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# A Conversation with Philip Dardeno II

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Phil Dardeno Interview  
Grace Yienger and John Buzzard  
April 19, 2018  
Holy Cross Multimedia Resource Center  
HIST 299: Making History  
Professor Stephanie Yuhl

G: Alright, so we are going to start with some basic questions about coming to Holy Cross, so the first one is why did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

P: It's interesting because I was really torn when deciding which school to go to. For me, it was between Brandeis and Holy Cross, and a lot of that was the strength of their communities and the strength of their missions, but a lot of people were very surprised because I was raised Catholic, and kind of a failed Catholic at this point, but my friends were surprised I was looking at Brandeis, which is a traditionally Jewish school, and for me, the religion was actually an interesting factor to both because it spoke of mission, and spoke of involvement and engagement with its community, so that was really attractive to me on that level, and which religion it was was less important to me. I ended up coming to Holy Cross because the overall strengths, especially of the English program here outweighed those at Brandeis. I really loved the small school feel, that was very important to me, having a contained campus, but also having a place really where you can get engaged, and like I was talking about the mission before, the people for others mission of Holy Cross was very important to me.

G: And so what was your transition from high school to Holy Cross like?

P: Oh, interesting. I'm the oldest of four, so I actually feel kind of socialized when I got to Holy Cross already, as in it wasn't a hard transition to me to do shared space or to have to keep myself organized. Things I struggled with more, my freshman year roommate. I did have a problem kind of putting my needs and wants out in that, and I think that was a hard transition point for me. Overall, though, I was it was a very freeing experience coming to college. You know, my family is fantastic, but coming here and being able to come into my own, was really important.

G: And so you were a student from 1998-2002, what was happening in the world then?

P: Oh, '98 to 2002. At that point, one of the largest events that happened while I was here, was the September 11th bombings happened while I was here on campus, and that was a very (pause) it was very shocking, it was very odd to be in the Holy Cross community at that point in time. The faculty and staff handled it phenomenally, at that point it was really very well addressed. They made it a point to still gather people in the community, classes were still held but as a way for people to come together to discuss, to support each other. At that juncture, no one had cell phones, and the land lines really weren't working, because they had shut down so many things, so it was very odd. Our only real eye to what was going on in the world was the television. And I remember I was actually living in Carlin at the time and coming out of the shower to you know get ready for class, and my roommates were all watching the television and it didn't really sink in what was going on. That was probably the biggest event during my college career, the one that stands out the most, but I think other things that were happening it was, from my standpoint, it was two years before gay marriage was legalized just in Massachusetts, and at that time we

really didn't think that would ever happen. It was kind of the advent of things like Friendster at the time. And so social media, for good or for ill, kind of catapulted many things into the forefront of the conversation of the world.

G: And so did the global context have an impact on your experience at Holy Cross?

P: I'm sorry, what do you mean by global? Like that event?

G: I would guess, like, the global context of maybe like, everything that was going on in Iraq, or, things that were just kind of happening globally. Anything that would stand out to you beyond the United States.

P: Okay. I am sorry to say my memory for those sorts of events can be terrible. You know, I think it was interesting, Holy Cross was a bubble in a good way? I think there was a way that we were isolated in some ways from some of those things that were happening, and I've never been a big newspaper reader, to be honest, so some of the things that happened while I was here on campus because the internet wasn't as much a thing it wasn't as much a source of news at that point in time, I was probably sadly, less aware.

G: That covers the first section, John would you like to start the next section?

J: So, now we're moving on to coming out and being LGBTQ at Holy Cross. So, recognizing that coming out isn't a one-time event, when and how did you first come out?

P: Oh, it's interesting. Is it at Holy Cross specifically, or like in life?

J: If was before Holy Cross, that first instance of coming out.

P: Okay. (Pause) it's hard, it's hard to say for that. There were points in my life I think I always knew that I was different. Part of my kind of rift with my faith in part came because at times when I was younger I prayed to not be different. I never really put a word to it specifically, I'm not sure I knew. On the other hand, I did kiss a boy in 2nd grade, and there was a curfufal with my parents and the principal at that point. So, maybe that, that's probably my gay kind of formative moment from that standpoint, but officially coming out, telling other people in an open and honest way, was kind of sophomore year, pretty much. So I'd come to Holy Cross, through my freshman year I started a process of meeting people who were LGBTQ or allies, finding connections within that group of people, and then at the end of, kind of culminated at the end of sophomore year (pause) Oh, here's something! Talking back to what you were asking about things that were going on in the world, the millennium march happened while I was here, and I was very lucky to be swept up into it, because it really spring-boarded my coming out process

because it was that year and that semester. We went down to Washington D.C. and there was a whole of van full of Holy Cross students, and I was like convinced on the fly, I ran into them as they were walking up to get the van and they told me to come and I said "Oh, okay!" and I went. Packed a quick bag and went down there and it was incredibly moving, and you know, it really, the feeling of community, and the feeling of never having been in that large a crowd of people who either LGBTQ or not were just open, and accepting, and didn't care, you know, in a positive way, not offended, was huge. So I came back to campus, and I spent the last two weeks of the spring 2000 semester just coming out to literally everyone I knew on campus in one on one conversations cause that's my style.

J: So, during your freshman year, cause you were saying that sophomore year was the time you felt most comfortable to come out, was there something that you think kept you from coming out your freshman year, going into the college experience? Being a little bit hesitant? Was there something maybe Holy Cross or just this new environment that just sort of kept you from coming out?

P: I think it was more of a personal journey for me. Realistically, it was the nicest thing I found about Holy Cross was that, and in many facets of my life, was that I surrounded myself with people who accepted me. I don't necessarily present as straight if you will, and I never really have. You know and so I think a part of that is that even subconsciously I built a community where I was safe, even if it wasn't in audible or verbal terms of what that safety entailed. So, I think at that point I was still struggling with myself and with the idea of what it would mean to be gay, what it would mean to come out as being gay. I certainly made gay friends at Holy Cross, I had people who, though I had never said to them that I was gay, they said you should just come out, and I said I don't know what you're talking about, and you know we'd move on from the conversation. I think for me it was really the personal journey. My family is and ended up being very, very, very accepting and wonderful. I think some of it was grappling with that idea of what would it mean, what would the rejection be like and I think I was afraid of rejection, though I had built those communities if that makes sense.

J: So, you're mentioning, you and the gay friends that you had made, so what was it like to be out at Holy Cross at that time? Was it an accepting environment, or did you have sort of like an easier time maybe because it was Holy Cross compared to like other contexts, what was it like at this time?

P: Um, it's a good question. It was interesting, it's... Holy Cross I think a very different place than other schools I've worked at, other schools I've visited, I think the community of people is very different. For good or for ill, I think the people who gravitate to Holy Cross are not necessarily ones to get up in your face about something. People will, at least at that point in time. So I think a benefit of that was that I, you know, no one ever said anything to me, did anything in my

presence, you know that peace felt very safe. Whereas to juxtapose that I was once walking through Cambridge, actually about roughly the same time of my life, and just walking by myself, and not wearing anything outlandish and it was the morning and someone walking by, some man walking by said something horrendous to me, which I probably won't put in your histories, but it was shocking because I didn't know this person, I had not done anything overt in any way, just like large sidewalk open walking past, nothing like that ever happened here. Similarly, I was once assaulted in the streets of Worcester with a group of people leaving one of the gay clubs. Um, but nothing like that at Holy Cross, people were very good about that even if they were not good about it internally, but I think things that did happen (pause) so my, what was it (pause) my freshman year (pause) they actually shut this function down, you could reply all to the entire school through email. So there was just these ongoing things where every single person at Holy Cross was getting a chain of emails, and someone at one point inserted something very nasty and homophobic into one of the emails and it became a raging debate across campus and I wrote a book about it. By saying book, I wrote an enormous email and sent that out to the whole campus that I reworked and reread and did over and over again until I felt it was a very good and impassioned argument, and it was important to me that that be a rational and thoughtful thing and not just something that was kind of whipped off and sent. And I was very proud of that and I kept that, even though that point I was not out, and my friends did not know. You know I felt very good that I signed my name to something like that. When I was junior senior, more, I got much more involved in Allies and Abigail, which was Allies was the ally group, Abigail was the Association of Bisexuals Gays and Lesbians, which had founded probably around 1997 98... right before I started. I became very involved in those groups and for senior year I became the chair, it didn't have a co-chair at the time but just the chair of Abigail. And part of that meant that I chose to become the most visible LGBTQ person on campus, and that had positives and negatives but for the most part positives. The administration was very supportive and they knew who I was, and for me it felt that, I've always felt that someone has to be the one to be able to stand out there and say this is me, and the downside can be that people think that you speak for your whole population, your whole cohort, and I've definitely had (pause) it's interesting, backlash from that. There was an alum I've known for a long time that once told me I was the reason he couldn't come out, which saddened me and I was very surprised by that, but that was one of those things in life where you never may get resolution (pause) like I still don't really know what he meant. He said it, something like that in passing at a pride event ten years later. But, you know, I tried to be open and supportive and be available for the community. I think, I always think part of it was he was not in a place to feel comfortable with people being visible. And again, kind of that, obviously I did not speak for the entire LGBTQ experience and that was never my intent. But so, junior or senior year there was an issue with one of the first year students in the residence halls, someone was putting slurs on the board outside of their room. Um, and so we organized a candlelight vigil for that, there was more presence of people being in his hall and being there for him and to help him feel safe, you know. So it's that balance, if you

will, of people really wouldn't ever say anything to your face about something, but the homophobia and some of the (pause) the danger if you will, was there.

J: You mentioned Abigail and your friends on campus, were there other support systems you had at Holy Cross? Maybe like Professors, or the Chaplains office, something around that?

P: Yeah (pause) there was the Confidential group. I don't know if you're familiar with it but the Chaplains office runs a confidential LGBTQ support group, which has done and always has done in my experience phenomenal work. My interactions with that was more limited because I, I think when I kind of found out about them and attended one or two meetings, they were at a different place overall than I was at, and so it didn't gel with what I needed, but like I said, I mean they've done excellent work, overall. Um, Allies and Abigail was a very nice balance, Dean Peterson, Jackie Peterson, who's retired recently, she was phenomenal you know at the time. And Mable Milner, started at that point, which was (pause) do you know who she is? She (pause) well I say that (pause) at the time, she was you know coming on board to look at, you know diversity, ALANA students, to support those groups, and that was a very big step for the university (pause) university, college. I work at a university.

P: Um and you know, so there was a move towards some of these things that helped to show that Holy Cross is working to you know, integrate people and to be a supportive space. We had safe space trainings a lot back then, you know which involves just taking people through conversations about LGTBQ issues. Um, realistically at the time it was really kind of more LGB. LGB were kind of the issues at the hand. It's kind of going back to the advent of technology and social media. It's I think been good that you see more of the T, the Q, the I, and the A even kind of permeating public consciousness and having people more aware of those people's struggles. You know I don't really, I didn't know anyone at the time who identified as trans at Holy Cross. And even from this vantage point of sometime later, um, I'm aware of two people that I know in College who have come out as trans. Um, so I think you know, there was a lot of growth to be done and I think huge steps have been taken, um, collectively in public consciousness and Holy Cross since then. I think I've rambled off the point of your question though. What did, did I hit that?

J: Oh no absolutely. You're great.

J: So were you involved in any sports teams, clubs, or campus organizations? I know talking about ABIGAIL again but maybe something um that didn't directly involve the LGBTQ community um but also involved it, you know? With your own identity? So like outside I guess that context maybe.

P: Yeah. Um, ACT I suppose. So, as much as the Alternate College Theater can be said to be not be an LGBTQ space, um, in many ways it is but I think that you know it certainly wasn't based around orientation. I was a marching band groupee which is great. I was in the marching band very briefly um but I didn't have the time to commit to picking up my saxophone again so I kind of phased out of that. I also was in and out of College Choir. I had a flirtatious love affair with that, but it didn't work out. Um, so yeah I think I did a lot of things. I did a soccer pick-up group so it wasn't on one of the teams, but we had probably 20, 30 people rotate in and out. We would just have ridiculous huge soccer games, before the grills and the picnic tables went in between Hanselman and Lehy we would usually play there.

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

P: Oh. I suppose it's a life question. I feel like I might have come out earlier. Realistically if I had the wherewithal to know how to do that. Um, I certainly would have talked myself through my difficult freshman year roommate experience. I really really would have worked with the Career Center earlier and more often. Um cause I think, you know, I bartended for a chunk of time after college. And then moved in Higher Ed and I think it's all been an outgrowth of my career and my personality and the thing, my strengths, all of the things that I've done. But um, I don't think I would do it too differently to be honest. I was very happy with who I grew to become and I was happy with the things I did. Um, you know, besides those one or two things that always stick out in your head that you're like, "oh I did that, that time" you know I think things are pretty good.

J: Did you have any romantic relationships at Holy Cross?

P: Oh heavens yes. Um, so it's interesting I've never been one to romanticize within a friend group if you will so it was nice because it made situations easier. You break up with people you're not necessarily seeing them all the time. Um, I, let's see, one, two, three. I dated three boys from Holy Cross while I was at Holy Cross. I dated a boy from Worcester State. Someone else from New Jersey, two someones from New Jersey. Friends of friends from Holy Cross actually. Um, so yeah, it was, I had a relatively active dating life.

J: How did you find that experience? Was it through organizations, you talked about friends of friends? Going back to the organizations did that help to bolster how you approached romantic relationships.

P: Um not really, just because, especially by the time I became chair of ABIGAIL, I didn't want that to muddy the waters of the things I was doing. My senior year I dated a freshman, but he was not involved in ABIGAIL at all. Um so you know that didn't become an issue there. My Sophomore year I fell for the guy who lived across the hall from me, so we dated for a year and

change probably at that point. That was something I didn't talk about. Do you want me to backtrack? Is that to stay on topic?

J: If you'd like to

P: Um, so going back to things happening on campus. At the time AIM instant messenger was a big thing. Actually it was AOL instant messenger at the time. I think. Um, there was, so he and I were dating, and we eventually ended up breaking up because neither one of us was out and we were in a place where we could not support each other because what was happening was someone, we never found out who, but someone was sending him threatening messages through AIM saying that they knew about us and what would other people do if they knew. Just (pause) really it never amounted to anything concrete but it was enough that both of us were just kind of on edge. We stopped spending as much time together because we felt we couldn't be seen together um and like I said not being out we didn't have the strengths to be able to support each other in that place. So that is maybe a regret of mine going back to your other question about doing something differently. But I think that was just timing and how it worked. Um, there wasn't a way to trace who that was. We kind of ended up suspecting it was some, (pause) a woman who had a crush on him but there's no real evidence besides what we think it probably was. Um, so yeah so that was another kind of thing that happened on campus tied in with all that shebang.

J: And finally for this section do you think the Jesuit identity and environment of Holy Cross affected your view of your sexuality?

P: Interesting. I think that the Jesuit mission and ideology of Holy Cross was actually very helpful to me, in terms of coming to terms with my sexuality. The Jesuits are loopy goosy if you will, in a very positive way I feel like and not in a scandalous way but like in a way that I think they are one of the more accepting orders and I think that is part of, bleeds through in the mission statement and it's part of why, going back, I was attracted to Holy Cross as a place. Um, you know, I never felt, I think in, we were talking about the religious aspects of Holy Cross and Brandeis at the time, I never felt penned in by the religious nature of Holy Cross or the Jesuits. I had Jesuits as faculty, I had some gay Jesuits as faculty who were out within the community. Um, you know, while still being upstanding Jesuits. You know and that was a very supportive environment you know overall. It wasn't a huge piece of it, but I think the Jesuits were a good influence on me if you will.

G: Great, and now we're on to the last section which is called Looking Back. So our first question is: Based on your experience what advice would you offer to LGBTQ students who are struggling to come out at Holy Cross today?

P: Oh dear. Words of wisdom I suppose. Um, for students who are struggling to come out today, I think it's a very different world from my vantage point especially working with college students. Um, the work I do is with people who are having more difficulty than not, um, so probably like a 30% of a population so it's not always indicative of how everyone is doing but the people that I see who have struggles are often around connectedness and connectivity. Um, but I think that's the same, that piece is the same as it was in my day. It expresses differently. I just said my day, dear Lord. (pause) Getting so old. Um, so I think a part of it is to make the interpersonal connections where you can to detach from all of the rest of the things going on that are dragging you down and to find that community to find your people whoever that may be and to build that safe space for yourself so that you can be who you want to be.

G: Great. Um and based on your experience what advice would you offer LGBTQ seniors who are about to make the transition from college to professional life.

P: Oh join the LGBTQ alumni network. Shameless plug. I founded it and I'm chair at this point. Um, I think is just general advice I think taking advantage of not just the LGBTQ alumni network, but all the offerings of the alumni network is the most thing any alum can do. It's something that I don't think always comes naturally to everyone it certainly doesn't come natural to me to reach out, to ask for help, but the Holy Cross mentality, the Holy Cross Mission carries so much weight with its alums, whether LGBTQ or otherwise, I think finding a way to connect with a community that can bring you back to your experience here is important and um you know taking advantage of the things that are there because people, alums especially, want to help. They want to help with life transitions, they want to help with networking they want to help you get settled in a new area and there are Holy Cross alums everywhere. You know, literally, it's nuts. Does that kind of get it, what you're asking for?

G: Yeah, I think so, and our final question is: Can you share a story about a moment when being LGBTQ impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross? Which you've already touched on but if there's one that specifically stands out.

P: Okay. (pause), I had an interesting experience in terms of inter-sectional feminism I was in the Global Feminism class at the time I was the only male in the class, male identified, at that point and um it was very interesting to have that experience because in some ways I felt allowed in because of my minority status but also looked to as a white male as for answers in a way. You know the saying, like, you don't speak for your whole community but in some circumstances when you are the minority representative in a smaller group of a majority say, or of any populace ,people will look to you for something. It was an interesting experience for me because I identify very much as a feminist, I wouldn't say I don't identify as male, but I don't necessarily feel like I'm like dude. Um, all of this is going in there isn't it? It's terrible, um, so that was an interesting interplay between my sexuality and my status both on campus and you know as a Gay man. Um,

playing into another minority community here on campus um other, I feel like that was a slant answer so I'm trying to think of something else for you. So like in a positive way, a negative way,

G: Any way

P: Okay. Um I think it helped me more, while speaking for others, while trying to live that mission of people for others and trying to be the support that I felt the community would need, um, it taught me a lot about that mission and taught me a lot about how to present myself, how to be out there, how to engage people in conversations around this. Um, a part of that is my personality. I am very Italian I am very talky I like people I'm the quiet one in my family so it's interesting but yeah I think it made me a little bit more of a big fish in a small pond here at Holy Cross because I had a mission and I was identifiable and identified myself to the community as a whole. So I think it um, while I'm often someone who's in the thick of things no matter what it is I'm doing I think that my sexuality enhanced that while here and brought me into more of a public persona.

G: Great and now just some basic fillers.

P: Phillers! Ha! Sorry.

G: So 2002 was the year you graduated. And your major at Holy Cross was?

P: English.

G: English.

P: I had an informal concentration in Gender Studies and um Creative Writing. There wasn't Gender Studies at the time so I took it upon myself to construct something that was like it. It's not written down on paper anywhere because it didn't exist.

G: And your gender identity is?

P: Cis-male.

G: And sexuality is?

P: Gay.

G: And your racial or ethnic background?

P: I would always say Italian but I suppose Caucasian. My grandparents are immigrants so my family feels a lot of immigrant culture and roots in it while obviously being white. My grandparents were the new wave of immigrants coming over on the boat so it was interesting because you know they were discriminated against about jobs. My grandmother once danced with an African-American man at a dance because she said it was wrong the way he was treated and she felt, you know, and it was, which this was like the 30s so that was a kind of a bigger deal than. And so I think my family has always felt closer to kind of a minority status and felt closer to our roots of having some discrimination against us not necessarily belonging in the country and things like that.

G: And your current occupation?

P: I'm a counselor at BU

G: Anything else you'd like to add?

J: Um, we'd just like to thank you for coming and interviewing with us

P: Oh of course

J: and this is alright to publish the audio file and the typed transcript to Crossworks? Do we have your consent?

P: Yes. Thank you.

J: Okay thank you so much Phil.

G: Thank you.

P: Thank you both.