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A Conversation with Sara Barber-Just

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Interviewee: Sara Barber-Just

Interviewers: Emma Powell and Nora Grimes

Date: July 12th, 2018

Location: Podcast Room, Multimedia Resource Center, Holy Cross via Skype
Weiss Summer Research in the Humanities Associate and Advisor Yuhl

Nora: Oh, it is gonna work.

Sara: Hello.

Emma: Hello!

Nora: Hi there.

Emma: Hi!

Sara: Hi.

Emma: Can you see us okay?

Sara: I can see you. Can you see me?

[22 secs cut (Technical issues cut out)]

Nora: We can see you now.

Sara: Hi.

Emma: Awesome!

All: Laughs.

Nora: Hi! So, we just have to do a bit of an introductory thing in saying that I'm Nora Grimes.

Emma: I'm Emma Powell.

Nora: And we're here with Sara Barber Just and we're conducting an oral inter-, an oral history for the GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project. Sara, can you just consent to being recorded?

Sara: Yes, I consent.

Nora: Okay. Awesome.

Emma: Awesome. So, to start off with our questions, how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

Sara: I looked at a bunch of different schools, and I was interested in rowing. So – and I was raised Catholic in Connecticut and so, I visited a bunch of different schools. And I was torn between, I think rowing was Division III then. I got a full scholarship to a Division I school to be, to George Washington University, but I liked Holy Cross better. And I was scared to basically commit my whole life to rowing, so. So anyways I applied Early Decision and I was

deferred but then eventually I got in. And, and, it was just the most beautiful campus that I visited. It was one of my reach schools and I, I really liked it. But I didn't know what I was doing when I chose it.

All: laughs

Sara: To be honest about that. I wouldn't choose it now. And, but I'm glad that I chose it then.

Emma: Gotcha.

Nora: Awesome. So, what was your transition from high school to college like?

Sara: It was great. I actually, I have an identical twin sister. And we didn't always get along really well, and so I, I was just really thrilled to be on my own for the first time ever... [3 seconds cut]

Nora: Laughs.

Sara: Just being my own person. And, I loved, I did the first year program, I don't know if it's still called that. It was, the first year of it was my class, the graduating class of 1996. That was amazing to be in all these seminar style classes. And I made really good friends. And I was on the Varsity Rowing Team my first year. It was great. It was a really easy transition.

Emma: Okay, awesome! So what was kind of going on in the news at that time when you were at college around 1990's, the late 90's? I know it's kind of a weird question.

Sara: No, well, do you – should I relate it to LGBTQ stuff or just in general?

Emma: It's totally up to you. It's a pretty broad question.

Sara: Yeah, I mean I think when I think of the 90s – I'll just hit you with some headlines. Think of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. I think of Matthew Shepard being murdered. I, I think of the AIDS crisis. Sort of, there being a growing awareness of AIDS, in a more positive way. More empathy around queer victims of AIDS. 'Cause when I was in high school it was, was, there was so much misunderstanding, yeah. Those are just, those are some of the headlines I remember. [Laughs]. I also studied abroad during my junior year and I was just so immersed in that experience, and then moved to Spain for a year, one year after college. So, one thing I remember about being in Spain is having no connection to US news. I didn't have an email account until I was in college and I didn't have a cell phone so [laughs], so life was really different then.

Nora: Yeah.

Emma: Cool.

Nora: So, kind of moving on to the coming out and being LGBTQ at Holy Cross, recognizing that coming out isn't a one-time event, when and how did you first come out.

Sara: So, it's interesting. I, I had, no, I didn't have any relationships really in high school, I went to dances with people and stuff like that. And then, I didn't know that I was queer. I came to Holy Cross and I, in my first year I just _____ hooked up with a lot of guys. And then in my

second year I met my best friend who became my best friend for years. And so she was in her first year and I was in my second year and we spent every, every minute together. And then the year after that I decided to go study at Oxford for a year. So I went to Oxford and we spent a lot of time that summer together. I had a really serious boyfriend who was, who had graduated from a military academy and was a Republican and wanted to marry me.

All: Laughs.

Sara: And I knew I didn't want to marry him. But it was a pretty serious relationship that summer. It lasted for six months. And then she came to visit me and she – that was when I started to just open up to the idea that I might be bisexual. And she – we basically, right in the middle of this visit, we're like, "I think we're in love with each other." And I was like, "I think we should just kiss each other and see what happens." And she's like, "No that's gonna just ruin our friendship. We shouldn't do that, that would be terrible." But we did, and it was amazing. And she had really long hair and the day after that happened, she cut off all her hair, she got this pixie haircut, and, just to show I think that this thing inside her had changed externally. And then we ended up having a long distance relationship for two years because when I came back she studied abroad.

Nora: Mmhmm.

Sara: For a year. And I really wanted her to, I felt, you know, I had doubts about it, but. We were like, "We should just be together for a year on campus." But we never were after that because I was abroad when she was at Holy Cross, and then she was abroad her junior year. And then when she came back I had graduated. But, I ended up staying in Worcester and teaching at a middle school in Worcester for a year, and, we're still together. So, it's 24 years later. We ended up getting married and have two kids, and, so -

All: Laughs

Sara: That's an amazing story, I think, is my first experience ended up being the person that I married.

Nora: That's amazing.

Emma: That's really cool.

Sara: It is amazing.

Emma: Was it-

Sara: That's why I'm glad I accidentally ended up there.

Emma: Yeah.

Sara: I think if I were identified now as LGBTQ I probably, it's not that I wouldn't go there, I actually recommend it to people, but I probably would have gone to Smith College or something like that. My wife actually works at Smith College now. But, we, you know the fact that I met

her there, and I had such an amazing educational experience, and, or rowing experience it all worked out for the best.

Nora: Mmhmm.

Emma: Awesome. So what was it like being out on campus at that time? Sort of.

Sara: So, I don't know. Have you talked to anyone of my year yet? Of that time period yet?

Emma: We've done mostly 2000s. Us personally, but.

Nora: Yeah, but we've listened to some of the other ones, so we kind of have a vague sense.

Sara: So, I, so one of the things was that it was a mix of being, of, of being awkward I would say was the worst that it was, was awkward. I remember going to a dance with Christina, after, I think it was after, I can't remember the timing. At some point we went to a dance together when we were together on campus. And, and I remember dancing together and holding hands together on campus and realizing we had never seen anyone do that in the whole time we were there. So that was awkward. But we had all these really good friends and they loved and supported us and, so it was okay. And also when I was there it was the beginning of all these support groups. It was, it was a huge, kind of beginning of support. There were two groups on campus that I remember. One was called Allies, and it was started by this straight friend of mine. And I think she may have co-led it initially with someone who was LGBTQ. But eventually it ended up just being a group for straight supporters and some queer people went to it. There were 100 people in that group and they did all these activist events on campus, and educational events. And then there was also a support group led by the college chaplain Mary Beth Kearns Barrett for LGBTQ people only. And I was in that group. And I formed really deep friendships with, it was, probably there were just eight of us, I want to say. And it wasn't really religious in nature but it was just, there was this spiritual piece to it. You know, cause she's a chaplain and she was this, I think she's a trained therapist. So she was just amazing in kind of talking us through experiences that we were having. I remember all of us getting in someone's car and driving to Boston and going to a gay bar for the first time together. And then the most memorable thing was that there was this woman, Jeannie Seidler, who decided that she was going to come out on campus in this speech in the Hogan Ballroom and they put up all these flyers, and she basically had this public coming out to talk about what it was like to be a lesbian at Holy Cross. And they invited back people who had graduated Holy Cross in the 80s and they sat on this panel and they – you know they'd host these events in the Hogan Ballroom and 40 people would go. It was, 600 people went to this event 'cause they were like, "Oh my god, a lesbian is coming out!" That was such a big – that was it. She was just going to come out in this ballroom and explain what it – and people asked her questions about, like "What is it like? Are you sure you're born that way?" You know, stuff like that.

All: Laughs

Sara: But it was amazing. It was just this really moving educational event. Cause she was so well liked. So things like that changed the climate on campus really quick. And that was I think, in '96.

Emma: That's awesome.

Nora: Yeah, that's incredible.

Emma: So, while you were at Holy Cross who was your support system, would you say?

Sara: , well, all my professors were amazing. I had a couple of professors, feminist professors, a Native American poet who was also this amazing feminist professor. They, they were incredible. And just my best friends, I had, I have a handful of people that I'm still in touch with, and they, they were my friends from the time that I started there before I knew that I was bi-identified and they're still really good friends. I'm actually going to one of their weddings, second weddings, this weekend.

Emma and Nora: Oh, awesome.

Sara: Yeah.

Nora: So, were you involved in any sports teams or clubs or any other campus organizations while you were there.

Emma: Yeah, you've already touched on that. But I guess just to expand.

Sara: Yeah, so, the rowing was really big. My, my boat won the Head of the Charles in my sophomore year, and then -

Nora: Wow!

Sara: My rowing team. Yeah, for the club, it was the club women's 8, in my sophomore year. And then my team at Oxford won the, the club championship in Oxford. We had all these Americans on our boat. We went over and joined their team and they were like, "Oh my god yes, big American girls." So that was, that was the majority of my extracurricular stuff. I was in the group called the Women's Forum too which was a feminist club, and I participated in those LGBTQ groups. I think that's it. I was really into poetry, I wrote a lot of poetry in college and did some writing things.

Nora: Okay. So, if you could do your Holy Cross experience over, would you do anything differently?

Sara: Hmm, I don't think so. I mean I think it, it was a place where I figured out who I was and made really good friends and had , an overall positive experience. And I think, now, I don't know what your experience is, but I'm a high school English teacher. I've actually been at the same school for 20 years, and I've seen kind of a shift in what, how people are able to handle really difficult or controversial conversations. And, you know there was all this discussion about trigger warnings. And I feel like when I was on campus people said the craziest stuff but we had this ability to dialogue around major differences and major political agreements that is, I see happening less now. So that's a thing I'm actually really grateful for. It's where I learned to talk to people who don't believe the same things that I believe. Now I live in the Amherst area so it's this amazing progressive bubble of almost everybody politically agrees with me and I never have to fight with anyone, but I use my skills I learned at Holy Cross to navigate conversations with

my more conservative students in classes and to teach my students how I learned to do what I do there.

Emma: Awesome. So, you already touched on meeting your wife. But, there's a question about how you found being in a relationship and how that affected your experience at Holy Cross.

Sara: Mmhmm. Well, I think it made my experience so much better. And, and it was, there also, I mean this is sort of an aside, it's not like I just met her and we stayed together. After I came back I had a, sort of emotional slash, leaning toward becoming physical fling with this guy that I was really good friends with. And when I was in England I had a relationship with this woman that I met after Christina left. So, it was definitely a place where I was figuring out who I was. And my wife definitely gave me permission, she's like, "I'm in love with you, I wanna marry you." And I was like, "Hold on a minute!" I just needed space to kind of to figure out who I was. And I was really honest about that, I was like, "I, I think I feel the same way but I just don't know and I need time to figure it out." And so, I think being in a relationship was awesome but it was also awesome having two different years abroad. Then working in Worcester when she was going to school and really figuring out that it was gonna work.

Nora: Do you think that the Jesuit identity and environment of Holy Cross affected your view of sexuality in any way?

Sara: So, yeah. I guess this is, this is where the pain comes in, is that I, I definitely feel like my Catholic upbringing and the Jesu-, my sort of my religious experience at Holy Cross was, I didn't think I was gonna cry but it was punishing, you know, it was. And you know, nobody ever said you're a terrible person for being gay but it was. It's really, you figure it out eventually. You have this Catholic chaplain who's leading this support group and she's amazing. And I remember I asked her, will you marry us? And she said no, I could never marry you, I would lose my job. And, you know it's still, it's still true you know, we couldn't have been. We both went to Holy Cross, but, we couldn't be married in the chapel on campus, you know. Catholics still don't marry gay people so it was hard. I was involved in all these religious events, 'cause everybody did them. I went and did the spiritual exercises. I, I remember coming out to a priest during that time and he was, one guy was basically like, "Are you sure?" and this other one was – this one guy, I don't remember what his name was, I think he was a gay priest, and he was like, "this is God's plan for you and you know, you are being who you're supposed to be." He was really supportive, but when I look back, what I found was I'd found this place that I'd gone to and I had this upbringing and I was looking for a place to have a spiritual home and ultimately what I found was that I was not welcome there, not really. And so, so I left. I left religion all together for ten years. I basically decided that I didn't believe in God, I was done with it. Then we had kids, and we got into this really big debate with my mother in law about having our kids baptized... [16 seconds cut] She believes that baptism is this cleansing of original sin. And I was like, well I don't believe in original sin, I don't think they need to be washed of some evil they're born with [laughs] so. But we ended up deciding to have a baby blessing and so we hired this friend who I went to Holy Cross with who became a Unitarian minister. And she had this beautiful service on top of this mountain near where we live, in a peace, it's this Buddhist peace pagoda near Leverett Massachusetts. And all our friends brought water from all over the world.

And my mother in law holy water. And they mixed it together and we basically had a blessing that was, you know stood in for a baptism. And we also were married by a Unitarian minister, but I'd been to all these Unitarian events and I was, I just feel like I'm at a lecture, I don't actually feel like I'm in church, and I wanted to have a religious experience again. So when our kids turned six we found a UCC church, a Congregational Church near where we live. And it's everything that I've wanted Holy Cross to be. There's a feminist lesbian and she's sort of, she's not in a relationship but she alludes to the fact that she's a lesbian, minister, there's an anti-racist ministry. They march every year in the Pride Parade. It's, it's just a completely open – it's, it's was the first church and one of the first churches, and I think the first one in the state of Massachusetts to become open and affirming, to have a dedication to LGBTQ congregants. And, you know, in the beginning when we would go to events in our church that were sort of related to LGBTQ things, I remember my wife, she would just sob, she would just, she would just cry because she had just been so traumatized by things that had happened. You know, when we came out her parents were, they just said this is not acceptable to us and they travelled to this mountain in Medjugorje where people, in Bosnia, where people claimed to see the Virgin Mary on the top of this mountain, to pray for us. And, you know, it was just, we had this amazing group of friends and we knew we were in love with each other but we just, we had also really terrible experiences with our family and just religion in general and that was, a lot of that happened at Holy Cross or was associated with it.

Emma: So I guess, that was a lot, but that was.

Sara: Laughs

Emma: It was, that was really great. Sorry.

Nora: Thank you for sharing all of that with us.

Emma: No, no, that was, that was great. Thank you so much.

Sara: Well, it's -

Emma: No that was, no it's good to share that because I think it helps people who are going through the same thing now.

Nora: For sure.

Sara: Yeah, I mean it's just. It's so far in the past.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: And we were talking about twenty five years ago, but you really never get over it.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Sara: You know, my mother in law is amazing. They were hard core Republicans and pro-life and very anti-gay and they have one daughter who's a marine biologist and an environmental activist and then they have one daughter who's a lesbian. And they are amazing now, now they

are very progressive politically, they, it took a decade but eventually Christina's mom marched with our family in our local Pride parade. I mean they've come around, it just -

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Sara: It's, it was like that, that would characterize my time at Holy Cross is, I think it's very similar to how transgender people are experiencing the world today.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Sara: It's like they're on the cusp of acceptance but the battle is not pretty and in twenty years it's gonna be a lot better than it is right now.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Sara: But it's, there was hope, so it wasn't like living during this hopeless terrible time but it was, there was a lot to fight for. I mean we, when we moved to Massachusetts, we actually left, after Christina graduated we moved to Barcelona for a year, just to get away from everything. We were like, let's just go to Spain and live by the beach and teach English for a year, so that was a great decision because we just kind of picked up and left everyone and they missed us a lot and then we came home and I started teaching at Amherst high school. And when I started there I remember coming out as a teacher my first year of teaching within a few months. And I remember how scared I was and it turned out okay, it turned out really well, actually. But it was so much harder then, than it would be now. And it was another five more years before gay marriage became legal in Massachusetts. And I remember, I took a bunch of students from our GSA on this bus to protest against there being a constitutional amendment in Massachusetts to bar gay marriage, and it was the craziest event I've ever been to in my life, thousands of people protesting at the State House, this guy was carrying a life-sized cross. People were singing gospel songs and it was, [laughs], anti-gay, but then all the gay people started singing religious songs to kind of counter the idea that they own that, you know. It was just so intense and being in this first state where marriage became legal was amazing. And I remember my wife calling me at work and being like, gay marriage is legal in Massachusetts. So all of that stuff happened just a few years after I left Holy Cross. Eight years after. And it was amazing.

Emma: Awesome.

Nora: Yeah.

Emma: So, kind of based on your experience what advice would you offer to an LGBTQ student who is struggling right now to come out at Holy Cross?

Sara: Well, I, I think the most important thing any, for anyone anywhere who is experiencing that is to seek support. And, you know, in my own life whenever really challenging things have happened I've, I think that everyone knows that when life is too much to handle. You know, I feel you just know it, you feel it in your body you, you know when it's hard and I actually think people should seek professional support when, if, they are struggling because it's, it can be the most, really directed in helping someone to figure out that they're okay. So I've had students so many times who've just ended up crying in my room [laughs] and I'll end up walking them

through a lot of what they're going through and then I'm like, you totally need a therapist, you need to get one, they're the best, and, you know, and I find that when they are willing to do it that they say like, it's true, it really helped me to have somebody besides my friends and teachers and my mom to talk to and that, that's the best thing any human can do.

Nora: So, also based on your experience, what advice would you offer to LGBTQ seniors who are going to graduate soon and kind of make the transition into the real world beyond Holy Cross?

Sara: I wish I could ask you questions.

Emma: Yeah, you can.

Nora: You're welcome to, yeah.

Sara: Well, are either of you LGBTQ identified seniors?

Nora: Ah, no, no we're Allies. Yeah, but -

Sara: Yeah, so I don't know what it's like to be at Holy Cross now and be LGBTQ identified.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Emma: I mean, I have a lot of friends that are LGBTQ.

Nora: Yeah.

Emma: For sure. And I feel like some of the concerns that they bring to me is that if they come out they feel that they have to be this activist at the front lines of, I guess queer rights at Holy Cross and, being completely accepted. Not that, I think it's probably a lot more accepting over time, but, I still feel like people don't want it to become the central part of their personality, and sometimes they feel like that.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: Yeah.

Emma: And even friends that are completely out on campus they, sort of are like, well there are so many other things about me that are not just being gay, and so I think that's probably the biggest struggle right now. But it's much more accepted probably.

Nora: I think in particular this summer research has allowed us the perspective to see how far things have come.

Sara: Yeah.

Nora: But also, we, we still have a long way to go, I think, as well. And kind of keeping that in perspective is something that a lot of students are trying to do at Holy Cross right now.

Sara: Yeah, I, I imagine that it is a different or better place than it was. And that there are people. I learned that the nation's first digital transgender archive is at Holy Cross.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: What, [3 seconds cut, inaudible].

All: [Laughs].

Sara: It was just surprising to me.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Sara: And, I guess just my question would be, and, this is just my only other question that I have, the pressing question that I have for you is -

Emma and Nora: Yeah!

Sara: So if they knew they were LGBTQ identified, what drew them? Is Holy Cross so accepting that it's, that it's not, I know it's Jesuit, but when I was there 60% of the people came from private Catholic schools.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: Or were mostly from Catholic families, so if they are LGBTQ identified, why did they go to Holy Cross?

Emma: I guess, I don't know if I can answer that, but, I'm just trying to think of my friends, and I don't want to talk for anybody, but -

Nora: And the conversations, yeah.

Emma: But I guess there are, people who still are very Catholic and, but Holy Cross is sort of a liberal place that's also Catholic so they want to be in touch with that, so I know that's part of it sometimes.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: It was not a liberal place when I was there.

Emma: Yeah, it's very split, I feel. And you can definitely find your niches. I guess, I guess we're talking from our own experience but we're pretty liberal, feminists, so we hang with people that are kind of similar minded, but also in your classes you interact with a broader community.

Sara: Yeah.

Nora: Yeah.

Emma: I, honestly, for me when I came to Holy Cross I was like, it's not gonna be liberal enough, I don't want to go there. And my parents were like, no, you should go there, you should go there. And I just came and I found my people.

Nora: Yeah, yeah.

Emma: But I mean, that's different that being LGBTQ. But I'm just... What about you, Nora?

Nora: No, I had a very similar experience. I still distinctly remember, I came from a, a Quaker school background.

Sara: Mmhmm, Mmhmm.

Nora: In Providence, Rhode Island. So even though I was raised Catholic, my mom is a total hippie, so it's kind of like shedding the institution of the Church. I already came to Holy Cross with that.

Sara: Yes.

Nora: But I distinctly remember communicating with professors I was in touch with, being, asking the question if this is a place where people are not welcomed, where the LGBTQ community is still not accepted, as a Catholic college, I don't want to go there.

Sara: Mmhmm.

Nora: And he just responded to me and he was like, I'm going to be honest with you, the faculty are very liberal.

Sara: Yeah.

Nora: The students are very split, but it's an understanding and welcoming place. You're always gonna get those jerks who aren't, but I think that the majority of the campus community realizes there's just unacceptable behavior -

Sara: Mmhmm.

Nora: And open hatred is one of them.

Sara: I mean that is, that, that is a pretty good summary of what my experience was like.

Nora: Mmhmm.

Sara: The faculty was really progressive and that, the students were divided. I wouldn't say it was half and half, but I definitely found my people there. But I think the benefit of going to a school that has a Jesuit underpinning is that, there, the dedication to service and to working in the community, and thinking about yourself in the context of a community, it, that definitely influenced me and all my friends. Whether you joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps after, or they ended up becoming ministers, so many of us went on to become principals and teachers and. And the biggest thing that happened to me was that I, I became an English teacher, but I also had had this amazing education and I ended up getting this Master's degree in social justice and. I created the first LGBTQ literature class in a public high school, in the country. And it's now been running for, since 2002 or 3. I did a pilot of it for two years and then it was opened up to the whole student body, and I would say 150 kids a year take it. There's five sections of it, it's the most popular English class at our high school. And, by the time, so by the time everyone graduates, it's more than half of the senior class, probably 2/3 of the senior class has taken it.

And that's a piece of, that comes from my Holy Cross education is this idea that you can, that education should be used to open up the way that people think.

Emma and Nora: Mmhmm.

Sara: And it ended up for me, I had just had this belief that, you know, if I could go to Holy Cross and learn all the things I learned there, that this liberal community that I was in, that they could also handle a little bit more too. And, it ended up being really, really transformative. And I do think of my job as a service, and not just a job.

Nora: Yeah.

Sara: It's my life's work, so.

Nora: That's incredible.

Emma: Yeah, that's awesome. And I agree with that. I think Holy Cross pushes you to fight more and sort of, it's kind of, I don't know, it's sort of a, a world of its own.

Nora: I think that earlier, earlier on you put it well in the sense, when you were kind of describing learning to be able to articulate your own point in this major dialogue where the perspectives are just so different.

Sara: Mmhmm.

Nora: I think that we definitely learn those skills at Holy Cross without even being aware of the fact that we're learning them.

Sara: Yeah.

Nora: Yeah, it's an experiential thing that I think does exist at Holy Cross over time.

Sara: Mmhmm.

Emma and Nora: For sure.

Sara: Now to go back to the other question you asked me what advice I would give to someone who was struggling to come out and then you, it was another one, or a senior who, and then I asked you well what are the issues they're experiencing. And you said that sometimes people want, think that there are more pieces to me than just this one piece of being queer identified or labeled. So I think that I have always been this person who think, I've lived my life in this way that, you don't have to be an activist to change the world. That you can change the world by just being the amazing person that you are supposed to be. There are all these opportunities when, especially right now in our political climate there's, things happen and people are like, what can I do? And, one of the most important things is for people to just gather and show their numbers. But the other thing is just for people to live their lives and dedicate their lives to justice and equality for all people and so that's not really, it's a quiet thing it's not a big activist thing. And I feel like, for example being a teacher or you could be a veterinarian it doesn't really matter but in your daily dealings with people being totally open about who you are. Walking in the world openly and as a queer person and with dignity and treating people with equality is, that is

enough, you don't need to join a club or march in the streets. A lot of people contribute more in a much quieter way.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Emma: That's really well put. Is there a particular moment that you think back on Holy Cross where being LGBT impacted your experience? Maybe one specific instance. It could be positive or negative.

Sara: Hmm, well, yeah, I, one thing. This is such a weird thing, it's a random thing that just jumped out at me when you asked that question. But, so, I was, when I was a senior I won two awards, and there's this awards ceremony and they say your name and they talk about the award you won, and so one of them was the Women's Studies Award. And I did my Women's Studies thesis on bisexuality at Holy Cross and whether the, whether the geography of the place affected people's choice. So in other words, if you were bisexual identified are you gonna live it out at Holy Cross or are you gonna live it out somewhere else cause it's safer, or more accepting. And it was really interesting because I did all these anonymous surveys and all these people that I thought were straight came out to me as bisexual. Now all my students are like, everyone's bisexual. And I'm like okay, I mean, not everyone. Almost everyone, almost all women. And I'm like, okay. But, that's sort of what I found out in that survey, was, I surveyed all these people and they were just coming up to me in the dining hall, like, "I just wanna tell you about this thing", cause it started out as anonymous, and then, so, that was this amazing thing and so I won this award and at the banquet they were just like here's your award you won the Women's Studies award, I don't think they talked a lot about what it was about. But, I think that there was a lunch or something, I think I had to give a talk about it. So it's very public, the talk, but at the ceremony they just gave me the award. The other one was I won this writing award, the Purple award or something for that literary magazine.

Nora: Mmhmm.

Sara: I wrote this poem, I wrote a bunch of poems, but I won this award for this poem I wrote that was "A Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Her Lover, Lorena Hickok". 'Cause she'd had this long affair and written 3,000 letters to this woman who was a journalist who covered her when she was in the White House. She actually lived in the White House at the time. So I wrote this poem and when they read the award, they cut the title. So at the awards ceremony they were Sara Barber Just wins the Purple award for, it was Sara Just then, wins the Purple Award for this poem "A Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt". And they just cut the rest. It was clearly the title was "To Her Lover Lorena Hickok." And they just cut it out at the ceremony, and I was like, oh my god, I couldn't. It was so weird going up to get it thinking they just did this because all these parents were there. And they didn't wanna deal with it. So that was just, that's a small, it's not a super defining thing but I think that, that was what my experience was like. Was you're doing so great, here's all these prizes, just kidding. Or, you can be in this group and I will mentor you every single week and for years but I can't marry you, you know. So that, it was always so much, but not really the whole package. I wasn't resentful, but was just, that was just what characterized my experience.

Emma: Yeah, yeah, I feel it's like that sometimes still. It's sort of like they're going as far as they can but they won't cross that threshold I guess.

Sara: Yeah.

Emma: It's like where you want them to be you're so close.

Nora: Agreed.

Emma: So, I guess we just have a couple of wrapping up questions, they're just sort of run-throughs, so your year of graduation?

Sara: 1996.

Emma: Uh, your major at Holy Cross.

Sara: English and Women's Studies was my minor.

Emma: Okay, cool. Gender identity?

Sara: Female and cisgender.

Emma: Sexuality?

Sara: That one is so hard. I mean I am lesbian identified by the world but I'm still you know bisexual identified for real.

Emma: Okay, cool.

Sara: That's my private identity. I mean everyone else just calls me a lesbian, but. It's not really wrong when you've been with a woman for 25 years, but.

Emma: And so racial ethnic background?

Sara: I'm white.

Emma: And then, your current occupation.

Sara: I'm a teacher and an English department head.

Emma: Awesome.

Nora: Okay, awesome, yeah, that's all we have.

Emma: Yeah, this has been really great. Yeah, very insightful.

Sara: Well thank you so much for getting up, I don't know if this is early for you, getting up at, getting there at 8:30.

Nora: No, no, not at all.

Sara: I was like, I'm waking them up early.

All: Laughs.

[(2:29 mins cut (Discussion of logistics of oral history and exhibit)]

Sara: Alright, well thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Emma: Thank you so much, it's been great. It was so nice meeting you.

Sara: Okay, well you can email me if you have any other questions.

Nora: Perfect.

Emma: We'll be sending you the transcription so we'll be in contact, thank you so much.

Nora: Thank you!

Emma: Bye!

Sara: Bah-bye.