

Callista (“Cally”) Womick  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth’s World  
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DONIN: Today is Wednesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. My name is Mary Donin. We’re here in Rauner Library with Callista Womick, Dartmouth Class of 19—19!—2013 [chuckles]. (Interesting, 1913.)

Okay, Cally, as you know, we always start off this interview with a question about how it is you ended up coming to Dartmouth, whether it was a high school guidance counselor or somebody else from Dartmouth who maybe was in your family. How’d you end up here?

WOMICK: Right. It was actually a letter in the mail. I know a lot of people downplay those mailings, but honestly, I come from a really, really rural part of North Carolina, and both my parents went to in-state schools. They went to Chapel Hill, but I’d never heard of Dartmouth. I knew about the Ivy League as this big, amorphous institution. I probably couldn’t have named more than three schools in it. I got a mailing from Dartmouth, and it was interesting looking. It was one of the ones that caught my eye out of all the ones I was getting, so I looked into it, and it seemed really cool. I liked the idea of the residential clusters, as they described them, and I liked the language programs. At that time, I was really interested in studying languages and becoming a linguist.

So I ended up going to one of their recruiting events in a city that was about two hours away from where I lived, and the fellow was really good at selling Dartmouth. He told us that the weather was not much worse than what we had in North Carolina, which, of course, was a bald-faced lie, but— [chuckles]

DONIN: Total lie. [Laughs.]

WOMICK: —something he said that really got my attention was that that year, Dartmouth was looking for students that were a little bit reckless, and I thought that that described me perfectly in so many ways. And so I applied, early decision,

and I got in. It was actually the only school that I applied to. There were other schools that I was interested in, but I didn't apply 'cause I wasn't that sold on the idea of college at all, and Dartmouth was the only one that seemed like the best fit for me. So luckily, I got in.

DONIN: Did you visit the campus before you applied?

WOMICK: No. The first time I saw the campus was after I'd been admitted. The summer before I came up here, I visited for a week.

DONIN: Oh, wow! That's pretty brave.

WOMICK: Yeah. It didn't seem all that strange to me. I mean, my family didn't have a lot of money. I wouldn't have been able to visit any colleges that weren't within driving distance of my home, so if I were going to go out of state and far away, which I really wanted to do, it would have had to be blind.

DONIN: Did its rural location appeal to you?

WOMICK: Oh, definitely. I wanted a really small school because I'm from a really small community. I couldn't handle something that was like a city. Both my parents liked Chapel Hill and wanted me to go there, but it has 30,000 undergraduates. I can't even imagine that number of people. So I wanted something small, and I wanted something rural 'cause that's what I knew, and I didn't want to experience too many new things at once, since I knew I was already going to be getting a lot of new experiences.

DONIN: Pretty far away. Had you been away from home before?

WOMICK: I actually moved out of my parents' house when I was 17 to live with my grandmother because that was closer to the high school I was attending. I went to a charter school an hour a way, and I commuted, so—it wasn't that much closer; it was 15 or 20 minutes closer, but it was also in the same city that I was working. I worked in high school to pay for my car and the gas to get to the school that I was attending, so I was actually away from home and, like, paying for all of my own life expenses really early on, so it didn't seem like that much of a jump to then be just living even further away.

DONIN: Were you the first—I don't know if you have siblings, but were you the first in the family, of your generation, to go away?

WOMICK: Yeah. I'm the oldest sibling. I have a younger sister. She just turned 19. But that's all in my family, just me and my sister. And then I have a little cousin who's eight now, but other than that, I have a really small family.

DONIN: So you weren't leaving home to—I mean, your departure was not that traumatic because you'd already been away, in some sense, anyway.

WOMICK: It was easy in the sense that I already knew how to take care of myself and was used to that, but it was really hard in the sense that my family *is* really small, and they all live together. Except for a great cousin and his wife, who lived in New York City for most of my childhood, everyone lives within an hour or two of where I grew up with my family in North Carolina. We would have dinner with each of my grandparents' families each week. So, really close-knit family that I saw a lot. So it was really difficult coming here, where I knew nobody. In the small community, I knew everyone. Everyone knew me. I couldn't go anywhere without having a conversation with someone who was a friend of my dad or my mom or my grandparents, or even running into a family member [chuckles] and then coming here, where I had absolutely no connections. That was really hard.

DONIN: Were you the first from your high school to go to Dartmouth?

WOMICK: I was the first from my high school to go out of state, actually.

DONIN: Wow.

WOMICK: The charter school that I went to was brand new. I think mine was the fourth or fifth graduating class. The school had only been around for about eight years when I graduated. It was a really good school, but just it hadn't been around long enough to start sending students out of state. And we have a lot of really good in-state schools, where people tend to go because it's the easier thing to do.

DONIN: And probably cheaper.

WOMICK: Yeah. Oh, definitely cheaper. So I was the first out of state and the first Ivy League acceptance for the school. They'd never had a student get into an Ivy League school before. I don't know if that's because no one had ever applied, if it's just not an ambition that the students had yet, but I wasn't the only person in my class. There were a couple of other people in my class who got into Ivy League schools, but they didn't actually go.

DONIN: So the transition from being a small-town girl that everybody knew about and was proud of because you were going to a big fancy school up North, to here, where nobody knew you—it must have been hard.

WOMICK: Yeah, it was kind of hard. But, then again, I really appreciated it because I'd never really enjoyed the small-town-everyone-knows-you kind of atmosphere. I mean, in retrospect there were things that I really did like about it that I didn't know I liked, but at the time, I just wanted to be around people who challenged me and who weren't always kissing my feet. That's the way I felt with a lot of my peers because—I mean, no offense to the people I went to school with, but they just weren't interested in the same sort of things that I was interested in and weren't as engaged with the learning. And so coming here, where I was all of a sudden really challenged in so many different ways, was amazing.

DONIN: Did you feel well prepared, though?

WOMICK: In some ways, I felt very well prepared. I had a couple really incredible teachers my junior and senior year of high school that worked us so hard and asked really important questions and took no bullshit. And so I really appreciate how hard they made us work, because they did prepare us, I think. I was less prepared in terms of mathematics, but, frankly, that's all my own fault because I avoided mathematics in high school. I took the minimum of what I had to. I took pre-calc and then stats. I never took calculus. So I probably would have been prepared if I'd decided to be prepared.

DONIN: So describe what it was like when you came up here in whenever it was—August?—for—did you go on one of those—

WOMICK: [Laughs.] It was hideous. It was raining.

DONIN: Oh, dear.

WOMICK: No, I visited at the end of July, beginning of August, I think, actually. I came up here—and I was dating someone at the time. It was someone who had gone to my first high school. For my freshman year of high school, I attended Eastern Randolph High School, which was the local high school where I grew up, and I hated it there. After my freshman year, I told my parents that either I needed to go somewhere else or I was going to drop out and get my GED because I hated that school so much. It just wasn't worth three years of my life to get a normal diploma when I knew I was smart and could probably still succeed in life even with a GED.

And so there was a senior there when I was a freshman, who I didn't know well, but he was really smart and weird. He had long blond hair—and this is rural South; no one has long blond hair except the rednecks, and he wasn't a redneck, so I didn't know what was going on with him, but he seemed cool.

And then he was the valedictorian for his class, and since I was in the band, I heard his speech, and it was all about dreams and ambition and—it was just different from anything else we had going on. And a few years later, when I was at my new high school, Gray Stone Day, he randomly got in touch with me on Facebook, and we started talking and hit it off, and then we started dating.

And so when I came here, he graduated a year early from Chapel Hill and came up here to do the MALS program. So the reason that I visited before DOC trips—DOC trips would have been the first time I saw campus, but he paid for me to come up here and see his new apartment and get a feel for the campus because he thought that that would be important for me, and it was something that he could afford to do for me, so he did.

DONIN: Great.

WOMICK: Yeah. But it was miserable. It was raining the whole time. It was that part of the summer where it's just cold and rainy for a week.

DONIN: So when you arrived for the DOC trips, did you do one?

WOMICK: Yeah, I did a hiking trip. It was really hard.

DONIN: Do you consider yourself an outdoorsy kind of person?

WOMICK: I would consider myself very outdoorsy. I mean, I grew up on a farm. My idea of playing as a child was to go out into the woods and stay out there all day and, like, build forts and climb trees and then come in at night for dinner. [Laughs.] And my parents didn't see me between breakfast and dinnertime, usually. I was home schooled, so I was out playing in the woods while the other kids were learning their multiplication tables, for better or worse. [Laughs.] So, yeah, I thought I would be really prepared for a moderate hiking trip, but then—to be fair, the trip that they called moderate hiking then, they now call harder hiking because so many people had trouble with it. It was the Presidential Range. We had three summits over the course of the trip.

DONIN: [Sharp intake of breath.]

WOMICK: We all had a really tough time. My leaders were great, but we got lost at one point, and we were lost for about an eight-mile round trip, so that added eight miles to our daily hike that we weren't anticipating.

DONIN: Uh!

WOMICK: A few people got hurt. One of my leaders hurt her knee. I hurt my knee really badly, actually, and had to deal with that for the first two months I was at Dartmouth. [Chuckles] I couldn't do stairs. It was a really challenging trip. One of the other people on the trip had a bee allergy, and within the first few hours of the trip walked right through a bee nest and got stung, like, six times. [Laughs.] So a lot of things went wrong, but overall, I think, we had a pretty good time.

Actually, one of my best friends at Dartmouth, I met on that trip, and I know that's, like, the cliché thing to have happened, but she and I would not have met other than that, I don't think, and she's one of—she *is* my best friend at Dartmouth and the only friend that I've had since freshman year.

DONIN: Well, that's exactly what they hope will happen, I think, or at least—maybe not have a friend that's gonna last through the whole four years, but bonding with a group of people who will support you at least through your first term, anyway.

WOMICK: Right. Yeah.

DONIN: That's fantastic.

So what dorm were you in that first year?

WOMICK: I was in East Wheelock. I was in Andres on the third floor.

DONIN: Oh, the cluster.

WOMICK: Yeah. [Chuckles.] That was a horrible experience.

DONIN: In what way?

WOMICK: I didn't get along with my roommate, and she didn't get along with me. It just didn't work out at all. I guess when they put us together—she was from India, and she was from a very traditional upbringing, and I guess they figured, “Oh, Southern girl from rural North Carolina. Probably had a traditional upbringing, too.” But that's not the case at all. My parents are total hippies. So she and I had very different lifestyle expectations. She had very strict understandings of when it was appropriate for boys to be over, which was a lot of the time not at all unless they were *her* friends, in which case it was okay. [Chuckles.]

And different ideas of cleanliness. She had a lot of very traditional Hindu ideas of cleanliness that I just couldn't understand at the time. I didn't have a lot of experience with people from different cultures and could not empathize at all when she got angry with me for things that I saw as very petty. We had a lot of trouble and I actually ended up moving

out winter—well, not moving out. I still had the room there, but I started living with my boyfriend in his apartment, just because it was such a terrible rooming situation, and I had an alternative, so I took it.

DONIN: Mmm. That's too bad. That's a hard way to start.

WOMICK: It was—well, freshman year in general was hard, but—

DONIN: What made it hard, other than the usual things that make freshman year hard?

WOMICK: I don't make friends very easily, and I didn't bond with my freshman floor at all. They bonded because they all went out to the fraternities together, and that was something that I was never interested in doing at all. I just—I don't know why, but it never interested me. I went once with a couple people from the DOC trip. I went to SAE, and it was just such a strange experience. I felt so objectified, and I didn't have the feminist mindset that I have now, but going into the basement and the way that the guys were just totally on top of us when they realized that we were freshman girls and it was fall term, and, you know, teaching us the rules and, like, giving us all these beers. And then at some point, we didn't want to drink anymore 'cause it was the first time any of us had consumed alcohol. And so we said we wanted to leave, and there was this weird thing that happened. Like, they were upset that, you know, we were starting to say no and, like, take some sort of agency over the situation, and I recognized that, and it made me feel really, really uncomfortable, and so I never went back to the fraternities, in, like, intending to have a good time. I went to dance parties, but not basements because that was the sort of environment that I'd heard about and that I then witnessed first hand, and I wasn't comfortable with that, so that was something my freshman floor did together to bond, and that was something that I couldn't do with them.

Also, they went out to restaurants and movies a lot, and I just didn't have the money to do that, so in a lot of ways I couldn't bond with them.

DONIN: So who was your—so you had this boyfriend here. Does that impact your efforts to sort of find a community for yourself?



WOMICK: I think it did a lot freshman year. But, then again, if I hadn't had him, I might not have stayed at Dartmouth because freshman year was just so hard and I felt like I didn't really have a community. I didn't find a community really that I felt was my own until sophomore year. And so it was really nice having him from home and, like, —we were both sort of experiencing this really new, really weird, completely different from what we were used to environment together, and he was older and could offer advice on college, which— my parents tried to be really helpful, but my dad dropped out of college his freshman year, and my mom had a very different college experience from what I wanted. She joined a sorority, and she partied a lot. She missed her own graduation because she was still drunk in the morning, so—I mean, a lot of stories that she told me that she regrets now, and I knew I wanted to do things differently, so they couldn't really offer me a lot of advice on how to get through this. And they had no experience with anything like Dartmouth. But he could help me, and we had a really great relationship. Until spring term. [Laughs.]

DONIN: So this is spring term of your freshman year.

WOMICK: Yeah, spring term, I broke up with him. We had some very important differences, because I'm polyamorous. So, I like being with different people at the same time, and I don't think that being with one person should exclude being able to have another beautiful relationship with someone else. And he just couldn't cope with that, and it caused a lot of really heated fights, and, yeah, so that needed to end for both of us. It became very unhealthy, unfortunately.

DONIN: So he was leaving town anyway, right? When he graduated.

WOMICK: So he was around until last year, actually, because he did one year in the MALS program and then he was working at Collis as a manager and really liked that work. He'd worked at the student center at Chapel Hill, too. And so he took a year off from the MALS program and then did his last year, last year.

DONIN: Oh, so he was on campus.

WOMICK: Yeah, so he's been here—he just left over the summer, and now he's at the Yale Forestry School.

DONIN: Oh, yeah.

WOMICK: So he's doing really well for himself.

DONIN: Right. So what was it—you said it was sophomore year when you finally felt that you could make it on your own here.

WOMICK: Yeah. It's kind of awful to say, but honestly, it was joining a house, which was something that I'd never imagined I would do at Dartmouth or ever, because I have so many moral qualms with the Greek system, with having to basically apply for friendship and then pay for the continuity of that friendship I find very problematic, not even talking about under-age drinking and binge drinking and sexual assault but just, like, the whole setup of the thing.

But a couple people that I got to be good friends with over the beginning of sophomore year and the end of my freshman year, one of whom lived on my freshman hall and was kind of on the outside, too—hung out at Phi Tau a lot, and some upper-classmen that I looked up to and thought were really cool were in Phi Tau, so I rushed, and they loved me, and so I joined. And I figured if I didn't like it, I could always de-pledge. But it worked out, and I was really happy. It was goofy and *clean*. [Laughs.] Which is different from just about all of the other houses.

Had a very nice, well-stocked kitchen, and I love to cook, and everyone else there loved to cook, so there was always good food around, which was really good for me, to learn to, like, eat food. [Laughs.]

And was able to finally form meaningful friendships, not just, you know, casual acquaintances that you have lunch with every now and then but people that I could actually talk to and not hold that much back, was something that I hadn't had before. And just having fun with people, too. And it was really wonderful. It completely changed Dartmouth for me.

- DONIN: So what's the personality of Phi Tau? What makes it acceptable to you? I mean, you just described some of what made it acceptable to you, but—
- WOMICK: Yeah. I'm gonna have to talk about what made it good for me then because I have since de-pledged the house. But what I really loved about it then was that I felt, as soon as I was there, that I had ownership of the space. Even when I wasn't a member, that I had some sort of agency to move the furniture or get something out of the fridge or, you know, give an idea about what we should do together as a group, that I could send things out to the mailing lists, that I was already a part of that community before I had officially become a part of that community. I wasn't just a visitor or an object or something to maybe, like, be seduced.
- DONIN: Is it a sorority?
- WOMICK: It's co-ed.
- DONIN: I see. Okay.
- WOMICK: And so it also didn't have the problematic gender dynamic that I really don't like in the single-sex houses. The—what do you call it? The motto of the house is "*Unitas in Diversitate*," which is "Unity in Diversity." So, I mean, it had everything. It had a rainbow flag flying in the Chapter Room, so it was just really progressive and open. A lot of the people in the house were Jewish. There were some international students, a lot of people with, like, a rainbow of sexualities, all very well versed in diversity issues and just a really open, supportive community.
- DONIN: It sounds like the anti-Greek house, if you know what I mean.
- WOMICK: In a lot of ways it is, yeah. We had the editor of the *Dartmouth Review*, was a member of Phi Tau [chuckles], so, you know, the motto really holds true. It's a place where anyone can come and find community if they want to find it there, and it's not about having common ideas or interests, because, actually, Sterling [Beard '12] and I are really good friends now, and we still talk. I'd say he's one of the better friends, and that seems so counterintuitive because I'm who

I am and he was the editor of the *Dartmouth Review* [chuckles]—of everything.

DONIN: Mmm. Crazy.

WOMICK: Yeah.

DONIN: Crazy. But that says a lot about the attitude of the members, obviously.

WOMICK: Yeah, it did. For me, anyway. I think it has sort of a campus perception that the people who join Phi Tau want to be outside the Greek community, and that gives it a bad reputation. Or that those kind of people are weird or socially awkward. And I can see where that comes from, but honestly, it's just because most of the people who join Phi Tau aren't interested in the fake sort of interactions that a lot of people engage in because it feels more comfortable and less threatening for them, so to be in Phi Tau, you have to be willing to be more open and honest about who you are and, you know, with the people that you're around, and I think, honestly, a lot of people just don't know how to do that, and so that's why they feel weird about Phi Tau. But that's fine.

It also didn't have a super-rage-y drinking culture, which is great. I was dry for my first year there, and they were totally fine with it. There were a lot of people who joined Phi Tau and never drank at all. It's just totally normal. It's not even an issue, which is not the case in a lot of houses.

DONIN: So what made you de-pledge?

WOMICK: It's really complicated.

DONIN: Well, and only share what—I'm just curious to see this transition of how your life changed at Dartmouth and your sense of community, but this isn't meant to make anybody uncomfortable.

WOMICK: I'm not uncomfortable. I'm worried I'll get sued.

DONIN: Okay. Well, let's not talk about it, then.

WOMICK: Just long story short, someone who joined the house was accused of sexually assaulting someone else in the house, and that was brought officially before Phi Tau, and it was a really horrible, messy process in which questions like “So were you birth control at the time?” were asked. And at the end of the day, they chose not to remove the member who I very deeply and honestly believe did commit sexual assault. And the way that the whole situation was handled, the way that it was discussed, the way that things went out on mailing lists, and, of course, the final decision—I felt like it wasn’t the community that I’d thought it was and that a lot of people that I thought I understood and saw eye-to-eye with, at least in some fundamental, very important ways, I didn’t anymore, and I felt less safe in the house because of that. Not because anything had been done to me. I mean, I was sexually assaulted my freshman year, but—I mean, this was a pretty different situation, but, at the same time, I could really empathize with the woman who came forward with this. That’s not easy to do, especially just with peers, asking for help and then they didn’t remove him.

I also couldn’t be in the same organization that he was in and call him “my brother.” That was beyond me. So it was a really hard decision because that was my home.

DONIN: That was your home.

WOMICK: But—

DONIN: But it wasn’t your home anymore.

WOMICK: It wasn’t anymore.

DONIN: That’s really hard.

WOMICK: Yeah.

DONIN: So I should think that the event of your assault freshman year and then watching somebody go through this sophomore year—didn’t it color your whole experience here?

WOMICK: You know, I think it definitely colored my experience. Actually, freshman year I think it didn’t affect me as much as—well, I’m not sure how much it affected me, because

honestly, I didn't realize—I didn't, like, cope with it, and I didn't even really remember it until junior year. I just sort of, like,—I remember a couple weeks where I was a total mess. At that time, I had a really severe eating disorder, and I remember it being even more severe during those weeks, and I threw away my sheets, and I showered a lot, but then after that, I just kind of forgot about it, which I guess is—there's some special term for that, where you, like, block out a traumatic experience.

And so it wasn't until junior year that I kind of remembered it, and then I realized, like, what I'd done and that I was the poster child [chuckles] for probably PTSD, and then—yeah, I had to deal with that during junior year because I hadn't really before. And so I'm not sure how much it colored my Dartmouth experience because for a lot of the time I was sort of—I wasn't even working with it in the forefront of my mind.

DONIN: Denial is a very strong tool.

WOMICK: Yeah. And maybe it worked well, or maybe it did me harm. I honestly can't say, because I wasn't observing it. Maybe other friends who were around could have said something, but honestly, I didn't really have that many friends who carried over from freshman year to the rest of Dartmouth, because I was a mess freshman year. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Did you find a group of peers to support you?

WOMICK: I would call that BoredatBaker, actually. The first time that I talked to anyone about my sexual assault or my eating disorder was on BoredatBaker, and I was able to find a lot of support there from people who had similar experiences and could offer really good advice and support and just kindness. And so that was my first community. And honestly, that's probably my community now, which may seem weird to say because it's an online message board, but all the people there are current Dartmouth students, and I have had the great privilege of meeting a lot of these wonderful people in person, too, so it's not exclusive to the online site. We get tea or coffee or lunch together sometimes. A couple of them have actually become really good friends at Dartmouth that I spend a lot of time with.

- DONIN: So what's the culture of BoredatBaker? Is it meant to be— obviously, it's meant to be anonymous.
- WOMICK: Mm-hm.
- DONIN: But what is it that allows you guys to then identify yourselves and become face-to-face friends?
- WOMICK: Yeah. So it is meant to be anonymous, but there are some people who—it's more or less known that they use the site. I think I've become one of them, because I talk to so many people about it because I think it's a wonderful thing and I'm glad that it exists at Dartmouth and I think more people should use it because it can help them so much, and so I talk about it a lot, and I'm that crazy girl who uses BoredatBaker. [Chuckles.] But I've also been outed on the site a few times by some jerks who think it's funny to post people's names. And so the screen name that I use has been tied to my name. So I don't think it's a secret, who I am.
- But then in terms of meeting someone actually in person, you can send private messages back and forth between users if you have a personality, and so—
- DONIN: "Having a personality" means?
- WOMICK: Having a personality. It's, like, having a user account.
- DONIN: I see.
- WOMICK: So you can use the site and not have a name and a page. You can just read and you can post, but there's no way to aggregate those posts for anyone else to see. But if you have a personality, then you can attach the name and picture to a post, and those will all be aggregated on a page. And then personalities can send private messages, like e-mails, back and forth. And so that's how you set up a meeting with someone else, if they're interested in getting lunch or tea or just hanging out. That's how I've made all of my friends. Sometimes you'll share names, or sometimes it's just "I'll be at the café at noon, and I'll be reading *The Color Purple*." And that's how you find one another, depending on people's level of comfort with sharing their actual names.

DONIN: So this is a very sort of alternative way to find your community, is electronically.

WOMICK: Yeah. Honestly, it's been a lot better for me to find friends that way because you talk so much before you actually meet, and there's not that initial reaction of, you know, race or socioeconomic class or gender because that's completely gone; it's not part of it unless it's explicitly stated.

DONIN: It's irrelevant.

WOMICK: Yeah, it's just not relevant. Sometimes, when talking about Dartmouth experiences, it comes up that, you know, *this part of my identity has affected my experience here*, but even those conversations are so much more genuine because people feel—it's less tied to them as individuals, and so they feel more free to say what they truly believe and have experienced. And especially if you're talking and you're still anonymous but you're talking together as two individuals and there's no expectation that you *will* ever meet, you can share some incredibly personal things. And so then, if you have a lot of conversations like that with an individual and then choose to meet, it's such a *richer* friendship, and that's what I really enjoy about BoredatBaker, because a lot of, like, the best part of friendship is done upfront; there's not that awkward spending time together watching movies, doing things that you don't really enjoy doing but you're trying to build a friendship. It's just—it's already there because you've already shared so much and you don't hate one another or think, you know, "you're weird." So it's beautiful. [Chuckles.]

I think the site's creator, Jae—well, that's not his real name, but that's his pseudonym—I think he's a genius, in some ways, for having come up with this and supporting it out of pocket for all these years. It's just his personal project that he pays for. He didn't even go to Dartmouth.

DONIN: He started at Columbia, didn't he?

WOMICK: Yeah. He graduated from Columbia in '05, I think.

DONIN: So is it your sense that there's a significant portion or significant number of students at Dartmouth who feel as you



do, that this is a better vehicle to create a social life for yourself?

WOMICK: Different people use the site for a lot of different purposes, I think. There are a lot of people that use it for the sense of community. I think there are probably equal part to the people who just use it for fun and to blow off steam and then the fraction of people who use it to be jerks and post mean, racist, sexist things, to post people's names and pictures. That's the absolute minority, and that's what BoredatBaker gets the most attention for, which is so unfortunate, because when those sort of things happen, the community is infuriated, and that's what people don't talk about: that when something like this gets posted, especially if it gets a lot of agrees and newsworthies, usually that's just because that one person who made the post has a lot of accounts and enough time to make it look like that post is really popular. It's something that you can do. A lot of agrees doesn't necessarily mean that 25 people agreed with the post; it could just mean that this one jerk has 25 accounts. That's totally a possibility.

DONIN: Oh, my.

WOMICK: It's more important to look at the posts that come after an inflammatory post to see what people actually have to say, because there's also a culture of if you think a post is awful, not interacting with it and not giving it attention, because that just encourages the people to keep doing it. So, the interactions that actually happen with a post generally aren't representative of the community sentiment. You have to look at the discussion that happens afterward, because people get points for every agree or newsworthy or disagree or reply. Replies are a lot of points.

There's a discussion on BoredatBaker right now: Is it worth it to give these kind of people points for doing things that we disagree with, or is it more important to say, "Hey, we think you're a jerk and we don't want you here, and we disagree with you, and here's what you've done wrong"? And different people have different opinions about that, and I have different opinions about that, depending on the post and the time of day and my mood.

DONIN: Of course. Of course.

So this community that you formed, this electronic community that then becomes a people-to-people community—

WOMICK: Right.

DONIN: —after a while—do you think this is a reflection of the fact that Greek life dominates the college social life so much that this is the only other format for having a community that you feel safe with?

WOMICK: I would say that Greek life definitely does dominate the social scene and that BoredatBaker is an alternative to that, but it also is part of that because a lot of people who are Greek affiliated use BoredatBaker. There are also a lot of people who are not Greek affiliated and also don't use BoredatBaker. There are a lot of other communities at Dartmouth that just don't get attention because they're not [chuckles] as interested in media attention as the Greek community is.

DONIN: Right, right.

WOMICK: There are a lot of off-campus scenes at houses. A lot of sports teams—the Frisbee team, the DOC, and Cabin and Trail, all have great communities going on. Ledyard. I mean, all of these places. It's not just people who hang out. They do the same sort of things that Greek houses do but with a different sort of spin on it. It's more equitable; it's co-ed; the alcohol use tends to be responsible. They have dances and parties and they play pong; they have formals. But they don't have a lot of the same problems that are part of the Greek system. They still have problems. There's definitely still hazing.

DONIN: They seem to fly below the radar, though.

WOMICK: Oh, they definitely fly below the radar because they're not organized. You know, they're not corporations; they don't have to get permission for their social group to exist from the college, so they're not regulated. And that's why you don't hear about them, because they're not part of the mainstream

culture and they're not regulated by the college, which I think is how social groups should be.

DONIN: Right. That's what they're there for,—

WOMICK: Yeah.

DONIN: —as an alternative to the structure of the rest of your time here.

WOMICK: Yeah.

DONIN: So let's talk about the academics. I mean, did you find that there were opportunities to make friends and have a community feeling through classes ever?

WOMICK: Mmm. Through classes. Well, I didn't really bond with any of the people in my year who were taking Arabic at all, because they were also very deeply into the Greek system.

DONIN: Is Arabic your major?

WOMICK: Arabic was my first major. I was doing Spanish modified with Arabic for my freshman year, and I just couldn't bond with any of the people who were taking Arabic, and that's such an important part, especially since the classes are so small. I think that was a huge part of why I decided not to continue with the major, just because I was not friends with any of the people that I had been in classes with for two years, and that's hard, to really feel like the outsider when all of these people are a social group.

But also I switched to Studio Art, and I don't think it's that I bonded more with the people who were also in Studio Art classes, but it felt easier to be around them because they weren't as interested in being clique-y and Greek oriented as the group that I had been with in Arabic was. I don't have many—I could name maybe two people who were my year who were majors in Studio Art that I would call friends, but, then again, they're still not really close friends, so that's not somewhere that I found a social group. You know, you spend a lot of time together in the studios, and you get to know one another, but I never really hang out with those people outside of the studio or the classroom. Sometimes I

do, and I'm friendly with them. I like a lot of them. It's just by the time I switched to that major, I already had my social group, so I didn't need to find it there.

DONIN: Right, right. Yeah.

So, you know, everybody, when they come into an organization such as Dartmouth, has moments of feeling like an outsider, like they don't belong. Would you say you had episodes of that? It sounds like—

WOMICK: Yeah, my whole freshman year I felt like that. I think from time to time—I feel like I'm outside of the mainstream Dartmouth experience, but that doesn't bother me at all because that's not what I want. I feel like I'm very much a part of Dartmouth. I feel very connected to this community. Not just Dartmouth but also the Upper Valley because I've been so involved with so many different groups. I've worked off campus a lot. I get to know people really well. And so I feel very, very connected and not at all on the outside. I feel like I'm more on the fringes because I don't participate in Greek life and I don't take a standard, traditional major.

But I've also done a lot of things, and I know a lot of people. I've been involved with the Dickey Center, and I've been on COSO for four years, so I've gotten to know a lot of people in that way. Working for OPAL and facilitating DPP for two and a half, almost three years, I met so many people. So I was able to meet people in ways other than the Greek scene, and I still feel very connected to my class and to a lot of other classes, and I feel—I probably know just as many, if not more people than the average frat star [chuckles], and I've done it in a way that feels really good for me.

DONIN: So in some ways, feeling like the outsider was a motivator for you to find alternative means to develop your own community.

WOMICK: I've always felt kind of like an outsider in life, because when I started public school, I'd been home schooled for so long, I was just so different from the other kids because the girls were into makeup and gossiping about boys, and they read magazines that I thought were really vapid, and they watched TV, which I'd never done, so I couldn't connect with

them in that way. And then it was basically the same experience in middle school and high school 'cause I was just interested in such different things. I've always not had much use for things that I think are immature or really image-oriented. I don't care about that sort of stuff, and that's what a lot of—especially in middle school and high school—people care about. So I was always kind of on the outside. Not like someone that people think is *really* weird but that's kind of quirky and enjoyable. I tend to get along with a lot of people. But, you know, like that weird lady who raises goats on the outskirts of town, that everyone says hi to but, you know, you don't hang out together.

DONIN: Right.

WOMICK: That sort of thing. [Laughs.] I don't know why that was the first example that came to mind. [Laughs.]

DONIN: It's a good example, a good example.

So do you see that Dartmouth has changed in the four years you've been here?

WOMICK: I would be inclined to say yes, but I also don't know how much of that is just because my perspective has changed.

DONIN: Maybe it's *you've* changed.

WOMICK: Yeah. I've changed so much as a person. I don't think I would get along with my high school self at all. A lot of that is thanks to OPAL, the diversity work that I was able to do and meeting so many people with different life experiences from mine. I had such limited experiences coming from where I came from. And I came from a really racist background, and I, myself, was never racist—not overtly racist. I think I had some prejudiced ideas that I didn't even really consider, and so coming here and being able to consider that and also learn so much about so many different people helped me become an even more accepting and loving person than I was before. And in some ways, I think that's made me less tolerant about the things that I don't like at Dartmouth because I think they're so senseless, and in some ways it's made me more tolerant about the things that I really hate because I think that people here are trying to do the best

they can, and especially now, seeing the friends that I've known for four years working hard on these really tough, tricky campus issues and realizing how hard it is to address them—I don't know whether I feel like things have changed all that much.

I think there's definitely a different atmosphere among the faculty and staff that I know since Jim Kim was here. That was something that I definitely recognized. Some people that I really respected and cared about left, and, in confidence, a lot of them told me that it was because of changes that happened thanks to his leadership. And so I think that's something that will be felt at the college, whether people know it or not, for a long time. I think it's really unfortunate. Some of my mentors left, and that was really hard, especially since they all left at the same time.

DONIN: These are staff people you're talking about.

WOMICK: Staff, yeah. So in that sense—I came, I think, at the end of a very different era at Dartmouth, and it's only in talking to people and reading articles and getting a sense for the history of the college am I able to realize how much has changed while I'm here and then being able to put together the pieces and see things that I *have* experienced and how those are different and that I was actually witnessing change, whether I knew it or not. So I'd say in that sense it's changed at an institutional level.

I'm not sure about the student body. I think as a senior, I feel I know more people who are critical of the Greek system than I knew in my past three years here, but that could just be self-selection bias 'cause this is the kind of people I'm hanging out with. [Chuckles.]

DONIN: Well, and that's been, I think, the discomfort with the dominance by the Greek system—

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

DONIN: —is an issue that's been around a long time, but it seems to come in sort of waves—

WOMICK: Right.

DONIN: —in response to some media spotlight on some particular event, and we've certainly had that this year.

WOMICK: [Laughs.] And almost every year that I've been here.

DONIN: Right, right.

WOMICK: Yeah.

DONIN: And the attention that's been given to incidents of bias and hatred that happen every year, but some years it seems to get more attention than others, for some reason, but it's still there.

Let's see here. I think we've covered it pretty well. I'm just looking at this list of—so when you leave here, how would you describe your community at Dartmouth, how it evolved from when you first got here to when you finally walk out the door and say goodbye?

WOMICK: I think a lot of that depends on when I actually leave. [Laughs.] I would say freshman year, I almost didn't have a community. My community was almost entirely Devin, my boyfriend from home. In sophomore and junior year, it was very much Phi Tau. I relied on them. Those were my friends and my family. It was the first time that I spent Thanksgiving away from home and actually felt that maybe I would rather be here than with my family at home, and that was a very—

DONIN: That's a big step.

WOMICK: That was a big feeling. I had to work on that one a lot because I felt like I shouldn't feel that way, but Phi Tau meant a lot to me. It was really important, and I learned so much and grew so much, and some of my best friends still are from there.

And then after leaving Phi Tau and separating from that community, I would say it's more just a motley assortment of people that I found over the years that are important to me, that I've bonded with in some way, and I wouldn't say it's a cohesive group the way that Phi Tau was, but it's more

hand-picked people that really are important to me and that I am important to. And so—

There's also my house off campus, the people I live with. We live together very well. [Chuckles.] It's just amazing. It's going to be very sad when we go our separate ways. But we have an '11, Taylor, who I am with right now and I hope to be with for a very long time. And then Sophia, who is doing fifth year at Thayer. And then Shaun, who's a '12. And it seems a really unlikely grouping of people, but it works together so well.

DONIN: It's your local family, as opposed to your North Carolina family.

WOMICK: Yeah, definitely. And I'm actually really looking forward to when my family comes up for graduation, to show them my house and the family that I've built and show them, you know: Look at how I've grown up and what I can do.

DONIN: Have they been to visit before?

WOMICK: They visited over freshman family weekend, and then I think there's a time sophomore year, maybe over the summer that families are supposed to visit, and my mom and dad and sister all came those times, and then my sister has also visited a couple times independently, which was a big step for her because she's the sort of person who won't even spend the night away from home at a friend's house. She's very much a home person. And she flew up here on her own, which was huge. And she loves visiting me here, so she's visited at least once each year that I've been here. And I usually pay for that. [Laughs.]

DONIN: You're a good sister.

WOMICK: Well, we didn't have a really good relationship when we were at home together, and we've gotten a lot closer since I've left, so—I enjoy having her visit.

DONIN: It's often the case, I think.

WOMICK: Yeah.



- DONIN: That whole thing about absence sometimes does help.
- WOMICK: Mm-hm. Also, she's grown up a lot. We had a lot of things growing up. My mom was an alcoholic, and she has various mental troubles. She's bipolar and has been diagnosed at some point with "personality disorder non-specified," so growing up was tough. It was very unstable, and I think my sister was a little too young to really feel a lot of that and recognize what was going on, and so I had a very different understanding of our family than she did until recently, just because she developmentally hadn't had the same experiences that I did, and so I think she didn't understand why I interacted with my parents the way I did for a lot, and she felt that I was mean or cruel or distant or cold, and now I think she understands a lot more, and we're finally able to have a good relationship because she doesn't think of me [chuckles] as a horrible person.
- DONIN: Wow! That's huge!
- WOMICK: Yeah, it's really nice.
- DONIN: So graduation is gonna be a happy event for you.
- WOMICK: Graduation? Bittersweet.
- DONIN: With your family, I mean.
- WOMICK: Yeah, bittersweet.
- DONIN: Yep, yep. As it should be.
- Okay, I'm going to turn off the tape. Thank you.

**[End of Interview.]**