

From: Bruce Loeffler [REDACTED]

To: Andrew Wallace [REDACTED]

Wed, Oct 5, 2011 at 5:02 PM

Subject: Re: The Colorado College LGBT Oral History Project

Hi Andrew,

It was nice to get your e-mail. I indeed have a lot of information for you, since the faculty-sponsored LGBT group was my idea. I was the first faculty member out on campus, and I had to find a lesbian who was willing to have a higher profile to facilitate the group with me (since I thought having a gender-integrated group was really important). In 1985, the College had no inclusive non-discrimination policy and no domestic partner benefits; there was no functioning LGBT student group nor an LGBT alumni group. By the time I left, we had all of those things.

In 1985, no faculty member was out, and the women in particular, were deeply closeted. You must realize that when I came to CC in 1977 fresh out of grad school and fresh from coming out in Boston, it was like going back a decade culturally. There were only 10 women on the faculty (out of 140 total)! They already felt they had an uphill battle just being women and working on gender equality, and understandably, no one was willing to take on the additional burden of being an out lesbian. When I first arrived, I could only identify one gay man on the faculty—a senior member of the Romance Languages Department (Herving Madruga). Herving had been in a relationship ever since grad school with Paul, but they always maintained separate houses. Herving lived with his mother, a few blocks from me. He and Paul were a very important early support system for me, and I often ate with them and Herving's mother.

So there I was in Margi Duncombe's office in the southeast corner of the Palmer basement. She was on the sociology faculty (I think she was chair at the time). I did not know her well, but I had seen her around town, often in the company of an older woman, and our paths had crossed at school casually since we were in departments at opposite ends of the Palmer basement (I was on the geology faculty). I very carefully did not indicate I thought she was a lesbian. I merely told her that I thought it would be a good idea to have a faculty-facilitated LGBT (actually LG at the time) group. I said I was willing to be the male faculty sponsor, but I wanted to find a woman who would do it with me. I didn't even suggest that it might be her or even necessarily that it had to be a lesbian; I just left it sort of open-ended. Margi and I went on to become very close friends, and she later told me that she just about "peed in her pants" when I was in her office talking to her about it! [In 1985, Margi and her partner Zoa had separate phones in their home and did not answer each other's phones; Margi was not out to her family and she was certainly not out on campus; so in retrospect, it was kind of a big deal that I was in her office talking to her about gay/lesbian issues.]

A week or so later, however, Margi agreed to do it. We both felt we could not openly announce where we would be meeting (to protect students), nor be overly obvious about

what we were doing. So bright pink flyers went up all over campus: “Out and About [we thought it was a clever name!], for information call Bruce, phone number, or Margi, phone number”. We developed a question routine for when students called us that would require only yes or no answers on their part (so students wouldn’t have to out themselves to anyone listening to their end of the conversation): “Out and About is a support group for gay and lesbian students; only gay, lesbian or questioning students need to know where we meet. Do you have a need to know where we meet?” etc. We met in the basement of Shove Chapel, and our first meeting had fewer than 10 students. To begin with, it had the form of a support group, since in 1985 most gay and lesbian students at Colorado College had not been out in high school and were now dealing with coming out in a fairly hostile environment (there was quite a bit on anti-gay graffiti on our posted fliers). Sometimes we had readings to discuss, but we always heard personal stories and were always supporting the coming out process.

Fairly early on—perhaps several months into our meetings—we had quite an encounter. We always checked in when we started with everyone introducing him or herself and talking about what was going on for them. We always let anyone new go last, so they could see what we were doing and would know something about us before they had to say anything. On this particular evening, the new person turned out to be a fundamentalist Christian who launched into a tirade about how we were all going to Hell. I was so alarmed and concerned for what would happen (this is just what Margi and I had hoped we could avoid). Then this amazing thing happened. Before Margi and I could even react, the students, individually and collectively, told this person that they had heard this all of their lives, and that they simply did not believe it. They said this was a space where they wanted to be free of such prejudice and they asked the person to leave, which he did. I was afraid this would rattle some of the gay and lesbian students; in fact, it empowered them and unified them. It was really amazing.

Not too long after launching the LG group in October, 1985, Margi and I made a Thursday-at-Eleven presentation: “One in Ten [we wanted to make them nervous!]: Homosexuality, Myths and Reality”. Margi and I sat in chairs on an otherwise empty the stage in Packard Hall and talked about our experience and took questions from the audience. If we were not out to the campus before that, we certainly were after!

When I came to CC in 1977, the Geology Department was basically “rocks for jocks” with most of the hockey team and football team taking geology classes, because there was a faculty member (whom I replaced) who would give anyone an A for just breathing. Their field trips at the time were notorious drinkfests of testosterone run amok. So, geology students (and faculty) were not the most progressive. And of course, the Springs was the Springs—a conservative cultural backwater. Having come out in Boston in 1976-77 (I marched in the gay pride parade for the first time in 1977, when I was 27), I went back into the closet in Colorado Springs, which was extremely difficult. I know there was talk among geology majors. It is so hard to compartmentalize. One day in Mineralogy, a football player was hassling me in class about when homework and labs were due, and I plugged in the wrong tape, saying, “Honey, if you don’t have that homework done by . . .” I think everyone was shocked (especially me!) and I just kept

talking fast, hoping that no one had noticed! At about this time, another geology major asked if he could be my roommate. I had bought a house just south of campus on Willamette between Tejon and Nevada when I moved to the Springs, and I needed a roommate to make it work financially (my starting salary at the college was \$12,300!, but I digress). I told Robert I would have to talk to him before he moved in, and we went to Poor Richard's. When I told Robert over herbal tea that I was gay, he said "you're what?"; I repeated that I was gay and he repeated "you're what?". So I said, Robert, "I am a homosexual" to which he said "Oh, Ok" and that was that. I would not have had a student roommate who was gay, for the obvious possible mis-interpretation and appearance, but Robert had a girlfriend and was spectacularly heterosexual. I wouldn't even have sought a student roommate, but Robert had asked. Years later, I found out the Robert was regularly pumped for information about me from other geology majors: "Is it weird living with Bruce?" "Why would it be?" "Well, he's gay, isn't he?" "No he isn't". I had never talked to Robert about disclosure; he just took it upon himself to put up a smoke screen! With students who knew, I had a really easy relationships. Robert and another geology major once even set me up on a date with someone they had worked with in Aspen over the summer!

The gay and lesbian group, I think, was a transformative experience for me and Margi and for many students over the years. In 1987, Margi and Zoa and I brought students from CC to the March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. We made a banner with black paint on a gold sheet: Colorado College Gay and Lesbian Alliance (our name at the time). When we marched in the parade in Washington D.C. behind that banner, CC alums came out of the crowd expressing their amazement and joy (this was the origin of the gay and lesbian alumni group). We brought students to the next March on Washington for LGB rights in 1993. Coming back from DC in 1993 was a very interesting experience. Leaving DC, the plane was full of gay people. When we changed planes in St. Louis for our flight to Colorado Springs, the world changed abruptly, as we were now the only GLBT people on the plane! Michael, my then-partner, and I sat with Margi on one side of the aisle; Zoa sat next to a rancher from eastern Colorado on the other side of the aisle. They were having an active conversation about ranching and farming and were getting on famously. Then the rancher said some disparaging things about gay people (I don't know how the topic came up). We were all listening to this from across the aisle. Zoa just turned to the rancher and said "I think you should know you are sitting next to a lesbian before you go any further." Our jaws dropped, since this was the first time Zoa, who was 74 at the time, had come out to anyone! The rancher changed course quickly, and she and the rancher just continued their conversation as if nothing had happened. But I am sure this encounter with Zoa made him think!

In 1987, we successfully lobbied our very conservative Board of Trustees to include "sexual orientation" in the College's non-discrimination policy. I can remember that when I sat down on a sofa next to a trustee to talk to him about it, he moved away from me to the other end of the sofa while telling me there was no need to include "sexual orientation" in the non-discrimination policy. It was the CC President Gresham Riley who ultimately convinced them to do it.

Over the years the student group became the LGBT alliance and became more celebratory and social. We still dealt with coming out issues on a regular basis, particularly after Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks, when students often came out to family. There were sometimes horror stories with students having their funding cut off or being thrown out of the house. And there were great victories. We dealt with substance abuse and suicidal feelings in students who were struggling to come out. Students from conservative religious backgrounds struggled the most. For one of them, Addison Diehl, I arranged an independent study jointly with me and the College Chaplain at the time (Bruce Coriell), reading John Boswell's "Homosexuality, Christianity and Social Intolerance," which had just been published. Addison is currently an English teacher in high school in El Paso and is out. At graduation, Addison's mother thanked me for being there for Addison and helping him accept who he was. Addison, who has also been active on the CC Alumni Board, is surely a person you should include in your oral history.

Since the group began in 1985, we also dealt with AIDS and safe sex, when talking about this was not so common. At the time the disease barely had a name, and there were no drugs for it. A former lover of mine, Rod Rhodes, who left Colorado Springs and our relationship to go to NYC to do an MFA in art under Robert Morris at Hunter College, died of AIDS in 1989. I brought a retrospective of his work, which had been organized by PS 1 in NYC, to the Coburn Gallery at CC. His work dealt with explicitly gay themes, and the show was well-attended and was a good vehicle for consciousness-raising around gay issues and AIDS. CC GALA also brought a section of the AIDS Memorial Quilt to campus (the first time the entire quilt was displayed was at the 1987 March on Washington).

I started giving safe sex mini-lectures before the first camping field trip in every geology class I taught, and made it clear there were condoms in the first aid kit. My approach on field trips was to get students up very early, do lots of strenuous work in the field all day, and then let them chillax in the evening. I didn't want to be a cop and told them their evening time was their own, as long as they behaved responsibly. I obviously never concerned myself with sleeping arrangements; I just made sure everyone brought a sleeping bag that that enough people brought tents to accommodate everyone. I started giving the safe-sex talks after a Freshman woman was infected with herpes on one of my field trips (the only reason I knew was that she required immediate hospitalization in a relatively rare severe reaction to the initial infection). So I decided I would start talking about safe sex, and that a little discomfort in class seemed a small price to pay to make sure no one else got a sexually-transmitted disease on one of my field trips!

In 1986, I organized Freshman Orientation around the theme of discrimination and the fight for equal rights, using the newly-released (and excellent) documentary "The Times of Harvey Milk," which was shown during Freshman Orientation (the gay producer of the film was also present to answer questions). Students also read MLK's Letter from the Birmingham Jail. In other words, we had a very active program of campus and community education on GLBT issues.

Once I was out and had a public profile as a gay man on the CC campus, students would come into my class knowing that I was gay, but knowing nothing else about me. Some male students began to challenge my authority, which had never happened when I was perceived as a straight, white male. It really made me realize what women and people of color on the faculty had to deal with in the classroom. Eventually, I realized that I had to address the gay issue in class, since students in a way felt they knew something about me they were not supposed to know. So, on the first day, in going over the syllabus and general information about the class, I would say that I was gay, that it certainly was not a problem for me and that I hoped it would not be a problem for them. I also said I would always be happy to talk to anyone about it, which in fact often happened on camping field trips. From that time on, I got lots of comments on final course evaluations thanking me for being open about being gay. In particular, I would get comments like: "I really had a problem with homosexuals, but you have completely changed my attitude and understanding. Thank you." Never underestimate the power of being out as a means of changing attitudes!

One unanticipated consequence of being an out faculty member was that closeted gay and lesbian faculty avoided me and Margi on campus, either fearing that they would be exposed by association or perhaps feeling guilty that they were not also out.

Beginning in 1991, I took on a very high profile as a gay man in Colorado Springs and beyond. Will Perkins, a Colorado Springs car dealer, organized a campaign to put Amendment 2 on the ballot in 1992. This would become the first anti-gay measure passed by voters in any state. Amendment 2 said that no government in Colorado (City, County or State) could ever extend civil rights protections based on sexual orientation.

That is Amendment 2 pre-emptively said that gay men and lesbians could never be protected from discrimination (for instance, in housing or employment) in Colorado. It was marketed as the "No Special Rights" amendment, which was infuriating, since even if Amendment 2 were defeated, we would still not be protected from discrimination. And they were claiming that if we were ever to be protected in the future, such protection from discrimination would be a "special right." [Amendment 2 was prompted by the City of Colorado Springs having extended civil rights protections to gays and lesbians, the third city to do so in Colorado, after Boulder and Aspen.]

Because I lived in Colorado Springs, the heart of the Amendment 2 battleground, and because I was articulate and knew, as a teacher, how to talk in sound bites, I became a major spokesperson for the anti-Amendment 2 campaign. I had an unlisted number, but all of the news media had it. I was always available to speak, and for almost two years, I gave almost daily local and national, print and electronic, news interviews. There were days when I was up in time for a live appearance on the 6AM local TV news and also was live on the 10 PM news. During this time, I had foot surgery and was home, unable to put pants on over my temporary cast. I had a TV crew in my living room filming me in a white shirt and tie from the waist up while I was in my underwear! I often met Will Perkins in debate—on radio stations, on TV and before a live audience in Packard Hall. I did interviews for Time Magazine and was part of a 1993 PBS Bill Moyers special entitled "The New Holy War" on the battle between the religious right and the gay

community in Colorado Springs.

It was devastating to have Amendment 2 pass. I was on a field trip for a course on geology and ecology of the Southwest, camping in Organ Pipe National Monument the night of the election. We rented a hotel room, so we could watch the election results. I was really bummed, and students were really supportive, coming by my tent when we got back to camp to say how sorry they were. Then the battle moved to the courts. It eventually went to the US Supreme Court, who in a 6-3 decision said Amendment 2 was unconstitutional because you cannot take a class of citizens (gays and lesbians) and say effectively they will always be subject to discrimination. The night of the decision, my sound bite for the local media was “Today the Supreme court looked under the hood of Amendment 2 and found that it was a lemon. Way to go Perkins! [the same phrase Perkins always used at the end of his car commercials]. The legal battle cost the state of Colorado about \$2 million, since the State had to defend the Amendment.

Immediately after Amendment 2, gays in the military came up, as Clinton worked on his “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Once again, I was the go-to guy for the local media. I also participated in a TV special on gay “reparative therapy,” where I argued against it, while an ex-gay program advocated for it.

One result of all my media work was that I suddenly had a public profile as a gay man in Colorado Springs. Since the religious right had really taken over Colorado Springs, this was like being the anti-Christ. I was accosted in supermarket parking lots; people would shout “faggot” when they drove by while I was walking. It even happened in my own neighborhood. I lived on Yale Avenue at the time at the south end of Garden of the Gods. There was a kind of scary survivalist family at the end of the street. The first time their teenage son drove by with his high school friends while I was out front working in my yard and shouted “faggot” I went across the street to Kathy Merrill’s house (she was on our math faculty) in tears. It caught me so off-guard and it was such a violation to have the security of my home threatened. Eventually, when people shouted faggot at me on the street, I just shouted back “That’s Dr. Faggot to you!”

The problems became worse when my living room windows were shot out. I wasn’t there at the time, and it was vandalism and intimidation more than an attempt to harm me physically. It was expensive, however, to replace the windows, because I had to cover the \$500 deductible on my homeowner’s insurance. Just after I replaced them, they were shot out again. I left them with bullet holes.

I don’t regret the public advocacy work that I did, but it did take its toll. The Springs was very hostile territory at the time. I eventually made the decision that the odds of my developing a good long-term relationship in Colorado Springs were not great. When I left on sabbatical in 1997, I told the Dean I wasn’t sure I could come back. I loved teaching at CC, but the town was becoming too scary for me. In 1998, I took the unusual step of resigning from my tenured position on the CC faculty. This is something else I do not regret. After I left, while caring for my 90-year old father in Tucson, I met Dan O’Brien. We have been together 12 years. In 2004, we moved to San Luis Obispo, CA

to be with his family, and in 2008, while it was briefly legal to do so in California, we were married. I am sure this never would have happened in Colorado Springs [when I left, all of the other gay male faculty members were single].

In 1996, before I left, I approached Kathryn Mohrman, CC's president at the time. I told her I needed to cover my domestic partner immediately with insurance. I pointed out that the College had always made a big point of talking about our total compensation package in our annual salary letters (salary plus benefits). I pointed out that I was not "lesser" than my straight colleagues, that I worked just as hard and deserved to be compensated commensurately. If their families could be insured, so must mine be insured. I also pointed out that since the College had had a non-discrimination policy since 1987 in which it guaranteed not to discriminate based on sexual orientation, I thought, in fact they had been discriminating. The Board, under pressure from Mohrman, acted very quickly to establish domestic partner benefits. After that, a lesbian I had not known who worked in the mail room, went out of her way to thank me for getting insurance for her, her partner and their child.

I would like to think I left the College a better place than I found it. It is certainly a place that is more welcoming of its GLBT community now than when I came to CC in 1977.

I would be happy to talk to you Andrew. I lecture on international tours, and I leave to fly around the world on a private jet on October 27. Between now and then, I am trying to finish a seven-month-long remodeling project on our 1943 home. So coming to Homecoming is probably not in the cards this year. I know Margi is back East and will return to CC at the beginning of November. I get back from my trip around the world on Nov. 19. It might be good to interview me and Margi together, since we shared this history as best friends and we are likely to jog each other's memories. I could come out to Colorado, possibly in Block 4 or Block 5. I would also be happy to talk to you on the telephone (number below).

Good luck with this project,

Kind regards,

Bruce

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----- Original Message -----

From: "Andrew Wallace (S)" <Andrew.Wallace@ColoradoCollege.edu>
To: <bruce.loeffler@pobox.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 20, 2011 9:42 AM
Subject: The Colorado College LGBT Oral History Project

Dear Mr. Loeffler,

My name is Andrew Wallace, I am a senior at Colorado College. As a gay male at CC I have become interested in the experiences of gay men and women from this institution's past. My interest and belief in the power of local gay historical knowledge inspired the creation of the Colorado College LGBT Oral History Project to collect and preserve the experiences of LGBT individuals. Myself, and a small group of committed students, are reaching out to alumni, faculty, and staff to invite their participation in this project. Though this work is seriously interested in preserving a fuller history of the college, it is also about facilitating dialogue between generations. We believe there is immense power, both personal and political, in the expression of and shared reflection on past queer experiences in our community.

Your name has come up in our early conversations with key informants as well as in archival research in the College archives. We would be honored to have your voice included in our project.

Though we are still in the early stages of our work, we hope to be collecting interviews over homecoming weekend. If you are not planning to attend homecoming, we would be happy to arrange a meeting at a later date.

Please contact me with any questions. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Andrew Wallace

Class of 2012

