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A Conversation with Katie Collins

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Katie Collins, Class of 1988

Katie: Hello.

Julian: Hi Katie. This is Julian and Caroline at Holy Cross.

Katie: Hi how are you?

Julian: Good, how are you? Can you hear us ok?

Katie: I can, yeah.

Julian: Perfect. Alright.

Katie: Can you hear me ok?

Julian: Yeah we have loud and clear, thank you so much for taking the time with us today we will just jump right into it if that's alright with you.

Julian: By Massachusetts law, today is April 24, 2018 and you are being recorded

Katie: Yup.

Katie: Should I be seeing you?

Julian: No that's ok. We just need audio.

Katie: Oh ok alright good I just wanted to make sure I wasn't doing something wrong.

Julian: No you're good.

Caroline: Hi Katie I'm Caroline, I'm a junior here at Holy Cross and were really excited for this interview. Just to get started I guess we were wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about your background. where your from and maybe what you what you decided to do post Holy Cross and maybe what your career path was?

Katie: Sure. Sure. So I am originally from Falmouth Maine, which is a small town outside of Portland and I went to HC because my sister had gone to HC she had graduated in 1980 and when she was at HC my brother was at Providence College and I was in 6th grade and my parents used to drop me off to stay weekends with my sister while they would go visit my brother. This was around like 1978 when he was a senior at pc and it was sort of like the height of the disco era and I can remember my sister taking me to this disco at HC in Hogan Ballroom when I was young, then I thought, I'm coming here this is great so, so that's it, it was really the only place I applied to, I was early decision and uh I just knew that was where I wanted to be.

Caroline: Awesome.

Katie: So I was an English major at Holy Cross, this was before the theatre major the theater major was actually approved my senior year. so I basically was an English major I think technically I probably could have double majored I just, you couldn't then. So I was an English major but I spent all my time in the theatre department and when I was a junior at Holy Cross I started dating my ex husband who was a senior and we got married.... I graduated in 1988 and we got married in December of 89, which is way too young to get married. Don't get married that young that is my one piece of advice, don't get married that young. But really non profits arts and cultural non profits which has been my whole a career path and that started really as me coming out of college and having no idea what I want to do and grad school at the time I went back to Portland and was living with my parents and got a job at the Portland sympathy orchestra. in their..... and I was soon sort of taken under the wing of the development director who said we have got this bring young college graduate here she should be doing more than you know, so she gave me more to do and I sort of fell..... so then I don't know any other oh..... I really want to be a non profit fundraiser so I think everyone in non profit development kind of fell into it but that became my career path when I got married and moved to New Hampshire and so that was in Jan 1990 and I've been working in arts and cultural non profits ever since then so I'm at the Capitol Center for The Arts which is the largest performing arts facility in NH and I've been there for 13 years prior to that I was the ex director of the NH writers project which is a non-profit devoted to proving the work of NH authors and prior to that I was the director of development for the NH humanity council so it's pretty much all been nonprofit.

Julian: Ok. Thank you. So you were a student from 1984-88 is that correct?

Katie: Correct. Yep.

Julian: what are some kind of memorable events either politically or socially that you remember from your time here?

Katie: Yeah I vividly remember when the Challenger went down in 1986 because I was in the green room of the theatre department and we had a visiting professor I guess artist who was teaching some classes and he was Italian and I remember he came in and he said to us "the rocket, the rocket. It's gone and and sort of didn't know what that meant and I will probably never forget that moment of of him coming in and telling us that. You know

those were the Reagan years so it was kind of weird and this is before you know I think the fascinating thing that students at Holy Cross have now is you have constant news, constant. At your fingertips and we kind of lived in a bubble you know we knew what was going on I remember volunteering, I volunteered on the....84 my freshman year at Holy Cross and I vividly remember getting actually spit on by protesters in front of the Worcester planned parenthood, I have vivid memory of them spitting at me, but yeah then the election happened and then kind of life just sort of goes on and we weren't bombarded with you could kind of exist on the hill and not know what was happening in a lot of ways because you know even if we had TVs in our room like there was certainly no cable so we had you know..... and this really grainy channel called v66 which was like Worcester's version of MTV so politically it was a very different climate. As far as student activism went, because there just wasn't this there just want this constant bombardment. I look at my daughter now who's a freshman on the hill and she's so involved with the feminist forum and you know there's just so much more awareness because you can be aware you know you kind of gathered around a TV in Hogan somewhere or someone else who had a TV sometimes we were kind of cut off from what was happening so it was a very different environment to be in politically. Does that make sense?

Caroline: Yeah. definitely. I guess going off that, we were just curious to see what the scope of your interaction was with the city of Worcester as a whole. Even though the hill is a bubble, was there any type of interaction there with the city?

Katie: I personally did not do a lot you know theatre students you are kind of in the theatre department all of the time and that was kind of what I did, I do remember my sophomore year this one class we took theatre in economics, it was called political expression through performance and it was team taught by Lynn Kramer in the theatre department and I vividly remember having to create these performance pieces and literally going into the city and sort of doing performance art you know and town and in front of city hall. You know we walked to the bottom of the hill into Worcester a lot we walked to what used to be a store down the hill that we would walk to and you know then when some people started to get cars then we got sort of adventurous in going off campus, but I didn't interact, I do remember my senior year there was sort of.....edge on campus between the neighbors neighboring streets and College Street and up you know the hill there about noise and

parties and people who were living next to houses rented by Holy Cross kids because when I was there you know Figge apartments wasn't there, Williams hall wasn't there so you know kids really went off campus to live uh I lived on College Street my senior year in one of those triple-deckers kind of across from the field house and there was a lot of lot of lot off campus housing there were apartments on Cambridge Street and across the street and it sort of came to a head of the noise issue came to a head so I sort of remember like this big kind of summit between the neighbors and the police and Holy Cross kids. You know like I was always in rehearsal haha so I wasn't kind of a part of that but there wasn't I personally didn't interact I know my classmates who were involved with SPUD and things like that interacted more than I was but I personally didn't.

Julian: Ok thank you very much, so kind of transitioning to your experience at Holy Cross so could you describe your experience as a LGBTQ student at Holy Cross?

Katie: Yeah, so I was not out at holy cross and I mean obviously I mean I married my ex husband you know I married a man and this is you know the one thing I want to try and have some sensitivity around because he is a very good person and we had a child together and were good friend and that child is at Holy Cross you know so want to be sensitive to him as I tell my story. I knew when I was a teenager that I was attracted to girls, I was a good catholic girl and it was the early 70's and that just wasn't an option so you kind of learned to temp that down now i didn't marry my husband hoping that i wouldn't be gay I mean I really loved him I married him because I loved him he was a good person he was a funny person we were students together and he was a friend and but there was always that was always there and so ultimately you know when my daughter was 4, 5 it sort of just really came to a head where I could not continue to live this way you know I needed to end the marriage and finally come out but it was not a climate where people could come out them I mean it just really wasn't there was one kid in my class, I think his name was S____ and he was very out and he really suffered for it and I think about him a lot. He was pretty brave to be as out as he was his name was salad bar S____because he worked in Kimball and he was like the master of the salad bar like that was his domain in Kimball but he was very open about it and honest about being out and he really was the only person I knew who that was out at Holy Cross it just was not... I mean if you told me 30 years ago that i would be in an LGBT alumni group that there would be an LGBT, that my wedding would

be in the magazine I would have laughed hilariously because it just wasn't an option but I will tell you there was a girl on my hall named Michelle and she lived across the hall from me and one night I had a you know 19 year old drama of some sort and I took off down Easy Street and she chased after me and spent a long time talking to me and talking to me and talking to me and talking to me and then she kept saying the whole time she was talking to me no I'm not gay, no I'm not gay which I thought was such an unusual thing to keep saying and why this girl picked me to kind of come after and spend the evening talking to and then years later probably tears later this book came out about Women on the Hill about the experience of women at Holy Cross and she was quoted extensively in it about being a closeted lesbian at Holy Cross and I think sort of light bulb ah ha moment, like of course, of course she was gay and of course she knew I was gay too, like she saw me even though i couldn't see myself you know. It was just one of those moments where you look back and go oh my god, that's what that was about. We have a joke, there is a picture that a bunch of us took cape, week my senior year, and if you look at that picture now there are about five of us who have come out of the closet. None of us were out then, so it just wasn't an option. It was a much scarier time.

Caroline: Going off of that, do you contribute that directly to the climate at Holy Cross,

Katie: Reagan was president, it was the dawn of the AIDS crisis, it started to become a thing my senior year, be talked about publicly. It wasn't a climate in this country where you could be open and out and it wasn't a climate where every...there is sort of this running joke where every movie about lesbians ends with one of them dying, you never saw anything reflected back at you in culture that made it seem that this was a choice you could make and be happy with. There was nothing out there that showed you that.

I will tell you, my father passed away right after my wedding, he was very sick the year after I graduated, and there used to be a talk show on, she had a whole show on lesbian couples, I was riveted, fascinated, it was the first time I had seen actual couples, living together, making a life together, being happy. You just didn't see it, it was reflected nowhere in popular culture around you. I remember hearing my father say "that's disgusting change the channel," and I think subconsciously that door closed for me and didn't open again for a very long time.

Julian: You mentioned your daughter here at HC, what in terms of activism did you see here on the hill or in Worcester during your time here, vs. what you see now?

Katie: None. There was no activism, I don't even think there was any activism around AIDS awareness, maybe there was, but sex was this weird thing at Holy Cross then too. I went on birth control pills when i started dating my ex-husband, I had to go to the planned Parenthood in Worcester to get them. I would see 6,7,8 girls in that waiting room. None of us made eye contact, none of us acknowledged each other. The climate around sex at a Catholic College at that time was so different, everyone knew everyone was doing it, but you didn't admit you were doing it, you certainly didn't talk about it. SO that was the climate around straight sex, so you can imagine it was even worse around the LGBT community, because it was just wasn't something, it just was a very different time with the church at the time, even though it was the Jesuits and they are very progressive, life wasn't as progressive as it is now, and certainly wasn't as accepting as it is now.

I was on campus two weeks ago to see my daughter was in Skin of our Teeth in Fenwick, we had a coffee at Cool Beans and she introduced me to a friend of hers, and she's like "this is Adam and he's my gay friend" that just would never have happened:

Caroline: That's crazy. Going off that, you talk about your boyfriend who came to be your ex-husband, when you had the thought that you knew you were attracted to women, were there friends or groups on campus that you felt you could confide in?

Katie: Oh no. On campus I really didn't acknowledge it. I really didn't. There really wasn't, I don't even know if there was a feminist forum then, I know ALANA was a thing, but it was called the women's forum I think back then. But no. You just didn't, and you know my best friend in the world, who is my daughter's godfather, he didn't come out to me until 5-6 years after he graduated. And he was my best friend. And you know, obviously, my wife always says now, people needed to be hit over the head, I could have taken...but we just, even if you knew, even to admit it to yourself at that time.

Caroline: I bet.

Julian: You mentioned that picture at the cape of people who have since come out, do you still maintain relationships with them?

Katie: Absolutely, I'm very close to my core group of friends, of whom, two men and one woman have come out since then, I'm very close to them, one of whom being my best friend, my daughter's godfather, who I have been inseparable with since. I met him at an audition in 1985 and we have been best friends ever since. We are actually talking about making plans for reunion, my friend Dana and I hadn't seen in years, and he had kinda disappeared from our friend group, this was back in the early-mid nineties, and it was because he was afraid to come out to us, and we all sort of helped each other come out when the time was right for each of us, and there are two of them, we have all actually bonded over the fact that one of our friends reacted very negatively, and really kind of cruelty, and I don't know if that's a hurt that I'm ever going to get over. She was in my wedding, we had our daughters within 2 months of each other, to this day she lives 30 minutes from me, and she, to all of us was pretty awful and remains awful. I think we have all sort of bonded over the fact that we have been spurned by her right wing Catholicism and inability to accept us. I'm very close to many of my college friends, my 30th reunion is coming up, I'm in the old people group now and we are all making plans to be there.

Julian: In terms of Holy Cross, although you weren't out here were there instances of violence or homophobia on campus?

Katie: There wasn't violence, but you definitely heard a lot of homophobic slurs, Like I said that kid Steve, he was pretty brave, because he took a lot of grief. I don't know if it was very casually, commonly accepted that homophobic slurs were no big deal, part of the vernacular. So yeah I definitely heard it, and to be honest, I heard my fair share of racial slurs as well. It was jarring, it was like having cold water thrown on you, like what just came out of that person's mouth. So I like to think, I think a lot of it changed, and I loved father Brooks, and he was president while I was there, and the work he did to make HC a more diverse campus was huge, but I think when father McFarland came along, it started to become a kinder place and I think father Boroughs has kept that up, this culture of inclusion. Just the fact, I just got my holy cross magazine today, and there is a wedding announcement for two women in it. My wife and I were actually the first one to be published after marriage equality became legal in New Hampshire, I sent it in because all of my best friends from HC were at our wedding and we sent our picture in. Just to see that is huge, to see the huge ad in the alumni magazine for the LGBT alumni cape weekend,

huge. I think that father McFarland started to set that tone, and I think it started to become more and more accepting when he became president.

Caroline: Wow, that's great. So your daughter is a first-year here, what have you noticed in terms of these cultural changes,

Katie: It's huge, I truly think, this is really interesting. My class has a Facebook group, and the responses to the dropping of the Knight as the mascot, and my daughter texted me, your generation needs to get over it, just let it go, and I see this, and it's really radical acceptance of anybody and their identity, whatever your sexuality, whatever your gender identity is, when I went to gateways with her last summer, and listened to orientation leaders say what their preferred pronouns were, I thought wow, it is a different place, for the best. That was really wonderful to hear and you know she will sort of, to her it's not a big deal, she will say "well I have this friend, and I think he is struggling a bit with his gender, he might be gender fluid, but we just roll with it" it's not a big deal, it's never said with capital letters, it's just who he is or they are and that's the biggest change I see, that it's just no big deal, and that is to me, whenever I despair about our country right now I really do look at Liza and this generation. We are really watching the last gasps of people clinging to the racism and the homophobia and the xenophobia, your generation is going to blow that all out of the water and I really believe that. We, I think my generation, the gay and lesbian community in our generation, we fought hard for it to finally be no big deal, just for my wife and I to be that couple that lives next door and she's a nurse and she works for a theatre, they like to take day trips and oh by the way they are gay. That's been a long time coming, and when she talks to me about campus I like that there is just so much more activism. It's really wonderful to see the enthusiasm around the feminist forum, and she sent me a picture of the shirt she has for the take back the night march. That is really astonishing to me, and there was activism when I was there but it's definitely pretty great.

Julian: You talked about how you grew up Catholic, did you kind of struggle with your Catholic identity while being gay at HC?

Katie: Of course, and I think the hard thing, my father died shortly after I got out of college, and my mother passed away 10 years ago, and when I was divorcing...my parents might have been the most catholic people to ever live on the planet I am pretty sure, and I struggled with this. I sent Liza to Catholic school from K-6 but I've realized, and the interesting thing to me was that I had less negative reaction from my catholic friends that I was gay than I had from my gay friends about the fact I was Catholic. That was fascinating to me, you know, my gay friends were very much like oh you need to become an Episcopalian, you need to go to Unitarian church, you need to this, you need to ...and I thought and thought about it, and what it came back to for me was that, my mother was

really a firm believer in the power of praying to Mary. Her name was Mary, my first name is actually Mary, my full name is Mary Catherine and she really raised me on that. She said just pray to Mary, and as I grew older I found a lot of comfort in that, especially when my mother was so sick for so long. I thought I'm going to stay here and keep being Catholic, because I think this is where I'm supposed to be. I didn't go to Church for a really long time when Benedict was pope, I just couldn't do it, then when Pope Francis became pope, my daughter was young and in grade school and I saw an almost overnight change in my parish. It was fascinating to me, the homilies became kinder, the atmosphere, it was just fascinating what this pope seemed to do kind of overnight. When my daughter was being...she was an altar girl for a while and then, so I was waiting for her, sitting in mass one day and our parish priest came up to me and said "I just wanted to let you know, I hope you know that your wife is always welcome here as well." He looked at me and said "I just want to make sure she doesn't feel she can't be here too", my wife isn't Catholic and I didn't have the heart to break it to him, but it was kind of an astonishing gesture to me. I remember on mother's day, and my ex-husband is remarried, on mother's day I remember he sort of gently teasing my daughter, you must be really busy today, you have 3 mothers, you got to take care of them all, sort of teasing her in a sort of kind way. So I stayed, and I stayed until, I sort of knew for my mother I needed to get her confirmed, I just needed to see it through, baptism, communion and confirmation, get her through the big 3. When she was going through confirmation, she went through the first year as a freshman, and they talk about a lot of social issues and we want to make sure we are being sensitive to your family, and I thought wow that's something, I don't think the teacher was as enamored that she had the child of a gay family in her class, but it was when I saw my daughter argued with this teacher a lot in class, which I appreciated a lot, and that's how I knew she would do great at a Jesuit college, she was already arguing points in class. But when she got confirmed, the head of religious education came up to me and said "your family has taught me an awful lot about what it means to be a family." So i felt kind of like, that was the reason I stayed, like I had done something, not just for my daughter or for me but maybe for my parish as well. I made it ok to be an out member of this parish, and I'm certainly not the only one.

Julian: Do you think the education you received here, influenced your daughter, or did she just already want to come here?

Katie: That's funny, for years she was like I'm not going to Holy Cross, I'm not going to go anywhere they will tell me they had my parents in class, I'm just not going to do it. And I said just come with me and take the tour, but she said it has to be the real tour, it can't be the oh look that was my dorm window tour. So she and her dad took the tour her sophomore year, and we arranged for her to sit in on some classes in the theatre department, and she came back so I asked "so what did you think?" Big sigh "Well I loved it"

she was sort of angry at how much she loved it after all these years of saying there was no way she was going to HC. She applied to a lot of places, and got into some, didn't get into some, and I think this was really meant to be the place for her. She said the other day when she was texting me, this was where I'm supposed to land. And I knew too because there were so many members of the theatre department who were still there so I knew what kind of a program she would be going through, I knew it was right for her, and she knows it now too. She's so happy, she's going to be an orientation leader this summer, she's going to be an RA next years, she's just full on Holy Cross.

Caroline: I'm happy she's loving it here, she sounds like a great kid and a true Holy Cross student. Just to wrap things up, looking back at your experience at Holy Cross is there anything you would change or do differently?

Katie: You know, I always regretted i didn't go abroad, I'm kind of a scardey cat a little bit and a homebody, I would have gone abroad if i could go back and do it again. But, I would have talked to more people I would have tried to get out of my nine dots more. I've discovered some really wonderful people in my class through my Facebook group that one of my classmates put together, and have made amazing friendships with people I don't think I exchanged two words to in college, and we have all said the same thing, "why didn't we talk, why didn't we know each other," One of my friends who I didn't know then at school, he actually ends up living 10 minutes from me, I see him in the supermarket all the time and he said "why didn't I go to any of these shows, why didn't I go see what was happening in the theatre department," so I think when you are there you feel like you have all the time in the world, and you just don't, it's over so fast. You're all still sort of figuring out who you are. I had no money, my parents were much older, my father was 50 when I was born, I grew up on an island in Maine, so like I wasn't sophisticated at all and people who I assumed were these wealthy sophisticated people that wouldn't be bothered with me, come to find out that we had all this stuff in common. You know, I could have gone out of my shell a little bit more and talked to people.

Julian: Is there anything else noteworthy that you would like to share about your experience that you think we haven't touched or that you want shared?

Katie: I think this is a really wonderful thing you are doing, the transgender archive, the fact that that exists now is something I couldn't have conceived. First of all in the 80s you never even said the word transgender, it was hard enough to talk about being gay or lesbian, it was really extreme. I'm really proud of the school, that its taking these kind of really bold progressive stances and not backing down. That makes proud to be an alum, and the parent of a student. I guess that's it.

Julian: Well thank you very much for talking with us, we really enjoyed speaking with you.

Katie: Thank you it was very nice speaking with you as well, I wish you all the best of luck with this.

Caroline: Thanks Katie!, Goodnight.