would have risked a little more or not been so... um, I think we were, a lot of us were, afraid to make a mistake and so we, there was sort of afraid to make a mistake, and a fear of failure and I think I might if I had to do it over again I may have tried to shake those a bit and just tried more, or tried things in different ways. Um, what was I going to say? Although I remember there were times where there were, where I had a paper due or, you know, a bunch of reading to do or whatever was coming up and there were, I can remember times where a friend encouraged me... basically dragged me to either a speaker who was coming or a film that was being shown, um, and he had the foresight to know like this is important like you know the academic stuff is always going to be there but this is sort of a one-time thing and we should go to that and a couple of times I listened to him and it's not surprising that all this time later those, I remember those... I remember that movie, I remember that speaker and I don't remember [laughter] you know what I got on a paper first semester my junior year, I don't remember what classes I took, so I wish I had a little more of that perspective but as far and just to go back to take the question in terms of being out at school, I mean yeah... I less wish, I don't regret, I don't have regrets about not being out here but I am envious of students who are college-age now. Um, so I don't have anything to do over again because knowing and remembering what the atmosphere here was I would not have been ready to be a champion, to be outspoken, to be out, literally out there and that was what it would've had to have been like, I think and so knowing the atmosphere at the time I don't wish I handled that differently but I do, I am envious of college students in 2015 and the world that we live in versus the world that we lived in when I was here... it's just a hell of a lot easier [laughter] I think. I mean I am interested to know, you know, from you what is it like and we can do this after the interview or whatever, but I am curious to

know I mean I have the romanticized version of what things were like in the 90s and what they, it must be like now.

Sarah: Yeah, from what you're describing the campus climate has definitely changed and we can go into it more later

Sarah: So did you have any romantic relationships while you were on campus?

Tim: Not really, you know I always had a date for whatever the social event of the day was but it never really was more than that. It never really extended beyond that and I had, you know, I had lots of friends here but no I never, I can't remember anything that we'd recognize as dating [laughter]

Sarah: I'm curious; were there a lot of people dating, like, seriously on campus?

Tim: No...at least that's my memory of it. There were, um, there weren't, there were not a lot of any kind of dating. I vaguely remember that the school social commentary at the time was that there was no dating, there was less dating here than there had been for us generally in our high schools from wherever we came from. You know people came from sort of a typical at the time idea of dating in high school and then everyone came here and just... I don't know everyone slammed on the breaks [laughter] um, so no there wasn't. It was a pretty... what's the word for it... conservative is one word or um, I can't think of the right word... I remember by comparison other schools that I either visited um, with friends or with family members, family members or friends who went to school elsewhere than I went to visit and the climate was I would say the climate was looser in other places than it was here and it was to the point of what was probably normal, appeared scandalous from the Holy Cross looking out. The rest of the world seemed scandalous [laughter].

Yadalis: Do you think that the Jesuit identity and the environment of Holy Cross affected your view of your sexuality?

Tim: Do I think that what?

Yadalis: The Jesuit identity of Holy Cross affected your view of your sexuality?

Tim: Yeah I think so, I'm sure of it. I don't remember it, you know, I don't remember the school or the Jesuits being overtly anti-gay, I don't remember that at all as a message from here but it was, it was more that LGBT people were just simply not acknowledged... the existence of LGBT people was not acknowledged, um, and so it's not like I went to you know an especially overtly repressive school, I'm not saying that but I'm saying that there was zero in a way of support or self-discovery or a, you know, a look outside to what was going on, what was starting to happen in the world around us. So yeah, I think the fact that this was a Catholic school certainly, it didn't help although, we didn't see, in my view as a Catholic it wasn't until, really wasn't until the mid-90s, so a few years later,

when same-sex marriages became a thing that the church and other conservative organizations had something to push back on and push back really hard on. So at the time no one was advocating for marriage when I was here, I don't remember that anyway. So it was sort of just status quo it was really you don't bring it up, no one else is going to bring it up. Just sort of hush, hush. But once it, once issues started to come to the forefront and started to push toward the mainstream then the rhetoric, in my view, from the church from the conservative bishops got cranked up and so I, in my own journey the church's position was more a factor later on for me because I don't think I was ready when I was at this Catholic school anyway so I can't, I wouldn't say "oh, I was repressed by the church and therefore I didn't come out." I can't say that. It was, it was later on for me that that was influential.

Sarah: So it was just very heteronormative in general so it didn't help you?

Tim: Yeah and it was so heteronormative, as you said, that that wasn't even a term [laughter] it was just you know normal. Heteronormative equals normal, there was normal and not normal [laughter] so yeah exactly.

Sarah: Ok, so that's the wrap up of your experience questions but now we're gonna do some looking back sort of questions. So based on your experience what advice would you offer to LGBTQ students who are struggling to come out at Holy Cross, if you have any?

Tim: It's ok to be struggling and you, um, and this is your story and you get to own your own story, I hope... that doesn't always work out that way some people are forced out and I have to think that's painful. It's scary enough when you are in the driver seat of it, I can't imagine being blind-sided or being outed so, setting that aside, it's okay to struggle and you, and do your best to keep ownership of your story and your journey. You don't owe anybody an explanation, you don't owe anybody. You should come out when you're ready but having said that, the conversation is way scarier in your head than it is in real life [laughter] and that goes for a lot things but I had that conversation in my head for a long time, for probably 10 years and that's a long time to have something on your mind everyday [laughter] and not come to a resolution of it. I wish I had known, I wish I had know how supportive my family was going to be and how supportive my friends were going to be and how not at all a big deal it was ultimately going to be and how quickly I would get to a point. But it was always scary, you know, it was scary the first time I told anybody, then it was scary the first time I told my family, then it was scary the first time I told Holy Cross friends and then it was scary at work but you get this certain momentum and you get to a point where you know you've made it. I feel like I knew I had gotten to where I needed to be when I really became sick of my own story so I became sick of telling my own story [laughter], um so, and that's all I suppose that's all well and good. I mean there are definitely going to be cases, I know there are people for whom their families are not going to be supportive, I was lucky to have support at home and I'm really grateful to my family for being so great and what the great place we've all gotten to, that my partner and his daughter and my family are all just kind of in sync and you know, I would say even those heartbreaking cases where a family is not ready, our

friends are not ready, and there's going to be break up and loss, well, the alternative is to just have that conversation keep going on in your head and that's not sustainable, you know, and I mean that's easy for me to say but I have to think you know, you have to push through it and if there is collateral damage along the way well then that's sometimes how it has to be and hopefully it will get better, hopefully the relationships will mend themselves going forward, but um.

Sarah: Great thanks. Last one.

Tim: Ok

Sarah: So can you share a story with us about a moment when, well you didn't personally identify as LGBT, but when being LGBT impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross so maybe just something in the back of your mind? Or?

Tim: There is this... there was this.... just so I understand the question, so it's not about me but about... what was the question again? Sorry. (laughter)

Sarah: The question we have is can you share a story about a moment when being LGBTQ impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross but that doesn't quite apply to you...

Tim: Yeah so no I wouldn't really have a good story for that. I do remember a student who was a friend of mine who went down, who got beat up, got mugged, hurt pretty badly in downtown Worcester and I don't know the circumstances, I wasn't there. I know it wasn't, it was barely spoken about which has always put in the back of my mind...so what exactly went down when that person got hurt and why couldn't we talk about it? And why was it so quiet and I mean this is unfair of me to speculate but off the top of my head I wonder if there wasn't a gay part of that story... whether he was with someone or meeting someone and he and or they you know, were singled out, were attacked. I don't know if that's what happened but it just, all these years later it's just curious to me that if it had been a simple mugging we would have had the story as like "oh poor so and so got mugged can you believe that?" it was all just suddenly went quiet and I felt like he, I don't know this but I feel like he... whether him, I know there are cases like this where in that situation you can't talk about violence that was done to you without coming out in some way or without the fear or risk of coming out and so that's an example of just how scary it is and you can't even seek adequate justice for a crime done to you because, because you're so conscious of staying at least... you know you want to keep at least three degrees of separation between yourself and gay [laughter] and so I don't know if that's a fair story for the archives because I don't know that that happened but I, that's just my opinion and that has been my suspicion all this time that there was an aspect of that story that could not be shared.

Sarah: Great, thank you for sharing that. Um, so for the last part here we're just going to ask you if you're willing to identify or, sorry tell, if you self-identify, I'm doing this really badly, what you self-identify in these categories. Your gender identity?

Tim: Male

Sarah: Your sexuality?

Tim: Gay

Sarah: Racial ethnic background?

Tim: White

Sarah: Your current or former occupation, well your current occupation?

Tim: Real estate specialist for the Nature Conservancy.

Sarah: Great, thank you.