

John G. Crane '69
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
November 19, 2012

DONIN: Today is November 19, 2012. My name is Mary Donin, and we're here in Rauner Library with John G. Crane, Dartmouth Class of 1969 and also long-time employee, and we can go into all your many titles and responsibilities later on. So first of all, John, just to sort of start from the beginning and put all of this in context, tell us a little bit about where you grew up and how it is you ended up choosing to come to Dartmouth back in whatever it was, '68, when you were looking at colleges?

CRANE: Right. It would have been 1965—

DONIN: I'm sorry, yes.

CRANE: I graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, in 1965, having grown up on a farm in East St. Johnsbury. It was a chicken farm, a little unusual for Vermont - which was mostly dairy farming at the time. I have four brothers and we all went through the primary schools in St. Johnsbury and then all attended St. Johnsbury Academy, which is a private academy with boarding students in addition to all the town kids - there was no public high school.

DONIN: That sounds like Thetford. Is it like Thetford?

CRANE: Yes; it's a hybrid school. It has all the advantages of a private board of trustees with fundraising and alumni support -- and little of the craziness of town school board politics. It was a terrific bit of luck to have a first-rate education and still grow up on a farm in rural Vermont. I feel like it was one of the greatest strokes of luck in my life.

DONIN: Best of both worlds.

CRANE: It was the best of both worlds. The faculty at the school was terrific—it was a time when old approaches to education were being questioned and new ways of doing things were

being developed. I was doing the “new math” in the first wave. My teacher would actually bring Dartmouth professors up to our class to talk. And my biology teacher was going down to Hanover on weekends as they were developing a new program in life sciences.

My chemistry teacher would bring us down to Hanover -- he took us into the basement of College Hall where the College’s computer was located. Later, we actually had a Dartmouth computer terminal at the Academy -- the Dartmouth Timesharing System.

DONIN: Oh, yes! John Kemeny’s—

CRANE: John Kemeny’s wonder. So that was part of my high school education, with this linkage to Dartmouth. But interestingly, as I compare the microcosm of my life in St. Johnsbury and my later life at Dartmouth, I felt like an outsider even at St. Johnsbury Academy-- because I lived on the “other side of the tracks.” I was a rural kid, so my family was basically a self-contained social unit. There were three primary schools in town, and mine was the blue-collar kids’ school. Because St. Johnsbury is a regional professional center, all the kids of the doctors and lawyers and engineers and other professional people went to another school, and we came together only in junior high school.

So because I did well in school, in junior high I was thrown into classes with all these other kids who had very different socioeconomic backgrounds.

DONIN: Did you say that it was—is it a day school or both—or a boarding school?

CRANE: Both. It has a boarding division. So we had the experience of living in a rural part of Vermont, but interacting with students from around the country and around the world. It was a relatively small boarding division in those days. Today’s is quite a bit larger.

DONIN: Were the local students sort of looked down upon as townies, or was it more—

CRANE: No, because the townies so outnumbered the others. I mean, at that point there was—I don't know what the dynamic is today, because there are more boarding students – but I'm sure it's still a majority students from several towns in northeastern Vermont.

DONIN: Right, right.

CRANE: But I was aware of the fact that I was down a rung on the social ladder. I compensated for that by academically outperforming most of the other students in the class. And, of course, we were teenagers then, and there was all that stuff going on.

DONIN: But you were able to sort of move past the social problem because of your performance in school.

CRANE: That was the way I dealt with it.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

CRANE: It was also the case that I was sexually attracted to other boys and not to girls -- and I knew that wasn't okay. I was hiding that fact and trying to mix into the mainstream heterosexual social milieu of teenagers, and was pretty lucky in that regard in the sense that the group that I hung with -- a group of probably fifteen other kids that did pretty well in school -- tended not to pair off in couples. We kind of operated as a group. Now, there were the occasional school dances, when you had to invite someone. But that wasn't hugely difficult at that point because of the social dynamics of our group.

But in the small pond that was St. Johnsbury there were, in a way, all the seeds of later insider-outsider tension. I had terrific parental support -- for at least academic achievement.

My family was very active in the Catholic Church and in the Boy Scouts – we were all super-achievers. All five Crane boys became Eagle Scouts.

DONIN: Whoa! What a legacy!

CRANE: And: "You will do it." [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Yes.

CRANE: My grandfather, my mother's father, had been a scoutmaster of the troop. We also all became altar boys at church. And so our life outside school was very organized around church and scouting.

DONIN: Were you out to your family at this point?

CRANE: Oh, my goodness, no. [Chuckles.] No! You mean "out" as gay?

DONIN: Yes.

CRANE: No, no. That didn't happen until I was forty years old.

DONIN: That's a lot of pressure for a teenager to live under -- a "perfect" ("perfect" in quotes) family.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: High achieving.

CRANE: Yes. Achievement in school, in church, in scouting! And we had farm chores – the farm was a big part of our lives. And, you know, the chickens laid eggs EVERY day, even on Christmas Day.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CRANE: That was one of the great injustices of the world. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Collect those eggs.

CRANE: Collect those eggs. Exactly. "Okay, stop opening Christmas presents. We've got to go out to the barn and collect eggs." [Laughs.]

DONIN: Oh, yes. So you were carrying a big burden around with you.

CRANE: But there was—

DONIN: You didn't feel it, probably.

CRANE: No. I attribute that to growing up on the farm, where you develop a sense of resourcefulness -- that you can do whatever you're called upon to do. My parents had that belief firmly fixed. Neither of them got to go to college and -- I've learned later in life -- that they really regretted that. It was a deep disappointment in their life, because they were both bright. My dad came from a farming tradition and college just didn't happen. So both of my parents were seriously determined that their five sons were going to college.

I remember a crystallizing moment when I knew absolutely that my future would be different from my father's. One day I was walking through one of the hen houses carrying two full baskets of eggs. At one point, I slipped and fell into the deep, sloppy manure with 200 broken eggs covering me. As I lay there, I thought, "I don't know what my future is but this is not it!"

DONIN: So you knew from the get-go, when you were a child, that you guys were all going to go to college.

CRANE: Absolutely. In fact, my piggy bank, where I'd put pennies and other coins—that was my college fund. It wasn't for anything else. We were utterly clear about that. With Roman Catholics there tends to be a real track that you get on. You shape your life to fit the track -- and that's what we did in all respects. I did it in Boy Scouts, I did it in church, I did it in school, I did it on the farm -- and so I had this huge experience of shaping and forming *my* life to fit "the track".

DONIN: So did your older brother go to Dartmouth?

CRANE: No, he went to St. Michael's College, a small Catholic college near Burlington, Vermont. I was kind of expected to do that as well. I applied to St. Michael's but also to the University of Vermont and to Dartmouth and to Yale. My parents took me aside and said, "We really don't want to discourage you, but you just need to know we're not the kind of people who can afford to send you to colleges like Dartmouth and Yale."

But I had done my homework, and I said, "You can't afford *not* to have me attend a place like Dartmouth or Yale

because of the potential for scholarships and other financial aid. So they said, "Go ahead and apply." I was admitted to all four colleges, and chose to go to Dartmouth. As I look back on it, that was the right decision for me. The local Yale alum who had interviewed me never forgave me, because, of course—

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CRANE: He just couldn't fathom that anyone would choose Dartmouth over Yale. But, you know, as I look back on it, it fits a model of my life: I am both an adventurous person and a cautious person, and by that I mean I think when I'm moving to a new phase or place or event or whatever, I want to have one foot that's on reasonably solid ground and then I lift the other one up and go. I don't just jump into the deep end of the pool.

And in that case, Yale, I realized, would have been too much for me. Academically it would have been like Dartmouth, but it was in an urban area -- and I'd never been to a city.

DONIN: Wow!

CRANE: And so going to New Haven, which is not only a city but a rough city—and I think Yale has some of the negative attributes of Dartmouth in higher relief in terms of socioeconomic strata and culture and history and all of that. So Dartmouth is rural, which I understood. For me it was moving out of the country and into a village, which was a step. I had a positive attachment to Dartmouth through my high school teachers, so it was really the right next step, even though it was a big step.

DONIN: So it wasn't based purely on, say, the best financial aid package or whatever.

CRANE: No.

DONIN: No.

CRANE: No. Both Dartmouth and Yale offered competitive financial aid packages which removed finances as a factor.

DONIN: And your parents were delighted, I assume?

- CRANE: Yes, they were. They were.
- DONIN: The Ivy League. I mean, that's—
- CRANE: Exactly. It was a big deal.
- DONIN: So you were probably part of that wave of—well, no, because you were admitted before. But John Dickey started what I think John Kemeny kept going, which was sort of reaching out to more local students in New England, northern New England.
- CRANE: Yes. I'm remembering that there were—I think there were seven or eight students from Vermont in my class.
- DONIN: Wow.
- CRANE: And that was seen as an advance. Yes.
- DONIN: So you arrived on campus in September, I guess.
- CRANE: September of 1965.
- DONIN: Yes.
- CRANE: Yes.
- DONIN: When it was getting crazy here, right? I mean, with protests and—
- CRANE: No. No, that didn't really happen until '68.
- DONIN: Sixty-eight?
- CRANE: Sixty-eight. Sixty-five was still—the kids came from boarding school to Dartmouth. Hair was closely cropped. We looked like—you look at our freshman book pictures, we were cut from a mold. All guys, and we lived in dormitories, and went on freshman trips, and there were many traditions. Fraternities reigned supreme.
- DONIN: What dorm were you in?

CRANE: I was in New Hampshire Hall. Lived there all four years. Never joined a fraternity, so I was on the outside in that regard.

DONIN: Was that a conscious decision on your part?

CRANE: Well, it really was not financially possible. I couldn't afford to do it, for one thing, but also socially I couldn't — that was where I wasn't fitting in. Part of coming to Dartmouth—one foot on firm ground was, Okay, this is a rural environment. And I can perform okay in the classroom.

The other attachment that I chose was to become very active at Aquinas House, the Catholic student center on campus, because that was an area that I knew. In fact, I let that become a deep involvement -- out of safety—

DONIN: Ah, interesting.

CRANE: —because that seemed like a safe, familiar harbor to me. And as a result, I lost a lot of the experiences I might have had in those four years at Dartmouth, because I insulated myself somewhat. What I was increasingly protecting myself from was revealing that I was gay, which was particularly tricky during those times at Dartmouth because of the all-male environment. Here were all these hormone-laden, late teen, early twenties guys out in the woods with no women around. And it got expressed in a lot of wild and crazy ways.

I got hit with it right during Freshman Week. One of the traditions at the time in New Hampshire Hall occurred towards the end of Freshman Week, I think, or the first week of classes, when the sophomores sank fraternities.

DONIN: Oh, Sink Night.

CRANE: Sink Night.

DONIN: Oh, yes, Sink Night, yes.

CRANE: The sophomores would return to the dorm about three in the morning. And in New Hampshire Hall, the sophomores (by then really drunk) would bang on the doors of all the

freshmen, line them up in the hall and show them centerfolds from *Playboy Magazine*, causing erections. Then they'd measure the erections. It was called the Peter Meter.

DONIN: Oh!

CRANE: I had been warned that this was going to happen, and so I was catatonically fearful that they would find out that I was getting an erection for all the wrong reasons.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CRANE: So I arranged to sleep out of the dorm that night, to avoid that embarrassment. I'm curious if that's a Dartmouth tradition that's ever been recorded. But it was—

DONIN: The first I've heard.

CRANE: It was well in place by then. It was an annual event.

DONIN: Everywhere, or just in New Hampshire?

CRANE: No, just in New Hampshire Hall, just in New Hampshire. It was a dorm-specific tradition called the Peter Meter.

DONIN: Thank God you knew about it.

CRANE: Yes.

Part of my financial aid package was work, and so in freshman year I worked in the dining hall, worked in the dish cleaning room at Thayer Dining Hall. And so I was aware of the differences in my Dartmouth experience from lots of other people.

DONIN: Listening to their—

CRANE: Just the way they lived and what they did. In the next room, there was an ongoing poker game, where lots of money changed hands. I was just kind of aware of this. I didn't fit in with that crowd, so it was a matter of—

We also were mixed in with upperclassmen in the dormitories so we got to see the full range of experience, and a lot of traditions got passed on in that way.

So I was beginning to pick up on being an outsider, and I remember winter term, freshman year was the hardest time. I remember one night walking down East Wheelock, crying my eyes out. I don't fit in here. There's no point of attachment here. I'm in over my head. You know, you look back at that sort of thing and say, Okay, that was a helpful experience. I grew from that. I learned from that. But it was hitting bottom. In high school, of course, I had been a star performer in school—

DONIN: And you had that big group of friends.

CRANE: Big group of friends. And so here I was, I was really average [chuckles] academically and didn't have this big group of friends, and so—

DONIN: Who would you have said was your—did you have any—had you made friends at that point?

CRANE: You know, I made acquaintances. That is, I had roommates—I had a roommate freshman year. The second year, a third person moved in - we moved to a triple - and we were there two years together. The three of us, by choice, had chosen roommates whom we weren't close friends with, and it made a fine rooming arrangement; that is, we didn't bump into each other in bad ways, and it all kind of worked out. And then I had a single room my senior year.

In sophomore year, I shifted work to the library from the dining hall, and I worked three years at the circulation desk there.

DONIN: The beginning of your—

CRANE: The beginning of my library career, quite literally. Had a fabulous experience that way. Got to know staff, the college, interacted with a lot of people over the circulation desk. It was all a very structured environment, which was really helpful.

I would say most of my social friendships happened at Aquinas House. I went to Mass almost every day -- I was really, really involved. There was a library there, and I would study there almost every night. There was a group of about half a dozen of us who would go to Mass every day and then go to dinner together. It was this self-contained sub-community that was quite rich and welcoming and supportive, and it really was the base upon which I could launch and learn and so forth over those years.

But as I look back, I was doing a couple of things. I was finding a safe haven, because I felt like an outsider. I knew that by engaging in Aquinas House as I did, I was an outsider to the larger Dartmouth community, but it was a very safe and comfortable place. And I also realized I was sort of channeling a lot of my sexual energy into a spiritual kind of experience — I was very celibate and engaged in virtually no sexual activity during that time, even though I was hugely attracted to other men. Over the four years at Dartmouth, I became more and more aware of that attraction, even though I didn't act on it.

DONIN: Were you aware—was there any homosexual social life going on here around you?

CRANE: If there was, I didn't see it. There was another student in New Hampshire Hall who it was assumed by everyone to be gay—I've learned in subsequent years that he *was* gay—who was really shunned and treated very badly. And so I knew what would happen when people believed you were gay, and I wasn't about to put myself in that position. I didn't become friends with him. You know, I regret some of that. But that was what I did.

DONIN: Well, it was self-preservation, really.

CRANE: It was. I did have some serious crushes on guys. During my senior year, I was the president of Aquinas House and I had a crush on one of the other officers. If we were in the same room together, my knees would start shaking so badly that I was afraid I'd fall down -- so I'd make sure I was sitting down [chuckles] whenever he was in the room. [Laughs.]

DONIN: Agony! Just agony!

CRANE: It was like playing with fire. It was exciting, too, though I was denying what was going on. There was so much going on outside of academics. I mean, going to college is so much more than just the academics.

DONIN: Indeed.

CRANE: We were growing into our adulthood, and it wasn't a straight line. It was messy and exciting and painful and happy and—

DONIN: Lonesome for you.

CRANE: And lonesome, yes. But there also was togetherness. I had this small, special group. And interestingly, this group—none have become lifelong friends. I mean, we really just drifted apart. A few years ago, I was reading a book on the gay history of New York and learned that Jack – one of the men in our Aquinas house gang - had died of AIDS, and I'd lost touch with him. Obviously he had eventually come out as gay and—so we had been in the same shelter together at Dartmouth without ever, ever expressing it to each other or being aware of our shared sexuality. It's been helpful – and comforting - to piece those elements back together over the years.

I regret some of what I missed at Dartmouth – especially a broader set of friends. But I guess that wasn't what I needed in life at that time. I was trying to get my feet on the ground.

I majored in math, thought I would become a high school math teacher. I knew I wasn't a great mathematician, but I could get my best grades in math, so I chose that as a major. It was the wrong reason to choose a major, but that's what I did.

DONIN: But you were still following that straight, straight path that was taught to you by your parents.

CRANE: Yes, I was. It was the idea that you keep yourself on the path, on the track rather than going inside yourself and saying, well, who am I, and let's make a track just for me. It was the inverse of that. It really was only, I would say, in my

late 20s and 30s that I figured that out and actually started creating my own track.

DONIN: So you graduated from here—

CRANE: In 1969.

DONIN: Yes, and you came away with a very sort of—I mean, your experience here was very constrained—

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: —by this need to keep yourself sheltered—

CRANE: And safe.

DONIN: —and protected and safe.

CRANE: Right, right. And I found ways and places to ensure protection.

DONIN: And you saw this life going on around you that you couldn't participate in, and I don't mean just the sex life.

CRANE: Right.

DONIN: I mean just generally.

CRANE: Absolutely, yes. Going off on social weekends—

DONIN: The pals going down to the girls' school.

CRANE: The sports teams. Yes, going down to the girls' school.

DONIN: Oh, yes, athletics, too.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: Were you athletic at all?

CRANE: No. No. All my four brothers were athletic. My parents would take them to after-school sports practice, and, fortunately, they took me to art classes.

- DONIN: Oh, really!
- CRANE: So there was that -- I'm different -- and there was *some* parental support for difference. I wasn't forced into the athletic mold. I did let myself take a couple of studio art courses at Dartmouth. I had also taken art courses in high school. So there was some fostering of difference. I was artistic. My parents just never figured out quite how "artistic" I was. [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: But that was probably a euphemism that covered all sorts of—
- CRANE: Exactly.
- DONIN: —differences.
- CRANE: Exactly.
- DONIN: You just didn't buy into the macho thing, and that doesn't necessarily mean you're gay—
- CRANE: Right. Exactly.
- DONIN: —(they could say to themselves).
- CRANE: Exactly. Right. "He's differently talented."
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- CRANE: Yes.
- DONIN: And you were clearly more self-aware than most—maybe this is a stupid generalization, but you were obviously more self-aware than most sort of jock-ish frat boy types of males. In any college.
- CRANE: Yes, I think because of the circumstances—I had a very finely developed antenna. It was always checking: how am I doing? In fact, in my 40s, I had a group, a circle where we would meet and talk about our lives. And one of the folks there observed, "John, you know, one of the things I notice about you is that we may be having a conversation, but there's always this side conversation going on: How am I

doing? How am I doing? How am I doing? And you're wanting me to respond back on that channel." That was very helpful feedback because I realized I had that channel going all the time.

DONIN: And that's really an outgrowth of this need to feel like you know where you are.

CRANE: Exactly, and hiding parts of me and making sure no one is seeing those parts, and always correcting, so if people are getting close, then you can throw that off.

DONIN: So you must have had some pretty high boundaries around yourself socially.

CRANE: Yes. Yes. And really didn't develop that part of me at Dartmouth.

DONIN: So the four years you spent here must have had a sort of lifelong impact on who you are and how you meet the world.

CRANE: It really was the bridge from childhood to what eventually flourished.

DONIN: So it was really a bridge to becoming who you are today.

CRANE: Yes, and a really important bridge. I had both the luck of growing up in St. Johnsbury -- having a fine high school education -- and then having Dartmouth literally open up the world. It was a tough, rough time but not so much that it broke me. You know, that which does not kill you makes you stronger. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Indeed. I mean, I could see people taking the opposite tack and say—in fact, I've heard this: "Dartmouth was a prison to me because I couldn't get in," and I don't mean "get in"—

CRANE: Right. Exactly.

DONIN: But "I couldn't break into—I didn't find my community here."

CRANE: Right.

DONIN: And you could certainly take that tack. “I had no community at Dartmouth other than this—

CRANE: Right, right.

DONIN: —community in the Catholic student house.

CRANE: Right. That’s right.

DONIN: But you’ve chosen to see it as an opportunity to grow.

CRANE: I did. It was what it was, you know, hardening the metal -- opening doors and possibilities: in the appreciation of the arts, in broader social engagement, as well understanding how people relate and what motivates people. All the things that fed into my later professional work were really getting developed here at Dartmouth and then, immediately after Dartmouth, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Interestingly, at Harvard I immediately sought out the Harvard Catholic student center. There was an Opus Dei chapter at Harvard – a very conservative, right-wing Catholic group -- and they invited me to the Opus Dei house. But I began to say, whoa! This is not me.

I had one especially funny experience when I look back on it. I had become friends with the organist at the Catholic church near Havard -- and one day he invited me to his home for dinner. I had no clue that it was a date. [Chuckles.]

I slowly began to become aware of this dimension of relationships among men, but I never let myself really, really go there. And so even as I had chosen at first to put my foot on a familiar pad (the Catholic church), I also was pulling away from it. I look back at that experience and realize that I was beginning to open up and to find my true self.

That was the time, right in the middle of the Vietnam War involvement, when everything was being questioned by my peers. I was realizing that I was not attracted to the people who were holding onto the old rules.

DONIN: Right, right. It was a good time for your exploration to begin.

CRANE: Yes. I wasn't out on the front lines of the rebellion, but I was there watching closely - and learning. I had a very low draft number, and so my work at Harvard was interrupted by going to Naval Officer Candidate School, another all-male environment. [Chuckles.] A very structured environment!

I ended up a young ensign aboard a very large naval supply ship with 400 men on board.

DONIN: Talk about close quarters!

CRANE: Very close quarters. [Laughs.] And a desperate need to stay in the closet.

DONIN: Yes. Especially—ooh—in the military.

CRANE: Yes. And in those days there wasn't even Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Of course, I was entirely complicit in that view. I didn't want to come out to myself, either. I mean, all of my internal structures were still saying, this is wrong; you can't do this. And so I had lots of support, a lot of help from the environment for staying in the closet.

One of my darkest days in the Navy was the day I – as legal officer on board ship – arranged for the discharge of a sailor because he was gay. I knew, down deep, that I was in the same shoes as that sailor and yet I let myself become the instrument of his discharge. I'm not proud of that moment.

In other ways, the Navy was a very opening-up experience for me. The captain of my ship had not come through the military route but had gone through the Merchant Marine Academy. He was a very savvy, smart man who was creative and thoughtful, and I learned a lot from him.

An example of that: There had been a racially-based incident aboard ship in which an African-American sailor had been injured by a white sailor. As soon as this happened, the captain called a meeting in his office with me (his legal officer) and the ship's doctor, and he said, "We need to make very clear that this is a big deal and this can't happen again." So he asked the doctor to tape the victim up so it looked like he was near death. The trial of the accused sailor would be very public, not the usual private affair. While the trial -- for

which I had prepared the documentation – was underway, the doctor arranged for the victim to be carried out of sick bay on a stretcher to a waiting helicopter in sight of everyone on the ship. A second helicopter then was brought out and, as soon as the sailor was found guilty, he was on the second helicopter and off the ship.

DONIN: Wow.

CRANE: I was learning a lot from this man about the complexity of human interactions and motivations. Yes, you have laws and you have rules and you have procedures, and they're important, but there are ways of adapting them to circumstances for the larger good.

So he turned out to be an important person in my life, and it all happened within a very rigid military institution, but, again, I was lucky to have encountered the right person -- even as I was hiding big parts of me from my coworkers.

DONIN: But he was, fair to say, a mentor to you?

CRANE: He was a mentor, right. I would say that, yes, in that I still remember him in detail and feel that his approach and spirit—saying yes, structures and rules and protocol are there for a reason, and you don't ignore them, but you also aren't totally constrained by them. I combined his approach with lessons from my childhood about being resourceful and saying, Well, what are my resources? What do I need to do? What's an interesting, effective way to make something happen?

I think the years at Dartmouth of coping and trying to make sure that one foot was on firm ground, even when the other wasn't, but trying to stay in balance, was all beginning to merge. Eventually, as I became an adult, I moved away from the Catholic Church and developed my own sense of values – incorporating from the past things that worked but letting go of things that did not.

But I couldn't yet fully acknowledge being gay. I married a wonderful woman shortly after leaving the Navy, and continued to develop myself within that relationship. It was a great partnership, in which I was extremely helpful to her;

she was extremely helpful to me. We were married for nineteen years. And then finally, at age forty, I was able to accept that I was gay. We separated and have remained close friends -- but have moved on into our own spheres of life.

Also during that time, my own professional career was developing. After the Navy, I went to library school.

DONIN: So when did you veer off the teaching math—

CRANE: From the Navy, I went back to Harvard for one semester and realized that wasn't what I was interested in, so I dropped out of that program and moved over to the graduate library program at Simmons College – funded entirely by the G.I. Bill.

At that time, library jobs were hard to come by, so I worked at a greenhouse in the Boston area for five years after graduation, with my library degree in my pocket and saying, well, that wasn't meant to happen. My wife, Katie, and I were living in Cambridge and loving the life there – but finally realized we'd rather live in the country and visit the city, rather than live in the city and visit the country. So she quit her job in the city. I quit my job at the greenhouse. We moved up to the Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire.

DONIN: Really!

CRANE: Because it was familiar—again, there was enough familiarity in that location that we'd have one foot on the ground. I took a part-time job in the psychology department at Dartmouth as a research assistant, an hourly-paid job, just to earn a little money until I figured out what I was going to do. Katie set up herself in business and worked long distance with clients in Boston. And then within a year, the position of circulation services librarian in the Dartmouth library opened up. I applied and was hired, so there I was - finally back in the library!

I think I was age thirty-three at that point, and it feels like all the threads in my life came together in that job. I mean, we were computerizing systems in the library, and my

background in math and computer science—I had taken a computer course from John Kemeny. The experience that I'd had in the Navy as personnel and legal officer -- together with the understanding I had gained about how organizations and people work -- had all come together. You know, I had the technical background from library school and a strong belief in innovation and hard work. It all came together in that job.

You know, my 20s decade was about just—it was confusing, and I felt like I was going off in lots of different, pointless directions. And it really was in my early 30s where —oh, things finally have pulled together. And the only major part that I wasn't dealing with yet at that point was my sexuality. But the Library was a very good place. It felt right for me personally.

DONIN: So when you got back here and realized you'd finally found your work life, is that when you felt comfortable to sort of come to terms with your sexual orientation?

CRANE: I was moving in that direction, but my wife was an adopted person and had major fears of abandonment. She was saying, "You know, you're the first person I've come to believe will never abandon me." And so I said to myself, "I can't do this." I just placed my sexuality in the background. I watched her develop her own strengths—and she made huge progress—I let it take the time it needed. It was really by the time we were each about forty where I finally said, "You know, I've watched and admired you wrestling with your abandonment issues, and I really feel that the time is now for me to wrestle with my issues. But they affect you." So we were able to work together. It was a matter of choosing the right timing.

There is a lesson that I recall learning in primary school on the playground. When you're pushing somebody on the swing, you just start tapping them which starts moving them. It's a matter of pushing them the right amount at the right time, and you can get a lot of swing going. But if you step in at the wrong moment [slaps table], you get hit, and everybody gets knocked over.

So I've always had a strong sense of: What's the right thing to do, what's a good way to do it and when's the right time to do it. I developed a habit of adopting that approach in all the areas of my life. It was a painful, difficult personal time because Katie and I were very close. We worked on it together and after a year decided to separate, which we did. Separation was painful, but perhaps a little less so because we did not have children.

Following our separation and divorce, Katie went through the MALS Program at Dartmouth, then to Harvard Divinity School and a successful, fulfilling life as a Unitarian-Universalist minister in the Boston area.

It was wonderful to have this great work environment at the Library because as I was devoting energy to personal issues, the work issues were going well--that foot was solidly on the ground.

DONIN: I think it's remarkable, the care with which you took to finally reach this final confirmation of your identity or whatever one calls it.

CRANE: Thanks.

DONIN: Because so many of these stories can feel sort of violent because people do it either because somebody outs them or they're backed into a corner in some way and have to do it maybe before it feels completely right.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: But you clearly did the kinder, gentler route.

CRANE: I was afforded that opportunity. I was very good at monitoring my environment—my antenna was out there all the time. Part of it was skill and part of it was luck, and those combined for me in a fortunate way.

DONIN: Yes. Life is a lot of luck, isn't it?

CRANE: [Chuckles.] Isn't it?

DONIN: And timing.

CRANE: And timing, yes, without getting knocked over, off your pins.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

So if you had to describe your Dartmouth experience, say, when you graduated and thinking about the people that you were saying goodbye to at commencement, how would you describe who your community was at that point? Was it mostly the people in Aquinas House?

CRANE: Yes. Yes.

DONIN: We didn't actually talk about teachers. Did you develop any kind of relationships with teachers here, in the math department or—

CRANE: I really didn't. One of the losses that I had for the way I negotiated Dartmouth, was that I didn't develop any mentors on the faculty. I had people in the library staff—my supervisor at the circulation desk became a lifelong friend and mentor, but not on the faculty.

DONIN: But also—and I don't know what I'm talking about here; I'm just throwing this idea out: I don't know what the model was for—you know, in the '60s. Did students have the confidence or whatever to be able to become close to faculty? During some decades I think they were sort of up on pedestals.

CRANE: Yes. It was happening. A good friend of mine, who was in Aquinas House, was also a fine chemist. He worked in a lab in the chemistry department and developed a major, professional mentor, lifelong mentor in that process. So I saw that with him and I saw it with others of my friends. So that was happening. But I was always keeping—that wasn't the focus of my engagement here. You know, it's the "what if." If only I could do Dartmouth again today, what a different experience it would be! Because I'm in a very different place. It would be hugely different.

DONIN: So going back to commencement, who did you feel sad saying goodbye to at commencement, if anybody?

- CRANE: I hadn't thought of that question before. I was ready to move on. I was excited about the future. I was scared at the same time—because I knew the Vietnam War was going on. It was a crazy world. Our commencement was totally crazy, too. Nelson Rockefeller was—
- DONIN: Yes, '69, yes.
- CRANE: Nelson Rockefeller was the speaker, and we—
- DONIN: The Parkhurst takeover had just happened.
- CRANE: Yes; the Parkhurst takeover had just happened.
- DONIN: Oh, yes, that was a crazy time.
- CRANE: I remember we started commencement on Baker Lawn, and then the skies opened and it started pouring rain. It was very symbolic of the time. We literally scattered -- and reformed later in Leverone Field House, all soggy, wet. Rockefeller was a controversial speaker and during his speech many members of the class stood up and turned their backs to him. My poor parents were in shock. Their son had finally graduated from this Ivy League institution, and it was chaos here! [Laughter.]
- DONIN: They had no idea.
- CRANE: They were blown away. And, of course, I was feeling parts of that, too. It was all in turmoil.
- DONIN: But they probably never witnessed that sort of misbehavior on behalf of the crowd of young—
- CRANE: No, never.
- DONIN: —young men.
- CRANE: Never, because they were very much: "These are the rules, and you conform to the rules."
- DONIN: So they must have been appalled, and they had another son following right after you at Dartmouth.

CRANE: Exactly! Exactly! Yes!

DONIN: [Laughs.]

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: So how are we doing here time wise? I know we have this other chapter to do about your career here. Do you want to take a break?

CRANE: I'm doing fine.

DONIN: You're sure. Okay. All right.

CRANE: How about yourself?

DONIN: No, I'm fine, too.

CRANE: Oh, good. Yes.

DONIN: So refresh yourself there and we can move on to—

CRANE: To me it's helpful to keep the narrative arc going.

DONIN: Absolutely. That's fine. I just don't want to torture anybody and make them go too long. Yes, this is good.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: So here you come back into the circulation department.

CRANE: The position was called circulation services librarian, and I was responsible for the circulation and reserve desks and the book stacks in Baker Library plus opening a new storage library.

DONIN: Was that the one that's out there?

CRANE: By Jesse's Restaurant. That was under construction. I had four parts to the job.

DONIN: Yes. And this was what year?

- CRANE: This would have been 1979, ten years after I was out of Dartmouth.
- DONIN: Yes. What did you find here when you came back in terms of how had the college changed?
- CRANE: When I left library school, I had no interest in coming back to Dartmouth because I found the old Dartmouth too insular. But by 1979, it had gone through coeducation, had opened up to the world, so I said, oh, this is a place where I can thrive. And partly I knew I was different, and I think I sensed that Dartmouth was opening up to difference, and, okay, I don't know what the future is, but I can find a place here.

Interestingly, during the—I'm just recalling—during the messy period of stopping at Harvard Graduate School of Education and applying to Naval OCS, there was a period of several months when I didn't have anything to do, and so I lived with my parents and taught math at St. Johnsbury Academy. Then a couple of years later, when I got out of the Navy, there was a period of several months when I came back to Hanover. Edward Lathem, then Librarian of the College, hired me to edit some Library publications. I actually lived at the Aquinas House during that time, finding a safe and familiar haven.

Then, after completing graduate library studies, I realized Dartmouth was not the place I wanted to live and work because it had not yet opened up to the world.

But as Dartmouth started to open up – especially through the enrollment of women starting in the early- to mid-seventies - I was thrilled at the idea of coming back.

In 1979, the library administration had just changed. Margaret Otto became the first woman to direct the Library – and she was in a position to appoint her three associate directors -- so significant change happened from the top. I was brought in as part of that change.

I soon realized that my job was more than just what was in the job description; it was helping to breathe new life into the whole organization. I learned later that some of the long-time department heads had figured out what was going on -- and

were deeply suspicious of me and other new appointees. I was shocked to learn that others might be threatened and upset by such refreshing changes!

DONIN: Suspicious how? Why?

CRANE: They were aware that change was happening and that they might be required to do new things and change things they had always done and they could see that I was—

DONIN: The change agent.

CRANE: That's right. I was inexperienced and energetic. I would toss out ideas and I would just start doing things. That created some ripples, but it was what the new administration wanted to have happen. It was a pretty exciting time organizationally.

DONIN: And you must have been seen as sort of the point person for that, or one of the point people.

CRANE: One of the point people for that. There were several of us in that role. For me, it made the position interesting because we saw the organization as a whole, and it wasn't just about managing our own fiefdom. Some of the older, longer-term department heads insisted that if anything happened between departments, the communication went up to them at the department head level, then went over to the other department and then back down. It was about maintaining control. And so, as that was breaking down, I understood how people who had operated in that mold would be very uncomfortable.

DONIN: Threatened by it.

CRANE: Threatened by it. And that was happening all over the library.

DONIN: Wow.

CRANE: There was a period of about five years when that was clearly happening. The library administration would bring in facilitators, where we would have group processes, where ideas would be opened up and new systems would be developed. It was really the beginning of a time when we were constantly revising and bringing in new systems, where

change was constant. So it was the end of the older model of a library, which had been the same yesterday, today and forever. And that model broke—

DONIN: Yep.

CRANE: —and some of us were part of that.

DONIN: Now, I assume this was a reflection not only of what was going on at Dartmouth but in the library world in general?

CRANE: It was, and Dartmouth was on the leading edge. There was a consortium of libraries in Ohio that formed an organization offering shared, computerized library cataloging services. Dartmouth was the first library outside of Ohio that joined that service.

DONIN: Oh, I didn't know that.

CRANE: John Kemeny's influence, especially with his development of computer timesharing, created an environment at Dartmouth that was very receptive to shifting library processes to the digital environment. We started with shared cataloging. Then we added circulation control and, later, acquisitions processes – until the Library had a completely integrated computerized library system.

DONIN: So this is a legacy of John Kemeny that I've never heard really talked about.

CRANE: Even though he wasn't directly involved, it really was the culture he created that fostered this change. Dartmouth College Library was big enough and complex enough to be interesting, but it was small enough to be manageable -- so that we could actually do these things. Some of the larger academic libraries, with huge legacies and huge collections and huge staffs had an inertia that was almost impossible to move and change. And libraries smaller than Dartmouth typically didn't have the resources to initiate such early and fundamental changes.

DONIN: So what's it like coming back to work for your alma mater? I mean, were there a lot of alums working here at the time?

CRANE: No. No, there really weren't in the Library. There were a couple of others on the staff, but it was not a career track that was common for Dartmouth alums.

I was a different person by the time I had come back, but there was a sense of familiarity as to place -- which was very comfortable—I knew my way around; I knew many of the library staff because I had worked for three years at the circulation desk as a student. I also knew some of the faculty.

But I think as a result of having been a student here, I had a sense of being a part of the larger college and not just a part of the library. It was easy from the circulation services position to reach out to the larger community because I was interacting with students and faculty every day in my job. Then, when I later moved into the central library administration managing finances and personnel, I interacted with administrators all across the college.

I felt that I had a well-rounded interaction with the institution as a whole, so as those experiences and relationships grew, it kept the job interesting.

DONIN: Right. Right.

CRANE: I started being called upon to do various activities outside the library, on campus, particularly with the Affirmative Action Review Committee.

DONIN: I mean, this is probably later on, but weren't you the cofounder of the first sort of coalition of—

CRANE: Yes, it was called the CGLBTC -- Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns. It was a mouthful. We still are trying to be inclusive in those terms.

DONIN: Inclusive. Right, right.

CRANE: Yes, that happened about—

DONIN: Early '90s.

CRANE: Early '90s, and it happened because one day two faculty members and I bumped into each other in the vegetable section of the Hanover Co-op. We looked at each other and said, "Are we gonna do something or not?" There had been generalized talk about "we ought to get a little more formal" or whatever, but nothing had ever coalesced.

I said, "Okay, I'll call a meeting." So we reserved a room in Collis Student Center, and a whole bunch of people showed up.

DONIN: Really!

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: Fantastic.

CRANE: And we said, "What's on people's minds?" We decided to form four working groups. I sent out an e-mail and it immediately got things going.

DONIN: And so your timing was perfect, it sounds like.

CRANE: It really just kind of worked—and the institution was ready for this.

DONIN: Yes.

CRANE: We weren't sure of that, but activity picked up very quickly. I think the four working groups were—one was dealing with partner benefits -- employee benefits for staff and faculty. Another dealt with the United Way of Upper Valley, which was funding the Boy Scouts and other organizations that had discriminatory policies. There was one to look at curriculum issues, and the other was more organizational: What do we call ourselves and so forth.

DONIN: I saw the list here. Here it is.

CRANE: Did you? Oh, my goodness.

DONIN: Here it is. [Laughs.]

- CRANE: Oh, there are the notes, yes. So 36 members at our first meeting.
- DONIN: It's great.
- CRANE: So establishing same sex benefits, ending the Reserve Officer Training Corps on campus, right; discontinue support of United Way, and creating courses. So we were able to launch right into work with different people interested in different topics.
- DONIN: Issues, right, right.
- CRANE: So we got several pots stirring. Most institutions of higher education were not yet offering partner benefits and so we thought this might be an uphill climb. We went around to various other groups on campus, trying to develop a broad base of support. We eventually brought a petition to the College administration asking them to study the issue of partner benefits. We were stunned when the provost immediately replied, "We're not going to form a task force to study the issue; we're going to form a task force to implement it." [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: Fantastic. That doesn't happen!
- CRANE: We jumped right to go!
- DONIN: Yes! Amazing!
- CRANE: And he said, "I'd like nine members on the task force. One of those, the chair, will be the executive vice president, Lyn Hutton. I will name four members, and I would like the coalition to name four members for the task force."
- DONIN: Wow.
- CRANE: It was a fascinating process being on that task force because we realized—it helped us understand what kind of education the campus needed. There was one moment when we were talking about the range of benefits that were involved. We talked about our families and our children, and one of the faculty members, who was a medical school faculty member, said, "Well, why are you talking about

children? You people don't have children, do you?" It was a completely honest statement on his part. He didn't know. So we realized, "Okay, there are a lot of conversations to be had here about our lives."

DONIN: Yes, yes.

CRANE: There was variable progress on the different issues the Coalition had identified as important. Partner benefits, as I've mentioned, went very quickly and smoothly. We worked for a couple of years with United Way of the Upper Valley and, as a result of those efforts, they stopped funding the Boy Scouts and all the other organizations within United Way ended up having non-discrimination policies in place. That was a wonderful community effort.

The coursework was a little slow to advance. It had, of course, to go through the normal faculty protocols for additions of courses, but it provided a catalyst, I think, for that activity.

ROTC was a real sticking point, and I think President Freedman was in a very tricky position on that. I remember a meeting in which Susan Ackerman and I, as co-chairs of the Coalition, met with him. I realize in retrospect that he was preparing us to know that the trustees were going to stick by—

DONIN: Push back.

CRANE: Push back and stick by their guns, so to speak, on that issue.

DONIN: He got in a tight corner there, I remember.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: Yes, promising one thing, I think, to the faculty and then push back from the trustees.

CRANE: Trustees. It was a sobering time. But I remember when that announcement came out. By that time, I was in my new relationship with David Chambers - it was a commuter relationship. He was on the faculty of the University of

Michigan Law School, and I was with David in Ann Arbor the weekend that happened. So I flew back early, and I found myself on the steps of Parkhurst with a bullhorn in my hand.

DONIN: Crazy. Crazy. Yes.

CRANE: The acting provost at the time was in the front row, clearly in support of us! As I spoke to the crowd, I was also remembering myself as a Dartmouth senior, when other people were on the steps of Parkhurst with bullhorns protesting the presence on campus of ROTC and the Vietnam War. I was quietly looking from the sidelines, and so a part of me was having a déjà vu moment of saying, Wow! This is a sign of growth here, where now—

DONIN: Come a long way.

CRANE: Come a long way. That was kind of a sweet—

DONIN: That was a sweet moment.

CRANE: A sweet moment, yes. But it was also sweet to be able to realize that and to see it. And part of that has to do with place. A lot of people talk about Dartmouth as place. I've chosen to organize my life around this place. Some of it—what I was going to say—for good reasons, some for bad reasons; some for security, others—but it also gives you these markers of change and progress, and that was one of those moments, I think.

DONIN: I mean, to have imagined yourself with a bullhorn in your hand—

CRANE: Right.

DONIN: —speaking about gay rights—

CRANE: Right, right. On the steps—

DONIN: —twenty years later.

CRANE: Right. That's right.

DONIN: Come a long way.

CRANE: Right.

DONIN: Phenomenal. So by that point, you were out to everybody, obviously.

CRANE: Yes, and was deeply involved in bringing the AIDS Quilt to Thompson Arena as well as organizing programs around campus that related to AIDS and HIV, and engaging students and faculty.

I remember as part of that, going to the Aquinas House and talking to the chaplain about encouraging them to join in the AIDS Quilt display.

DONIN: Were you successful?

CRANE: No. It was a cold shoulder.

DONIN: So this was what?

CRANE: This would have been 1991.

CRANE: You know, again that was a moment of remembering the past—because I sat in the very room where I had sat as a Dartmouth senior with my knees shaking because I had a crush [chuckles] on the man sitting next to me. Again, that sense of place, feeling the—

DONIN: Going back there, yes.

CRANE: Comparing moments in that place has been very helpful.

DONIN: You know, in so many ways—I mean, the face of Dartmouth when you got back here in, what did you say, seventy-?

CRANE: Seventy-nine.

DONIN: Seventy-nine. Women had been here as full-time students for seven years.

CRANE: That's right.

DONIN: The whole place had changed.

CRANE: Yes, yes. Montgomery Endowment had happened.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

CRANE: And it felt like Dartmouth had opened up to the world. It had established a successful process of change and that was a model that could grow.

When I was here, it felt—again, it's a little hard because I didn't have perspective, but as a student, it felt like Dartmouth was a place that was tradition-bound, and things happened because they'd always happened.

DONIN: Right.

CRANE: Now I realize that that is not an entirely accurate statement, but it was the perspective I certainly had as a student here.

DONIN: I think many people did, still, in the '60s.

CRANE: Yes. And so when I was deciding to establish myself somewhere professionally, the old Dartmouth wasn't the right environment.

DONIN: But how lucky, though—I mean, your timing was such that it was because—

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: —again, your timing allowed you to see the new beginning, so to speak—

CRANE: Right. With the introduction of new technologies to library services, it was becoming apparent that the beautiful old building that was Baker Library no longer served the needs of Dartmouth's students and faculty. The College had terrific ambitions in that regard, and the planning for the new Berry Library began. We first moved Special Collections out of Baker Library into Webster Hall. By doing that, we opened up the physical possibility of connecting Baker Library with Sherman Art Library.

By then, I had developed experience and relationships across the library and across the campus - and so was asked to chair the building committee for the new Berry Library. That assignment became a long-term project that brought together many pieces in my life: about how libraries are growing and changing, about how organizations work, about how people work together, about getting multiple visions to coalesce, about how you marshal resources both financial and physical.

An important part of that project was the decision to bring Computing Services into the Library building. The Library staff and the Computing Services staff had very different cultures. As a Dartmouth student, I'd been a math major with a computer science sub-major, so I had some understanding of both cultures.

Throughout the Berry Library building project, I also found parallels with my previous experience in organizing the Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns: working with many different people, getting committees and groups working on topics and holding them accountable. I used the same model for the library building committee, involving people from Computing Services and the Library as well as from the College facilities staff. Kept the project on track, on time, getting decisions made.

I felt lucky to have that project—

DONIN: Really? [Chuckles.]

CRANE: Yes!

DONIN: Oh!

CRANE: Absolutely.

DONIN: I mean, the stories that have been told about the difficulty involved in getting the design approved—

CRANE: [Laughs.]

DONIN: You must have been part of that.

- CRANE: Oh, yes.
- DONIN: Yes, a lot of stories.
- CRANE: A lot of stories, a lot of tensions - because everyone's an expert on architecture, and everyone cares a LOT about this campus.
- DONIN: And the library—it's the heartbeat of the university.
- CRANE: Literally and figuratively the center of the campus. And it is the indispensable working tool of faculty and students, whom we had already been upsetting by changing fundamentally the way they work. In spite of the disruption, we knew that there needed to be new teaching and learning spaces, new collaborative work spaces in the library. Technology had to be built into the library at its core.
- DONIN: Right.
- CRANE: Then, in the middle of the building of the Berry Library, Margaret Otto retired as Librarian. After a brief period during which I served as interim Librarian, Richard Lucier was appointed Dean of Libraries. His tenure was characterized by a significant re-evaluation of the Library's services and organization, as well as difficult budget and staffing reductions. Building plans remained largely unaltered, but staff morale hit an all-time low - largely due to the abrasive style of the new dean. Following his departure after three years, I was asked to again serve for a year as interim Librarian with the task of re-building staff morale.
- DONIN: Mm-hm. And I have to believe that your understanding of the culture of the place, having been a student here, had to add some sort of *gravitas* to your suitability to do this, to keep this place going, keep the library going during these crazy times of so much change.
- CRANE: I think it might have—I think it did help.
- I understood the pressures that Library staff were feeling as they experienced fundamental changes in their work processes – and at the same time living through several years of construction.

I also understood what students were going through because I had been here as a student myself.

DONIN: And you could say that legitimately because you were here.

CRANE: Yes; literally. I had had a series of pressures and stresses as a Dartmouth student. I remembered that night in winter term of my freshman year when I was stumbling down East Wheelock Street saying to myself, this isn't working. I don't fit in here.

I also became a mentor to some of the gay students at the time—

DONIN: Oh, I bet.

CRANE: I'll never forget one of those students, who showed up at my office early one morning. It was clear he had been crying his eyes out. His boyfriend had broken up with him the night before. He had just had his pins knocked out from under him and he needed someone to console him—tell him it was going to be okay.

DONIN: And what a gift that you were there, because you certainly didn't have that same kind of resource when you were a student here.

CRANE: [Laughs.] Exactly. Far from it.

DONIN: For sure, for sure.

CRANE: It was nice to watch those opportunities – personal and professional -- grow and develop. The new library got built, a wonderful new dean of libraries, Jeff Horrell, was appointed and I was ready to phase out my library career. My partner, David, is seven years older than I am. He had retired from the law school at Michigan. I was still engaged with what I was doing at the Library but also wanted to work on the next chapter of life.

President Wright at that point decided to do a top-to-bottom administrative review of the College, looking for efficiencies from an administrative standpoint.

- DONIN: Oh, the McKinsey—
- CRANE: He had hired the folks from McKinsey to come in as a consulting group, which was a deeply threatening exercise for administrators—
- DONIN: Everybody, yes.
- CRANE: And he asked me to coordinate that project across campus.
- DONIN: Again, perfect fit.
- CRANE: I knew a lot of people, a lot of people knew me. I thought back to the building committee for the Berry Library — a committee of fifteen people. I had chaired the committee even though I was the most junior person administratively. In other words, everyone else on the committee was above me in the organization, which meant I was a threat to no one. [Laughter.] And I think Jim Wright might have had the same idea here. [Chuckles.]
- The McKinsey study was like a speeded-up version of the Berry Library building project. For me, it was satisfying because I was deeply committed to the whole institution.
- DONIN: And you'd been successful with the library, so—
- CRANE: Right, right. Why not?
- DONIN: Perfect fit.
- CRANE: I'm just remembering: an unexpected result of the Berry Library building project was the opportunity to re-connect with my classmates in the Class of 1969. The class had been collecting money over time for a class gift to the College, and they couldn't figure out what the gift should be. We were fundraising for the Berry Library, and I realized that one of the opportunities we were offering was within the price range of the class gift. So I planted a seed—would the class like to name one of the study rooms off the Novak Café? The class really liked that idea - the Class of 1969 Room. What it meant for me was re-engaging with members of the class, with whom I really hadn't had a relationship.

DONIN: Yes, we didn't talk about that. Yes.

CRANE: So I started to re-enter the class, in a way. I came back to reunions for the first time.

DONIN: Oh, how interesting!

CRANE: It was very interesting—I forget which reunions was it? It may have been the thirty-fifth reunion?

DONIN: Oh, so that would be 2004? That was thirty-fifth.

CRANE: No, the library opened in 2002.

DONIN: So maybe it was your—well, whatever.

CRANE: So it would have been the reunion in the late '90s. The class put together a program in which a few members talked about adapting to life. They chose four members of the class who had had major moments of adaptation in their life.

DONIN: So you were one of the four?

CRANE: I was one of the four.

DONIN: Uh-huh. No surprise.

CRANE: [Chuckles.] I talked about the process of coming out as a gay man. I described a model which I often call “successive approximation” -- a mathematical concept -- you get as close as you can to where you want to go, and then you try again and you get closer, and then you try again and you get closer. And that is, in life, the image I have. You take the skills, experience and knowledge you have at a moment and do the best you can. And in the process of doing that, you gain more experience and skills and knowledge, and the next time you get closer. And then through that process, you get more knowledge and skills and so forth.

After the program, one of my classmates -- whom I actually had had a serious crush on when we were undergraduates -- came up to me and said, “You know, John, what you said really resonates. It's helps me make sense of some stuff in

my life, and I really want to thank you for offering that.” It wasn’t that he was gay. But he was saying, “The process by which you have engaged change in your life helps me make sense of some stuff that’s going on in my life right now, and I thank you for that.”

DONIN: Wonderful.

CRANE: It was a lovely kind of coming together—creating some bonds that hadn’t been bridged back when we were students because I had defenses up then- I was hiding.

DONIN: Yes. I mean, just thinking about how your relationship to your classmates has changed is—we could go for an hour just on *that* topic.

CRANE: Yes. Right, right.

DONIN: So when was the first reunion you came to?

CRANE: Hmm. I think probably my twenty-fifth.

DONIN: So the thirtieth, then, would have been ’99. That was probably when they did—

CRANE: That’s right, that’s right. That sounds right, yes.

DONIN: So you came to your, say, ’94 maybe for the twenty-fifth.

CRANE: Right, I felt pretty distant at that reunion.

DONIN: Oh, did you?

CRANE: I came because, well, you should come to your twenty-fifth reunion.

DONIN: Right, right.

CRANE: But it was really hard for me to plug in.

DONIN: Was it?

CRANE: It was very hard to plug in at that one.

- DONIN: Interesting.
- CRANE: It really was in the later experience of working with the class leadership on the idea of the 1969 Room in the Berry Library that opened up the channels of communication.
- DONIN: I see. Right, right.
- CRANE: And through that process, two different classmates said, “You know, I’ve got a son who’s gay, and can I talk to you about this?”
- DONIN: That’s great.
- CRANE: I think the relationships with classmates are still less well developed than they might have been had they been formed when we all were undergraduates.
- DONIN: Right, right. But it’s amazing the number of people that we’ve talked to who left here, never wanting to have a relationship with Dartmouth, having no interest in it—
- CRANE: Right.
- DONIN: —who say that their reunions have been the opportunities to not just renew relationships but to begin relationships.
- CRANE: Begin. That’s right.
- DONIN: Multiple numbers of people have said that, and I feel like I’m a poster child now for the alumni office, who’ve said that the nurturing of this relationship by the alumni people who keep sending their stuff to you—that, and some, you know, changes in your own life—
- CRANE: Right.
- DONIN: —leave you open to come back—
- CRANE: Yes.
- DONIN: —and start these relationships.

CRANE: Right, and that certainly was my experience. At one point, the president of the class asked me if I would be the class representative on the Alumni Council.

DONIN: Wow.

CRANE: That certainly was a surprise! It turned out that as an employee of the college I was not eligible to serve on the Alumni Council, but—

DONIN: Right. Well, the invitation—

CRANE: —I had been asked to do that, yes. Yes.

DONIN: Well, and it says a lot about how the world has changed.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: It's an easier place for different people to be themselves.

CRANE: Right, and that Dartmouth is a part of that world now.

DONIN: Exactly. It took a while.

CRANE: It took a while, right. [Chuckles.] And the institutional change *is* happening. But you see other institutions that I was associated with—the Catholic Church - not doing a good job of it.

DONIN: No.

CRANE: The military has begun to do it.

DONIN: Baby steps, yes.

CRANE: Boy Scouts, an organization I was deeply involved with, hasn't yet been able to open up.

DONIN: Right.

CRANE: And so you've got—

DONIN: Different stages of—

CRANE: —that’s out there.

DONIN: Right, right.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: Great. I feel like we’ve done a good sweep.

CRANE: This feels—I think we’ve completed the arc.

I’ve retired from the Library. I’ve retired from a lot of my “social change” work, the Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns at Dartmouth. I chaired our local AIDS service organization. I was an area coordinator for the AIDS Quilt, coordinating displays of the AIDS Quilt in the northeastern United States for a number of years. I chaired the Samara Foundation of Vermont, sort of a gay and lesbian “United Way” for Vermont.

DONIN: Wow.

CRANE: Then, for the last five years, I’ve pulled back from my work in the library and the work in these organizations. Have become—

DONIN: An artist.

CRANE: —the artist that I wanted to be, a printmaker as well as working with fiber: spinning, knitting.

DONIN: You had a show at—

CRANE: I had a show of my prints at the Hopkins Center earlier this year. I describe retirement as the “Friday night of life”.

DONIN: Great.

CRANE: That feels good. I feel like I have—a little part of me keeps saying, well, you should be contributing more to the common good. I’m thinking, I won’t rule that out, but I think I’ve earned this.

DONIN: Exactly.

CRANE: And it really has been just being able to back off and relax. Engagement does take a toll.

DONIN: You need to recharge your batteries at some point.

CRANE: Yes. Yes. And that's what we're doing now.

DONIN: And art does that for you.

CRANE: It really does.

DONIN: That's great.

CRANE: Yes.

DONIN: And that's something that's been with you since you were a child, you said.

CRANE: Right. So that was a thread that I could—

DONIN: Pick up.

CRANE: —pick up again.

DONIN: Well, you're lucky to have identified that for retirement, because I think for a lot of people, it's a scary—talk about walking off a cliff.

CRANE: Exactly. You know, it's the idea of having one foot on the ground as you're moving into a new territory. Yes, I'm of the generation now where people are retiring, and the successful stories are people who have a place to put at least one foot.

DONIN: Exactly.

CRANE: And the unsuccessful stories are those who don't. I agree with your observation.

DONIN: You're a good model of how to have a successful retirement.

CRANE: Well, I feel lucky having these interests and having them develop the way they have.

DONIN: Right, right.

CRANE: Well, this has been fun to review my life and to look at the narrative arc, seeing it through the Dartmouth lens.

DONIN: Well, you'll see the transcript, and if you have lights go on in your head, saying, well, I forgot to talk about this, we're going to add to it.

CRANE: Sure.

DONIN: But I'm going to turn these off.

CRANE: Good.

[End of interview.]