

Edwin Hermance, Class of 1962
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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DONIN: Alright. So today is Wednesday, June 19, 2013. My name's Mary Donin, and I'm in Philadelphia with Ed Hermance, Dartmouth Class of 1962. Okay, Ed. First of all, I cheated, and I looked at your 50th reunion essay. So you were born in Texas, right?

HERMANCE: Yes.

DONIN: So how is it you—tell us how you ended up coming to Dartmouth? Were you a legacy or did you....

HERMANCE: No. My best friend in high school wanted to come to Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh.

HERMANCE: And he was really important to me. [Laughs.] And so I applied, too.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: And sadly I got in and he did not. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Oh, dear!

HERMANCE: So...but, you know, it was an adventure that I wanted to have, to go off. I love the country, and I love the northeast trees and mountains and stuff; it's a really beautiful world up here.

DONIN: Had you been to Dartmouth before you went there?

HERMANCE: No, no. I had not been to the Northeast at all.

DONIN: Wow!

HERMANCE: My mother's family was from Mississippi, and I had not been to Chicago. I'd been to Minneapolis. And mostly in Texas and New Mexico. A little bit in Colorado and, you know, a couple of fast trips to California. But I really knew nothing about the East.

DONIN: That's pretty brave.

HERMANCE: Not really. [Laughs.]

DONIN: So you got there under your own steam, or did your parents bring you, or how did—

HERMANCE: I got on the train with my best friend, who was going to Washington and Lee. And the train from Texas to Hanover passes near—what is the name of that beautiful little town? Lexington, Virginia? Is that it?

DONIN: I don't remember.

HERMANCE: Well, anyway, in the Shenandoah Valley. It's gorgeous.

DONIN: And it was on the way to Hanover.

HERMANCE: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: So when you arrived, did you know anybody at Dartmouth at all?

HERMANCE: No, no.

DONIN: Uh-huh! So how was that, arriving? Was it scary?

HERMANCE: No, I wasn't scared. I did feel like, you know, this is the way to start over, you know, in a way that, Okay, I don't know anybody here. And I can kind of do my best to create a new response to people around me. I don't feel like I did a very good job of that. [Laughs.] But nevertheless it was...I felt kind of liberated.

DONIN: Were you feeling confined by your life in Texas as a high school kid?

HERMANCE: ...it was a social struggle for me.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: Until I was probably my...I guess as early as my sophomore year in high school, I didn't have any close friends. And just a reflection on—and I don't know why this is so. But then there was a group of five or six people in high school who... We were really very good friends; did a lot of things together. And then, you know, fairly steady contact with three of those folks.

DONIN: Wow.

HERMANCE: And I never formed that strong of relationships at Dartmouth. And, you know, I have one of my former roommates and another guy that I liked very much; when I did that coming-out letter, they responded very supportively.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

HERMANCE: I have seen David [the roommate] a couple of times since then. But it's really the Dartmouth gay alumni people; those are the people from Dartmouth that I know the best.

DONIN: That you've come to know since your undergraduate days?

HERMANCE: Right. You know, in fact a couple of those folks that I met in the early days of the—we called it Dartmouth Lambda in the beginning—those people were in my class, but I hadn't known them at college. And sadly both of them have died since then of AIDS.

DONIN: Yeah...

HERMANCE: So....

DONIN: So you were already...Were you already self-identifying as a gay man to people who were close to you when you got to Dartmouth? No.

HERMANCE: No. I wasn't out to myself at that point.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: I thought, you know, Oh, well, it's a passing phase. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Oh, yeah, a lot of people have said that.

HERMANCE: You know, I just couldn't believe it that, you know, my life was going to be completely different from everybody else's. How can you believe that?

DONIN: Well, and you didn't see any...You didn't have any role models from which to build.

HERMANCE: Right, right. You know, there was kind of like Liberace floating around in the background.

DONIN: Yeah.

HERMANCE: That didn't seem like anything that I could do, [chuckles] you know. That was not picking up on my talents.

DONIN: So who did you find as your group of friends at Dartmouth? You said you didn't make a lot of friends, but—

HERMANCE: Roommates. That's pretty much... You know, I don't think I ever had trouble finding people to sit with in the cafeteria. I don't feel like I was an outcast.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: But there weren't people that I... And actually one of the most beautiful things that happened there was an upperclassman who lived with his two roommates across the hall and down a ways, took me to his family's house on Lake George.

DONIN: Oh!

HERMANCE: And it was so beautiful. And then when we came back to Hanover, it was like the first day of spring, and the buds were exploding. It was really wonderful. And of course, you know, that was a really very special occasion for me.

DONIN: Yeah.

HERMANCE: But it was not... There was nothing about being gay about that.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: That's not what was happening.

DONIN: It was just a good friendship.

HERMANCE: Yeah. I don't know... How much dirt do you want? [Laughs.]

DONIN: Whatever you're comfortable talking about. You know, the focus of this project is insider/outsider feelings that we all have at some point in our life. Or feeling that you do belong or you don't belong.

Or, where is the community where you felt that you did belong, and how did you create that community? So whatever you're comfortable talking about, we want to hear about.

HERMANCE: I think a staggering difference between those days and these days is cruising. You know, because we were not introduced into like high school dances or the dating, going to football games with your date or whatever, none of that was conceivable in those days. And I think it is conceivable now; certainly not everywhere, but at least a lot of places. And the only way that... You know, you have this sex drive that's oriented in a certain direction, but there's no way of socializing it.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: And so that there's this, there's this cruising scene. People anonymously trying to connect with each other. They don't know—they want to have sex, but they cannot imagine how they're gonna build a social world around that relationship. It's really very hard. You know, one of my jobs at Dartmouth was working for the archival thing. [Laughs]

DONIN: Was it!?

HERMANCE: Yes. And I remember we moved the archives. And one of the things was Daniel Webster's beaver skin top hat.

DONIN: Oh, it's still there.

HERMANCE: And there was a collection of photographs taken on the banks of the Connecticut of—I assume they were students; why would they be in the archives if they weren't—wrestling in the nude and running around and stuff.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Old pictures. Pictures from—yes, right.

HERMANCE: Yes, really long ago.

DONIN: Yep.

HERMANCE: And, you know, Well, isn't that a surprise? [Laughs.] I wonder what life was like back then about, you know, this. Maybe because sexuality was not as big a deal as it is now. People were more

relaxed around each other than we are now. I also, as a part of this gay alumni group, my supervisor in the Stefansson Collection....

DONIN: Yes, yes.

HERMANCE: He has also died of AIDS.

DONIN: Oh.

HERMANCE: He had these almost knee-length boots—how do you say that? Knee-length boots?

DONIN: Knee-high boots.

HERMANCE: Knee-high boots, very highly polished, rich reddish tan. And these two magnificent Huskies that are not shaggy like you usually think of Huskies, but are the kind of animals that actually pull sleds.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

HERMANCE: And I remember him cruising me in the restroom. I don't think he knew it was me, but of course I knew it was him by his boots, you know? [Laughs.]

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: You know. Nothing came of that 'cause, you know, that didn't appeal to me. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Now, there have been other stories. I'm tryin' to get the chronology right. The Hopkins Center didn't exist when you were there, did it?

HERMANCE: That's right.

DONIN: It hadn't been built yet.

HERMANCE: No.

DONIN: It was just about to be built, I think.

HERMANCE: Yes.

DONIN: Because that apparently became—this is through other oral histories—that became...the bathrooms in the Hopkins Center

became the place in the sixties where the cruising was taking place—and the encounters were taking place. So we're told.

HERMANCE: It was Baker Library in those days.

DONIN: In those days it was Baker. Yeah, yeah. And there's no doubt that this was taking place before you arrived there.

HERMANCE: Yeah.

DONIN: And there's also theories that the fraternities were the sources of—the locations for, sometimes, these sorts of activities.

HERMANCE: I never heard that. So it may be true, you know. It sounds like a fantasy, though. [Laughs]

DONIN: And maybe it was a fantasy.

HERMANCE: And I don't think that people cruise like that now. I don't think that...I'm positive the bathrooms don't have the central role in the gay life now that they did in those days.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

HERMANCE: I'm so glad of that. It's so much better for people [chuckles] to be able to talk to each other in public. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Of course.

HERMANCE: You know? [Laughs.]

DONIN: And have normal social channels like we were talking about before we turned the tape on. Have normal social channels through which to interact. Is it just folklore that the theater was a place that attracted men who were looking for one another?

HERMANCE: Hmm.

DONIN: Was that your sense?

HERMANCE: You know there were.... First off, I think Dartmouth always had a really good drama department. The plays there were—

DONIN: Excellent!

HERMANCE: —much better than the places that had—I don't think they actually had a drama department. I think that it was all volunteer, not for credit, you know. At any rate, I think the famous actor...oh, lord...

DONIN: Somebody's name?

HERMANCE: Moriarty? He is the....

DONIN: Michael Moriarty?

HERMANCE: Yeah. He was performing at Dartmouth in those days.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: And I have a vague recollection that, yeah, some of the people doing theater were that way. And that's why you didn't really, you know.... I wasn't gonna do theater myself. And somehow, you know, it's also fear of saying, Well, if I associate with them, then people will think.... And I won't ever get a job. [Laughs.]

DONIN: So was that your thinking then, that you had to stay secret?

HERMANCE: Sort of; something like that. Oh, yeah. Absolutely, to be secret. Now, I want to tell you about two...the only faculty in whose classrooms those sorts of things came up at Dartmouth. One was just horrible. The head of the psychology department—this was...I can't remember what the class was. But at any rate, it was the last session, and he just stopped and said, "How many of you—," this is a class of 20 or 30 people "—how many of you are not gonna get married?"

DONIN: Oh.

HERMANCE: And how many hands do you think went up? Zero. [Laughs.] And he kind of laughed to himself and said, "Well, 10 percent of you aren't." And I thought that was the cruelest thing. That he is the head of the psychology department and he knows he's humiliating people.

DONIN: Mhmm. He's in the wrong field.

HERMANCE: The only positive thing that came in the classroom at Dartmouth was I took a seminar on Proust with Ramon Guthrie.

- DONIN: Oh, yes.
- HERMANCE: Who was an absolutely fabulous person. Well, at one stage in *The Remembrance of Things Past*, is a scene in which somebody asks Robert de Saint-Loup—
- DONIN: Oh, yes! You write about this here in your memoir for the reunion book. Oh, yes, and he had good things to say.
- HERMANCE: And he said, You know, if you don't want to.... Robert beats up the guy that asked him if he'd like a blow job. And the professor says, "You know, he didn't have to do that. He could have just said, 'No, thank you.'" [Laughs.] And of course later on, Robert is caught in the boy whorehouse. So, you know, it's that aggression to cover up your own feelings of, you know, denying that that is you.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- HERMANCE: So at any rate, that's the only positive thing about homosexuality that I heard in four years. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Well, it was dominated by this.... And this may be true of all men's colleges in those days.
- HERMANCE: Absolutely.
- DONIN: Dominated by this—
- HERMANCE: No, it's not Dartmouth *per se*.
- DONIN: Right. Hyper-masculine, macho model that everybody's expected to follow.
- HERMANCE: That first semester—or term—I got a D in French. Turned out that I and maybe two other kids had not had any French before [chuckles] we took this elementary course. But I was petrified, you know. This is a D, you know.
- DONIN: You probably hadn't had a D.
- HERMANCE: So I went to Dick's House and saw the psychiatrist. And, you know, he talked to me. Well, I went there a long time. And on the— I think it turned out to be the last session—he said, "Is there anything else

that you'd like to talk about, anything else that's troubling you?" And of course there was. But, you know, he may have been a saint. I don't know. Some...Beyond his peers. But I knew enough not to say anything to him because that's gonna be a permanent record of, you know... I wasn't gonna talk to him about that. I didn't think he knew anything about it. I was sure he was gonna be hostile. Oh, you wanna go for a little therapy? [Laughs.] Get rid of that little blotch? [Chuckles.] You know?

DONIN: We did an interview with another alum—I forget what class he was in. He actually went to Dick's House and said that he was troubled by the thoughts that he was having about men. And they sent him to see a specialist at the hospital who gave him a little sort of black box that he was supposed to press the button on every time he was having those thoughts.

HERMANCE: To shock him?

DONIN: Yes. It was some sort of shock box that was meant to treat you—

HERMANCE: Negative reinforcement, yes.

DONIN: Yes.

HERMANCE: No, the Pennsylvania Hospital, a couple or three blocks down there [gestures], they were famous for electric shock therapy and lobotomies. And the very first gay organizations invited the shrinks from that hospital over to give them a talk at the Drake Hotel over here [gestures in opposite direction]. And got the media there and did their very best to humiliate 'em, to show that they had *no* basis for doing what they were doing.

DONIN: Crazy!

HERMANCE: But it went on for years and years.

DONIN: Yeah. So who ended—So what dorm were you in?

HERMANCE: Started off in Russell Sage, and then I went to, oh, I can't remember, for two years. And then went to...on the other side of the Green there's a little dorm [Ripley]. The first two years I was in a three room, three-person space. And then the last two years I was one, there. And then the last year was at North Hall.

DONIN: Oh, yeah.

HERMANCE: Both in singles.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Your roommates those first two years in Russell Sage, did they end up...those were your— I mean if you had to describe who your community was, was that it?

HERMANCE: Well, really only David Pritchard, not.... The other two— Sorry I forget. Myers is his last name, M-Y-E-R-S. I think he dropped out.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: Maybe after the freshman year or something like that.

DONIN: Yes.

HERMANCE: And Doug Anderson was our roommate for the second year. David was the only one that, you know, I had any sense of closeness about, really.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. And you were working a job because— Did you have financial aid?

HERMANCE: Well, working jobs was the financial aid.

DONIN: And so you worked in the archives? Any other jobs?

HERMANCE: In the Stefansson Collection.

DONIN: Yeah.

HERMANCE: I don't think there was anything else.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And what was your—

HERMANCE: I was at Stefansson for a long time. I was at the archives for a long time, I don't know, a year or something.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And did getting involved in the Greek life appeal to you at all?

HERMANCE: No.

DONIN: I mean, did you do rushing?

HERMANCE: Mm-mmm. No.

DONIN: Because you felt threatened by it or—

HERMANCE: I didn't think I could make it in that world, no.

DONIN: Yeah. Make it in the sense that—

HERMANCE: Socially acceptable. You know, when you're hiding, [chuckles] joining up with a group of people the purpose of which is to get close and you've got somethin' to hide, well, you don't go there, you know. Least I didn't. People are different, you know. The people who get married, some of 'em are doing that for defensive purposes or something. But I think a lot of people, gay men, have a really great time in there just.... They may well get a divorce, but they're very likely to be very strong friends with that woman for the rest of their lives. You know, I couldn't fake it. I couldn't fake marriage.

DONIN: So you couldn't fake the whole dating scene and all that, inviting girls to Winter Carnival or Homecoming.

HERMANCE: Well, yes and no. My high school girlfriend, I'm embarrassed to say, came all the way from Houston.

DONIN: From Texas. Wow!

HERMANCE: To Winter Carnival.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: And I think she had, bless her heart, I'm sure she thought we were gonna get married. Though, that's more about her innocence than anything else. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: You know, if you can't tell when somebody is, you know, hot for you, then you're pretty innocent.

DONIN: Well, in those days, though, I mean in the fifties—

HERMANCE: It's true.

DONIN: Who knew anything?

HERMANCE: [Chuckles.] Yeah.

DONIN: Wasn't that the norm?

HERMANCE: In certain classes, I guess.

DONIN: So you did try to sort of fake it or whatever.

HERMANCE: Yeah, you know, but I never went down to, what's the nursing school, not far?

DONIN: Well, Hitchcock.

HERMANCE: Hitchcock.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: Well, there's another one.

DONIN: Oh, Colby-Sawyer. Is it Colby-Sawyer?

HERMANCE: Yes. Or, I went one time to Holyoke because somebody else was goin' and sure, why not? Another time to—oh dear, it's a college in Boston—one time with a date, you know.

DONIN: Simmons or—

HERMANCE: Tufts, I guess. I think that's right.

DONIN: Tufts, yeah. Right. To dances or whatever.

HERMANCE: Because, you know, get out of the house. [Laughs.] Right.

DONIN: Yes. So you spent your whole four years there.... I mean obviously you said you didn't come out to the Dartmouth community until 1975, if that's the date.

HERMANCE: Yeah, it's about then.

DONIN: That's hard. Did that impact your entire experience there? I mean did you join—

HERMANCE: It affects your whole life, you know? [Laughs.]

DONIN: Yes.

HERMANCE: That's not just Dartmouth. It's before, in high school and so on. It was really a miracle that I found this group of people in high school that we had a lot of fun together, a lot of interests in common.

DONIN: So what were your interests that you could've shared with other Dartmouth students? I mean, did you have any hobbies or sports or intramurals or clubs or anything that you joined? Or you were too busy hiding, as you said before?

HERMANCE: No, I wasn't interested in sports. The thing that I liked to do there the most was go for walks. Once, probably my junior year, I discovered that if you walk up the road across in Vermont, in the fall, there are acres of abandoned apple trees with the most delicious apples.

DONIN: Oh, you mentioned that. Yeah. That was your favorite memory.

HERMANCE: And the walks along the Connecticut.

DONIN: The river.

HERMANCE: The river beside the golf course and the ski jump and stuff. No, it is a gorgeous place.

DONIN: So it was a pretty solitary life for you.

HERMANCE: Yes, it was. That's for sure.

DONIN: Hmm.

HERMANCE: Yeah. And, you know, I'm not a different person now than I was back then.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

HERMANCE: You know, I feel like these letters that you've found...I'm good at kind of organizing my thoughts and getting them down on paper in an effective way. And putting me in a place, the Ecology Food Co-op, a store, like this, where, you know, my experience and... The

store combines a love of books, academic—you know, I majored in philosophy and a graduate degree in comparative literature—and being gay. And then it combines with my first job here, was running the Food Co-Op, the store.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

HERMANCE: Was retailing. And so this store is like the—

DONIN: Perfect combination.

HERMANCE: Yeah, it is. And I don't feel like other people are in a place to judge me about this place.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

HERMANCE: Because I know it's good. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Let's give a plug to the name of the store. I don't think I mentioned it.

HERMANCE: Giovanni's Room. The biggest, the best, the most beautiful LGBT bookstore in the world.

DONIN: And is it not the oldest?

HERMANCE: In the U.S., yes.

DONIN: Oldest in the U.S.

HERMANCE: Yeah. There's a store in Canada that claims by its founder, going from one conference to another with some books in his backpack, that that was their—the founding of their store. Alright.

DONIN: [Laughs.] That's a stretch. [Laughter.]

HERMANCE: You tell 'em! You tell 'em!

No, and of course it's sad that the real first store, Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in New York, was the parent of this store.

DONIN: Oh.

HERMANCE: That it's clearly the model. And every book in Giovanni's Room in those early days, the owners of Giovanni's Room had driven to New York, picked up the owner of Oscar Wilde's, Craig Rodwell, and went with him to the West Village where he helped them pick out books, and they drove the books back to Philadelphia. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Wow!

HERMANCE: Arlene and I did that twice. We can't go to New York every time we want a book. So, we stopped doing it. But it was very much—you know he's a great guy in New York, Craig Rodwell is. Or was. He's passed away, too, now.

DONIN: Uh-huh. So that was the original—

HERMANCE: Gay bookstore in North America and in Europe. European stores came after us, Lambda Rising, and there may have been a couple more—Glad Day. And that was something from Dartmouth though, that in the early eighties until the mid-nineties, Giovanni's Room was the wholesaler of lesbian and gay books overseas. None of the distributors were interested in carrying—they didn't know anything about these books. They didn't think there was a market for them. And they were pro'bly right. You know, we were really excited when we got up to \$150,000 in sales in a year. But what's the profit on that? Well, we were collecting 15% of profit of that. So, you know, it was fun for us, but it was.... And then, of course, the overseas wholesalers did pick it up. [Gets up and walks off to fetch something.]

**Let me show you this. And it's a direct result.... [Returns.] And I figure this is about, you know, my education that put me.... At Dartmouth, I knew I was gonna go into comparative literature. I took lots of language classes and ended up after Dartmouth going to language school in France and Germany. And we ended up being the wholesaler overseas for The Naiad Press, which was by far the largest lesbian publishing company ever.

DONIN: What was the name of it?

HERMANCE: The Naiad, N-A-I-A-D, Press. And they published this book of personal essays, lesbian nuns. And because we were their wholesaler—

DONIN: [Reading aloud:] One copy.

- HERMANCE: —export to the rest of the world. And they got this letter with a return address in Latin. And they couldn't make heads or tails. So as they did everything, I'm sure they just saw it was overseas, Oh, we'll just send it to Giovanni's Room. And so they sent it to us. [Laughs.] One look at it, and you know it's from the Vatican Library. [Laughs.] Ordering a copy of personal essays, *Lesbian Nuns*.
- DONIN: [Reading aloud:] *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*.
- HERMANCE: And I didn't trust 'em—I wasn't gonna send that over there and hope they were gonna pay for it. Uh-uh. You've gotta prepay.
- DONIN: Yeah.
- HERMANCE: So they did. They sent another letter, which I then sent to Naiad because they wanted in on the action. And they enclosed a check written on the Bank of the Holy Ghost.
- DONIN: Oh, fantastic!
- HERMANCE: Isn't that amazing? [Laughter.] And I'm sure they thought I was not gonna cash it, but I did. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Nineteen eighty-five.
- HERMANCE: It's now faded away, but there used to be a lavender "J" down there [on the letter].
- DONIN: Oh, really! In the signature line?
- HERMANCE: Mm-hmm. And there was never a name associated with this on the return address or on either of the letters; 'cause I don't know why they would...I don't know. Somebody didn't want his name on there or her name on there.
- DONIN: Oh, isn't that interesting. Well, it's all....
- HERMANCE: At the same time we were dealing with this Vatican sale, the editors of this collection of essays were in Dublin. And the book was banned in Ireland. And these two editors were on a late night TV interview show. When they got back to their hotel at two or three in the morning, they threw 'em out on the street.

DONIN: Is that right?

HERMANCE: “We don’t want you in our hotel.”

DONIN: Oh, gee!

HERMANCE: But by the next day, the Irish government had caved in, and the book was everywhere. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Oh.

HERMANCE: So, times change. But the Irish, some of them anyway, are more Catholic than the pope.

DONIN: Yep. That is great. So we didn’t talk much about your academic life there. You majored in philosophy. Did you connect—

HERMANCE: At the end of my freshman year, I had two A’s. One was philosophy and the other one was math. Maybe I should have gone into math. I don’t know. [Laughs.] But that’s how I decided what I was going to do. Oh, well, this is what people are telling me I’m good at.

DONIN: Yeah.

HERMANCE: So, let’s go there.

DONIN: But languages, too, you’re good at, right?

HERMANCE: I wouldn’t say I’m good at languages, I took a lot of ‘em [classes].

DONIN: I know you got a D in French, [chuckles] but obviously you made up for that.

HERMANCE: Yeah. Well. You know German language schools are vastly superior to the French ones, in my experience.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

HERMANCE: So I learned German much better than I did French.

DONIN: Did you connect with any professors in particular? I know you mentioned Ramon Guthrie. But as sort of mentors or—

HERMANCE: There was a very, very handsome French teacher there who jumped off into the Quechee Gorge.

DONIN: Oh!

HERMANCE: And I'm 90 percent sure that he was gay. That that's what that was about.

DONIN: Oh, gee! But more in terms of, you know, being a mentor or a....

HERMANCE: English professor, Mr. Vance.

DONIN: Oh, Thomas Vance.

HERMANCE: Well, I told you, I had been teaching at an American college in Germany.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

HERMANCE: Which was not far from Tübingen. And so, I was on my way to Greece for vacation. And I'd just stopped in Tübingen and stayed at the youth hostel and went, Oh, this is really cute. [Laughs.] And so, Well, let me look into the English department and see what they're doing. So I'm standing there reading the bulletin board, and Professor Vance comes walking towards me! [Laughs.]

DONIN: Is that right!

HERMANCE: And they were shorthanded, so they hired me to teach English that year.

DONIN: Uh-huh!

HERMANCE: So that was pretty wonderful.

DONIN: Yeah, that's great! That's great. But I don't think professors back in those days were maybe as approachable as they are today—accessible.

HERMANCE: I don't know. I felt like—I'm gonna screw up his name, of course—but Professor—Zbigniew—what, Carter's...?

DONIN: Oh, Brzezinski!

- HERMANCE: Brzezinski. Well, he was teaching at Dartmouth in those days.
- DONIN: Really! I didn't know that.
- HERMANCE: Dave Pritchard was, you know, to hear him talk anyway, they had a really good time together.
- DONIN: Uh-huh!
- HERMANCE: And I remember that there was a math teacher who came over to our dorm room one time, and we played chess. And I think David had told him that I was really good. So he came over, Well, let's see. And of course I beat him. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Did you really? In chess?
- HERMANCE: Yeah.
- DONIN: Oh!
- HERMANCE: Chess is not, you know, it's not something that I ever played a lot and certainly haven't played in many decades now. But it was luck, you know. You see it, and then, Oh, that's okay. But, you know, it didn't form a—we never played again. [Laughs]
- DONIN: I'm sure not. He wasn't gonna put himself in that position two times in a row.
- HERMANCE: And I enjoyed the Stefanssons. They were, they were—Mrs. Stefansson tried to give me a couple of volumes of Icelandic tales. But her assistant, the guy with the boots, "You can't do that! These books don't belong to you anymore." [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Right. Ah-hah. That's amazing, that you—you actually had a relationship with the Stefanssons. I mean, they're sort of...
- HERMANCE: A little bit. I'm very sad that that collection isn't there anymore. That's—[sighs.]
- DONIN: That particular—what, the Stefansson Collection? It's still there.
- HERMANCE: It is? The—
- DONIN: Did somebody—

HERMANCE: The guide who.... When I was up there three years ago, I went on a little architectural tour and the person who led the tour—she has to've worked there. I think she's an architecture professor. But whoever it was said, "No, that's gone. That's not there anymore."

DONIN: Well, all I know is we have an enormous Stefansson collection.

HERMANCE: [Laughs.] Well, it's not a different one, I'm sure.

DONIN: Right.

HERMANCE: Well, great! I'm glad to hear it.

DONIN: Oh, yes. And the students use it, consistently every year.

HERMANCE: Good.

DONIN: Both the manuscripts as well as, you know, the book collection.

HERMANCE: Uh-huh.

DONIN: Now maybe portions of it went away that I don't know about. But, no, it's definitely one of our big draws is everything Arctic to do with Stefansson.

HERMANCE: Right.

DONIN: Yeah, it's fantastic stuff.

HERMANCE: It was in those days anyway, it was the second largest Arctic collection after Leningrad.

DONIN: And it's all, you know, the finding aid is now all digitized, and the access is really wonderful.

HERMANCE: Uh-huh.

DONIN: It's great. Great stuff.

So what have I not asked you? Let me just look here at our questions. Or is there something you wanna say about your community at Dartmouth that we haven't gotten to yet? I mean your community at Dartmouth was very—

HERMANCE: Very small. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Very limited.

HERMANCE: It was indeed, you know. And so I do stand at a—you know, until I wrote that letter in '75, I hadn't had any contact with any of those folks. And until the gay alumni group formed, then, you know, again I've heard from a couple of non-gay Dartmouth folks. But I haven't reached out to any of them either. It's not like it's all their fault, [chuckles] because I haven't reached out to them either.

DONIN: Have you ever been back to reunions?

HERMANCE: No. Uh-uh. Only to the gay reunions. There was the first gay reunion in Hopkins, and I went to that. And then I guess the 25th anniversary was the next one. I might have gone to one of the—maybe the second year, too.

DONIN: And they just had a 40th, I think, last year. A celebration of 40 years of—

HERMANCE: Of coed.

DONIN: But what was the DGALA? Was it 25? What was the celebration they had?

HERMANCE: Twenty-five. It was three years ago it was 25.

DONIN: Yeah. I see. Okay. Oh, and that's the one where Dr. [Jim Yong] Kim—so you went to that. You did go to that?

HERMANCE: Yes.

DONIN: That's the one where Dr. Kim spoke.

HERMANCE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Right. And did you see a lot of your classmates there? Were there any?

HERMANCE: No. I don't remember any of the people in my class.

- DONIN: Uh-huh. Did it change—Having DGALA there as a sort of vehicle for all of you to have a voice, has that changed how you feel about Dartmouth? I mean has it helped?
- HERMANCE: Well, the thing that changed my, you know, perspective on Dartmouth was being there and, you know, when I was there it was 98 percent white, and it was 100 percent male. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Right, right.
- HERMANCE: And walking around out there now, there's all colors in the world. And there were a couple of women kissing right in front of Dartmouth Hall. [Laughs.] That's really kind of...you know. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: It just must have boggled your mind.
- HERMANCE: Yeah. It's amazing. It's also...it's still impressive how remote it is. And how few there people are... You know, compared to a place like Philadelphia, there's also pretty few black people.
- DONIN: I mean try as hard as they do—and they do try.
- HERMANCE: But nevertheless... Even if there were the same proportions, there would still be a hundred yards between each person.
- DONIN: Right, right. Oh, absolutely.
- HERMANCE: So it's just a tiny place
- DONIN: City versus rural. And in some ways I think that makes it more difficult to find your community there because it's slim pickings. I mean, what are your choices? It's not like you can, you know, go to White River Junction or something—
- HERMANCE: [Laughs.]
- DONIN: —and find your people. You're not gonna do it.
- HERMANCE: Well, you know that hotel that straddles the railroad tracks at White River Junction? Amtrak goes right underneath it. Any rate, that was owned by a gay couple, you know, back when I was paying attention in the eighties and nineties. I don't think they own it.... I

don't know what happened to 'em. But I'm pretty sure they don't own that anymore.

DONIN: Yeah. Well, then obviously Vermont is a....

HERMANCE: So it would have been nice to go over there. [Laughs.]

DONIN: It would have been nice to go to White River Junction. Right. But Vermont has become a mecca for gay couples now.

HERMANCE: Sure. And socialists and Commies. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: All kinds o' crazy people. [Break for telephone call.]

HERMANCE: Mary, I'm sorry. I don't know how well this is gonna work. The store computer has been out o' commission since Friday.

DONIN: Oh!

HERMANCE: And the part finally—or, the new computer finally arrived today. And we really need to install it right there.

DONIN: Well, let's stop.

HERMANCE: Okay.

DONIN: Unless there's.... I mean do you want to give us some perfect ending paragraph?

HERMANCE: [Laughs.] Well, again, you know, the place has been transformed since I was there. And so, yeah, I really can't imagine what life is like there. I hope that people are getting the sense that they can do anything. That their emotional, erotic connections are not barriers to the future. That they'll fit in, too.

DONIN: Well, I think it's very uneven. We've talked to a lot of members of the class that just graduated. And some feel very welcome, some don't. But that's reflective of the bigger outside world. There's a long way to go, but there's obviously progress.

HERMANCE: Yep. It is.

DONIN: And I think that's....

HERMANCE: They're not sticking those buzzers on your thumbs anymore.

DONIN: Ugh. Honestly. No. Definitely not.

HERMANCE: Do you happen to remember what year that person was, what class?

DONIN: I'll have to....

HERMANCE: It was about that same time, sixties?

DONIN: Probably in the sixties.

HERMANCE: Fifties.

DONIN: Yeah.

HERMANCE: Well, I'm really glad I didn't say anything.

DONIN: And the thing that's remarkable about this project is that this [collection] is getting slightly skewed. We have more members of DGALA who want to speak up; many of them have the attitude of, What took you so long? I've been waiting to tell my story for 50 years. What took you so long? In a nice way. I mean, they're happy that this is happening.

But we would also like to hear from all the other people who felt that they didn't belong, for whatever reason. You know, the financial aid students, the international students, obviously the Native American students, and students of any color in the rainbow. And they don't seem to feel safe enough to speak out. But I think DGALA has sort of legitimized people's connections to the College and allowed them to feel like, Okay. I'm gonna tell you my story.

HERMANCE: Are you gonna get to talk to Tom Song?

DONIN: Tomorrow.

HERMANCE: And what's that guy's name?

DONIN: Well, you gave me the other guy's name—Leib?

HERMANCE: Frank Leib.

DONIN: Leib. I never heard back from him.

HERMANCE: Oh, no?

DONIN: And I don't like to be a stalker. I mean, if they don't wanna reply, they don't wanna reply. That's fine. That's their choice.

HERMANCE: I'm surprised, 'cause he's quite a talker, too. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Really! I wonder if it went into his spam box, and he just never got it. But I don't like to badger somebody.

HERMANCE: Sure.

DONIN: Well, if you run into him or talk to him or see him, tell him, you know, I'd love to come back and do it again. Or we can do it on Skype or whatever. We'll figure out how to talk to him.

HERMANCE: Well, is it interesting to you to look at a Philadelphia map and talk about this and that of things to do, places to walk, and so on?

DONIN: I'd love to. But let's turn this off.

HERMANCE: We can do that downstairs.

DONIN: Exactly. And let's get us out of here so your person can come up and work on the computer.

[End of Interview]