

Louis C. Spelios '95
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
September 20, 2013

DONIN: Today is—well, it's an important day. We need to note this, in fact. Today is Friday, September 20th, 2013. We are here in Rauner Library for a special day because it's the inauguration of Dartmouth's 18th president, Philip Hanlon. But in addition to that, we're doing an interview with Lou Spelios, Dartmouth Class of 1995.

Okay, Lou, just to sort of put your life into context, tell us a little bit about where you grew up and how you ended up coming to Dartmouth and if you had Dartmouth connections that got you here. And I mean Dartmouth connections like legacy or something like that.

SPELIOS: Sure, sure. I grew up—well, first off, thank you for having me. I'm very excited to be participating in this important project.

DONIN: Great.

SPELIOS: I grew up in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, which is a small town a little more than two hours south of Hanover, right off of Route 91 on the Connecticut line. It's a town of about 16,000 people and in many ways is reminiscent of Hanover. It's an old New England town, dates back to the 1600s. And I was born and raised there in western Mass., and when I made it to about the seventh or eighth grade, I started thinking about college, and Longmeadow and Longmeadow High School, where I went to high school, was a longtime feeder for the school. Dartmouth had a long legacy in the town. So it was instantly recognized and recognizable among a lot of people that I knew.

I didn't have any members of my family who went, so I'm not a legacy, and I didn't even have any distant relatives that I could even speak to about it. But, like with a lot of things I did, I kind of approached this from a methodological perspective and asked myself, what did I want out of college. I wanted to—I was fairly certain I wanted to spend my college years in New England. It's a place that I was very comfortable in and there was no shortage of schools.

But I quickly decided that I wanted to go to a smaller school. I wanted to go somewhere where I could spend time off campus, if I chose to, pursuing my academic interests. I wanted to go someplace that was friendly and dynamic. And so—in those days, of course, there was no Internet, so this is now—this is the '80s, right?

DONIN: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

SPELIOS: And so I just started ordering catalogs, and so I'd get books in the mail, and I'd start flipping through it, and, of course, they're all nice. They all have nice glossy pictures. But this Dartmouth thing always was kind of sitting out there because I had heard about it, and I quickly honed in once I received the materials, and I started doing a lot more research and started talking to people in town who either knew people who went or went. And everything I was hearing said, *This sounds right to me*. So by the time I got to eighth or ninth grade and, having made—and coming up here was also—it was convenient.

DONIN: It was easy.

SPELIOS: It was easy, right. So being able to come to campus and walk around and kind of get the feeling, get the vibe of the campus, it seemed very, very right. So for better, for worse, by the time I was a freshman in high school, I decided this is where I wanted to go.

DONIN: Wow.

SPELIOS: Yeah, which is—for anyone who has kids is—I mean, now that I'm older, I can understand how really dangerous that could be, but, I just was very fixated on it, and so it became for me kind of a *cause célèbre* and a motivator. So, everything I was doing—I want to make sure that I'm doing the right thing, I'm working as hard as I can, and I'm positioning myself to apply when the time came. And my feelings became more and more intense. I became more and more kind of personally invested in it.

So by the time I was a senior, not only was it a foregone conclusion I was gonna apply, everyone in my class knew I was applying. It was just—because I had talked about it for so long.

DONIN: And your guidance counselor—

SPELIOS: And my guidance counselor was already all—like, they saw me coming and said, *Oh, yeah, here comes a guy who's applying to Dartmouth.*

DONIN: So how did you sort of stay up on Dartmouth? Did you visit often?

SPELIOS: Periodically. I mean, so I might come up maybe once or twice a year, and it was never for more than a few hours. I mean, I didn't stay overnight until I was actually into my senior year. But, it was only a couple hours, and, for my parents—they like coming up here, too. There was plenty to see. We would stop at Lou's [Diner] and have something to eat, or we'd go to EBA's, and so it was a nice day trip when we, for lack of a better word, had nothing else to do.

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: And, we'd pick up a t-shirt or pick up something to wear, and it was just kind of fun. But once I applied, the whole thing became very, very—much more serious, and, like for any student applying to school, it's nerve wracking. But the news was good, and—

DONIN: Did you apply anyplace else?

SPELIOS: Yes. Yeah, I looked at Middlebury, and I looked at Bowdoin, I looked at Amherst and Williams and also Cornell. But, I mean, in retrospect,—none of those—I mean, with the possible exception of Middlebury, those schools were really not comparable to Dartmouth in terms—I mean, when you really look at what I wanted out of school and how I wanted to feel when I was here, I don't think that—I mean, they all would have been far distant second choices for me—I mean, had it worked out that way.

So anyway, yeah, the news was good, and the rest is history, right?

DONIN: Fantastic. Yeah.

So getting ready to come up here, did you feel prepared academically?

SPELIOS: Yes. And, this is one place where I was very fortunate. Longmeadow High School is a very competitive place. We used to say when I was there that there was absolutely no reason to go to private school; it's a waste of money because Longmeadow was more competitive and just as good as Loomis Chaffee or Deerfield or some of the other ones that were in the area. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it was as good or as competitive as Andover or Exeter. It wasn't. But it was—

DONIN: A good, solid education.

SPELIOS: Very solid. Widely considered as one of the top three, four, five high schools in Massachusetts. So I was used to working hard. I was used to the competition. I was used to not always being one—that it was okay to—at Longmeadow it was okay sometimes to get an A minus or a B plus. And fortunately, Dartmouth felt the same way. Because it happens. Being first or second or third in class at that high school was an incredible accomplishment.

So I came here, and I really didn't know what to expect, however. I mean, Dartmouth is a formidable place, and there are a lot of very talented people here. But in talking to my classmates, particularly early on freshman year, I think there were a lot of people that were stunned—

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: —at how competitive—how intense Dartmouth is and how bright your fellow classmates are. I think there are a lot of people come here who are used to—I won't say mail it in but, people with a lot of natural intelligence and, with some moderate effort, can quickly in a lot of places end up first in class. And so you take that and an SAT score, and you're already—you're well down the road.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: So that wasn't—getting in and kind of melding in academically wasn't an issue for me.

DONIN: That theme has come up in these interviews, that people who were used to being first in their class in high school had a bit of a shock the first term.

- SPELIOS: Right. Yeah. Truly so.
- DONIN: It took them—they stabilized maybe by the end of their freshman year, but it was pretty shocking.
- SPELIOS: Yeah, and it's shocking, and in some cases it was demoralizing. I mean, I can remember having conversations with people saying, "Really, should I be here? Maybe I should drop out and go back home." There's an excellent advising system here in the dean's office, and certainly among ourselves, too, that those few people you felt like were coming up on the precipice—kind of taking them back, saying, "It's gonna be okay"—
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- SPELIOS: —and, in some limited cases, giving them some additional academic support—
- DONIN: Sure.
- SPELIOS: —was certainly warranted. But, everyone who was here belongs here, and that was the hard message, I think, to deliver for those that were truly shell-shocked by the change in atmosphere, academic atmosphere.
- DONIN: So let's hear what you discovered when you checked in to your dorm. What dorm were you in?
- SPELIOS: I was in Hinman, which is no longer here. [Laughs.]
- DONIN: Now, where was Hinman?
- SPELIOS: Hinman was in the River Cluster.
- DONIN: Oh, yes. Okay.
- SPELIOS: So it's all the way down Tuck Mall, so there was—at the time, there was French, Hinman and McLane down there.
- DONIN: That's right.
- SPELIOS: And then there was also, across from that, Maxwell and Channing Cox.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

SPELIOS: Right? And the River Cluster, where—at the time—now, this is 1991—and it was the case for I think years before and some years after—it was a place where you put a lot of first-year students.

DONIN: Yep.

SPELIOS: And there are pluses and minuses associated with it, but I think the pluses are—the list of pluses are a lot longer. So, a significant portion of our class was down in the River, and my floor was, for the most part, freshmen. The initial complaint on Hinman was that it was too far, particularly in the winter, for people who weren't used to the cold. Now, that wasn't me because I grew up in the Northeast, but that's actually a minority here, people grow up in the Northeast.

But it was a great community. There was—and the other thing, too, about freshman housing—and I knew this after the fact, as I lived in the Choates as a senior—is that there is a lot more attention, and there's a bigger budget allocated to acclimation, assimilation in these dorms than there is in the, quote-unquote, more popular dorms, which at the time were in the East Wheelock Cluster, Massachusetts, and Fayerweather.

And so, we—I would say because there were a lot of us down there, because of the perceived distance, we all quickly bonded. I'm to this day—my two best friends are people who lived—were my roommate and lived two doors down in Hinman.

DONIN: Nice.

SPELIOS: That was—I mean, these are people that I met literally as I was moving in.

DONIN: So what was the gender makeup in those days? I know women didn't reach parity here until '95, but were there women on your floor?

SPELIOS: Yes. Yeah, it was a co-ed floor, and it was, I would say, roughly equal on the floor in terms of men and women. In our class itself, I believe we were 52-48 male. And you're right: it took—I think in '95—so that would have been the

class of '99—there was actual parity, and in subsequent years there's been more women than men.

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: So it was pretty close—

DONIN: You were close.

SPELIOS: We were close, but the classes ahead of us—there was a little more of a delta, and it was—we were close enough to some of those years, where it was 60-40 and 70-30, that certainly some of the legacy of that, we still felt on campus. But within our own class, it was somewhat of a non-issue because we were very close in terms of parity.

DONIN: So you spent the first year in Hinman.

SPELIOS: Yep.

DONIN: And then what happened?

SPELIOS: So I was in Hinman first year fall, winter, spring, and then I wasn't here in the summer. I had one of those kind of bum summer jobs everyone has when they're 19, right?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: [Laughs.] And then I came back, and I was on campus for fall and winter of my sophomore year, and I was back in Hinman at that time. And, I didn't ask to be back at Hinman; I actually wanted to be in one of the more popular clusters, but as a sophomore, your housing number is very, very high—or low, I guess you would probably describe it. So I got put back in Hinman, which was fine to me. I lived the floor up from where I was.

And then I took off for my sophomore spring and worked, then I was back sophomore summer, and sophomore summer I was in Gile.

DONIN: Oh, great.

SPELIOS: Which was great. That was fantastic. And actually I was in the basement of Gile, which was a further plus because when it got hot it wasn't hot. That basement level, the single-

digit rooms were always cool. As a matter of fact, it ended up being kind of a popular place for people to come 'cause I had a room that was kind of always around 70 degrees.

DONIN: Oh, perfect.

SPELIOS: And there were some days—it does get 80s and 90s up here, so that was a fantastic time. And then I was on fall, winter of my junior year, and I lived in Rip/Wood/Smith. And then I was off campus my junior spring.

I did the government FSP in Washington, which we can talk about. It was also something that I had put on my list of things I absolutely wanted to do here. If you get back to what I was looking to do in college. I was a government major; I was very interested in the American political system and particularly in elections. And so kind of being down there and being able to work on Capitol Hill was a fantastic—

DONIN: Exhilarating.

SPELIOS: —exhilarating, absolutely exhilarating experience, and to get academic credit for it was beyond a gift. And then also I was off junior—that following summer, and then I was back on my senior fall, winter, spring, and I lived in Brown, which is in the Choates.

DONIN: Oh, Brown. Okay. In the Choates. Okay. Yeah.

SPELIOS: So I had a lot—I was kind of all over the place, but I had an emphasis, I guess, on mass junior housing, I think is probably the way to describe it, 'cause my housing number wasn't good, and once you get it, you don't—you can't draw again.

DONIN: Right, right.

SPELIOS: So—but that was—in the end, I—especially when you look back on it,—and I walk around campus now—I think we all overblew the differences between these places. For one thing, Hinman isn't far. The River really isn't that far. There's nothing wrong with the Choates. It's just that, like with any community or with any social structure, rules are quickly developed as to what is more or less attractive. And, to say that you are a one-minute walk from the dining hall versus a five-minute walk from the dining hall—it is irrelevant to me. I

mean, I commute to work an hour a day. And I would kill to be five minutes from anything at this point, right?

DONIN: Yes. Right.

SPELIOS: And that's what we were fighting about, was whether we were one minute or five minutes away.

DONIN: Right, right.

SPELIOS: So I—all these places were great. And, as I mentioned before, Hinman was ultimately demolished when they did the expansions over—down there for Thayer. I like what they did. When they made the announcement they were gonna take the dorm down, there was a lot of us who were just—it kind of hit us—it hit us in the gut. 'Cause that was the first thing we knew. We lived there. And to say you're just gonna tear it down? Why?

DONIN: Yeah. It's painful.

SPELIOS: It's very painful. And some people actually—a couple of my classmates who live close enough drove up and took some final pictures of it—

DONIN: Ohh!

SPELIOS: —and sent pictures around, saying, "This is the last time you're gonna see it."

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: But actually it was a little pang. A little pang of sadness.

DONIN: Yeah, I'm sure.

SPELIOS: What they put up there is a lot more useful, I will admit, and it's a lot more modern.

DONIN: Right.

So let's take a look at your sort of social group and your social life. Did you have an intention to become part of the Greek system when you got here?

SPELIOS: I was undecided when I came here. I didn't—I knew of it and, like today, there was always a lot of conversation about it, but I kind of went in with somewhat of an open mind, but I approached it from a somewhat different perspective than I think a lot of my classmates—at the time, now—just to put a little bit of perspective—about half of the campus joined a house. Today I understand it's closer to 70, 75 percent, so that's—I mean, that's in and of itself a different dynamic. But among the half that did join, those were most of my social group.

We started—then as now, you can't join a house until you are a sophomore, but the participation in the system commenced fairly early. And it was very clear to me that the people that I associated with frequently were all becoming very serious about joining houses. I was somewhat agnostic about it, and I saw the pluses; I could see the minuses.

But one thing that appeared to me very—kind of maybe midway in the process—is that I could maintain those relationships, participate in the system and not become a member. It's one of the quirks about Dartmouth that doesn't exist at a lot of other schools. I went to Vanderbilt for law school, and, I asked—I would talk to people there, especially if you went to the undergrad—and, you couldn't step foot in a fraternity or a sorority without being a member or without being a member of one of the other houses. You couldn't participate in the social system at Vanderbilt, really, without being a member. And this is true at a lot of schools.

Here, the rule is exactly the opposite: You can't exclude people. It is a violation of college policy to exclude people based on—from any event that you're having, based on membership. And so I was—and in retrospect it may not have been as valid—I was a little concerned about choosing a house and, in so doing, finding myself a little—maybe more distant from some of my friends who were in other houses because I chose that house over another house.

And so, this is a recurring theme in my personality, is I'm a facilitator. I like to find common ground, right? And so my conclusion at the time was, *Well, the common ground here is actually not to join a house but to be active in the system, to be active in what goes on on this campus*, and so, I had friends who were in Zeta Psi, I had friends who were in Chi Gam, I had friends who were in Gamma Delt, I had friends

who were in Bones Gate, and so you can run down all of Greek Row, and I had people in all these places.

And so when I felt like going out or felt like socializing, I'd pick a house that was having something. I'd walk in, I'd see my friend, and that was the end of the conversation. There was never—there was never any pressure put on me at any time, to say, "If you want to keep coming here, you need to put up or shut up." Never happened.

And that, I think, is one of the beauties of the system here, that you can make those kind of individual decisions and still be an active part of the community. And so—and, I understand that if you—if you do join a house, that, you have some opportunities to really get to know a group of people much better. There's a bonding element associated—there's an—after graduation, there is—there is a referral network. There are connections that are developed across classes, within houses. There's all kinds of things. I mean, you come back to reunion—those connections become key parts of the reunion experience here.

So, I recognize all that, and by not being a member, I don't participate in some of those things, but I don't—it's okay because I feel like I got out of it what I wanted to get out of it, and I felt like I got to take advantage of a lot here by doing it my way.

DONIN: So you didn't experience any of the sort of downsides of being unaffiliated, as they say.

SPELIOS: No, I didn't, and I've spoken to people that will tell you that they felt like there were downsides, that they didn't feel like they were a valued member in this community, that they felt somewhat left out. And in my—my reaction to that—and, again, just take it face value—my own approach was that whether or not you're in a house and, I would say, whether or not you're at Dartmouth or any other place, it is what you make it, right?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: If you feel like you were left out because you were not in a house, well, maybe it's because you were excluding yourself. I mean, there was no one in any of these houses

that said that you couldn't come in and develop relationships and friendships and couldn't be with who you wanted to be. I think there were then—I'm sure there are now—people who very much do not want to be part of the Greek system. They have their own reasons to why they don't think, that it's representative of their own values or they don't appreciate, how people in Greek houses choose to celebrate their Friday and Saturday nights, or whatever it is. And that's fine. But it's still incumbent on you to seek out people who have similar views. And to the extent that you lock yourself in your room and say, *Oh, woe is me because, half the campus is a member of a house*, well, that's—I have a hard time sympathizing with that.

I think it needs to be addressed. I think that—one thing I see now that I probably saw less of, 20 years ago is a real effort on the part of the school to advertise alternate programming on campus. Alternate programming was always here, and I certainly—I'd seek that out, too. I mean, I didn't—one of the keys—or one of the benefits of not being in a house is that I didn't have a schedule when I had to be there, right?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: I mean, when you join, there are commitments, there are personal time commitments that you're expected to honor as a member, and so I kind of got—I got to pick and choose. I mean, the things—I'd go and do what I wanted to do, and then if there was something going on at Collis or I wanted to go see a movie or there was something going on at the comedy club or whatever it was, or if I just felt like pursuing a particular activity, that was my choice. And it was always there, but, yeah, you have to sort of—you have to lift your head up and say, *Well, where is it?*

I think, today there's a little more spoon feeding as to answering that question, and perhaps it's done as a reaction to those that say, *Well, if I'm not gonna go and spend time in the Greek system, then what I am gonna do here?*

DONIN: Well, with the amount of social media that's out there now, it's so easy.

SPELIOS: It's—right.

DONIN: As you say, it is totally spoon fed.

- SPELIOS: Yes.
- DONIN: There's more than you can possibly choose from.
- SPELIOS: Right. So now you *really* have no excuse.
- DONIN: Right.
- SPELIOS: Right. And if you can't—between the dozens of various options that are going on at any given night here—if you can't find something to do, you aren't gonna be happy anywhere. I mean, I don't care if you're here, if you went to Harvard or Middlebury or any of these places, it's not city versus rural, it's not small versus big, it's you. And that—maybe that needs to be addressed.
- I mean, college is a growing experience for a lot of people, and, my own view is if you see somebody like that, it would be the right thing to do to raise your hand and either suggest they talk to somebody or just maybe go around them and find someone who can seek them out and do something about it because I think every example of this can be addressed.
- DONIN: So the increasing diversity of the Dartmouth community, as we call it,—
- SPELIOS: Mm-hm, yeah.
- DONIN: —offers chances for people to find their community, whatever that is,—
- SPELIOS: Right.
- DONIN: —either through the social interactions or, in fact, the—the tons of activities and groups and, intramural sports—
- SPELIOS: Right.
- DONIN: —and arts and whatever. So what was your community in terms of, your extracurric—did you develop a community with some extracurricular activities?
- SPELIOS: I did. I think you have to look at it in sort of a temporal way. My initial community I think was very much based in my

dorm, so even if you were—let's pause there and rewind a little further. The first people I met here in my class were on my first-year trips.

DONIN: Oh, we didn't talk about that. Of course.

SPELIOS: Yeah, yes, right.

DONIN: What was your trip?

SPELIOS: I went hiking. [Chuckles.] And, they—I was—I had never really done a real hike before; I had done some walks, but I never had anything on my back. So I played it a little conservative and signed up for, quote, "easy hike." So, you come to Hanover. They break you into groups of six. And after a night of feeding you and telling you some stories and kind of getting you keened up for this, you get up the following morning. You've slept on the floor, right? You're in one of these—you actually slept on the floor. And you wake up, and there's—you get out in front of Robinson Hall, and there's all this stuff waiting for you. So you have your bag, and you're loading it up with food and with cooking utensils and with water and all this other stuff. And it's 40 or 50 pounds.

DONIN: Is it really?

SPELIOS: Oh, my gosh, yes. No joke.

DONIN: Oof!

SPELIOS: And so I get it on my back, and [chuckles] I'm almost falling backwards. And so, I'm like, *Okay, I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna do this. Everybody's doin' this. I'm doin' this.* And, I weigh 150 pounds, right? At the time. And, like, still, putting 40 pounds on me, if you look at me now you can see that would be somewhat of an issue.

And so we get on the bus, and we travel north about ten miles or so. Drop us off at the Appalachian Trail. And the easy—quote-unquote, "easy hike" is just, hike back to Hanover.

DONIN: Oh.

- SPELIOS: Yeah. And, of course, we didn't know that. We didn't have a map. That was intentional. So we had a trip leader who was a '93, so two years ahead of us. And he had the map. And so we just—I think it was 10. I think it was Route 10.
- DONIN: Route 10, yeah.
- SPELIOS: I believe that's what it—I think it was Route 10, and I think they probably went partly in the direction toward the Skiway?
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- SPELIOS: They dropped us off somewhere in between. I remember being on—not a highway but a road where you can go 45 miles an hour or so. And we just—we literally just got from the highway—cut right into the woods. And so we start the process of hiking our way back to Hanover, although we didn't know if we were going north, south, east or west. And all we knew is we had to get to a shelter that was on the Appalachian Trail before it got dark.
- DONIN: Oh, so you weren't walking on the road; you were walking through the woods the whole time.
- SPELIOS: Oh, absolutely.
- DONIN: Oh,
- SPELIOS: Oh, yeah. I know. No. That's the essence of this experience, right? You really were lost. And so you [chuckles] kinda walk through—towards the heart of darkness here, right? [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: Yeah.
- SPELIOS: And so we start in the morning, and we all have these things on our backs, and we—and we're hiking. It's not strenuous, but you're going up and you're going down, you're going around trees, rocks, whatever and, some running water. And a couple of times, we did take the wrong fork, so we lost some time in hiking. So we didn't get—on the first night, we didn't get to our shelter until about 11.
- DONIN: Ooh!

SPELIOS: And so we were hiking in the dark for a couple hours. And, the AT (Appalachian Trail) is marked with these diamonds, right? So, we have our flashlight and we're checking the trees, going through. And we knew roughly we were going the right way. We all had compasses. [Chuckles.]

So we get to the shelter, and—absolutely one of my favorite stories of my entire four years. We got to the shelter, and somebody else was there.

DONIN: Oh, no.

SPELIOS: Yes. And so—and they're not Dartmouth students. They are straggly, long hair, beards are down here [demonstrates], and—through-hikers, alright? And so they heard us, and they immediately woke up, and we were, of course, shocked because we didn't know what to expect. And they started to tell a story. They had started at Springer Mountain, Georgia, where the AT starts, and they happened to be in—outside of Hanover the night that we were there, and so we chatted some.

We bartered some water for some food and chatted some. They started telling some tall tales about how they shot a brown bear somewhere in the woods back here, which then—I then quickly deduced—'cause, I am a Dartmouth student—that they have a gun. [Chuckles.] So we were very tired. They were already kind of half out anyway, so we spent maybe ten minutes talking.

They stayed in the shelter. We set up a tarp on the ground and fell asleep. And then we were woken about 20 minutes later to chain saws and people running around us with chain saws and yelling at us. It was the Dartmouth Outing Club pranking us, 'cause they were sitting here waiting for us to get to this shelter so that they could then scare us and then give us ice cream, right?

DONIN: [Laughs.]

SPELIOS: So we had already spent 15 minutes with the through-hikers. We knew they had a gun, and then we hear chain saws.

DONIN: [Laughs.]

SPELIOS: Absolutely the most hilarious experience. At the time, it was terrifying. And so we were up eating ice cream late. We woke up late, and we—second day, we hiked, a good seven miles or so, seven eight miles, all the way down. The third day we made it down here to Hanover.

But I tell you all this detail because in that time, when you look at the intensity of the experience,—it was, quote-unquote, an “easy hike”—and this whole business with the through-hikers, we got to be very close, and so that was the initial piece of community, I think, that we—once we came back a week or a week and a half later, we immediately sought each other out.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: Right. I mean, “How was your week and a half?” “What classes are you taking?” At the time, one of the big community events here was to get our computer.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

SPELIOS: Right? In this hall—

DONIN: Yes.

SPELIOS: —there was warehouse space or there was a lot of open space, and so there were boxes stacked, 10, 15 feet high with everybody’s computers, and so we—I remember all of us meeting here from the trip to get our computers. That was before we knew anybody in our dorms. And so we kind of started there. The community then, I would say, was who we lived with.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: And then, we all had different academic experiences and different extracurricular experiences—or interests, sorry. And so that’s I think a slow evolution, right?

DONIN: Yep.

SPELIOS: —that you slowly accrete friends and contacts as you start going to class and as you start meeting people that other people met in class or having gone out or whatever it was. From an extracurricular perspective—I mean, I had a couple

distinct interests, one of which was not a team sport. I am a weather buff.

DONIN: Oh, yes, that's right. It's in your *Aegis* profile.

SPELIOS: Oh, is it? Is it? Okay. Yeah.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: I didn't know how much homework you had done.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: So I had been—Let me see. What do you have? Oh, it's a page out of the yearbook. Okay.

DONIN: Okay. So daily weather forecasts.

SPELIOS: Daily weather forecasts. So the story there is—I was a weather buff from about nine years old. And so we are now into the early '80s, and the Weather Channel was a new cable offering. At the time, the Weather Channel was like the Discovery Channel. And, so I, through endless watching of the station and through my own research, kind of learned a lot about meteorology, and enough that I could walk it and talk it and, with the right information, could do rough predictions.

And so I did that right through grade school into high school, and so I was having a conversation with my roommate, and we were talking about some things that we were interested in, and I told him that I had done this and that, I still am doing it but I'm not involved in it. He goes, "Well, do you think you could tell us if there's a storm coming or if there's anything that we need to know?" And I was like, "Yeah, sure. What do you want to know?" He said, "Well, I just want to know if it's gonna be cold."

DONIN: [Laughs.]

SPELIOS: And so he relays this to a couple of other people, they start—and before you know it—I'm now three or four weeks into my first year—there's a group of people outside my door saying, "Could you just tell us—'cause it was 32 degrees this morning. I thought it was gonna be 60. Could you just tell us?"

- DONIN: [Laughs.]
- SPELIOS: And so that—and I was, like, “Oh, you’re talkin’ to the right person.”
- DONIN: [Laughs.]
- SPELIOS: And so there began me printing out everyday weather forecast, which I put on the bulletin board for Hinman.
- DONIN: That’s great!
- SPELIOS: Yeah. And so everybody—it was kind of—and one of my colleagues or friends down there made a thing, “Lou’s Forecast.” And I just put it up on the bulletin board. Did that the entire year, and then from sophomore to senior year I’d Blitzmail it. And so I had a Blitzmail list of a few hundred people, I think, by the time I graduated, who were just getting the weather forecast from me every day.
- DONIN: [Chuckles.]
- SPELIOS: And so that was something—that was—I mean, it was an everyday experience, and it was probably—I don’t know, I put an hour in every day to do it.
- DONIN: Yeah.
- SPELIOS: I mean, I didn’t just wing it. I mean, I really—when I put something out, I wanted to at least believe it in my own heart that it was gonna happen. I mean, it’s weather forecasting, so, there’s an art involved, and, you also have to account for the fact that a lot of the reporting stations are up on hills around here.
- DONIN: Yeah.
- SPELIOS: I mean, so you get info from—you get info from Concord, which you really can’t use much of because it’s too far.
- DONIN: Yep.
- SPELIOS: And you’ve got Lebanon, and you’ve got some other reporting stations that used to, at the time, report in to this database that was run by the University of Michigan. It was

called Weather Underground. It still exists but in a very different form. Weather Underground was [chuckles] literally underground. It was somebody at the University of Michigan that just collected raw weather data for people like me.

And so I used my Dartmouth network at the time—go through Unix—and going through Unix, I could access Weather Underground, and I'd just type in—I said, "I want to know what readings or what is being observed at the following stations," and so I'd look at that. I'd apply some of my own experience—what happens when X, Y, Z. And then I'd also then start taking—took under advisement what the Weather Service would say about what would happen in Burlington and Concord and Boston, which of course were the three main, weather centers.

And I'd take all that information, and then I would devise something for Hanover— accounting for elevation, accounting for, a whole host of things. By the time I did all that, that was an hour's time, an hour and a half, an hour and a half every day.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: For four years.

DONIN: Wow.

SPELIOS: So I did that, and—

DONIN: I'm surprised *The D* didn't hire you to do *their* weather forecast.

SPELIOS: *The D* did a story on me, and if you look for it you can find it. It was kind of cute—about how I started doing this and what I do. But they—*The D*—and I think even to this day just draws whatever the National Weather Service forecast is for Concord, and knowing what, it's oftentimes wrong.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: Because what happens in Concord doesn't happen here.

DONIN: Right.

- SPELIOS: Right? And so I kind of shrugged and said the same thing too, I said they can use it. I mean, there were people who wrote for *The D* that were on my list.
- DONIN: Right.
- SPELIOS: They certainly could have used it if they wanted to.
- DONIN: Yep, yep.
- SPELIOS: So I did that. But I also—, I also was interested in—I mentioned to you earlier—I was interested in elections—politics. And, I also like to talk. [Chuckles.]
- DONIN: Really?
- SPELIOS: Yes. I know this is shocking to you.
- DONIN: [Laughs.]
- SPELIOS: So a friend of mine was—worked for the radio station, and he had this idea. It was modeled off of CNN's *Crossfire*. That was a very big show at the time.
- DONIN: Oh. Mm-hm.
- SPELIOS: And he wanted to do a *Crossfire* that would be on [W]DCR. And I said, "If you're doing that, I want in on it." And so we cut a few—we put together four people, including him, that were just generally interested in national events and politics and elections, that kind of thing. And we—we'd develop an agenda. And for an hour every Sunday we would be live on the AM station, for no one to listen to because, it would be Sunday morning at 11. I mean, people were still sleeping.
- DONIN: Yep, yep.
- SPELIOS: But I think they'd replay it—
- DONIN: Yeah.
- SPELIOS: —at various times, and we'd have some wonderful conversations. I mean, it was exactly what I wanted—some great debate about the issues of the day.
- DONIN: Did you ever have guest speakers?

SPELIOS: We did, we did, but it was other students.

DONIN: Other students.

SPELIOS: Yeah, we never had—we never had faculty or any—that actually—it would have been brilliant if we could—the whole thing only went on for a few months or—I take that back. I think we did it for two seasons.

DONIN: Great.

SPELIOS: But it would have been a nice idea to do that. And I don't know if it continued after we left or not. So, I spent time with that.

And then the other—I was always interested in campus politics but never ran. I always wanted to be the guy behind the guy. And that opportunity presented itself, too, when I was a senior, when one of my friends, Jim Rich, who was a '96, ran for Student Assembly president. And so he invited me to be part of his campaign team.

And that—I just had the time of my life with that. When you look back on it, it seems—it's so small, because, it's a Student Assembly election, but, again, you got to look at the context or reference of the community, and being elected Student Assembly president—

DONIN: It's a big deal.

SPELIOS: —is a big deal, and it's a big process to get there, right?

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: I mean, it's a real campaign, and it's really like—it's great training. And so I got to apply a lot of things I had thought to getting people elected, and he won! There were some things that I think we did that I had a lot to do with. So that was another kind of just interest of mine that I followed that just, again, had more to do with who I knew at the time than anything else.

DONIN: What's Golden Key?

- SPELIOS: Oh, Golden Key is just—that was—that’s an outside organization that—based on your grades.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- SPELIOS: So I think if you were in the top fifth of your class or something like that, you get invited to be in Golden Key.
- DONIN: And student liaison officer?
- SPELIOS: Yes. That was actually a nifty prelude to how I spent really the rest of my life since I graduated. One thing that—kind of going back to how I decided to apply to Dartmouth and how I was talking to people in town—I was really taken aback by the intensity of the alumni about the school. It wasn’t that Dartmouth’s a good place for you to go. It isn’t that, we want the best of the best. It’s, “This place is incredible, and I spend every day thinking about it.”
- DONIN: Oh, my!
- SPELIOS: And the core group that runs these clubs—and, again, we can talk a little bit more about this, too—are very passionate people. And, they were very supportive of me. I explained to them, what I was looking for and why, and there was, like,—I think at the time they could see someone who was doin’ it for the right reasons, and—yeah, so they got excited. And, they got excited, and I got excited.
- And so I said to myself as an undergraduate that *I want to do something with them. There’s obviously something going on there that I don’t completely understand, ‘cause I’m relatively young, but I want to better understand it.* And so I—this other thing I sought out. Is there anything that’s structured between students and alumni?
- DONIN: Yeah.
- SPELIOS: Today there is something called Green Key, right? But it’s new. Green Key is within the last, I don’t know, five, six, seven years? At the time, there was something called the Student-Alumni Liaison Committee, and that was a loose group of undergraduates who were tasked to kind of understand what’s going on on campus and report back to the alumni in their area. And so, there was—and when I say it’s loose, there was no specific reporting obligation. There

were no—there might have been one meeting a year. But you can do whatever you wanted with it. And so I would periodically converse with the alumni leaders in my home area, in the Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts and let them know what I was doing, what was going on on campus, answer some of their questions, et cetera.

And so that was something that I always thought could have been developed more, and I think by the time you got into the 2000s here and the formation of Green Key—I think they said, actually, it not only needs to be developed, it is *important* that alumni have a bridge to the undergraduates here that's direct. And so I love what they're doing. But that's—so you can almost think of that as like a prelude to Green Key.

DONIN: Mmm. Nice.

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: So going back to your interest in politics,—

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: —the politics on campus when you were here were pretty raw at times,—

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: —with the *Dartmouth Review*—

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: —attacking certain religious groups,—

SPELIOS: Yup.

DONIN: —notably Jews,—

SPELIOS: Yup.

DONIN: —including your president at that time.

SPELIOS: Exactly.

DONIN: What did you make of all that?

SPELIOS: I thought it was disgusting. But, I think—when you look at the *Dartmouth Review* at the time, and I think it's probably even true today, they were doing a lot of bombastic things to get attention, and they got the attention. And they also had some fairly high-profile alumni who were well placed in the White House at the time. You had William F. Buckley, who was throwing all his weight behind it. And so there were a whole host of reasons why the *Dartmouth Review* was relevant in that era. But, we would get it every week. It would be at our doorstep, and we'd look at it. And I'd read it because—again, I want to know what's going on.

DONIN: Sure.

SPELIOS: And, my own reaction, and talking to other people, too, was that it wasn't taken anywhere nearly as seriously as it was perceived to be taken, I think, within the administration and in the press. I mean, the word "it was a joke" was used fairly frequently. And because you had people who were working on the *Dartmouth Review*, who took themselves very seriously,—

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: —but were really completely out of touch and were—to the extent that they had an agenda, were choosing methods that I think were anathema to achieving that agenda. So if, for example, you were concerned that President Freedman was gonna turn this into Dartmouth University, okay, we can have that conversation, and I think that conversation was occurring at all levels—from the board down, as to what Dartmouth College should be.

But, the *Dartmouth Review* would take it and make it a personal attack on Jim Freedman. That's—we're Dartmouth students, people. That's not how you win an argument. And, they would—every year they put out an issue about left-wing faculty. "These are the professors that you need to avoid because they hate Republicans." Well, they may not like Republicans. I mean, they may be left wing. But to accuse them of setting aside all of their professional judgment to attack you because you vote Republican is silly. I mean, I just—but they—that was their MO.

And I think that when you really peeled the onion back some, there *were* racial and ethnic undertones and overtones in some of those conversations. I mean, there was an African-American professor here who was terrorized by the *Dartmouth Review* for years, and I think largely because of his race.

And I think, a lot of us recognized that and assumed that they were gonna collapse under their own weight. Now, the *Dartmouth Review* is still here, but how often do you hear about it? You don't, because they went from having Dinesh D'Souza and Laura Ingraham—who are—Dinesh and Laura, I mean, are still very high-profile people—

DONIN: The national stage.

SPELIOS: The national stage. I mean, Laura's on Fox all the time.

DONIN: Yes.

SPELIOS: Dinesh has written a number of books. They're bright people—

DONIN: Yep.

SPELIOS: —who used the *Dartmouth Review* as a platform for themselves. But that hasn't been replicated since. After the Reagan administration and after having William F. Buckley really being that conduit between *The Review* and the White House, it then became, I think, a tabloid.

DONIN: Mmm.

SPELIOS: And it's still, I think to this day,—is basically a tabloid that—I mean, even at this point, when they do something that's relatively controversial, you don't pay a lot of attention to it. So I think—to answer your question, I think we were unhappy with what was being done, but at the time, I don't think we ever believed that they had the moral, political sway on campus to affect any real change other than to offend people.

DONIN: Mmm. And I think it did harm to Dartmouth's rep,—

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: —national reputation.

SPELIOS: Yeah, I think—

DONIN: ‘Cause, as you said, the media blew it up.

SPELIOS: Yeah, they did. And it was catnip for a number of years. I think you’re absolutely right. And, I would—for a long time—although you hear this less now—you say, “Well, Dartmouth. Isn’t that a really conservative campus?” Right? And so the data point that I will put out to you,—and I don’t think that you can characterize a campus as conservative or liberal. I mean, I think that’s too simple. But, I was—my first presidential election was 1992. I was here. A relatively reliable poll was done of students, and, wouldn’t you know it, 91 percent voted for Bill Clinton [chuckles], okay? So—and I think those numbers have been replicated in election after election. I think when Obama ran in ‘08, it was in the 95 percent range.

So, this has never been a conservative campus in the way that we know conservative campuses to be—like Brigham Young, University of Georgia—University of South Carolina. Those places are conservative campuses. You have—the Republican organization on those campuses control—and you have students who really are dyed-in-the-wool Republicans.

Here, I think, you have what is probably a left-of-center campus that has some conservative ways about it—I mean, that you can distinguish ourselves from Brown and from Bennington, from Wesleyan—in terms of I think the way that we carry ourselves.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: Right?—that there is—When you walk the campus, there is a certain feel of traditionalist—

DONIN: Tradition, exactly. Yeah.

SPELIOS: —right?—that we have. But if you really wanna talk about politics, this is not—I don’t think this has ever been a conservative campus. And that was the ultimate irony, I think, with *The Review*, is that the media looked at this paper and said, “Oh, this is the Dartmouth newspaper,” when it

was just a gadfly. I mean, it was just something that the college didn't support and was delivered to people's doors against their will, right? I mean, a lot of people didn't even wanna get it. They would get it and throw it in trash. So, that's—yeah, it was one of, a few notable controversies over the years that probably didn't help our reputation.

DONIN: So I think one of the legacies that's attributed to Jim Freedman's administration is his efforts to diversify the face of Dartmouth.

SPELIOS: Mm-hm.

DONIN: So there were obvious growing pains that were going on within the community, not just via the *Dartmouth Review* but, clearly every—whatever kind of group you want to identify, whether it was the students of color, the financial aid students or international students, gay and lesbian students—

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: Were you conscious of the increasing diversity on campus while you were here, and if so, how did you perceive that these groups managed to work their way into the life of Dartmouth?

SPELIOS: I was aware of it. I mean, I think we were all conscious of the—I think the need to make the campus here more reflective of society. And I think—overlaid is really also from a socioeconomic perspective, too. All the things you mentioned are all important, but that's something I think runs through each of those categories, is a kind of a question—a question of means, right?

DONIN: Yep.

SPELIOS: And so—and from my perspective, that's really the first thing I noticed, is that there is—and I think there continues to be—a wide gap of people here when you kind of look at their backgrounds, what their parents do and what they make, right?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: I mean, you have people that, come from near poverty, right? And then you have billionaires, all under the same roof.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: And that is the first thing you notice, I think. I always thought that whether you were rich or you were poor or something in between, we were all very gracious about that. I mean, I was—I can remember living near someone who—living near a couple of people that were—had a lot, a lot of money, and, they would get \$5,000-a-month allowances. And I'd say, "What are you spending that money on?" I'd be, "My allowance is zero, and I do fine." [Laughs.] I didn't—I ate in the dining hall.

But you find—you live at a means that you're used to, and I'm sure that they had things to buy and things to do with the money. But they never really flaunted it, I don't think. I think they were smart enough, I think, and conscious enough not to walk around like it's the Roaring '20s.

But it still—I think for people who came from less, that was something that really stuck in their craw, and there was a percep—somewhat of a perception about the rich kids and, what they stood for. I think what they had to deal with.

You then overlay that with, trying to increase minority enrollment. Then you mention gay and lesbian enrollment and Native American enrollment, and also doing something about parity, too. That was still—the question of parity was still a big topic.

DONIN: Yep.

SPELIOS: It's great that we don't hear about it as much anymore 'cause that means that we were successful, right? It's over. We're not debating that anymore. We are focusing on some of these other things. But every time you turn one of these corners and you try to push for a little bit of change, there's gonna be some—there's gonna be some resistance—I mean, some people that say, "Really, should we be looking at the world in that way?"

Now, from a temporal perspective, the early '90s—sort of that '91 to '95 range, when I was here, really—you didn't see

a lot of change in terms of the real face of the Dartmouth population. It was relatively static, I think, from a perspective of the number of minorities—religious, ethnic composition, et cetera—again, the real gap that was being closed was really I think basically women.

After I left—I think if you kind of look at maybe the classes of '98, '99 and then afterwards, that's when you saw a lot of this progress, right? That's when I think the face of this campus really started to change fairly dramatically.

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: And now, you look at some of the numbers—what, it's, like, 40 percent of the incoming class are students of color. That's huge. We were not 40 percent. I mean, we might have been 20 or somewhere in there. That's one thing—do not quote me on this 'cause I'm not sure exactly. But it was somewhere in that range. And—and I think it's a result of a lot of things. I mean, one thing is obviously the focus and effort being put on it.

But it's also how Dartmouth is perceived in some of these communities, and that took—getting back—you mentioned President Freedman. That's really what he was doing. You can't point to those years when he was president and say that, you can see a real change. But Jim Freedman said, "We need to do something about this," and so you start laying the groundwork. You tell the admissions office that, "We need to start sending people to some of these communities. We need to start sending people to some of these states, regions where, we don't see a lot of applicants."

I mean, I'll speak personally for a second. I moved to Atlanta 15 years ago, and, you look at who was being sent to Dartmouth from Atlanta. It's very homogeneous. I mean, they were from a handful of high schools, and they all kind of were about the same, right? I mean, 'cause that's—it wasn't that the admission office was doing anything wrong; they were doing their job and admitting the right people. But they weren't getting the applicants, right?

And so in those days you might have gotten 100 applicants from the entire state of Georgia. Today—

DONIN: Wow!

SPELIOS: Yeah. Now, today it's 450, okay?

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: And there are high schools that appear on these lists now that some people have never heard of.

DONIN: Weren't there before.

SPELIOS: Never. I mean, because the guidance counselors in those schools, the students didn't know Dartmouth. Either maybe some of them never heard of it, and if they had heard of it, it's, "Oh, it's that place back East that's, for rich people." Or whatever perception—or "It's that place back East that has all those crazy conservatives, that run the *Dartmouth Review*." Whatever happened to be out there that was easy to find.

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: And so you're kind of commencing, I think, in those Jim Freedman years in really accelerating—when Jim Wright became president and certainly, Jim Kim, and I think it's gonna—obviously it's gonna continue with Phil Hanlon—a willingness to invest the time and the money to say, "This is what Dartmouth is. This is what it can offer. This is why it's a good idea for you."

And so I now—I look at who gets admitted from Georgia and who goes, and it's a very different picture. It's concerning, I think for some people, who got very used to a certain way, being able to say, "Well, if I send my son or daughter to this particular high school, I'm halfway there." It's not true anymore. You're not—there's nowhere you can go where you're halfway anywhere, right?

DONIN: Mmm.

SPELIOS: I mean, everyone is kind of—the playing field is a lot more level, and, the school is a lot more willing to think a little more outside the box, I think,— and make sure that, if you admit someone from this high school who has all the goods and has performed—that you follow up with that, right?

DONIN: Sure.

SPELIOS: You say to that person, “You’re the first person from your high school to ever go to Dartmouth, and we want you to be an ambassador.” “We want to get you excited so that you get other people excited,” and that’s how this grows.

DONIN: And part of making it more attractive to a more diverse population obviously is diversifying the faculty as well,—

SPELIOS: Exactly, yeah.

DONIN: —which—the same thing is happening.

SPELIOS: It is. It is. And, again, I think you—it’s something that as an alum I am less connected to,—

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: —right? I hear about it, I see the results of it, but, I am—the alumni are intricately involved in the admission of students. I mean, this is a place that—we have a lot, a lot of interest, and we have the opportunity. We don’t get invited to participate at faculty conversations. And so I know it’s happening, and I see the results of it, and I know from, my own involvement in some of the organizations that I’m involved with here, that it has been an absolute priority, and can you date it back to really that same genesis, that same idea that not only does the student body need to be more reflective of society as a whole if we’re going to keep producing leaders, and if we’re gonna keep being relevant in this 21st century, in these communities—when you invite these people to come here, they’ve got to have the same conclusion: “Well, how is Dartmouth relevant to the way that I see the world?” “Are there people here who really understand what it’s like to be me?”

And so—and I’m very proud of the efforts they’re making. Now, that’s all to say that with minority faculty hiring, I think the same is true with female faculty hiring. There’s a lot that still can get done, that needs to get done. But, from my perspective as an alum, as long as it’s a priority and as long as, you can say, “This is the progress that we’re making and this is sort of our plan,” my view is I need to stay out of that.

DONIN: Right.

- SPELIOS: That's not—that's really not my business other than just asking the question.
- DONIN: So when you graduated from here in 1995, did you take with you a sort of sense of a community of people that were going to continue to be part of your life?
- SPELIOS: Yes. And that kind of leads into sort of how I've chosen to spend my time in the years that followed. I left with, like a lot of people here, this sort of core group of people that I consider my good friends and, even kind of beyond that, good acquaintances.
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- SPELIOS: And I—like when you're here, you have to make an effort, and I always—it was worth it to me to stay connected to those people, and they felt the same way. And so that has endured over all of these years, and I talk to other alumni, and I hear the same thing, which I think is wonderful, that people really think it's important to stay in touch with people here and to continue this community that they've developed.
- Now, I mentioned to you that I went to Vanderbilt for law school, and you talk about culture shock. I mean, this was the reverse culture shock for me. I mean, I went to Nashville. *Oh, my goodness!* And then I moved to Atlanta. *Oh, my goodness!* again. And so I—and I did these things intentionally. I mean, I'm not complaining. I mean, I wanted to—I wanted to vary my life experience. I felt it was important not to spend my entire life in the Northeast, notwithstanding kind of who I am.
- DONIN: Mmm.
- SPELIOS: But, when I was down there—I think—one thing—law school was busy, so I didn't—I was really a lot more focused on just making sure I was doing well and that I was gonna get myself positioned the way I wanted to be positioned. But once I'm out of law school and I'm in Atlanta, I looked around and I didn't know anybody. And so the idea developed—it kind of jumped to me—said, *It would be efficient if not wise to at least reach out to the Alumni Club and let 'em know I'm here?*

DONIN: Mm-hm.

SPELIOS: *And say that "If you're doing anything, let me know. Get me on your mailing list."* And so I did that, and that led to, "Would you be interested in interviewing?" "Of course." And so I got myself very involved in the interviewing process, and once I started doing that, I started to meet other alums that do that as well, and we started to spend some time together, realizing that—we weren't in the same class. In many ways we're not even in the same generation. But really saying, "Wow! This is an amazing use of time," 'Cause we all have this common experience, and we love talking about it. And because we're like people, it's fun to hang out.

And so I started to push myself further and further into kind of what I might call the alumni world. And as I did that, an opportunity developed at the Georgia club level for me to be in charge of young alumni affairs, and so I did that, ultimately went on and became president of the club. And that then yielded a whole host of things. I mean, you kind of know—and you probably have seen this—where I've gone on and—I've gone—become president of my class, I'm president of the Class Officers' Association, I'm now gonna be president of the Alumni Council. I mean, all these things were, for me, the—the whole point was community. The whole point was I really—I really enjoyed this experience, and I think it's important that other people have that experience and that there is such an incredible opportunity to continue what you started here and that somebody needs to make sure that that's made available.

And, when you look at what's going on this weekend, not only with the inauguration but also class officers' weekend—we have three hundred-and-something class officers coming up. That's an amazing statement, that once a year we get three hundred-something alumni leaders that go up to all get together and talk about how we can do *that* better—I mean, how can we take, again, this kind of concept of community and push it out so that more and more people feel connected to the college?

And, this—I think it's something that is unique about Dartmouth. I talk to people who go to other schools or who went to other schools, similarly situated schools. A lot of them don't have this. I mean, they have versions of it. Every marquee school has an equivalent of an alumni council,

right? But, it's—I won't mention any particular school names, but one very particular one that I know—it's used to recognize big donors. So, if you get to a certain level of philanthropy, they will put you on what is the equivalent of the Alumni Council.

Well, there's no asking, "Well, when that person was placed in that chair, did they want to do anything other than give money? What is *their* sense of community?" In my mind, yeah, that's a nice pat on the back, but, you can also get that by writing a letter or having the president call and say thank you, right?

And so to me—like, when you say there's an alumni council, I then ask the question, "Well, what do you do? What is the point of the alumni council? How often do you meet? I mean, what are your stated goals? What are you doing to make sure that the alumni are plugged in, involved, reacting, responding, contributing to the life on this campus and essentially taking the community that's here and then projecting it out, throughout wherever you happen to live?"

And so, I—it started from the, *I need to know people*. And this particular community was the most welcoming, and in my mind, once I recognized that, I just kept going. And, I've loved every minute of it.

DONIN: And it's ongoing for you.

SPELIOS: Yeah.

DONIN: It's not gonna change once you stop being president of the Alumni Council.

SPELIOS: No, it's not. I mean, there will always be—for me, there will always be a place and a reason for me to keep giving—to keep that up and—and I don't need a title to do it. This is something that I want to do, and you're absolutely right: I'll do this for the rest of my life.

DONIN: Mmm.

SPELIOS: Because it's important to me, and I think it needs to be important for anyone who was privileged enough to go here.

- DONIN: Mmm. And do you think—the way your community evolved from when you started here to now—how has it changed?
- SPELIOS: I find that I am—I think that when you're here, you tend to spend a lot of time with people that are close to you, physical proximity, right? And that becomes one, two, three degrees of separation. And so there are a lot of people that I didn't know when I was here, that were in my class and were around, that I meet through this work, that—for the life of me, I have no idea why I didn't know them. I mean, in some cases they were in my classes or they knew a friend of mine. And so it's changed in the sense that it's gotten a lot—better rounded.
- DONIN: Right.
- SPELIOS: When you're here, I kind of think of it like in clumps, right?
- DONIN: Yes.
- SPELIOS: There was sort of the Hinman clump—or the Choates clump or the government major clump or the guys who were on the radio clump. And so that's true with everybody. If you were in a Greek house, that would have been your house. Or if you were on a sport team, it would have been your team or whatever. And it has something to do with how you're spending your time. I think that gets smoothed out with the years, that, you start to look at some of these clumps or these groups, and you start finding commonalities between them.
- DONIN: Yes.
- SPELIOS: And social media is great for this, right? And you can go onto Facebook or LinkedIn, and it's people you may know, and you—*Really?!*
- DONIN: [Laughs.]
- SPELIOS: I have that epiphany—I have it on Facebook or LinkedIn, but I have it when I do this, too.
- DONIN: Sure.

SPELIOS: Like, really! I never knew that there was that close of a connection between these two people and that—and I didn't know one of them. So—

DONIN: That's a common theme, people saying that once you become an alum, your group—it grows.

SPELIOS: Yes.

DONIN: It's like a spider web.

SPELIOS: Yes. Yeah.

DONIN: Connections.

SPELIOS: And it keeps going.

DONIN: Yeah.

SPELIOS: And so by the time you come back for your 20th or your 50th or hopefully your 75th,—

DONIN: Yes.

SPELIOS: —that you look back on it and you will be stunned at how wide that web is and how the community that exists here facilitates that. The work that the Alumni Office does, the alumni volunteers do, the people on DCF—all of them. They do—to push that and make it available to you, is really—and it gets back to sort of what—what I believed I saw when I was 14, 15 in some of these alums. There was something—there was a spark there that—and I told you I looked at other schools and I did interviews with alumni at these other schools, and it was not the same experience. You just felt like they—it was a little more like, “Yeah, I'm really proud I went to X, Y, Z. It's a good school.” But you didn't—the passion wasn't there. But invariably, in these Dartmouth alums, it was always there. It was infectious, really.

DONIN: It's interesting—another sort of—taking that one step farther: A lot of the people that we've interviewed who did in fact feel that they didn't belong at Dartmouth, for various reasons, and who left here sort of disconnected from it—they say that for one reason or another, they've been pulled back here—

SPELIOS: Mm-hm.

- DONIN: —for a reunion.
- SPELIOS: Yeah.
- DONIN: And the people who, when they were undergrads, would never have given them the time of day—
- SPELIOS: Yes.
- DONIN: —or they felt that they could connect with because they were big man on campus and whoever—that all of that seems to melt away—
- SPELIOS: Yeah.
- DONIN: —when you come back here.
- SPELIOS: It does.
- DONIN: So things that were barriers to people feeling like they belong are dropping away.
- SPELIOS: Well, I attribute some of that to just how old you are when you're here.
- DONIN: Sure.
- SPELIOS: It kind of gets back—I mean, again, I keep going back to this, but sort of where you lived on campus question, right?
- DONIN: Mm-hm.
- SPELIOS: So you create a hierarchy that perpetuates the sell as to where it's fun to live and where it's not. That also exists, I think, socially on campus. I mean, applying or giving some credence to the criticism about the Greek system, which is that there feels like there may be a hierarchy that has developed, not only into whether you're a member or you're not a member but also which house you're in, right?
- DONIN: Sure.
- SPELIOS: There was, I can remember—and I'm not sure what the ranking is today, but I remember when I was here that there were—that you could list—it's true with the fraternities less

than sororities—but you can sort of list an order where was most prestigious versus the least, right? I mean, if you had your druthers, what would be your first choice? And I suspect that still exists today.

Now, if you were to carry that on and say, “Well, if you are a brother in this fraternity that everybody says is number one,” and let’s say, even go farther and say you become president of that fraternity; now that, by definition, means you’re a pretty big person on this campus. I mean, you’re very, very relevant. You have accomplished something that a lot of people want to accomplish.

And I think that when you’re 21, that makes perfect sense. I think when you’re 40, it’s—who cares, right?

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: I mean, it doesn’t matter. You start doing some of those things in real life—I mean, value judgments are made about what people do as a career, what some people do with their money, how much they have. I mean, so you start doing that again. But I think it’s a lot rougher because, as you mature, you can pick any one of these categories and—you want to say it’s money. Well, there are a lot of Dartmouth alumni who have no interest in making money. Let me rephrase that. They have no interest in making a lot of money, right?

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: I mean, it’s not like—having money for money’s sake isn’t a value to them. You don’t have those kinds of distinctions being drawn on campus when you’re 21 when, there’s kind of a general perception that someone who is president of this fraternity is really the big man on campus or is the head of the women’s basketball team, right? These are things—these are the things that everyone decides they’re gonna value.

And so I do understand that. But I don’t think that by merely taking it all away that you solve the problem because I don’t think it’s the institutional issue; it’s how 21-year-olds think. And so if you were to say, “I’m gonna mow down everything here that creates a societal structure. Well, I’m gonna take away the Greek system. I’m taking away athletics. We’re going to stop admitting legacies.” I mean, whatever bothers

you about inequality—and say, “And now we’re gonna put 1,000 people on this campus and we’re gonna tell ‘em to go learn,” they will find a way, in a matter of days, to make decisions about who’s better and who’s worse.

DONIN: Establish a pecking order.

SPELIOS: Absolutely. And so I see that as a human condition. It just so happens that on this campus there are things that are—they’re institutions that allow a defined pecking order to occur, and it just—instead of dreaming it up, it’s already there for you. And I think it’s incumbent—and this gets back to my own experience, the way I looked at all of this, is you get what you ask for, and you get something because you want it. And, if you’re going to be passive about your college experience or about life, then you’re gonna get what comes to you, whether you like it or not.

And so I just—again, my advice to anybody who’s here who feels a little left out because they’re not in a house or because they’re not friends with the president of—pick your fraternity—well, okay. There are other things for you to do. There are plenty of other opportunities and there are certain people you can talk to, so that there’s no reason why anybody should leave this college and feel like they were left out.

But it’s interesting, yeah: You mentioned reunions, and that’s—I mean, to me, when you look at all the work that goes into a reunion, I hear those stories, and I’m gonna say it makes it all worth it—

DONIN: Right.

SPELIOS: —right, for people—even if they spent 20 years or they spent 30 years feeling that way and you finally get ‘em to come back and they start talking to all these people and they walk out saying, “Wow, this was just wonderful. I finally feel like I’m part of this community.” Like, that’s precisely what we wanted to have happen. And it’s too bad that you spent 30 years feeling otherwise because we probably could have addressed it a long time ago. They probably could have addressed it while you were here, it’s just—for one reason or another, you fell through the cracks, or maybe there was some self-segregation that was going on as well that somebody, just didn’t proactively address.

DONIN: Anything else you want to add?

SPELIOS: No, I think this is—

DONIN: Are you talked out?

SPELIOS: I'm talked out. I think this was a wonderful conversation.

DONIN: Okay.

SPELIOS: Thank you very much, Mary.

DONIN: Thank you.

[End of interview.]