

4-26-2017

A Conversation with Jamie Hoag

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Recommended Citation

"A Conversation with Jamie Hoag" (2017). *GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project*. 9.
https://crossworks.holycross.edu/glbtc_alum/9

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Hoag_Greco_GLBOT Oral History Transcription

Interviewer - G.Matthew Greco

Interviewee- Jamie Hoag

**G = G.Matt, J = Jamie*

G: So before we start do I have your permission to be recording you during this interview?

J: Yes, you do.

G: Awesome. So, first question. How did you decide to come to Holy Cross.

J: So I grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts and when I was in high school, at Durfee High School in Fall River I received the Holy Cross Book Award when I was a junior. I don't even know if they give them out...

G: They do. (Laughter)

J: It was an actual book...not a kindle, not an E-reader. It was a dictionary...and so I didn't know much about Holy Cross. Both my parents were not college educated, my sister was the first person in my family to go to college two years before me and she went to Providence College.

G: Okay.

J: And when it came my turn to look into schools, I didn't really know where to start. You know and so but then I got his notice that I received this book award from Holy Cross and (cough) that's how I decided to apply and I visited and I ended up here.

G: Awesome what was like your favorite thing about Holy Cross like when you visited. what really drew you to it?

J: The campus. I mean I had visited I think it was early spring and beautiful day, the campus was blooming and also the students I met. I met with a few students in the Poly Sci department, I met with some faculty members, everyone was so welcoming and supportive and I think they were particularly helpful to me because being a first generation college student my parents didn't know how to navigate the world of admissions and financial aid and I received a particularly...I think I did at least I received some special amount of attention and I was grateful for that.

G: Yeah, that's awesome. What was the transition like then from going from high school to a place like Holy Cross.

J: You know it was easy for me I would have to say because my high school had 2800 students.

G: Wow.

J: So it was a very large public high school and so Holy Cross is about the same size in terms of the number of students.

G: Yeah.

J: But at least at my high school we were all compacted into one building while Holy Cross you're spread across this beautiful campus and I was just ready, I was ready. I remember looking through the college catalogue for Holy Cross about courses offered the activities, the clubs, the intramural sport and I was just hungry for more, if you will, and I was ready to go. So I remember when my parents dropped me off at Freshmen orientation and we had the parent, the Mass of the Holy Spirit and all that and I was like okay time to go mom and dad. I'm ready to go. and my mother was horrified I think both because she was leaving me but also because I was so ready to be left (laughter).

G: So what was happening, what year did you enter here and what was happening in the world both your first year but really throughout your four years?

J: In what way?

G: Just globally in general any things, global context, president wise?

J: Well I was here, I started, you're gonna laugh at this, I started in 1994.

G: Okay.

J: I don't even know if you were born then.

G: (Laughing)

J: Don't insult me too much, don't make me feel... I'm not that old. (Laughing)

G: No. (Laughing)

J: But it was President Clinton was, Bill Clinton was the president. I think we had a number of... I don't know what else was going on at the time, but you know there was the people and the economy was recovering, people were getting back to work slowly. I think that...I remember the Oklahoma city bombing happening my freshman year so that was the context. One of the points of reference, if you will, for my first year here. Yeah I think that's....

G: Wow and what was Holy Cross like during that time? How different? How similar?

J: Oh it's a lot different, I would say. I think when I started...A lot different from today is that were you asking me how it's changed?

G: Yes.

J: Well I'll speak about just the LGBT sort of perspective, we had allies on campus at the time, which was an alliance of gay students, a gay straight alliance...and that was the only type of LGBT group that the administration at that time would permit.

G: Okay.

J: So it was, it was struggling. You know the society has changed a lot obviously in the twenty-three years (laughter) and I'm glad to see Holy Cross has kept up with it. So, but it was conservative and I felt that it was conservative, but at the same time I developed a strong partnership. I was very much involved in campus ministry and the Chaplains' office, very much involved in student government and I met a lot of my good friends, who are still my friends, who were committed to social justice in every sense of that form, right, and that included it being accepting of LGBT people at a time when society was just dealing

with those issues and trying to figure it out, and so coming to a Catholic College I had to expect a little bit of Conservatism but it was, it was...I found my niche on campus and my constituency if you will and my allies if you will, personal allies.

G: Got it. So recognizing that coming out isn't necessarily a one time event, when and how did you first come out?

J: On campus or generally?

G: Generally.

J: So I first came out, I think I came out to some friends my Sophomore year of Holy Cross. But that was just a few friends from back home. It wasn't until late in my junior year that I actually came out to more people on college campus and at Holy Cross. It was a process for me, you know I think I knew. Let me back up. I would say maybe one of the first people I came out to at Holy Cross was MaryBeth Kearns-Barrett.

G: Ok.

J: The Chaplain.

G: Yeah.

J: But I came out anonymously, I knew that there was an LGBTQ support group on campus and I wanted to reach out to her. But I wasn't ready to do it as Jamie Hoag. I was ready to do it as... so I wrote her a note I wrote her a note and I mailed it to her and I wrote an anonymous note saying I'm interested in learning more about the group... I'd like to meet with you and she wrote me back and I never followed up but I at least knew that she was there, I knew that there was a resource on campus.

G: She's been a common, throughout these projects, she's been a common name.

J: Yeah.

G: Awesome, so who was your support system at Holy Cross once you did come out or once you started to, what people, organizations, groups?

J: I think some of my really good friends. Emily Rauer-Davis she's a chaplain here, she was supportive. My good friend Erin Molten, who is still one of my best friends, she was supportive. And so I think there were individuals on campus and a lot of them associated with campus ministry. A lot of the students who were active in social justice groups or active in the liturgy on campus and the Chaplains' Office were my biggest support group. And also two faculty members at the time were very supportive - Dean McGuire, Joe McGuire, who was an academic dean he knew and Maryanne Hinsdale, who was the head of the Religious Studies Department, she also...I came out to her and she was enormously supportive.

G: That's awesome.

J: Which is interesting because people would think that Catholics are conservatives and so for me my, most of my support group actually came from the religious community on campus.

G: Yeah.

J: And there was also a Jesuit at the time, Terry Deveno, who was also very supportive and very. So I think that when people proved to say Holy Cross is ultra conservative or being Catholic is synonymous with repression and not being supportive of LGBTQ issues, I had the reverse experience at Holy Cross.

G: Yeah, that's very cool. So kind of back tracking a little bit were you involved in any sports, clubs, organizations... You kind of said, but which ones were they?

J: So I was the president of my class, I was the president of my class and I was involved in the Chaplains' Office, I was a resident assistant. I didn't do any sports, I did some pick up intramural and frisbee or whatever. Nothing to athletic. I was a little bit clumsy, I ran not as on track, but on my own time, but I was very much involved in student government, I was an RA, and the Chaplains' Office, those were my main activities.

G: Okay and did your involvement impact your experience of being LGBTQ or how did they kind of mix together, work together?

J: Yeah I think they did, I think you know not so much my role in student government, I sort of kept the two separate. Chaplains' Office, I think I've already gone into how there was a strong intersection between the two. And being an RA I think that I tried to make sure that in my programming as an RA that I brought up these, so that if there were other student in the residence halls who were dealing with sexual identity issues or sexual orientation issues, they knew there was a supportive network there for them. Regardless if they weren't ready to take advantage of it, but they knew, making sure these people know these resources were available is important even if someone doesn't come knocking on your door.

G: If you could do your Holy Cross experience over, would you do anything differently? If so, what? Why?

J: Actually that's a good question and I think what I would do differently is just spending more time in conversation with my classmates, right. I think I was so busy, I was involved in so many things and my time was so regimented. You know obviously the focus was on my academics, but also on the extracurricular activity side and the clubs. I didn't spend enough time just hanging out with my roommate more, or hanging out with my hall mates, or just talking about life, talking about where we were in life, where we were in our studies, what we thought about X issue or Y issue.....I was too scared to do all that, if I had to go back and do it all again, I would allow for some unscheduled, unpredictable time to sort of get to know some of my hall mates a little better.

G: Yeah, yeah.

J: And for them to get to know me too, because I think that part of that was that I was purposely separating myself from some of my hall mates because I wasn't comfortable with them knowing my sexual orientation..and so I think I was very guarded in some ways...and I think that I look back on it now and I was probably doing that as a defensive mechanism as much as anything else.

G: Okay. Did you have any romantic relationships at Holy Cross and if so how did you find that experience?

J: I did not, well not at Holy Cross I was dating someone, but not at Holy Cross.

G: Okay.

J: While I was at Holy Cross, this person was not at Holy Cross. He was at another Worcester school.

G: Got it.

J: And so I found it very....you know it was interesting for me..... because I did not, other people were talking about their relationships, their straight relationships. And I did not feel comfortable and neither did he, to talk about our relationships, which was unfortunate at the time, but I look back at it now and I wish I had. We did not date very long, it was one of those college flings if you will. But it was fun while it lasted and I wish I integrated him more into my life because it's you know, special.

G: Yeah and again this kind of reflects back to the whole Chaplains' Religious thing, but do you think the Jesuit identity and environment of Holy Cross affected your view of sexuality?

J: I think in some ways it did, at first I...well...let's see when I came into Holy Cross, when I started Holy Cross, I had this set idea that Catholic Catholicism, being gay and being Catholic were mutually exclusive, right? I had that sense and I think Holy Cross changed that for me, in a way I didn't think it would. When I started I was worried that it would just reinforce my belief and preconception, but actually reversed it, it actually shifted it. Because I saw that people like Marybeth Kearns Barrett, my friends I named already were so welcoming and so open. They said great, you know that's part of social justice, that's part of Catholic social teaching. I also had a professor, Professor Nicholoff who was gay, I don't know if you chatted with him, if he's on the list...

G: We read his book. He has a book, yeah.

J: Yeah and he was very supportive. I never came out to him, but just knowing that someone of his stature within the Catholic Community was LGBT it was someone to look up to and so I think that one thing I learned too, was that being Catholic or being a Jesuit or being Jesuit trained is about respecting the whole person, mind, body, spirit, having people understand who they are. It's about respect at the end of the day. I mean it's all we can do is be respectful. That should be the basis of any religion and I think respecting and also realizing that being gay or your sexual orientation and your sexuality is a part of what it means to being human.

G: Yeah

J: And it's a gift and you should explore it and sort of recognize that it is a gift and not a curse.

G: Yeah, very cool. So now looking back, based on your experiences what advice would you offer to a LGBTQ student who is struggling to come out at Holy Cross?

J: Yeah, reach out to your network, reach out to your resources. Understand there are people on campus who are there for you, who care about you, who want to be supportive to you. So don't try and handle this yourself because it's a hard thing to come to terms with. It's a blessing, it's not a curse. Like I said, you should realize that it's a gift and I think you need to be and have that conversation and rely on other people to be there for you as you grow into your identity as you come to understand your identity or your sexuality. I think it's a lot, it's a lot to handle. For anyone gay or straight. Understanding who you are, dealing with relationships for the first time, dealing with your parental issues, coming out to your family that is something that is hard and you should realize that there is a support network system for you to, for you to take advantage of. And also I would tell them don't care what other people think. I cared too much about what other people thought, going back to the story about my residence hall mates, I was worried about what they would think about me. I look back on that now, I shouldn't have cared. It was about who I am, and if they didn't respect who I am, then they didn't deserve the benefit of my friendship anyway.

G: Yeah

J: And so I would tell people that to be proud of who you are, stand up for who you are, also go beyond Holy Cross, there is a life beyond Holy Cross in Worcester. So think about groups and organizations you can get involved in off campus too.

G: And that kind of transitions into this next one.

J: Yeah, glad I can predict the questions. (Laughter)

G: Yeah for real (Laughter), [what advice would you give to] LGBTQ Seniors who are transitioning from collegiate life to professional life. How to handle that.

J: Well I'd say for me, from my personal experience when I, after I graduated I moved to DC in August after I graduated, I was so excited. I was so thrilled to go be in a large city. Be in a large community and I went to gay bars I associated with I've joined LGBT youth groups for people my age and I joined Capitol Hill Congressional Staff Association so there are, I think there are many opportunities out there that you'll find. I think it is an easy transition, it's easy to go from Holy Cross to the outside world because there are so many resources out there. And it's hard, it depends where you are in your life, depends where you're moving to. If you going to some conservative part of the country, then maybe its not, if you going to some place like DC, or Boston or New York, there's a lot of these. But also tap into, what I would tell people is there's an active LGBTQ Alumni network, which didn't exist when I was here. But we meet regularly and I think that you should reach out to the leaders of that alumni network and find out if there are LGBTQ alums who are living in the city where you're living. To connect with them and to share your experience and to help and again rely on your resources to integrate into the LGBTQ community.

G: Awesome and then final question, kind of sums everything up. Can you share a specific story about when being LGBT, or being gay, impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross?

J: Oh,

G: You can think for a minute, it's definitely a tough one(laughter).

J: Impacted an experience at Holy Cross, ummm.....You know I think that you know, I'll tell you this story. When I was in, so we had an allies, which was the gay-straight alliance and then we wanted to transition to get ABIGAIL recognized, ABIGAIL was the alliance of bisexual, gay, lesbian students, just for LGBT students. And it was hard for me because I was just coming out at the time when they were advocating for that group and so it impacted my experience here because I was the president of the class, I had a lot of political capitol with the administration, but I didn't use it as much as I probably should have, because I was not fully out yet on campus. And so it impacted it because it realized to me, it brought together my future hopes and dreams of being a political activist, right, with the idea that you have to stand up for these issues even if it might be a little uncomfortable to do so.

G: Yeah.

J: Looking back on it I realized later on, I interacted with alums and my former classmates, that I didn't realize who also was out, who also was gay on my campus. So they appreciated even the little work that I did to try to advance LGBTQ issues on campus. Even though they weren't ready to come out. So when you hear those stories later on, you get an appreciation of what you did, of what you tried to do. And even though at the time you may not think it made a difference, it did at the end. So, you know I also was, I ended up after I worked on Capitol Hill, I worked for Mayor Menino, who was the mayor of Boston, and

I was his LGBTQ liaison for the city. and it was a wonderful experience and I got to meet Holy Cross Alums, who were you know, amazed that every time I tell people they would look at my biography, people would say “You went to Holy Cross, how did you survive?” And it was powerful for me to explain to people the wonderful support that I did receive on campus was because it was a Jesuit institution and not despite it.

G: Yeah, awesome and I am just going to ask one more question that’s not on here, but just cause it kind of is a theme. So do you think that Holy Cross is a welcoming, warm place for, if you are LGBT, if there is a senior in high school who has reservations about coming to Holy Cross, would you say that if you come here, you will find your place.

J: I think it has some work to do and I think there is a little work that needs to be done, but I think in terms of, yes, I would say yes. I think it has come a long way, since the days I was at Holy Cross as a society it’s come a long way, but I know that Father Burroughs in his address to the first year class during the convocation spoke last year about accepting all the diversity in all of its forms socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and he also talked about sexual orientation, so I think that sends a powerful message to the students on campus, the first years who are sitting there, that yes you are welcome. I think that the hard part, is that’s when the students have already signed up and are already there. It’s in terms of the recruiting, talking to the juniors and seniors in high school who are out, to make them realize that Holy Cross can be a welcoming place for them, it can be a place where they can thrive as well. And I think that’s a part of our admissions and our recruiting team to make that clear. So to have LGBTQ Admissions officers, who are talking to high school students about the fact that there are programs if you’re interested. Make sure we are out and proud about how welcoming we are.

G: Awesome, sounds good.