

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Erica Hieggelke, Class of 2003, and Fievel Gordon, Class of 2004*

Interviewed by  
Carolyn Rees, Class of 2014

May 17, 2013

## **Abstract**

In this oral history, Feivel Gordon and Erica Hieggelke, who met as first-years, reflect with candor and humor on their evolution as a couple. Feivel discusses his own process of self-discovery while at Smith and they speak candidly about the issue of transsexual students attending all-women's schools. They also recall being together on 9/11 and the aftermath of that trauma on campus.

## **Restrictions**

None

## **Format**

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 30-minute tape.

## **Transcript**

Transcribed by Janet Harris with Harris Reporting.

## **Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms**

### *Video Recording*

**Bibliography:** Gordon, Feivel and Erica Hieggelke. Interview by Carolyn Rees. Video recording, May 17, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

**Footnote:** Feivel Gorson and Erica Hieggelke, interview by Carolyn Rees, transcript of video recording, May 17, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Gordon, Feivel and Erica Hieggelke. Interview by Carolyn Rees. Transcript of video recording, May 17, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Feivel Gorson and Erica Hieggelke,, interview by Carolyn Rees, transcript of video recording, May 17, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 17, 2013, with:

ERICA HIEGGELKE and FIEVEL GORDON

by: CAROLYN REES

REES: Okay, so this is Carolyn Rees and I am here with Fievel and Erica, May 17, 2013 and this is for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. So thank you for agreeing to be a part of this. I think we'll just start off by me asking like what brings you back to Smith for reunion.

GORDON: Do you want to start?

HIEGGELKE: I mean – well, so we live in Seattle so what bring us back for reunion – you know, it's funny being really far away from Smith. There's certain things that Smith has I think really impacted our lives and kind of like what we do and who we are as people, but it isn't really kind of in our face because we live really far away. We live in a place where there is a good amount of Smithies but it's not a ton of Smithies and so it's just really nice to come back and kind of you know –

GORDON: See people and just catch up.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, we don't get a chance to come back here super often. Fievel's dad lives in the area, but you know, when we're here we see family. We don't come back to Northampton, so –

GORDON: Right.

HIEGGELKE: It's just kind of fun to like be on campus and –

GORDON: It's really fun to be on campus. It's so won – it's like so pretty here and it's so fun to just walk around and – I don't know, remember.

HIEGGELKE: We met here, so it's kind of nice.

GORDON: A little special.

HIEGGELKE: To do that too.

REES: Yeah, definitely. So how did both of you come to be at Smith?

GORDON: Do you want me to start?

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, you go.

GORDON: So actually I wanted to go to Smith since I was probably 13 or 14. And then when it came time for me to graduate from high school, I got a little derailed, like just in a bad relationship and totally let myself get derailed, but when that ended, I said like, okay, I'm finally going to do this then. And even when I was young, I just for some reason like not only wanted to come to Smith, but like I knew something was drawing me here and it would totally change my life. So yeah, I came and it really did and it was wonderful and yeah, it's been great.

HIEGGELKE: So I wanted – also wanted to come to Smith since I was like 13 or 14, but it was kind of more random for me. I don't know if you remember Sassy Magazine but I used to read Sassy magazine because it was out when I was like 13 years old. And I read this article about why go to a woman's college, and so I read this article and then kind of like filed it away, you know, and when I was applying to colleges, I actually really wanted to go to film school, and so I had applied early admission to NYU and I like really didn't have a backup plan, and when I didn't get into film school, I was like oh, what do I do now. And so I applied to a bunch of schools and Smith just kind of came on my radar. And so I applied to Smith. Never visited, anything, and I was actually planning to go across the country to go live in Portland, Oregon and I was like all set to go to this other school, and my parents had this friend who had gone to Sarah Lawrence and so – and they knew I really admired her, and so behind my back of course, they convinced her to call me and say, "Don't go to Portland. It's – you're not going to reach your potential there." She said something, and I was like, okay, I'm going to go to Smith and the first time I actually saw the campus was when I came here for my first year. So it was a pretty big transition for me because I grew up in downtown Chicago, I went to public school, but you know, I really learned to love it here and just really felt like I got so much out of being here, so definitely glad I came even though now I'm like – I didn't even visit.

GORDON: And I had been at a small, very small Catholic women's college in Baltimore and when I transferred here, it was very different.

REES: So let's talk about that for a second, like tell me what it was like when you first arrived at Smith, like what were you feeling or thinking or –

HIEGGELKE: You know, it was really overwhelming for me because you know, I went to – I went to a good school in Chicago, but you know going to a public school like especially in the city, you just don't have to work as hard. I mean it just – you don't. And you know, I got here and a lot of people had gone to private school, they had had a lot of just experience with the level of academics here,

and it just was a very different culture for me. I had to work while I was here, so I worked – I worked more than I was supposed to work. You know, so I was like working a lot. I got really involved in a lot of different political things right off the bat and I took on a lot, and so I actually – I actually failed out. I almost – they asked me to leave after my first semester here, and I had to fight to stay and so I – I was on academic probation for two years and actually had – was it a 3.0 by the time I left?

GORDON: You had – yeah, you had really raised – I can't remember what it was, but I mean but from where you were –

HIEGGELKE: I had to work my butt off.

GORDON: -- to where you ended was amazing.

HIEGGELKE: I mean – but it – but you know it was one of those things where it was really overwhelming for me to be here and be away from home and be in a small town. And like this school was the same size as my high school and like I had friends all over Chicago, so like I just wasn't used to the environment of being kind of in this place, but honestly, I think if I hadn't struggled, I probably wouldn't have appreciated the experience as much. So I don't regret it. Of course, now that I'm 32, I'm like – God, you really could have done better, honey. You know? Maybe you shouldn't have partied so much, but –

GORDON: That's college.

HIEGGELKE: But yeah, and you know, I also lived in Cutter my first couple of months that I was here and I moved to Sessions house and I think I really blossomed once I moved to Session. Just the house culture there was just really – that's where I fit, so –

GORDON: When I got here, I was just really excited because like I said it was kind of finally fulfilling like a dream that I thought maybe was lost. And it was just an absolute like gorgeous day. Drove up. I had – I also hadn't come to visit, strangely enough even though I really wanted to come here. And when I was choosing like what house I wanted to live in, I had no idea about the different houses and the culture, like it wasn't even in my radar. I wanted to live in Sessions because it was the oldest house on campus, because I am a nerd. And I just thought that was like the coolest thing that this house was like over 300 years old and – so I had no idea what I was getting into.

HIEGGELKE: Did you know about the ghost stories?

GORDON: I didn't know about the ghost stories. I didn't know – at the time – I don't know how it is now. But at the time it had a reputation as being like the queer house, so yeah, I had no clue about any of this, and you know, I drive up and

it's gorgeous and the house is so cute, and then there's this woman just sitting on the porch.

HIEGGELKE: Stop.

GORDON: So that's actually like kind of the beginning of our story, a little bit.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah.

GORDON: So is that the first time that you met is when you arrived?

HIEGGELKE: As a transfer, right.

GORDON: Yes, I was a transfer. I was a transfer so I was like her age, but fresh meat. So –

HIEGGELKE: Pretty much.

REES: Best of both worlds.

GORDON: Yeah, yeah, exactly, so – but yeah, it was – it was funny. I think we tried to stay away from each other for like a week, and then it just didn't work.

HIEGGELKE: I was trying to focus on my academics.

GORDON: Oh, okay. Got it. Yeah.

REES: So where does your story go from there, after first meeting on the porch?

HIEGGELKE: Well, I lived on the third floor at the top of the stairs and he lived on the second floor at the bottom –

GORDON: At the bottom of the stairs.

HIEGGELKE: -- and we kind of just started hanging out and we were friends at first and then as these things go, ended up, you know, getting together and actually we got together and the first –

GORDON: Morning we woke up together –

HIEGGELKE: -- it was 9/11.

REES: Wow.

HIEGGELKE: So we woke up and I remember – like I ran into my best friend's room to tell her, right? Like, you know? And – and –

GORDON: Sorry. And Rebecca said – you said, “You won’t believe what happened.” And Rebecca said, “No, you won’t believe what happened.”

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, “Two planes hit the World Trade Center.” And it was like, “Are you joking?” What are you talking about? Because you know, we slept in late. Like we had just been hanging out and we like we had kissed and then, you know –

GORDON: No, we hadn’t.

HIEGGELKE: -- we just fell asleep. And it was like, you know, but it was oh my God! And because we had been kind of like leading up to it.

GORDON: Yeah, it was pretty palpable what was going on between us.

HIEGGELKE: Everybody was like, really?

GORDON: When’s it going --

REES: No one was surprised.

HIEGGELKE: But yeah, it was really intense, you know, like we ended up – I remember we ended up going downstairs and like everybody was just like glued to the TV and it was just like this weird moment where we were really excited about what happened, but we didn’t know what was going on. Like we didn’t – like it was before the third plane went down, like nobody knew what was happening. There were all these freshmen who like – first years who like – it was like their second week of college.

GORDON: Right.

HIEGGELKE: You know, and a lot of them were like from New York, and it was just like unreal. So yeah, our tenth anniversary is not – was 9/12/11.

GORDON: Right, our anniversary was 9/12 so –

HIEGGELKE: Which is when we got – we had a wedding that day. We’ve been together 12 years now.

GORDON: Well, technically we – technically, we –

HIEGGELKE: You say ten years, but it’s been 12.

GORDON: -- we eloped but then we –

HIEGGELKE: That was true.

GORDON: We eloped and then we had a big party for what was our official tenth. That was in place of the wedding, so anyhow that's our story.

HIEGGELKE: That was kind of –

GORDON: That's the beginning.

REES: We'll get back to parts of it. I wanted to ask what the aftermath of 9/11 was like on campus.

(adjust microphone)

REES: Erica, where in Chicago did you go to school?

HIEGGELKE: I went to Whitney Young.

REES: Oh, okay. I took the SATs there.

HIEGGELKE: Really?

REES: Yeah, I graduated – well, my second two years of high school I was in Chicago.

HIEGGELKE: Oh, okay, where did you go to school?

REES: I went to Latin (XX) --

HIEGGELKE: Oh, cool. I have a good friend from Smith who also – she'll be here this weekend. I think – Lindsey Gullows (ph.)

GORDON: Okay, yeah, I wasn't sure. I know her.

HIEGGELKE: Anyway, technical –

REES: We're good.

GORDON: We're good.

REES: All right, so President Connelly was in charge for one year.

GORDON: Yeah, John Connelly. Yep.

HIEGGELKE: Oh, that's right.

REES: After 9/11.



GORDON: Interim.

HIEGGELKE: Because it was after Ruth.

GORDON: Yep, it was between Ruth and Carol.

REES: Yeah, and when we were researching, he seemed to be most well-known for like guiding the campus through that hard time, so I'm just wondering what your experiences were with the aftermath of 9/11 on campus?

GORDON: I mean it was pretty emotionally intense around campus for awhile.

HIEGGELKE: I just remember that day – I remember that day because, you know, we spent the morning like in front of the television and I remember having to decide if I was going to go to class or not, you know, because –

GORDON: They hadn't officially – they hadn't canceled classes.

HIEGGELKE: Nobody knew what was going on. I mean I think I had skipped class that morning, and you know – and it happened while some people were in class, right? And so I remember, yeah, like not knowing if we should go to our class and really not knowing what was going on and then they had an assembly later that day and there was one girl who was at the college who ran out of the room crying and I don't know if this is true or not, but supposedly both her parents were –

GORDON: Both her parents.

HIEGGELKE: -- in the towers.

GORDON: Yep.

HIEGGELKE: I mean that was what was going on. I mean it was just really – I feel like tingly even just like thinking about it, especially now living on the West Coast. It's like people don't get it.

GORDON: They don't get it.

REES: Interesting.

HIEGGELKE: And for us the whole world changed. I mean it's like everything was different afterwards. And it was intense because, you know, both of us were pretty politically active, pretty left wing, you know, not super patriotic and all of a sudden it was like everything was an American flag, and we were like, okay, this is not the right way to go, but like – you know.

GORDON: But we were 20 and like what did we know also about like how do you react – you know, how does anyone react to something like that?

HIEGGELKE: Well, I remember when President Obama got elected and in Seattle they shut down the streets, and there were people who looked like me waving American flags and it was literally the first time I had ever seen people excited about America but not like in a super right wing conservative way, and I was – and it was so powerful because it was so different like during 9/11 and that time period, it was just like people didn't know how to like deal with the pain and the hurt, you know, besides just being like really angry. But I think it was just – I mean it was just depressed, like people were just upset, you know, and like didn't know how to deal with it, so yeah, it was really intense. We also lived in New York the summer – the next summer –

GORDON: Afterwards.

HIEGGELKE: -- which was like – I'm like, oh my God –

GORDON: Really.

HIEGGELKE: That was really –

GORDON: I mean the only way I – I think of it is like the city was a raw nerve, that's it. That's it.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, it was.

GORDON: And I worked only a few blocks away and that was also just being that close was really crazy.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, it was really intense, so –

REES: So you mentioned that you were – overexerted yourself in extracurriculars.

GORDON: She still does.

REES: I was just wondering – I'm wondering if you guys can talk about your various involvement in extracurriculars on campus as well.

HIEGGELKE: Okay, what did I do? Well, okay, I always worked, so I did -- I always worked in the kitchen because I didn't have work study officially, but I would like -- so nobody wanted to work in the kitchen, so I would just work in the kitchen because I could always get hours and I always worked reunion, so there was like 10 to 15 hours a week right there. And then I -- what was I on, Student Labor Action Coalition for awhile, and I played rugby for a little while and --

GORDON: The -- well, I don't know --

HIEGGELKE: I was on -- what was it called, like Fire Feminists something -- I was on like some other thing. I mean I just was like doing a lot of stuff, and I hated my roommate too so I think that also kind of kept me out of the -- my roommate and I just didn't get along. So I was like, peace, I'm outta here. So I think that was mostly what I was doing that first semester and I kept doing it afterwards, but just like really dialed it back. I quit rugby because I was like -- I was a smoker at the time, I was not athletic. I was like this is really not my thing actually, just kidding. So yeah, but I still did a lot of that stuff, but I just kind of was more involved but not like as involved as I was when I first got there, so I'm trying to think of what else -- what else did we do while we were at school?

GORDON: Actually I didn't have that many extracurriculars. I mean like we worked together in the kitchen and at a -- what was it called, the little coffee shop that was on campus?

HIEGGELKE: Oh, Jittery's.

GORDON: Jittery's, that's right.

HIEGGELKE: In Davis, yeah. Oh, yeah, I like -- I was like in charge of Jittery's for a year.

GORDON: Yeah, that's true.

HIEGGELKE: Or two years.

GORDON: Was it two or -- I don't know. You were my boss.

HIEGGELKE: That was after I graduated I worked at Starbucks because I worked at --

GORDON: She had coffee experience.

HIEGGELKE: I ran my coffee shop for two years.

GORDON: Well, that's what happens when you also move to a college town right out of -

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, we moved to a different, another college town.

GORDON: (Inaudible).

HIEGGELKE: So there were like no jobs, but -- yeah, I mean -- well, we --

GORDON: I don't think I -- you know, I mean I think I did a few things with like one of

the feminist organizations on campus, but I think I was too like caught up in -- I mean the academics here were much tougher than where I was before, so I was caught up in that and then kind of -- I mean for me like doing a lot of self-discovery, this is the first place that I went to where like being trans was talked about in a safe way, and my own journey with that was a little hard and confusing at times. It's easy for me to look back now and point out things and be like, oh, God, that makes so much sense, but for a lot of reasons, like in my childhood and all sorts of things, like I just -- it took me awhile to become comfortable with that. Maybe for lack of a better term, I was kind of a man-hating lesbian for a little while.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, you were.

GORDON: And now I understand why. Like I just had a lot of internal stuff going on so right before I got to Smith, I had gone to like this music festival and it was the first time I had ever met a trans guy and I was so confused because like he was at this booth or whatever and I went to him and I was like, "You want to be a lady?" And he was like, "No, no, no, no." And it blew my mind because I literally didn't know that people like me existed.

HIEGGELKE: Which is funny, because you do that now. People say that to you and you're like, "How could they not know?"

GORDON: What do you mean?

HIEGGELKE: (Laughter.)

GORDON: So yeah and then I came here like not even a month later and it was being talked about in a safe way and in an accepting way. So I was going through a lot of stuff like that. I was newly in love. So yeah, like I didn't do like a ton of extracurriculars, but I kept myself busy.

HIEGGELKE: We took classes with different -- like we took a -- that video class at UMass.

GORDON: No, that was you, babe.

HIEGGELKE: You didn't take it with me at UMass, you took it here?

GORDON: Pretty sure.

HIEGGELKE: Anyway.

GORDON: But I took -- I took like classes --

HIEGGELKE: We got around.

- GORDON: So anyway and we'd also like take road trips and stuff like that. I grew up right outside of Baltimore, so I would go hang out with friends and go see my brothers and stuff like that, but yeah.
- REES: So I don't know if you guys like stay up-to-date or connected to Smith now --
- GORDON: We know -- yeah.
- REES: But there's all this -- a lot of discussion around trans limited admission and so I'm just wondering like what were the conversations that were happening during your time here about trans issues or trans men--
- GORDON: I feel like --
- HIEGGELKE: A lot of it was about whether or not trans men should stay here --
- GORDON: Yeah.
- HIEGGELKE: And like how -- so Fievel didn't start transitioning until after he left.
- GORDON: Physical -- well, I changed my name before.
- HIEGGELKE: Right, you changed your name but --
- GORDON: So I could make -- well, so I could make sure I had my name or my degree in my name.
- HIEGGELKE: Yeah, but you know, a lot of talk about like do you have chest surgery while you're here, do you start on hormones while you're here --
- GORDON: And where does the college draw the line, like --
- HIEGGELKE: And also like we -- SGA was trying to have gender-free pronouns in our constitution, I think.
- GORDON: Right.
- HIEGGELKE: Our senior year. So there was a lot of talk about that. And it really -- I mean, it was kind of intense, because I think it raised a lot of the hidden issues at Smith that I'm guessing probably still happen, where there's a lot -- I mean, at least when we were here, it was like there was a lot of overt GLBT stuff that happened, and everybody was like, yay! Until it wasn't okay. Until it was like, everybody thinks this is a lesbian school, and it's not a lesbian school—
- GORDON: Oh, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: —and I hate that — you know, that people think that it's a lesbian school. And it's like, whoa, I really didn't realize that you felt that way! And I mean, we lived on Elm, so for us it kind of was okay, but it definitely brought up a lot of those issues at the time. And I think, I mean — I would say — well, I guess my perspective hasn't changed that much.

GORDON: What?

HIEGGELKE: Well, just that, you know, I remember at the time thinking that it was fair for there to be men here, and I think now — well, okay. To be fair, you hadn't gone through transition, and like, it was really hard.

GORDON: I think it's really hard, I think personally and for the college, like where do you draw a line, you know. For someone like me, I had already transferred once, so really, you're going to kick me out?

HIEGGELKE: But I'm glad you waited to transition because I think honestly, I don't know.

GORDON: I don't know too many people who did start hormones and stay.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, that's true.

GORDON: To be honest with you.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, I mean, so I guess, when I heard about the stuff about what was happening with the transwoman who applied here, I totally think she should be allowed to come here. I don't know that it's fair for someone who knows that he wants to transition and be a man to come here.

GORDON: Their first year, straight off the bat.

HIEGGELKE: Or even someone who wants to transition fully while they're here, to be honest with you. I just — I don't know.

GORDON: What, if like I had gone here all four years and halfway through was like, actually this is what I need to do, and I need to go?

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, I mean, I don't know, I just think that if it's going to be a women's college, I get needing to go through the process of discovery, and I really see how Smith is a place where, you know, you don't realize until you're here that gender's such a huge spectrum, right? Like yes, we're all women, but being a woman is so many different things, right? I mean, it just, it's so different to — and so I think that kind of discovery is important to do here, and I think it's a safe place to do that discovery.

GORDON: Definitely.

HIEGGELKE: But I think that if you know that you're a man, and then maybe you should consider that you might not want to graduate from a women's college, and that you might not want to be a man at a women's college.

GORDON: Right, cause it is tricky. I mean, it is a subject that I — I've actually, it's been nine and a half years since I started transition, and over the past couple of years I've definitely gotten more comfortable talking about my past and where I went to school, but there are still instances and there were plenty of years where I tried to avoid that question completely. So it is, I mean it's tricky being a man and having a degree from a women's college, but I love Smith. I love that I went here, it is really special to me. I mean we talk about if we have daughters that we want to try to push them to come here.

HIEGGELKE: Try to push them?

GORDON: Well.

HIEGGELKE: (laughs)

GORDON: So yeah, I mean I do. I love it here. I think it's tricky, like we did have a friend who started hormones his last semester, but it's like, at that point you don't leave.

HIEGGELKE: We also had friends who decided that they wanted to transition who left.

GORDON: Who left, yeah, yeah, so it's like, do you really leave though, like your last year, last semester? That seems a little un—

HIEGGELKE: Well, yeah, totally.

GORDON: We're now splitting hairs, so.

HIEGGELKE: I mean, I guess my point is, if I didn't know of other colleges that I thought were safe spaces, like I think Sarah Lawrence probably would be a safe, an okay safe space to be in, or something like that—

GORDON: Well, and it's ten years later, where there's now like — there's a frat in a college in Boston and they raised money for their frat brother to have top surgery. Like it is a different world.

HIEGGELKE: That's fair.

GORDON: So, anyways.

HIEGGELKE: Didn't know that question would be so— (laughter)

GORDON: Really, you didn't?

REES: So were there any other hot topics or issues on campus during your four years?

GORDON: Women of color. I definitely think there was a lot of—

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, I think, well that's always — well Amadou Diallo was shot, that was a big deal.

GORDON: Yeah.

HIEGGELKE: That was a really big deal, and Ruth was really supportive of us having events on campus and talking about it. God, Ruth was awesome.

GORDON: That was right before my time.

HIEGGELKE: She was an awesome president. It was really cool. She was just really out there, she always knew who you were. She knew who I was, my freshman year, she's like the college president, she'd be like, hey Erica! You know? So I mean, that was a big deal for her to leave. I think people were really bummed when she left. Ann Coulter came to speak, remember that? That was—

GORDON: Oh that's right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: That was—

GORDON: People were not happy.

HIEGGELKE: Oh no.

GORDON: I feel like—

HIEGGELKE: People were not happy.

GORDON: I can't remember if there was racist graffiti on campus at one point too.

HIEGGELKE: That's right!

GORDON: That's what I — yeah.

HIEGGELKE: Was it — did people get drunk and —

GORDON: I don't know.



HIEGGELKE: Yeah, it was like something happened and they like did all this really bad stuff.

GORDON: But it happened more than once too. Within a short period of time it happened twice, and so that's like—

HIEGGELKE: I suspect that some of the social issues that have been a problem all the time here were happening then too.

GORDON: Just continue—

REES: Yeah, yeah, right.

HIEGGELKE: I mean, we haven't fixed this world we live in, so everything kind of is like this microcosm. Smith is like a bubble but it's also like a microcosm of everything else that's happening, and I think it's always more intense here. Right? Everything is way more intense here, so everyone's talking about it all of the time. (laughs) In ways that you don't necessarily talk about it, but it still exists in the "real world." (using air quotes) So.

REES: Yeah, so—

#### BREAK IN VIDEO

GORDON: It was like right here.

RIDEOUT

[videographer]: Are you good?

GORDON: Yeah. Is it gonna—

RIDEOUT: Nope, it looks great. Go for it.

HIEGGELKE: He did do video. Was that your minor?

GORDON: I did do video here too. No, I almost did it as a minor, but it was like an unofficial — I needed like one more class, but I already had an extra semester, since I—

HIEGGELKE: Just — he was a video minor. (laughter) They're not gonna look at your—

GORDON: That's right.

HIEGGELKE: They might look at your transcript. Oh god, don't look at our transcripts. (laughter)

REES: Well speaking of majors and minors, how did both of you come to your area of study?

GORDON: (laughs) I actually, kind of again, since I was pretty young—

HIEGGELKE: You have to repeat the question.

GORDON: Oh. My major. How did I come into my major. Yeah, I mean I think, since I was pretty young, I wanted to major in women's studies. When I was first in college I was thinking about doing psychology and then I thought about doing video as well. Actually, I also wanted to go to film school, and then there was a whole hullabaloo about me not going to film school. But then I came back to like, okay, I want to do — I did a lot of women and gender and media studies. Which was really good for me. I loved it. I don't know, I mean, am I going to have this conversation again? We just had it earlier today.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, but they weren't there.

GORDON: It's true.

HIEGGELKE: (laughs)

GORDON: I think it's tricky and challenging for me, because I really value my coursework and what I did, but in some ways, I also think I was still trying to figure out who I was, and so I was really in some ways searching, especially here, like Erica was saying, there's all these different genders, and I was just desperately trying to figure out if there was a type of woman I could be, and I couldn't, you know. That just wasn't my answer. But I didn't know at the time that that's what I was doing. It's easy for me to look back now and figure that out, but I had no clue. With that said, I mean, I loved it, and even though it's not something that I use directly in my professional life, I definitely think it's helped me maybe be a little kinder to people, a little bit more patient and understanding of the different perspectives that people might come from. Yeah. How about you?

HIEGGELKE: Well. I was an American Studies major, and my focus was on race and ethnicity. I came to my major kind of cause I just couldn't make a decision about what I wanted to do, so I wasn't sure if I wanted to do Latin American studies or sociology, or I have a fairly literary background. My parents run a newspaper in Chicago, so I had grown up kind of doing a lot of book-y type stuff. I actually just got my Master's in library science about a year ago, so go figure. I spent a lot of time in Neilson when I was here. (laughter) But a lot of it was, I couldn't make a decision when it was time to make a decision, I just didn't know what I wanted to do, and I am so glad that I was an American Studies major, because it's really — I was just talking to somebody, actually

— I work in IT now, and yes, you can get a computer science degree and work in IT. But a lot of people don't. And one of the things that I love about American Studies was, it really made me think about things in a whole systems kind of way. So it's not that I'm going at something just from a sociology perspective or just from a history perspective or just from a literary perspective. It really caused me to think about the big picture of culture and the United States and — so I ended up really, really loving it. And it was the best major for me, so maybe it was good that I couldn't make a decision.

REES: Yeah, sounds like it.

GORDON: Some of my very favorite coursework was here in the archives, actually.

REES: Oh really?

RIDEOUT: You can say that again, I just had to put it between you guys.

GORDON: Okay. Yeah, I think I did more than one project, but my very first semester here, the — we primarily worked in the archives, and it was really cool.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, you were really into that class.

GORDON: I loved it. I loved it.

HIEGGELKE: It was cool.

GORDON: And then I think my two other almost favorite classes here were my German studies, my German film studies classes, which were really cool. But that professor's long gone now. It was his last year when we graduated.

HIEGGELKE: God, I had so many — I really loved — my classes here were awesome. Some of them, I look back and I was like, that was so cool!

GORDON: I know.

REES: What were some of your favorite classes?

HIEGGELKE: We were just talking about this the other day. So a couple of my favorite classes were in art history, which were totally outside my major. But I took this class in Bauhaus that was really cool.

GORDON: Oh yeah, you loved that.

HIEGGELKE: I remember I took a literary theory class with Janie Vanpée, who's still here, and a couple of really neat comparative literature classes. I can't speak another language, but some of the comp lit classes were just really awesome.

One of, I think the most formative classes I took, though, was with Floyd Cheung, who ended up being my advisor. He teaches a class — well, he might — I don't know if he still teaches it — about the Japanese internment during World War II. And it was something that, growing up in the Midwest, you just don't learn about, and so it just kind of rocked my world. Now living in Seattle, it's everywhere, but at the time, I had no idea. I just really remember that class really intensely. I mean, almost every class I took here I can remember, and there were some where I was like, I don't really like that class, but not mostly. Mostly I really liked the classes that I took here, so.

REES: Yeah. Did you have favorite professors, or professors that you were particularly close with?

HIEGGELKE: Well, Floyd I really loved. I loved Ginetta Candelario. She just — again, to have someone who's a strong woman, so articulate. Kevin Quashie, he was really great — really hard, and so it was really good to do — like I did well in his classes, so I was like *yes!* Who else? Kim Kono, I really liked her a lot—

GORDON: Yeah, you loved Kim.

HIEGGELKE: I took a Japanese literature class with her that was really great.

GORDON: Yeah, I loved Kevin too, I mean absolutely. Hans Vaget was the professor who did the German history. And it was film throughout, basically it was two semesters and one was the films of World War II, and then the Weimar Period right before, and so yeah, loved him, which was just funny, cause he was like this old German dude, and I never would've—. My advisor was Lisa Anderson — Armstrong, Armstrong. I don't know if she's still here.

REES: Yes, she is.

GORDON: Okay, and it was like her first year, I think, teaching here, when I started having her. Who else did I really like?

HIEGGELKE: Those were the big ones.

GORDON: Those were the big ones.

HIEGGELKE: I was here longer than you, so.

GORDON: You were, that's fair.

HIEGGELKE: I get more professors to love. Kevin Rosario, actually, I really liked him too.

GORDON: Oh yeah.

- HIEGGELKE: He and I had an interesting relationship, though. But by the end of it I really liked him. (laughter) Yeah, I think I was trouble for some of my professors though, not gonna lie. I can say that now.
- REES: Yeah, you can. You can say anything now. (laughter) So I want to talk about house community a bit. Were you both in Sessions your whole time at Smith?
- HIEGGELKE: Except for my first two months. I moved in—
- GORDON: Well, and your second-to-last semester, and then my last semester.
- HIEGGELKE: Oh I moved out! Yeah, that's right.
- RIDEOUT: (inaudible)
- GORDON: Oh, sorry.
- HIEGGELKE: Well, I lived in Sessions most of my first year.
- GORDON: House community. We're talking about house community.
- HIEGGELKE: We're talking about house community.
- GORDON: Okay, go.
- HIEGGELKE: Okay. So, I lived in Sessions for pretty much my first three years. I mean, for the most part, other than two months. And then I moved out — my senior year I moved off campus for a semester, and then realized I didn't like it, and so I moved back into Sessions. Yeah.
- GORDON: And yeah, I lived in Sessions — so I was here for five semesters total, and lived there my first two years, and then I lived in a — what are they called now? I can't—
- HIEGGELKE: Friedman.
- GORDON: A Friedman for my last semester. And Erica had already graduated and moved, so it was kind of like—
- HIEGGELKE: The charm was gone.
- GORDON: Most of my — well, and it's like, there are now students there who are four years younger than me, who I usually wouldn't — so, it just seemed like the good decision to make. Plus I was like, what, in the backyard? (laughter)
- HIEGGELKE: Yeah, pretty much.

REES: Literally.

GORDON: Yeah, pretty much.

REES: What was the house community like in Sessions during your time there?

GORDON: I think it changed over the two years that I was there. But for the most part it was really close. I don't know, I mean you were there for much longer than I was.

HIEGGELKE: The house community while I was in Sessions was really intense. When I moved in, it was definitely like we were the queer house. Do you guys still use the term BDOC [Big Dyke On Campus]? (laughter)

REES: Yes.

HIEGGELKE: Sorry, that was really loud.

GORDON: Is the Jolt still around?

HIEGGELKE: Oh my God, the Daily Jolt.

GORDON: The Daily Jolt, yeah is that even still around?

HIEGGELKE: Drama!

GORDON: It was like a community message board.

HIEGGELKE: It was like this message board.

REES: Not anymore. There are equivalents though, to that.

HIEGGELKE: It was really dramatic. So it was like, you know, totally like, people were out, there were a lot of cool girls who lived there. I don't know if you guys still have shower hours, but it was like, shower hours were hours where you could shower with another person and the house didn't mind. Sessions had twenty-four hour shower hours.

GORDON: Twenty-four hour shower hours. (simultaneously) (laughter)

HIEGGELKE: I mean, it was just kind of like that. You still could smoke in the house my first and sophomore year.

GORDON: Oh yeah that's right, I forgot about that. No, you could when I came, and then your senior year they stopped it.

HIEGGELKE: So senior year we stopped. And so there was kind of some strife about that. So on one hand we had this really close community, a lot of the house events — so every year we have the haunted house that everybody kind of comes together and does. For senior banquet everybody comes together, but then we'd have these long, hours-long processing sessions about the house reputation, and some people were straight and they were really upset, and it was just like hours and hours and hours of processing. I'm sure it was actually probably only like an hour, but it felt like two or three hours. So yeah, so it was close, but also I think there was kind of an interesting undercurrent there. But I think ultimately, you know it's funny, there's a ton of Sessions people back for Reunion and we're all hanging out. And even people who—

GORDON: We weren't super close then, we're hanging out.

HIEGGELKE: You know, we hang out with each other now. We all snuck in yesterday.

GORDON: That's true. (laughter)

REES: Aw, that's adorable.

GORDON: I think it being one of the smaller houses too probably helped.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah. Well yeah, and at Convocation we would always do the most inappropriate poster, like banners. Oh my God, we got into so much trouble. I mean, inappropriate. Now I'm like [hiding face].

GORDON: Slightly embarrassed.

HIEGGELKE: But that was our reputation, like that's who we were, we were the inappropriate house with the BDOCs.

GORDON: I loved our house. I'm not gonna tell that story.

HIEGGELKE: It was fun. Yeah.

REES: You can tell the story.

HIEGGELKE: Nope.

GORDON: No. It's not even necessarily about us, so that seems a little unfair.

REES: Okay. (laughs)

GORDON: (laughs)

REES: Okay, so we're going to move into some wrap-up questions.

HIEGGELKE: Okay.

REES: Let's see, so since Erica graduated first, right?

HIEGGELKE: Mm-hmm.

REES: How did you chart your life together post-grad, post-Smith?

GORDON: I think at first we really actually had no plans, and we were a little aimless for a minute there. I mean we moved out, so we moved to Bellingham, Washington. And with kind of this like, oh, you just have a semester left, it'll be no big deal, whatever. And yeah, we had no idea that we were moving somewhere where there was no economy. (laughs) So we weren't actively necessarily planning the next steps of our lives, but we knew we would do it together. So yeah, we lived in Bellingham, I graduated and came out there, started medical transition. And then—

HIEGGELKE: Lived on no money.

GORDON: Lived on no money.

HIEGGELKE: I mean nothing, like we I think made collectively—

GORDON: Was it like twenty maybe?

HIEGGELKE: Maybe twenty grand a year. Maybe less actually.

GORDON: That first year, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: I mean, it was like, we were broke as a joke.

GORDON: But our rent was like four hundred dollars, so.

HIEGGELKE: And you worked at that fish packing plant.

GORDON: Oh, I was getting the most random temp jobs ever.

HIEGGELKE: And I worked at Starbucks.

GORDON: So thankfully I had health insurance. (laughs)

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, but also, I had to take out a lot of loans, so it was an intense — post-Smith was an intense time for us. I mean, I was really depressed actually, for the first three or four months that I lived in Washington, because we had this



really great community here, and then all of a sudden it was gone, and we were three thousand miles away—

GORDON: From each other, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: And I didn't have a job, and I didn't know what I wanted to do, cause Smith is like a marathon and a sprint at the same time, you know, you're just like — everything's just like ahhhh! And you're just constantly working and working and working, and then you're done, you're just like, okay, what do I do now? (laughs) So I think we're still figuring it out.

GORDON: Yeah.

HIEGGELKE: To be honest.

GORDON: Well and when I got to Smith too, so my plan when I started college was like, okay, I go to college, then I go to grad school, and I start my professional career. And I got to Smith and actually like you, a lot, you were like, that doesn't have to be your plan. And finally I was like, okay, it doesn't. I didn't come up with another plan. (laughs) So yeah, we were in Bellingham. It wasn't great for us, and then we decided to move to Seattle, and that's where we've been since.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah.

REES: And when did you guys get married?

HIEGGELKE: We got married two years ago.

GORDON: In February.

HIEGGELKE: In February, which is my grandparents' anniversary, so. Yeah.

REES: And same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts a year after you graduated, is that correct?

GORDON: I think, I can't remember.

REES: Pretty recently after you graduated. So I was just wondering if there was conversation on campus about same-sex marriage.

HIEGGELKE: I do remember there were a couple of alums who — or not alums, they're alums now. Students who were together, and one was British, and I remember a lot of talk about how — I think they live in England now, because they couldn't stay here, you know, and how unfair it was that they couldn't stay here. But you know, same-sex marriage is tough—

GORDON: I don't remember—

HIEGGELKE: Because at the time, there were so many other issues that affect the community, and it wasn't a big issue then. I think it became a big issue over the last ten years, as things grew traction, and it was more likely that it was gonna pass, people have stood behind it more, and it has become a much bigger issue than it was then. It just, it was like one thing out of many that we were talking about at the time.

GORDON: Yeah, I mean some of the other stuff is like job protection, and even though there are still laws throughout the country that prevent job protection for gays and lesbians, that was a big one. And I know some of the conversation was like, how do we talk about marriage when I can't find housing or a job, or stuff like that.

HIEGGELKE: Positive Sexuality Educators! I was part of that group!

GORDON: I wasn't gonna say that! I wasn't gonna say that!

HIEGGELKE: We used to show porn, remember?

GORDON: Well, no, again, that was before my time.

HIEGGELKE: Oh, so fun.

GORDON: I know, I was about to be like (whispering) what about PSE? But. I wasn't gonna blow up your spot.

HIEGGELKE: But yeah, like safe sex, that was a big deal, you know.

GORDON: Yeah, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: That was bigger, I think, than marriage, to be honest. Although we did volunteer and help pass the Washington law that just came in. And that was really exciting. I mean it's really exciting — we are able to marry opposite-sex, so we've been legally married, but it's still our community, and we still feel really excited for that, so.

REES: Yeah. So who have you become since Smith?

GORDON: Well, I'm a dude now. (laughter)

HIEGGELKE: I have become a man since Smith. (laughter)

GORDON: I love you. Who have we become, wow?

HIEGGELKE: Well, you know, it's funny, we went out to dinner with someone we haven't seen in ten years, and she kept being like, what?! What?!

GORDON: Oh yeah.

HIEGGELKE: Who have we become? Well, at Smith I was really anti-establishment, kind of always protesting. My parents always make fun of me because they came to visit once and I made them do this protest in downtown Northampton and it was raining. (laughs)

GORDON: That was before my time too.

HIEGGELKE: Well, now I work in IT, in philanthropy, I work for the Gates Foundation, so I get to live out the mission. But it's a much more professional environment. We have become marathon runners, so quit smoking a while ago, hung up that.

GORDON: And I was never athletic, I was like the sad asthmatic kid, so for both of us it's pretty cool. I don't know, yeah, we have chilled out a lot, but we're still, I mean, we're still really passionate. But I think like with a lot of people, college is this really crazy time, and you can still figure out ways to live out your values, but not necessarily, for lack of a better term, and granted I hate this term, be in people's faces.

HIEGGELKE: It's really important — well, it's really important for me, but I think for both of us, to be good citizens, and to me that means really being a positive force in the community where you live, and just really kind of how can you contribute and give back to your community. And I think at Smith, especially when we were here, you feel like it has to be in a big way. And it doesn't.

GORDON: In a loud way, yeah.

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, and it doesn't, right, it's about like, hey, am I voting in every election, or hey, am I volunteering for my community, you know?

GORDON: Like, how do I help my neighbor?

HIEGGELKE: Yeah, yeah. So we live pretty boring lives now, but it's awesome. We love our lives.

GORDON: Yeah, it's true.

REES: Good. So when you think about your time at Smith, is there a distinct memory or story that always comes to your mind first, or is it more—

GORDON: I mean, I met my wife there. When I think about Smith, is there a distinct memory? I mean, it's hard not to think about that. And in some ways, to think about 9/11 too, given that that's where I was when that happened. But what else? I don't know, I mean, there are just so many funny things that happened, and just so many wonderful friends, you know.

HIEGGELKE: When I think about Smith, it's just a lot of memories, and it's good and it's bad. I worked so hard here, and I saw a lot of success here, but there's also a lot of things that I did that, you know, looking back I'm like, oh buddy. (laughter) You were really growing up during that time.

GORDON: I've got a good one! The sign?

HIEGGELKE: No. Don't tell them about that. This is going on the Internet! For anyone to look at! Some of us have still not grown up! (laughter)

REES: We can revise the sheet if you want to.

GORDON: I mean, whatever.

RIDEOUT: (inaudible)

HIEGGELKE: Good! We're out of tape.

GORDON: Okay good.

RIDEOUT: No, not really.

REES: Okay, so we'll just end with, do you have any advice for current or future Smithies?

HIEGGELKE: Study what you love. And have fun.

GORDON: Yeah, have fun. And as clichéd as it is, enjoy it, because it does go fast. And I knew when I was here that I loved it, but I don't know, I think sometimes you don't realize how special something is until it's over.

HIEGGELKE: But I will say, I haven't talked to a single Smithie who — their life has gone the way they expected it to, but that it hasn't impacted them in some way. So that's okay! It's okay to not know what you want, you know?

GORDON: Yeah, and it's okay to be lost for a little while afterwards, we all find our way.

HIEGGELKE: It's all here.

GORDON: She pointed to her heart, for those only reading the transcript. (laughter)

REES:                Okay, well I think that we're out of time, but thank you so much, that was really incredible.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2013, and Julia Greider, July 2014.*