

UC Santa Cruz

Out in the Redwoods

Title

Living History Circle (group interview): Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

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LIVING HISTORY CIRCLE



This group living history circle was conducted on April 20, 2002, as part of the Banana Slug Spring Fair annual event for UCSC alumni and prospective students. The session was organized by Irene Reti, together with Jacquelyn Marie, and UCSC staff person and alum Valerie Jean Chase. The discussion was approximately ninety minutes and included the following participants: Walter Brask, Melissa Barthelemy, Valerie Chase, Cristy Chung, James K. Graham, Linda Rosewood Hooper, Rik Isensee, David Kirk, Stephen Klein, John Laird, Jacquelyn Marie, Robert Philipson, Irene Reti, and John Paul Zimmer. This was also the thirtieth reunion of the Class of 1972, which is why there is a disproportionate number of participants from that period of UCSC history. The interview was taped and transcribed. Where possible, speakers are identified.—Editor.

Jacquelyn Marie: We have three basic questions, and they will probably blend together. Please say your name, what college you graduated from, and your year of graduation. Then there should be lots of time to respond to each other. The questions have to do with



the overall climate on campus; professors and other role models, and classes; and the impact of UCSC on yourselves as GLBT people in terms of your life, your identity, your work.

The first question is: what was the overall climate at UCSC when you were here, in terms of your identity?

James Graham: I'll start. I think I'm the senior person here. I'm James Graham. I graduated from Cowell College in 1971, and there was nothing out in the redwoods that I knew about while I was here. I do remember in my senior year seeing a notice on a bulletin board saying, "Gay house looking for a roommate," and thinking, oh my, this is something new. But at the same time, I don't think it was exactly an oppressive or repressive atmosphere. I thought it was an incredibly life-enhancing atmosphere. The campus was still very small. It was very easy to be queer, in the old-fashioned sense of the word. Everyone who came here was thought to be queer in those days. Because, after all, we were the hippies in the redwoods. People were doing all kinds of wonderful, strange, inventive things. And at the same time, the dormitories were still segregated into men's and women's dorms. The proctor came around to announce that visiting hours were over. Don't roll your eyes in amazement! It was, I think, a very healthy place. And certainly the notion of searching for truth in the company of friends is one that has guided my life ever since.

Rik Isensee: My name is Rik Isensee. I graduated from Porter [College] in 1972. I had a college major. I don't know if they still have those. So I had to transfer to Porter in order to graduate. When I was a senior, there was a gay-straight dialogue event that I went to. That was very helpful, because you didn't have to say which side of the dialogue you were on. I was really intrigued by that and was thinking that this was something... I had had a girlfriend for a few years, and we had recently broken up, and I was in a perplexed place myself. Prior to that time, I didn't know anybody who was gay. I didn't know anybody really was. It was such a vague thing, because there wasn't anything written about it. There was nothing in the media, the newspapers, or anything. Except for Stonewall. I sort of vaguely heard about that. I was kind of interested in psychology, so I



knew that it was considered a mental disorder, and that didn't change until 1973 or 1974. So there was a part of me that was wondering whether there would ever be a future for me. I'd say overall, it was a perplexing time.

Immediately after that, by the mid-1970s, I was involved with a number of community groups in town [Santa Cruz]. I think that UCSC, even though there wasn't a whole lot going on at the time, really provided some momentum for people to be involved in community development and community-related projects. I was involved with study groups in town, which were all run by former students. We'd get together and learn about things, or start some project. I was part of beginning a men's resource collective, and half of us ended up being gay. That was part of how my early process was facilitated. A men against rape group. I was part of the radio news collective at KZSC for awhile after I graduated. Then a group of us got some peer counseling training and we set up a gay peer counselor service. That was in the mid-1970s. We offered peer counseling for people who were just coming out and wanted to talk to a real live gay person, just to see what that was like! [laughter]

Melissa Barthelemy: My name is Melissa Barthelemy and I graduated in 2000 from Merrill College. The climate is pretty much like what we're experiencing right now. I'm the most recent alum here. My freshman year is when I came out, and at that time we didn't have a director for the Center. The very first event I went to was actually a repainting of the [GLBT] Center and pancake breakfast. Because it was put to me that the students... Well, Merrill College was trying to take away the physical space of the Center in order to use it for administrative offices. That was what Donna had told me, who was the student who kind of acted in the director role for the Center. She worked part time. So I went from that, to being able to participate in the constituent interviews for the hiring of the director, and worked with Deb Abbott my last three years. I think being in such a liberal and supportive environment helped speed my coming out process. I think if I had been at UC Irvine or other campuses that my partner and friends attended, that it might have been several years before I actually came out and became as active. Having such a supportive Center also helped me get more involved, in terms of being able to do



an internship with the chancellor my senior year, and helped in my growth and development and professional functioning. In the fall, I am going to pursue my master's in social work. I think getting so involved in programming and social support activities has influenced my career path.

Cristy Chung: I'm Cristy Chung and I graduated from Crown College in 1987. I was here from 1982 to 1987. When I first started, it was hard, because I was at Crown. It was a pretty conservative college. A lot of computer science people. I was one of those when I started. I finally took my first women's studies class—Women's Studies 101, with Bettina Aptheker. That's when I came out. Once I left Crown College I felt like oh okay, there's this whole other world out there.

Linda Rosewood Hooper: What college was that world at?

Cristy Chung: At Kresge.

[group laughter]

Cristy Chung: I was really active, mostly in doing women of color organizing when I first came out. We did a lot of feminist stuff too, and bringing books to campus. One of the things about being a lesbian of color is having to choose between which community you are going to organize around. So initially for me it was really women of color. I think part of what was hard was that I wasn't getting to do queer stuff. So I started to do more organizing in the queer community. I joined GALA and I was on their board for a little while. There was a big fight between women of color and gay white men. It sort of exploded in our faces.

Also around that time was when the queer Center was underneath the radio station in this little dark closet. We were trying to fix it up, because it had gotten dusty and old, and the library wasn't in any order, and people had taken out books and not returned them. So we were trying to put them back together, and there was this rickety old heater in there that caught on fire. I was talking to Deb Abbott today, and she said, "That's



where those books came from! We have these books that look all water-damaged.” It’s because there was that fire in the Center. So anyway, after that whole thing between women of color and gay white men sort of exploded in our faces, I left. I started doing more organizing around Pacific/Asian lesbians. There was a small group of about five of us who got together. We did writing groups. We were in search of each other, so we were so excited to finally have found each other, and to all be students on campus. So we started a book project, and we came out with *Between the Lines: A Pacific Asian Lesbian Anthology*. We distributed it across the country. At that point it was really exciting. It launched my career, and allowed me to be who I was, to put the pieces together. I really did a lot of great work here.

Valerie Chase: I’m Valerie Chase. I came to UCSC in 1979. I graduated from College Five in the last graduating class of College Five [Porter College—Editor], which was 1981. I hung out afterwards and became a staff member. I’ve been a staff member for the University since 1985. I’m a housing administrator at Merrill right now. I must say I was really clueless. I was the last person to realize I was a lesbian. When I came here, one of my gay friends in Santa Barbara said, “Oh, you’ll love UCSC. It’s crawling with lesbians!” It just passed over my head. 1979 was that period where women had short hair and wore flannel shirts, and everyone was very butch. You couldn’t go anywhere without seeing this big lesbian presence. I think that became the influence for that article in *Ms. Magazine* which said Santa Cruz was the feminist utopia of the United States. The climate was very out and very proud and very feminist. There were a lot of out women professors, people like Josette Mondanaro, Karlene Faith, and Nancy Stoller. So there were real role models on campus. Soon afterwards, Bettina [Aptheker] came. There were a whole host of women, and also gay men like David Thomas. It was a climate that made you feel like you were going to find yourself. I still remember that poster that admissions did, “Coming to Santa Cruz is a Good Idea.” *City on the Hill Press* took that poster and recreated it as, “Coming Out at Santa Cruz is a Good Idea.” It was an environment where you discovered who you were, and had the space to rethink where you were going, and what you were going to do.



Irene Reti: My name is Irene Reti, and I came to UC Santa Cruz when I was seventeen years old, in 1978. I was straight out of a girls' Catholic high school in Los Angeles, although I was Jewish and didn't know it, which is a whole other story. I came out in that late-1970s, early-1980s lesbian-feminist context. Bettina Aptheker and the whole women's studies experience was very intertwined with my coming out as a lesbian. "Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice," went a popular saying of the time, although I certainly never considered myself a political lesbian. It wasn't just about politics. I was attracted to women. But it was certainly political. I ended up staying here as a staff person working for the library.

Linda Rosewood Hooper: My name is Linda Rosewood Hooper and I graduated from College Eight in 1984. I came here from Fresno City College in 1981. I'm glad you mentioned that about the newspaper because I came here for a Preview Day, and somebody had saved some [copies of] *City on a Hill* for me. I saw that cover and I thought, oh yes, I bet I could meet some lesbians if I came to that school.

The first year I lived at Porter, and I was trying to write my own vagina dialogues play, but I was not political. It was mostly I wanted to be a lesbian because it was my personal life. I had no real political context. I graduated three years later and took a year off. I started reading and came out to myself and other people in my family.

Then when I came back in the Science Communication Program at Crown as a graduate student, something wonderful had appeared since I was an undergraduate, and that was that what later became the internet was available here, just on this campus, where students could anonymously have conversations with each other in what you would call a chat room now. We called it a forum then. But it was a newsgroup... Those weren't even happening then, either. But it was a place where students, where I could participate in being a different person, and arguing, and coming out, and working out all of the wonderful things that the web and the internet have given gay culture now. It was tremendously exciting.



A student named Gary Reynolds put a list available in a public way... You could look at this list of everybody who was gay. You could send a list of everybody you knew who was a gay or lesbian person, and he would add them to the list. There was no fact-finding or anything. It was a list of everybody we knew who was gay from all time anywhere in the world. And it was a wonderful, wonderful thing.

I never went to a women's studies class. UCSC has been everything to me. I've worked here... Without this place I wouldn't be who I am. I hope I've given something back.

John Laird: I'm John Laird. I graduated from Stevenson College in 1972. I was here for four years as a student. I went straight through, 1968 to 1972. I've already done an oral history for Out in the Redwoods, so a lot is in there. I've been intertwined with the campus and the gay community since I first came to Santa Cruz. I've been on Closet Free Radio... I finally had to leave when I filed [to run] for the [state] legislature a few months ago. But I've been a regular for twelve years, and have been at Gay Pride for twenty-two years, was on the [Santa Cruz] City Council all during the 1980s, and was mayor.

In our four years, 1968 to 1972, Stonewall happened in the summer between our first and second years here. There was absolutely no role model, or no out-life in any way. Nobody talked about it. Earlier today, Rik Isensee and I were sitting next to each other at the reunion table, and commenting on the fact that of the twenty people who lived on our dorm floor, we now know four were gay then, and yet that's nothing we knew when it was going on! Which is too bad, I'm sure, for many reasons we would not want to talk about on tape. [laughter] Nevertheless, that's what life was like.

Rik talked about the Gay-Straight Dialogue; that was very significant. The Stevenson Coffeehouse was created the Thursday night before we graduated. It didn't exist the four years we were here. That was a commuter lounge. It was actually called the Jolly Room. [laughter] And that is where the dialogue was. There was a big buzz around the college, because people would walk by and they would look and see who was in there, and they would talk about it. "Did you who see who was in the Gay-Straight Dialogue," sort of inferring that they were gay. It was very interesting, and there were a couple of people



we thought were gay. One of them I actually rented a place to for a summer. When I went off for the summer, he moved into my place, and he re-decorated the whole place and wanted me to come in and see it, and I did. I always wanted to talk to him years later. He died in the middle of the [AIDS] epidemic. I read an obituary of him in the *Bay Area Reporter*. He was somebody who had been at UCSC and could have offered what it was like to be an active gay man during the time when nobody knew about it or talked about it, which was exactly what it was then. That's what's exciting about hearing all the other histories as we've gone around the room, is what different times and places and what different experiences. The University has been here for thirty-seven years and nobody talked about it at the beginning.

I was thinking when James Graham was talking about the proctors at the dorms, that they were very upset if a man was in a women's dorm overnight. The proctor at Cowell College was actually a minister and I never saw him as mad as when he discovered men and women skinny-dipping together in the swimming pool at night. He hadn't even advanced to gay issues. And one of the interesting things is that I was in the Blue Lagoon [bar] about ten years ago, and this guy introduced himself to me, and the name that he gave was the same name as the minister who was the proctor at Cowell College. He said, "That was my father." His son turned out to be a gay man, and it didn't seem to me that [his father] had ever been clear on that before he died. But it was another very interesting thing of how evolution comes.

Robert Philipson: My name is Robert Philipson and I was at Merrill from 1968 to 1972. It was interesting hearing John [Laird] talk about those years, because those were the years that I was here, and I can corroborate what he was saying. It wasn't on anybody's radar screen. It certainly wasn't on mine. I didn't know that I was gay at that time. As a matter of fact, I have a little anecdote. It was a very touchy-feely time, as you remember if you were around. One of the things that the University sponsored was a... They were kind of like encounter groups, and Merrill started one here that I was invited to join. During the first session, the fellow to the left of me, who was at the very advanced age of twenty-six or twenty-seven, haltingly confessed that he had been a gay man; he'd been in the navy



and been a gay man in San Diego and had moved up here to get away from all of that. I had this reaction that was like [gasps]. Of course it was homophobic panic, but I didn't realize that. We later got to be very good friends. He stayed in the community, and unfortunately died of the plague [AIDS]. Since there was this sort of pan-sexuality that was going around, you could sleep with people of the same sex and not label yourself as gay. Certainly there was a lot of that happening. I was retarded, so I wasn't sleeping with people, and certainly not with men. That came later. But I just wanted to second what John was saying about... I mean, the women definitely had it over us because there was a political discourse through feminism that allowed for the articulation of a gay consciousness. Gay men didn't have that.

John Zimmer: I'm John Zimmer and I was a Crown student between 1968 and 1972. By the time I was seventeen, I was out and knew I was gay. I knew it in a theoretical way. I always say I solved everybody else's problems with my sexuality (because I didn't have problems with my sexuality) in high school by asking myself a question. And that question was: if true love were to present itself, would it matter if it came in the guise of female or male? Well, let's not talk about the question.

I found my first love here in Santa Cruz. I was an out and openly out gay man between 1968 and 1972. So I have, I think, a little different experience of the campus. I remember that during those years we figured out that Santa Cruz had an absolutely *huge* number of gay people living here. There was an enormous community, and in terms of men not being organized, they weren't organized in the sense... But we did start a gay union. I remember that the women were pretty much the political organizers. I remember we used to have lots of guests come down. We had some folks who were going through transexual operations come down and talk to us.

Rik Isensee: Well, it turned out my own roommate was gay, which I didn't know and he didn't know, but he contacted me after about twenty years, and said that he had seen some reference to some of my books. He said, "I wondered about you." He said that he was too. It was so startling to think that we actually could have been roommates and never have ventured onto that topic. In so many ways you are lucky because of your



own developmental place that you were in that you were already open and out and meeting people. I didn't know anybody, including my own roommate.

Laird: I had the same experience. The first roommate that I was placed with at Merrill turned out to be gay. He actually came out before he graduated. I was still clueless.

Isensee: Then John and I shared a roommate, in a sense. His roommate our first year was my roommate our sophomore year. We always speculated about him, because he seemed so homophobic and was always kind of scoping out who the fags were, but in a negative way. It always seemed like this was on his mind more than might have otherwise been likely. He was a very strict Catholic.

Zimmer: I do not remember homophobia on campus, but maybe I was just oblivious.

Melissa Barthelemy: I think it depends on your personal experience. I mean, look at me. I graduated in 2000. I was incredibly active, but I did [experience] quite a few homophobic incidents because I was so active. I lived in the dorms over at Merrill, and it was kind of funny, because we were told that our dorm was going to switch to being an all-girls floor. I was there my first year in a single. It's unusual to get a single room, and they said I could stay the next year and have that same single room, but it was going to be all girls.

But we all arrived back, and it ended up being eight guys and four girls, which was okay, because it was co-ed our first year, but these guys were just a little bit more testosterone-prone. It was just a different environment. The guys my first year... I hate to stereotype, but they were much more like into women's studies and taking Chinese and doing yoga and that type of thing. It just happened that the guys my second year were into rough-tough activities, blaring rap music at two in the morning, getting drunk, doing drugs. It was just a very different environment. I was very active with the GLBT Center, and I would post up flyers by my door of activities going on, and sometimes I'd even have lots of other GLBT folks come over to the lounge, and we'd have a social support group in our lounge in the dorm hall. The guys didn't really like that. It got to be an issue, where



comments were written on walls, and things like that, that kind of an environment. We had to have the residential staff come in and do some work, and try and get together and talk about those issues. It worked in the sense that of the eight guys, two of them came around and apologized to me and kind of loosened up. But some of the other guys got more defensive about the whole situation. That was [at] the end of my sophomore year.

I think sometimes it just depends on your personal experience. Like I said, the guys my first year were fantastic. But coincidentally, the guys who were there my second year were less comfortable with themselves and their sexuality. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the individuals I'm discussing later did come out as gay. I think they were struggling with some of their internalized homophobia. For me to be as active as I was, and have gay people regularly visiting me and hanging out in the communal area, was a threat to them.

Rosewood Hooper: It always surprises me how guys who are really homosocial end up being real homophobic. They just want to be with the guys.

I have a question I'd like to ask the group. I've been thinking a lot about what coming out is, and why people don't. I wonder if anyone here can recall a scandal at UCSC where somebody was outed and it was a bad thing. I find it hard to believe. I don't think that it did happen. Have people who worked here or taught here always been able to come out here? Has anybody ever heard of anything like that, maybe a professor? I think I've heard that Nancy Stoller's struggles had to do with the fact that she was a lesbian, but she was out already. It wasn't like she got outed. I know that students coming out probably are persecuted. But I can't remember any faculty or staff member who was persecuted or outed or anything like that.

Dave Kirk: I'm an ex-staff member for twenty-nine years, 1972 through last year. So I have a range of gay history on campus. The only thing I can comment on is that Alan Sable, who was a professor here, outed himself, [and] the general feeling is that due to him outing himself he did not get tenure. They didn't use that as the direct reason why he didn't get tenure, but that was the peripheral reason that it happened. Alan was one



of the founders of GALA, in 1975. He was the faculty sponsor. So that's the only case I even know about.

Zimmer: And having worked some years ago for the University President's office, I would take this fellow's story as being pretty literally true, as you can imagine, anywhere. It can be detrimental. You don't know where it comes from. And they can't say anything, or you'd have a lawsuit. These are fairly conservative institutions, no matter how liberal they are, and they tolerate a certain amount... But within the institution it can be very hard on people who come out.

Rosewood Hooper: So you still think that at Santa Cruz a professor couldn't come out?

Zimmer: I don't know. But I'd say that you'd be taking your tenure in your hands. Not if you've got it already.

Reti: Yes, that's what a lot of professors have done. Dave Thomas didn't come out until he had tenure, for example.

Laird: Well, I was never more surprised in my life. David Thomas was my faculty adviser the whole time I was a student here. There was this men's group in town that was one of the things that transformed the local gay men's community. About 1979 and 1980, it ended up being ninety men a week, about 250 men over a year. It was when people banded together, and came out as a unit, and moved out very publicly across the board in town. I walked into one of the first ones, and David Thomas was sitting there. It was all I could do to keep from blurting out: "What are *you* doing here?" [laughter]

Walter Brask: My name is Walter Brask. I was at Cowell from 1968 to 1972. We just came from a Cowell reunion of mostly Cowell people, and my sense then and now is that the Cowell experience was really a major part of our experience at UCSC. I was not out. In fact, I wasn't even really self-aware when I was a student here, although it was bubbling, and I did end up at the counseling center for a few sessions. The basic function of that



was just to calm me down. I dealt it with it a few years later. My roommate was gay! And I only found that out later on.

[laughter from whole room]

Laird: Did anybody have a *straight* roommate?

[laughter]

Brask: The way I came out was actually directly related to that. Because [my roommate] was seeing... He was from Los Angeles and he was seeing Dr. Evelyn Hooker who was [one of] the psychiatrist[s] who was responsible for getting the APA to remove homosexuality from the list of diseases. When I was in graduate school, I was reading a *New York Times* article, and here was Evelyn Hooker talking about gay people and related issues. I thought: *my friend, gay, Evelyn Hooker*. Aha! I made the connection on him. And so my actual coming out was coming out to him. I said, "I know you're gay, and I'm kind of there, ready to come out." He's the one who took me to my first gay bar, and that was a whole revelation of the experience. We were freshmen year roommates and that was six years later, but in a very odd way, initially negative obviously, but ultimately positive, that was the link.

Stephen Klein: My name is Stephen Klein. I was at Cowell from 1968 to 1972. What I remember gay was during my senior year, and I think it actually got started during my junior year because I did [the] Education Abroad Program during my junior year, there was a gay group that met at Cowell, in the room that's right across from where the mailboxes are. I was scared shitless to go to those meetings. It was at Cowell. Who would see me go in? So I waited until April of my senior year to go in, and it was quite a revelation and very affirming to do that. I remember it wasn't so much a whole lot of people from campus, as it was people who lived in town. I met this very interesting guy who lived in Boulder Creek. So that was what I remember from campus.



What I liked, was that at least in my head, dating was very ambiguous here. We would go to movies in Natural Sciences III on a Saturday night, and it would be eight or nine people, men and women, just going off. It wasn't like arm-in-arm, a boyfriend-and-girlfriend kind of thing. So the pressure of having an identifiable girlfriend in my confused freshmen and sophomore years was not there. Now, my confusion kind of went away in my sophomore year because I had a car and I used to drive to San Francisco, and go to this dirty movie somewhere. I didn't know what was going on. I just watched the movie. Little did I know that if you kind of walked around you would have a more social experience instead of an individual experience. As far as stuff in town, I kind of remember it, but I think it was after I graduated. There was this place over near Dominican Hospital that was Mona's Gorilla Lounge. I mean, Hollywood could not have cast this place as a depressing-looking gay bar. I don't even remember if there was music.

Laird: At the beginning, it was just a jukebox. You put money in and you danced.

Klein: By that time, I'd been to Berkeley. I'd paid my fifty cents to go across the Bridge to San Francisco and I *knew* there were better things than Mona's Gorilla Lounge! [laughter] And yet that was the only show in town. So if you wanted to meet gay people, that's where you went. That's what I remember about gay life in those early years. I do remember going to the library. I'm a librarian and [the book category] HQ76 was [laughter all around] It wasn't like a small town library, where you could look at the cards to see who checked the book out! [laughter] Not like Lake County, or other places in the world. But would there be other people browsing in that section? Would that be a way of meeting people? I don't remember a whole lot of identifiable gay men at Cowell. Do you?

Graham: I would say there were people who were obvious, but not necessarily out or identified. And if you weren't out yourself, then you just sort of observed. But it wasn't a big issue.



Speaker unidentifiable: I'm curious about this gap between John's experience and so much of what we're saying. I mean, partially lost to my own consciousness. Was I not seeing what was there in front of me? What was going on for the men?

Zimmer: One of the comments that Steve made is that at the Gay Union meeting there were people from off campus. It was my impression that those were gay and lesbian students who didn't live on campus. I guess I should kick in. Part of my reality was that by my second quarter here I was gone from campus, in the sense of living where I was staying. I met someone whom I fell in love with, and I was protected from having to seek out others for sexual purposes, if you will, because that wasn't part of my life. I was very happy. My life was...married. So I'm wondering about those people. Were they students?

Klein: No. I don't think there was anything else going on in town. So the fact that it was happening on campus... That was just a place where people chose to come to these meetings. Rap groups were very popular. And those kinds of things.

The only other thing I can remember is John Dizikes, God bless him, telling me—because he read the *New York Times* and I was clueless about the *New York Times*—I remember him telling me that he had read something about the Stonewall Riots and that he thought that was going to be a big thing in the world. I just remember him mentioning that to me. So I started reading the *New York Times*.

Rosewood Hooper: I think the experience was whether you were out or not. Because when I was not out as an undergraduate, being a lesbian was completely about my private life and who I was in love with and chasing after, or whatever. When I came back as a graduate student, it was completely different. Oh look! All these lesbian organizations have suddenly appeared here that I can now go to! So that's obviously why. It's completely different.

Laird: Well, there's one other thing that is significant there, and it's you saying: "Off campus and on campus." Because in those early years (and the reason there is a



disproportionate number of people graduating in 1972 is because it's our thirtieth reunion and that's why we're all here), in the very first years of campus it was residential. There were people who lived on campus all four years. I lived on two, and off for two, and that was considered somewhat revolutionary. And as a result, the social scene significantly revolved around the dorm life and the living on campus life, and there were certain social strictures or pressures that came from that. You lived your life in front of everybody else. And that's very different from being off campus with one other person and feeling like a lot of people are gay.

Speaker unidentifiable: Well, Steve Kraft whom you know, Steve Kraft had a mission to attempt to create communication, and let everyone know—you are *not* the only gay person in Santa Cruz. Actually, there are lots of us. He literally leafletted the town, put flyers and... So there were lots and lots of people.

Laird: I'm sorry I missed that.

Speaker unidentifiable: ...and off campus places at our homes.

Laird: But you're putting it perfectly in perspective, because (and I sort of alluded to it before you came here, in just mentioning him, but not by name), there was this underground talk about two or three people who might be gay, and he was one. It was not like it was really open, and I didn't feel like he was really open among the people who were on campus. And yet he was the subject of... I don't even know if people even used the word *gay*. So I think it was real different in how it was reflected among the people who were living together in close quarters. When we started in the fall of 1968, there were only 2400 students up here. There were four colleges. There were only 600 people in each college. And the residential percentage was overwhelming.

Kirk: I have a question. When did the trailers go away, that were down by the Fieldhouse.

Graham: The summer of 1967.



Laird: What I think you are asking about, Dave, is when did people actually live in them as a group, and that was 1965 to 1967.

Kirk: God, that dates me then. I was going with a guy who lived in the trailers, but I could never...

Speaker unidentifiable: Trailer trash... [whispered]

[general laughter]

Kirk: ...but he didn't want me to come down there and pick him up, or meet him, or anything, or eat [there]. He didn't have any transportation and the bus system, God knows [in] those days did not come on campus. It may have come on campus once a day. So if we wanted to go to the movies, or go out, or anything, I had to come to campus and pick him up, but away from the P. E. building, which was the main meeting building, and the trailers. I had to sort of park the car—talk about furtive. He could not let anybody know in the trailer unit that he was in, one, that he was going out with anyone male or female, but two, with a guy! I don't know what the real situation was of everybody living in those trailers. But that is something I had experience of, of the furtiveness of gay identity in those years. I cannot tell you which year, [but] it was probably 1967. So it's very different hearing about what happened after the dorms were built. It must have been really closeted in that trailer situation.

Klein: The source of information for me was the *Berkeley Barb*. You could get the *Barb* in Santa Cruz. I remember the ads were always good for a thrill at some level, but there were also articles in there, because there were things going on in San Francisco and Berkeley that had yet to come over Highway 17 to us.

Laird: I don't think they'd gotten to Belmont! [laughter]

Klein: I had a choice of going to graduate school at UCLA or Berkeley. And of course UCLA meant probably living at home, and Berkeley meant Berkeley. And as I said, the



bridge toll was just fifty cents in those days before BART. You could get over the bridge really quick. There too, the gay students met in one of the dorms, one of the high rises. There it was worse because of the football jocks, who would sit in the lounge area before you went into the meeting room. It was pretty intimidating to have them there, and just kind of glare at you. That was their other sport, which just struck me as totally weird. Now we'd all say it was harassment and haul someone to a training class. It *was* harassment. They were never physical about it. They were just harassing by their presence.

Speaker unidentifiable: Remember *The Boys in the Band*? It played at the Nickelodeon. There was a gay group that was leafletting outside the theater.

Graham: I think it was presented on campus, in 1972 or 1973.

Speaker unidentifiable: It was some gay group on campus, and they were denouncing it because of the negative stereotypes. My reading is that people's attitudes towards the movie have changed. But at the time it was considered to be very retro.

Speaker unidentifiable: Now it's an artifact. I'm just wondering if anybody here had any experience with it?

Laird: There was one thing I was going to add that was more modern, that I forgot about. I thought about it walking over here. I'm a fellow of Merrill College. I was given an honorary fellowship because I was selected to be the graduation speaker. It was either 1991 or 1992. I was in part selected by the outgoing class to be the graduation speaker because I'd been one of the most public openly gay men in the community. I made my graduation speech in part about my own self-awareness after campus, and being a gay man. And there were some letters of protest written by parents of the graduates to John Isbister, who was the provost at the time. I still have them somewhere. It was like, "We paid for four years for our kid to come to school here and that didn't mean for us to have to sit and listen to that at the graduation." There were some very homophobic things. John Isbister wrote back and said, "That was the selection of the graduates. We're proud



of John Laird. He's now an honorary fellow of the college. Thank you very much." But it was a very interesting juxtaposition. I remember even being a little bit terrorized about giving the speech, because the graduation was in the Quarry, and there was this huge crowd, and I had to stand up and talk about something that was very personal and risky in some ways, even though I figured there could be somebody listening to this that this will make a difference to. Someone will take something away from this, because that's what happened to me in certain ways. I wanted to give back. It's all a cycle, and you help the next people along. So it was interesting, because there was a discussion earlier about how supportive this environment has been in different ways. I didn't feel unsupported in any way by anybody who was closely affiliated with the University. It was people who came in from the outside. But it was an interesting experience in the scheme of things.

Isensee: The time that we were here, from 1968 to 1972, was such a tumultuous time in this country. There was the anti-war movement, People's Park. We had demonstrations up here on campus.

Speaker unidentifiable: We blocked Highway One.

Isensee: Right. And there was a strike, and somebody blew up the kiosk.

Speaker unidentifiable: And caused Ronald Reagan to appear in Santa Cruz.

Speaker unidentifiable: And Max Rafferty.

Laird: That's right, Santa Cruz was "a cross between a hippie pad and a brothel."

Isensee: Stuff like that. Kent State and the very-charged political environment led to a conscious awareness of all kinds of social issues and involvements of many people, and politics was such a big deal on this campus.

Speaker unidentifiable: And in a way, what would now have been identified as queer consciousness, was subsumed by feminism. There wasn't a discursive space for gay men



at that time, I don't think. Santa Cruz was supportive of everything. If there had been any sort of consciousness that we could have grabbed onto, Santa Cruz would have been supportive of it.

Speaker unidentifiable: But it did lead to that.

Speaker unidentifiable: Eventually. But I think we were lost in a fog of unconsciousness and our own internalized homophobia.

Rosewood Hooper: It led to that when the AIDS epidemic started.

Isensee: Well, way before that, actually, in the early-1970s downtown, after I was off campus.

Rosewood Hooper: What years were those?

Isensee: This was 1973, 1974.

Rosewood Hooper: So you're saying this was different?

Isensee: No, this is just a couple of years later, and it was off campus. But it was generated by people who had been very close to a lot of women who had been involved with the feminist movement. And as it turned out, a lot of men were attracted to doing that kind of thing. Half of the men who ended up getting involved with the men's resource collective were in two or three men's groups in town that we knew of. The one I was in, most of the men were straight, but there was another one where more of the guys were gay. And then we pulled together this men's resource collective, with the idea of providing a weekly program for men to have a drop-in rap kind of thing. Out of that, a lot of gay consciousness-raising and organizing happened. Half of us turned out to be gay, so we ended up emphasizing that as well.

Laird: The later part of the 1970s in this community was powerful. The first Gay Pride Day was in 1975. The county became the first county in the United States to prohibit



discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation for its own employees in 1975. The first parade was in 1976. By the time of the men's group in 1978 and 1979, women's and men's groups at Cabrillo and UCSC during the 1970s... I remember something being published, a community newspaper of some sort, and the list of community resources was phenomenal. The peer counseling group, different individual groups... At that time we were so bursting out that we had everything. We had a gay Spanish-speaking dinner group. We started volleyball, Ken Smith and I, in 1979. We were searching to see how you constructed a community, trying to build something from scratch, because there was no history and there were no institutions. It's like what a lot of people have said around the table, [these] were the first stirrings in different nooks and crannies, that took eight or ten years to get to a critical mass. I think [all this happened] in many ways because this was a university town. But it didn't necessarily happen on the University campus. I think in some ways people were freer to do it in town, although at first it was probably a little bit freer to do some stuff on campus.

Marie: The people involved, were they coming from the campus, would you say?

Laird: There were a lot of graduates, a lot of faculty and staff, a lot of people that might be here for different reasons in town, economically, but those economic reasons wouldn't have existed if the University weren't here.

Kirk: I think after the 1972 class...[there was a] gap that happened in the middle there, until 1975, when we started the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. The Lesbian and Gay Men's Union out at Cabrillo was from 1972 to 1975, and then UCSC got its group. 1976 was a turning-point year because that was Anita Bryant. Then the follow-up to that in 1978 was Proposition 6, the Briggs Initiative. That stuff galvanized the Santa Cruz campus, the city, everywhere. I remember at that time it united every group in Santa Cruz. And our record that we hold is that Santa Cruz County, of all the counties in the state of California, had the highest No vote other than San Francisco County. Or we maybe even beat San Francisco County with the highest No vote on Proposition 6. Because every gay person and every feminist, every group that had anything going, got out on the streets and lobbied one-to-one with people, and talked about this, and educated, and did



everything possible. I think that was a big tide that happened with the community, with town-gown—the whole thing at once.

Laird: The interesting thing about it was that it qualified for the ballot a year, or a year and a half before people actually voted on it. There was a group in Santa Cruz called the Coalition United to Defeat the Briggs Initiative (CUDBI). CUDBI had these meetings... I thought, is this ballot measure ever going to get here? We were going to dinners all the time. And yet it was very good. It was one of the first times there were all these things with people from all parts of the community.

Kirk: So I think that helped change an atmosphere on campus for later years of students here, that there had been a politically active, gay group. Very visible things happening.

Isensee: A number of us went to this conference called “Faggots in Class Struggle” in Wolf Creek, Oregon, in [the] summer of 1976. It was a very stormy conference. The sissy-identified men went on strike because the male-identified men weren’t doing any of the cooking.

[laughter all around]

And there was this big storm between the country faggots and the city faggots. The city faggots thought the country faggots were all just off being hippies. And the country faggots said that the city faggots were just exploiting the city and the environment. And then there was this heart circle kind of maze thing that they made everybody go through, which culminated in an orgy in the teepee, apparently. I missed out on the orgy. But the next day somebody took the Talking Stick.

[laughter all around]

And demanded to process the fact that he had felt very left out in the orgy at the teepee because of all the ageist and looksist and sexist attitudes of the orgy.

Laird: What a great story. And an appropriate place to stop.