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A Conversation with Joe Sasso

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**GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project
Conversation with Joe Sasso (class of 1975)
April 22, 2015**

Conducted by Halle Lopez and Sam Zurn

Location: Holy Cross campus

Length: 48 minutes

Keywords: adulthood, alum, Catholic Church, college, cycling, family, friendship, gay couple, marriage, the 1970s, Vietnam War

Transcript:

Sam: Alright, this is, uh, Sam Zurn, Class of 2015.

Halle: Halle Lopez, Class of 2017.

Joe: And Joe Sasso, Class of '75.

Sam: And today we are conducting an interview with, uh, Joe Sasso as part of our Intro to LGBT Studies class. Um, today is, uh, Wednesday April 22nd, 2015. Ah, we are currently in Williams Hall, um ... and we are about to get started.

Halle: So, um, how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

Joe: I decided to come to Holy... This goes way back now!.. I decided to come to Holy Cross because I wanted a liberal arts education and I wanted it in a small college environment, and I was very attracted to Holy Cross for that reason.

Sam: Ok, and what was your transition from high school to the college life...on Ho- on the Holy Cross campus?

Joe: ...Well... there really wasn't much transition, it just kinda happened and it was uh... I showed up here on a, on a Saturday and uh and life just started. And back then um ... we we, came to Holy Cross maybe with a TV and that was about it and um uhh really didn't have much of an issue and it was certainly a few of my classmates, you know, who didn't quit make it. Saw a few that had problems with binge drinking and all that, but I really didn't have much of a problem.

Sam: Did you come from like a Catholic, or like an all-male high school?

Joe: No, not at all and the fact that, that Holy Cross was all male when I entered really wasn't something that, that I was ... I had much, much issue with nor was it really much in my conscience. Um, the year after I, I arrived is when Holy Cross went co-ed.

Sam: Oh!

Joe: So seventy-two, my sophomore year, uh, was when the first females arrived.

Hallei: So kind of being a student at Holy Cross from like I think 1971 to 1975.

Joe: Seventy-one to seventy-five.

Hallei: ...Five, yeah. How was the world like? Outside of campus or...?

Joe: Well the world was, was still very much in...in a focus and a turmoil about Vietnam. And everything was, was kinda tied to that. Um in seventy, when I was still in high school was when Kent, was when the, the um the murders at Kent... the shootings at Kent State occurred and the country was very divided at that point in time between uh people who were pro Vietnam and supporting the war and a significant part of the population that was opposing the war. Um one of the first things that occurred during my freshmen year that I very, very vividly remember is that we had the, the draft lottery.

Sam: Wow.

Joe: And uh everybody got their, their, their draft number. The draft was, was broadcasted on, on the college radio station and they pulled a number and it would be a low number and you'd hear um someone from someplace in the dorm kinda scream. And we did have several members from my class who um ... did have low numbers and ended up being, being drafted and left college because of that.

Sam: Wow.

Hallei: Mmm.

Joe: Yeah, it was a, it was a...a dramatic time from that perspective.

Sam: And how did, how do you think that affected students on campus? I mean was there kind of like a fear of getting drafted?

Joe: Uh, before the, the lottery. Uh, there was a big build up to that. It...there was a lot of newspaper articles on campus and off campus, and there, and there were certainly people who were very concerned about, about the possibility of getting drafted and sent to Vietnam. Seventy-one was the first year that college deferments were. I believe it was the first year that college deferments were uh were eliminated. So, we like I said we had people out of the class uh who ended up going, and the, and, and the whole issue of Vietnam just hung over the campus.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: It was, it was...it was probably the, the biggest issue that we all kinda faced. Obviously well before internet and well before any, any easier way to get information, so it was all radio, TV, and, and newspaper.

Sam: Yeah, when you describe like that there was like a Holy Cross...How would you describe the Holy Cross atmosphere beyond that context, or would that be primarily how you...describe it?

Joe: That's probably the uh, the, the biggest uh... uh context of Holy Cross. Uh, I remember in one point, I think it was my freshmen year, where uh, where uh, the Navy, I think it was the Navy or the Air Force ROTC wanted to recruit on campus and there was a big, big turmoil over the fact that the military recruiters were coming on campus.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Um protest and the, and the sort. It, it really, it really engulfed the whole campus.

Sam: And what about sentiments? Cause you were here kinda at a ground-breaking time when the first female class entered Holy Cross. How is, how did that kinda play out?

Joe: Um, the way ... that played out was, was, the, the, it, it did change, it changed very fundamentally the way that the male students on campus acted um...my freshman year, all male, it was very much of a, a, of a kind of a casual atmosphere. As soon as the females arrived, and, and, Holy Cross I think did it right in that it wasn't just a few females, it was a significant portion of the class of seventy-six.

Sam: Hmm.

Joe: Um, and what it, what it did was from a standpoint just of the way people dressed, it, it for significant portions of the population it raised their, their, the way they dressed and kinda the way they acted it, it changed in in many ways the, the way that people operated on campus. Gone were...what we saw our freshmen year, which was incredible. Um, they had the various donors who had mixers and there were bars in every dorm.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And the, uh, Wheeler would have a mixer and there would be busloads of females from other campuses. Bused on campus...let's say at four o'clock on a Saturday night. And they would, and then the buses would then go back at two in the morning. And um everyone would gather as the females get off the bus, and, and, many of the males would decide which females they were interested in.

Sam: [laughter] Interesting.

Joe: Yes.

Sam: [laughter]

Hallei: Ok, um so...Kind of recognizing that coming out isn't a onetime event, um when did you first come out?

Joe: I came out, very late. I came out um when I was forty-five. Um and until, until, until that point I had what was...what is a very common kind of a um evolution uh for many um older gay males. Of going through and getting married to a woman, having kids, and then recognizing or deciding that it...that just really wasn't what I was all about. Um, and so I went through an, an evolution, um, to make that determination. During that time of kinda making that determination, uh, I'm a bike rider. Long-distance bike rider.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And I did six AIDS rides from Minneapolis to Chicago, um, and um during that, that also gave me an opportunity to, to interact with some people and, and I actually talked to people who'd gone through that same kind of life-changing activity or, or um, life-changing um, um evolution that that I was going through so, so it was, it was forty-five when I came out and that effectively ended my straight marriage.

Sam: Right ... So you were [chuckle], clearly at forty-five you were not out at Holy Cross, or at your time at Holy Cross [chuckles].

Joe: There was, there was very, very, very few people who were out at Holy Cross in 1971 to 1975.

Sam: Right.

Joe: Um, I certainly could count them on one hand, um, and they ... and they all seemed to be, uh...they all were in Mullydy.

Hallei: [Chuckle]

Joe: ... You know, um, and most of them were...were...at that time it wasn't a major...It was kind of a minor, but they were all in the Theater Arts Department too.

Sam: And how did you know... how... were they self-identified you know as, as gay?

Joe: Yes.

Sam: Ok.

Joe: But as I, as I said before, um in in the seventies you couldn't spell gay at Holy Cross as it was.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: It was so far underground.

Sam: Was it on your radar at all when you were at Holy Cross? Or did it, it wasn't even something that really crossed your mind?

Joe: No, it wasn't on the radar all.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: You know and uh, uh the point that... my closest friend at Holy Cross, from Holy Cross today was one of my roommates, uh and he is gay... and he and his partner and my husband and I are close friends. And

Sam: No way!

Joe: We did not talk about it during the two years that we were roommates. At all!

Sam: And do you think it was in a similar situation like he had no idea either? Or have you had that conversation ever?

Joe: We...we haven't really had that conversation, um, but it, it was just, um, it, it was just something that we never went there. When were here, we haven't when there since but we're close friends. Um but uh... I, I wasn't in a position that I was, that that I was going to come out to him and he wasn't in a position clearly to come out to me.

Sam: Right...For those, the few students that were out during your time there do you feel like they were treated much differently on campus? Was there a lot of discrimination towards them?

Joe: My sense is that there was a little bit of discrimination towards, towards them um but I didn't see anything...not that I was looking for it, but I didn't see anything that was blatant. Um my understanding I've said in a few forums who actually had people from various classes talk about their experiences at Holy Cross. That we went through in the eighties and maybe even into the early nineties, a period where there was very significant discrimination against students who were identified as gay on campus.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Um, but I didn't see any of that when I was here. Not, it may have, it may have existed.

Sam: Right.

Joe: But I didn't really see it.

Sam: Ok.

Hallei: Um, were you involved in any sports, teams, clubs, or campus organizations?

Joe: I was involved in a number of clubs um like...purp. I, the one that I was most involved was Purple Key. I was, uh, chairman of the par-of the parents' weekend. Um, and I was, was involved in a number of activities through the Purple Key.

Sam: And what about, um, your support system at Holy Cross, or kind of like your friend network...what did that kind of look like for you?

Joe: Um, there were three friends who were, extremely, that I was extremely close with. Uh, one of them is...was my roommate for two years who we just talked about. Uh, and the other were two other guys that, uh, um were close friends, um, I still see them once in a while. I'll probably see them at reunion.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Um but short of that it's just emails, kind of contact now, but, but we...almost always together for uh, for dinners, and for going out for drinks and what, and whatever.

Sam: And was there uh like a kind of coming out period with those friends from Holy Cross ever? Or did it kinda just...

Joe: No, it, it... not at all it was just, it, at the point when I ah, uh, when I came out. I...I, I think that I just, uh, I just probably called each of them and said: "Uh, I've broken up with my, with my wife..."

Sam: Right.

Joe: "Um, and uh and I'm now living by myself, and I have a boyfriend."

Sam and Hallei: [laughter]

Sam: "How are you?" [laughter]

Joe: That's right. [laughter]

Sam: And was there any sense of, um... uh surprise from them? Or like wh-what was that kind of like?

Joe: No, it wasn't, it wasn't a case of, um, surprise it was it wa-was, it was the same reaction I got when I came out to my son: "So what?"

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: You know, it was ok. So...and, and "what was the weather yesterday?"

Sam: Yeah, “what’s next?” [laughter].

Joe: And I was just kind of...exactly.

Sam: That’s great.

Hallei: Mm, I don’t know, I mean did your involvement, involvement in any of these groups like Purple Key Society you said...

Joe: Mhm.

Hallei: Like any of those groups impact your experience at Holy Cross kind of ...the

Joe: Oh definitely, yeah I mean it...It, it, it’s kind of interesting because, I had my group of friends we just talked about, and none of them were involved in like Purple Key.

Hallei: Mhm.

Joe: Um and one or two of the things that I was kind of involved in, because I tend to be an organizer. Um and... my, those three friends tend not be organizers (chuckles). They tend not to be joiners, where I tend to be more of a joiner. So, I utilized Purple Key and a couple of the clubs I was involved with as, as a way for me to be able to kind of interact with other people and do what I wanna do which is kind of organize things and, and get events going and, and the sort, but! At that point there was, there were no activities on campus related to uh to uh to gay students. At all, I mean it didn’t it, it didn’t exist, and Purple Key gave me opportunity president’s, uh parents’ weekend and I don’t know if it’s still exactly this way, parents weekend was a big weekend on campus. With uh the dinner in the Field House, with where it was packed, with a big orchestra, and a big fancy dinner. There was a lot of kind of orga-organizational kinda things around that. And I enjoy that kind of thing and that gave me opportunity to kinda do those kinda things which I still kinda get involved with today.

Sam: Ok. This is a big one: If you could do, a=uh, your Holy Cross experience over, would you do anything differently?

Joe: I guess the...that question has to be answered in the context of, is...was Holy Cross when I do it over the same place that I, that I, now or the same place that was that back then, or is it sorta like it is now because if it’s the same place it was back then, um...you always look with the path taken versus the path not taken.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And, and in my life that that divergence was, was making the decision to get married to a woman and how did, how did I get to that path versus some other path where perhaps I would’ve come out earlier.

Sam: Right.

Joe: Um, and to, to that extent, I don't see where, where if, if we look at the Holy Cross seventy-one to seventy-five where my experience would've been much different even if I'd come out at Holy Cross.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: E-e-even if I had made that decision, which I didn't, clearly. But if I'd made that decision, I don't see where Holy Cross would've been that much different. And I my perception is that even if I had been out to to my friends on campus that, that wouldn't have had a significant impact on who I associated with or what I did on campus.

Sam: Ok.

Joe: And, and part of it because, because again the whole thing about, about gayness was so underground.

Hallei: Mm.

Sam: Right.

Joe: So like, but... [mumbles] and I don't believe that I would've been discriminated against in a significant way if I'd come out on campus.

Sam: Yeah, and what do you mean by it was so underground?

Joe: It, it didn't, it, there was no activities related to it.

Sam: Right.

Joe: Um, there, it was uh, um...

Sam: Secretive?

Joe: It was, yeah, it was very secretive. It just didn't, it just...it wasn't in the consciousness of the campus.

Sam: Ok.

Joe: Again, as we started off, the consciousness of the campus was all about what was going on in Southeast Asia.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: And the, and the impact that significantly tore up the country from the, uh, the from sixty, sixty-six, sixty-seven onward and seventy-one was just kind the end of that. Um, I do remember very vividly, uh, with my three friends being in downtown Worcester, when the negotiated peace went into effect.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And, uh, and that was a big thing for us, and that was, that was probably seventy-two? Um, seventy-one, the end of seventy-one or early seventy-two I don't remember the exact date but, but, but that was a big day because now we, we could get beyond that. We then went from the, on campus, in the next big thing which was Watergate.

Sam: Right.

Hallei: Mhm.

Joe: Which was the next consuming activity. Um the TVs in in ...in Hogan were, were on the Watergate hearings for months and you were either, you were either in class, in the library, or watching Watergate on the TV.

Hallei: Mm.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: You know, and so that was the other, the next consuming event. So, much of the time I was here it was events off campus that were, were, were impacting the campus as opposed to something that was happening on campus having such, such a significant impact.

Sam: Right. So if you, ok, you kinda posed this question when you first answered it. If you could go and do Holy Cross right now, do you think your i- your gay identity would shape how you experienced four years at Holy Cross?

Joe: Yeah, definitely. I mean I, I, I just think that, that what, with the, the environment that exists today, may have put me in a position to have actually been comfortable admitting and coming out...

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Back then, where it was, it was underground on campus and it was underground in this Italian boy from Massachusetts too, and uh it so, it wa- it wasn't in the consciousness of the campus and wasn't in the consciousness of me. It was underground. If, if the campus was in a different environment maybe that would've given me that opportunity as well.

Sam: Right.

Hallei: So, did you have any romantic relationships at Holy Cross? Like any girlfriends, did you meet your ex-wife here or?

Joe: No, I had vir- I had virtually no romantic experiences on campus and any that I did have which would have been with a female, was was totally un, um, uh...un-remember able [chuckles]. So it, it, yeah, it, it was, and that was very, it, it...in the first year it was being up with the, with the bus loads arrived.

Hallei and Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And I did that a couple of times, and, and made the decision that, that really wasn't something that I was interested in. Uh, and consequently with my three close friends, we all just kind of um ... withdrew from all that stuff and, and, and would hang out together. Uh, and of the, of the four, the other two are straight and are married to women. So it, it wa- it, there was, there was nothing amongst our, us as a group. But we just hung out together, we, we, we did, we did meals together, watched movies together, went to bars together, um. So that, that was the, that was the core, um, friend group if you will, when I was on campus.

Sam: Right, and did that, did you see that trend change quickly after you graduated? Like would did, did all four of you, or any of you kind of transition into romantic relationships after leaving Holy Cross, or was it still kind of like, uh...

Joe: It was...

Sam: Delayed process?

Joe: It was a delayed process for, for all of us.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And, and I don't know how that was, if we, we were kind of became friends because we were in the same kind of, even though with not necessarily all with women or with men. Were in the same kind of um environment but, but none of us got married or um early on. It...

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: And in all four cases, it was...I was probably the first, yeah I was the first to get married and that was probably eight years after Holy Cross. And, um, that was, that was what, why, why I married my, my ex-wife. Um, and every, and all the other three, well the two that married women, it was later than that, it was late eighties. So it was at least ...ten to twelve years out of Holy Cross.

Sam: And would you say your friend group was in the minority in the sense that you weren't, you weren't having romantic relationships or serious relationships, like was there...

Joe: Yeah, I would, I would say so. I would...I would say that, that if there was a consciousness level...about, about same-sex, uh, friendships, we, we may have been tagged as being, being a group of gay guys. But, we weren't tagged as that because it was so far un-...not in everyone's consciousness.

Sam: Right.

Joe: You know, which is kind of an interesting kind of, uh, uh, twist.

Sam: Yeah, yeah.

Joe: Because we, because we did everything together. I mean, when, when Holy Cross, I don't know what year it was. Seventy-four, or seventy-three? When Holy Cross was in the Madison Square Garden tournament, the four of us drove down to New York, we went to the games, and then we drove back. Uhh, we went to, uh we went to in the summer we would go to Maine, or we would go to Tanglewood or we would do something. So we were all, even though one was from Connecticut, one was from Rhode Island and two of us were from Massachusetts, we did everything together.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: You know.

Sam: That, essentially, was the relationship [laughter] of the college experience.

Joe: Exactly, right.

Sam: Great.

Hallei: Um, do you think the Jesuit identity in the Holy Cross, um, kind of shaped your, or affected your own sexuality here or?

Joe: Hmm that's a good question. Um...I would say...no, because I, I would say that my, kind of my views on sexuality pre-Holy Cross and my views on sexuality post-Holy Cross kind of evolved without really having a significant Jesuit spin to it. Umm, but what I would say that, that is kind of interesting along those lines is that my core group would, three of us were Catholic, and with three of the four of us that were Catholic would go to daily mass. And it was always Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday it was the eleven o'clock mass at night, which was downstairs in the Mary Chapel. So, from that perspective, I guess the Catholic and the Jesuit, uh, influence did exist, uh, but uh, but I, I don't think that it, that it really, developed-was part of developing my, my, uh, sexuality...to the extent where now, now fast forward thirty-nine and a half years, since in June we had our fortieth, uh, I have no relationship with the Catholic church at this point. Now my, my, uh, my friend who's gay, who was in the class evolved differently because he does have a very close, uh...he, he is very close to the church; he and his partner are.

My partner and I, my husband and I, are not. So I...the bottom line is, I wouldn't say that, that the Jesuit tradition, or the Catholic tradition at Holy Cross had any influence on my sexuality before, during, or after Holy Cross.

Sam: And were you, were you raised in a Catholic, you said Italian family?

Joe: Yes.

Sam: Were you raised a Catholic?

Joe: I was, I was raised in a Catholic family, but I was raised in a Catholic family which went to church on Sunday, not one that, because there are some, that had, went to daily mass. I kind of evolved into daily mass when I was on campus, and that became a bigger support group, uh, because, because beyond my core group, a lot of our friends went to daily mass.

Sam: Right.

Joe: But...that became a uh, uh, a group from, a group to associate with, as I look back on it, not something which, where mass was the core to, to the activity, even though it all revolved around mass.

Sam: Right. And so now, does that ever come up with you and your partner about the - you said currently it doesn't play a role in your life, but has that ever been something you kind of thought about and re-visited, and thought of if your spirituality and your sexuality would be something that would develop, or come into play?

Joe: It just, it, my, my husband is not Catholic.

Sam: Right, ok.

Joe: And it's just something, he was not raised in a very religious family, Protestant family, not very religious, and it's just something which, which we haven't addressed at all, um, and quite frankly, personally, when I came out...I made the conscious decision that, that based on the way that the Catholic Church was treating same-sex partners, and gay people in general, was not something that I was very pleased with, and so, I made the decision that that was not where I wanted to spend time or effort. Now, when I, when my roommate and his partner come up to visit us, which they do three or four times a year, they end up going to mass.

Sam: Right.

Joe: And they go to mass and they come back. The only time I'm, the only time I go to a Catholic Church at this point is for a funeral or a wedding.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: It's just kind of the way we've evolved.

Sam: Right. Um, I want to, I'm going to hop back to the, uh, the romantic relationship question.

Joe: Sure.

Sam: Um, and I'm wondering if, again, in looking back, um, maybe in a relationship with a woman or in a relationship with a man is there anything that you would have wished you'd known? And I suppose if it was with a woman, maybe it was that [laughter] your gay identity, but, um, what do you think?

Joe: Anything that I wished I'd known?

Sam: Yeah, kind of like in entering your romantic life.

Joe: I'm really not sure how to answer that, um...May-maybe...if, if I draw the contrast between, between with a woman and with a man.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: I guess, if I had allowed myself to accept my true sexuality, as opposed to being dominated by what was supposed to be the way an Italian boy operates, I, perhaps I would have...undoubtedly if I had allowed that to occur I would not have ended up in the relationship I ended up with. But, then I wouldn't have the two great kids that I have, so that's kind of the interesting counterbalance to all of this.

Sam: Right. Um, so then for any, um, what would be a piece of advice you might give to an LGBT person who is navigating romantic relationships, in your experience?

Joe: It's real simple, but it's very difficult.

Sam: Ok.

Joe: And that's be honest with yourself. It's, that's the bottom line. Now, sometimes the difficulty is that you don't really know where the truth is. I've kind of settled at this point. So you're, you're in an evolution it's, it's not a static kind of thing. But during that whole point, during that whole evolution, just be as honest with yourself as you can be.

Sam: Mhm. So even, in the context of like, you have, um, two openly gay, or LGBT people navigating a relationship, it still comes down to that honesty, even if you are, you know both of your identities.

Joe: That's right. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Sam: That's a good value.

Hallej: Um, do you have any, like, advice for, um, LGBTQ-identified students who are, like, struggling to come out? Or would it kind of like be the same...idea?

Joe: Yeah...I think I may have said this before in the context of one of the questions, um, the whole coming out process...is everybody has a unique story. And there's...I kind of look at it like a balloon, and there are pressure points in various spots on a balloon and when you press in one area, it kind of comes out in another area. Coming out process, I think, is very much like that in that, in that there's all kinds of pressures from family, um, from friends, from potential romantic partners, which, which move a person from point A to point B. And that struggle is not easy, so number one we have to admit that, that that struggle is not easy, which says that we have to be willing to open up, to be honest, but also to seek advice in a non-threatening way. And I think that's one of the things that I see with, with what's happened on campus, that, is so positive compared to where we were forty years ago in that, there are levels of support systems that exist. Some of it is just the fact that there are, there are other students on campus who may be are going through the same struggle, or have gone through that struggle, or gone through that evolution, so you've got, you've got people to talk to. Back forty years ago, like I said, I had a roommate who was gay, and I knew I was gay. I mean, yeah, deep down I knew I was gay, and I'm sure he did too. But we never once talked about it.

Sam: Yeah.

Joe: You know, we never once talked about it. Even to the point that when I came out, to [roommate's name] and his partner, [roommate's name] first denied that I was gay.

Sam: Really?

Joe: And, and his partner was the one who said, "[Roommate's name]! They're gay!" [laughter]. So, but everyone goes through it in a different way. So, again, the, the point is that, that take advantage of all those support systems that exist, whether those support systems exist within the college, within the Catholic Church, or outside of either of those two. Most support systems that exist, that you have the opportunity to take advantage of, the more you can, can become the full, the real person that you are.

Sam: And this is kind of a variation off that question, you may-could very well have a similar answer, um, but what type of advice would you offer LGBT seniors who are about to make the transition from college life, you know, to the real world life and into the professional workforce?

Joe: Um...Don't, first off don't deny who you are.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Ok, uh, because if you, if you deny who you are in, let's talk the business world first. If you deny who you are as you go into the business world, it then becomes another transition from who

you are to, to, um, uh, to, to, from, from who you are as a business person, to, to who you are really. So if you deny it going in, you, you're gonna have to make that transition at some point.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: Um...we're certainly in, in 2015, we're in much better position than where we were five years ago, ten years ago, or fifteen years ago, from the business world and the way that the business community operates, whether we're talking about Massachusetts, or Alabama, and I do business in Alabama.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: So even in, even, wherever you are in the, in the country, we're in a better business position, so, don't deny, don't deny who you are. Because when you do, and I, and I lived this for many years, when you do, whether it's in a business world, or in a personal world, you end up - and I always get this, I always have difficulty with this world...you end up having to compartmentalize...your life. And, that becomes a juggle, and that juggle, whether it's personal or it's business, becomes, can become difficult. Now, you can navigate that. I navigated that for twenty years, uh, but it's not easy. So, the advice is, be yourself as you, as you leave campus in whatever environment that you are, we're in a much better position today than we were five years ago, and hopefully at the end of June, we'll be in a better - with the Supreme Court ruling - we will be in a better position than we are even today. And so, all of those things just build on allowing people to be who they really are.

Sam: And would you say, for you, kind of reaching that point of, you know, be who you really were, um, you spoke earlier at the beginning of the interview about, like, the bike rides, which sounds like those were kind of like some times of personal reflection, but were there, were there other almost kind of like tipping points? Or was it a culmination of, like you were saying, having to compartmentalize these different aspects of your life? Or like, what kind of helped you reach that point?

Joe: The bike rides - the AIDS rides helped, uh, because what they, what they did was they gave me an opportunity to be in a, in a, kind of a different safe environment, even though everybody on the AIDS ride wasn't gay.

Sam: Right.

Joe: But, but there was a significant portion of, of people on the ride who, who were. So that gave me an opportunity, uh, it also gave me an opportunity to interact with some people who became friends. Um...beyond that...just from personally...as, as that, as I moved through that evolution, I came to the realization that, that, at the end of, at the end of the kids growing and leaving the house, I looked at what, what my life was going to be, and said that that's not what I wanted...to evolve to. And so that's when we, when I made the decision to, that I needed to come out and, and end the marriage.

Sam: Mhm.

Joe: But it's, it was, it's like, it kind of comes back to the same theme, it, it's being honest with yourself, and how you get to being honest with yourself. And it took me...if we say the conscious, if the struggle started at say, fifteen, it took me thirty years to go through that.

Sam: Right

Joe: And it took my husband thirty minutes to go through that [laughter]. You know, and so everybody goes through it in a different kind of way, you know, and uh, sometimes I look at it and say, ok - and we've talked about this - so I didn't have the backbone. Now...that's a negative kind of connotation, but that's, but, but some of that is family related, some of that's church related, some of that's - there's lots of things, again, those pressure points on the balloon, ultimately, you want, you need to become who you really are.

Sam: Right.

Hallei: Would you, like, kind of consider some of the friends you made in the, uh, bike rides kind of, like, they kind of became like a support group afterwards?

Joe: Yeah, some of them did. Uh, and it's interesting because, uh, one of the guys who was actually my tent mate, who was straight, at the time was not married, he was divorced. Uh, and for, I did six AIDS rides and for four of them he was my tent mate. And we would ride together, and we rode together separate from that. We rode together a lot, because separate from the AIDS rides, that was, that was where I, that was my recreation, that was my, uh, what I, what I did a lot of. Um, when I came out to him...the relationship ended...which was really kind of strange, and we didn't say anything, it just kind of ended, because he just wasn't comfortable, even though we didn't have a conversation about that, it became very obvious, he just wasn't comfortable. And that's, those things exist. Now, those, those things are always going to exist, but, but from my perspective that was a good relationship, even though it ended. But, if the relationship's not built on, I'm not sure if reality is the right word, if the relationship's not built on who you really are...

Sam: Honesty.

Joe: Then, then maybe it's, it's in a sense a bit of a false relationship. Not saying that I didn't want to have that friend, that bike rider, and again, for four years we did the AIDS rides together and we were tent mates. Uh, but as soon as I came out, he was really uncomfortable with that. We probably rode once or twice after that, and then I'd call and he was busy, which was never the case before, and it just became obvious. So, you know, life's a, life's a tr - life's not a straight line. It, it's you know, it's a path, and so those kind of things are going to happen.

Sam: Yeah, that sounds like one of them, um, but were there any other significant challenges that you've faced since coming out?

Joe: This sounds kind of strange, but it's actually pretty simple. Uh, we live in Chicago at the time, my parents, who are now both deceased, my parents, uh, still lived in Massachusetts, and I flew home and we had the weekend and I told them what happened, and they said that they loved me, like almost immediately, which is what everybody who comes out wants really to have happen with their family - doesn't always happen.

Sam: Right.

Joe: And it doesn't, sometimes it happens, but it takes a while to happen, it happened real quickly there. When I came out to my, to my children the, the comment was, "So what?" I mean it literally was, "So what?" So that was very simple as well, um, I effectively, and I worked in an old line manufacturing organization, where I had worked, for the time, probably twenty-five years - I finally retired there after thirty-two years - and I just made the, I didn't proclaim it, I just didn't deny it. And, we would have events...business events, and I began bringing my, my boyfriend, who's now my husband. And, there was never an issue, other than one or two events where I probably been invited to, but because I had a, a male partner as opposed to a female partner, and my, my, that's a challenge, but my, my view on that was, that's the issue of the other person, that's not my issue.

Sam: Right.

Joe: I'm not going to worry about that. Now, maybe if I was in the third year of my career, or my first year of my career, and something like that happened, it would be, it would have appeared to be more of a challenge, but I was secure in my job, and I was secure in my sexuality at that point, so I said, "I'm not going to care about that." But that could have been a challenge; it wasn't in my case. Uh, beyond that...I haven't denied it, like I said, I do a lot of business in Alabama. The people I do business with in Alabama all know it, and I've never had an issue down there either. I mean, I do know people who have had issues, not necessarily there, but in, in business, um, but I, I've been very fortunate in that regard.

Sam: On the flip side of that, what's something, maybe what's, um, a success that you've personally experienced since coming out, or like, even you and your partner have experienced together?

Joe: Well, one success is, um, because of the Holy Cross gay...lesbian... uh, bi, transgender, queer - whatever, however you lay those letters together [laughter] - um, alumni group, uh, we came to the organizing meeting, and um, uh, actually we were in meetings before the organizing meeting, but at the organizing meeting we met, um, uh a guy from the class of 2010 and his boyfriend at the time, now his husband, and they have become very close friends to us. And, uh, so the positive there is that, is that we were able to, to end up with, my husband and I ended up with very close friends, uh, who I, I probably never would have met [friend's name] from the Class of 2010, and when we are together and we meet someone, we say we both went to Holy Cross thirty-five years apart, you know, and that's kind of what it is. So they've become our close friends, and they've been down to our place in Tampa, and we travel together, and uh, we

bike ride together and, and so that, that's something that happened that I would never have expected to have happened.

Sam: Yeah, that's great. And, do you have, um, do you think Holy Cross can improve in any ways in supporting LGBT students?

Joe: I think that Holy Cross has to be diligent, particularly in the Catholic environment that still exists today, which is not as supportive as it could be, and we see, we see evidence of that in, in different places, uh, within the church hierarchy, with, with different colleges, um, and within the church hierarchy in Rome, even though the Pope appears to be moving in, in a positive direction. If we look at some of its history, it's not so positive, um, I think that Holy Cross, as an institution, has to continue to be diligent to, to number one, demonstrate support, and number two, be very aggressive in whenever the opportunity arises to, to counter any negative activity that occurs. And some of that activity might occur at some point in time, and that will show the true colors of the, of the College and of the administration. And, and to date, everything we've seen has been really positive from, from the school and, and I think that's good. It just, it's something that, that can't be under-understated that they need to just continue to be diligent and supportive.

Sam: Right. Ok, um, well those are all of the questions that we had formally prepared for you, so thank you, Joe, for sharing your story with us. Um, we didn't start off the interview kind of specifying, but it was about, um, four o'clock when we started the interview and it's about five o'clock now.

Joe: Okay.

Sam: Um, and yeah, that's all we have.

Joe: Thank you.

Sam: Thank you!