

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Kit Wang, Class of 1981*

Interviewed by  
Sarah Dunn, Class of 2011

May 21, 2011

## **Abstract**

In this oral history, Kit Wang describes the overall campus atmosphere (especially in regards to lesbianism, homophobia, and race), her experiences living in Hubbard House and Hover House, her work as a biochemistry major, her participation in the first national gay rights march on Washington, her involvement with the Lesbian Alliance, her experiences in seminary, and current work as an Episcopal priest.

## **Restrictions**

None

## **Format**

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 60-minute tape.

## **Transcript**

Transcribed by Thomas Goodman at the Audio Transcription Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Olivia Mandica-Hart.

## **Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms**

### *Video Recording*

**Bibliography:** Wang, Kit. Interview by Sarah Dunn. Video recording, May 21, 2011. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Kit Wang, interview by Sarah Dunn, video recording, May 21, 2011, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Wang, Kit. Interview by Sarah Dunn. Transcript of video recording, May 21, 2011. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Kit Wang, interview by Sarah Dunn, transcript of video recording, May 21, 2011, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted on May 21, 2011, with:

KIT WANG

by: SARAH DUNN

DUNN: Perfect. So you have to pretend that's not there, just chat with me. So this is Sara Dunn, and I'm conducting an interview with Kit Wang, Wang. Sorry.

WANG: That's all right.

DUNN: I go back and forth.

WANG: Happens all the time.

DUNN: 1981. Class of 1981, on May 21, 2011, for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. Thank you for being a part of this project, agreeing too. We'll start out with just some basic questions on how you decided to come to Smith. So what made you choose to come to Smith College?

WANG: Well I started out at the University of Delaware, they had early admit freshman honors program, and I knew that I'd transfer, and when I was transferring, I knew I wanted to be a biochemistry major, and there weren't a lot of schools in the late '70s where they actually had a biochemistry major. You can be a chemistry major with a bio-chem emphasis, or you can be a biology major, with a chemistry emphasis, but there weren't a whole lot of schools that had the major, and Smith had the major. I came here in the winter to interview, and it was a really snowy day, and the campus was really beautiful, and I had come from Rensselaer Polytech, where it was just gray and awful, and it was beautiful here, and the science labs were gorgeous, and they had great equipment. I looked at Colby, and the science labs were under construction. So it was sort of like all of these funny little things. My mother was really excited that I was looking to go into college, and she really wanted me to go to a women's college, and she was really jazzed about the prestige of Smith. So when I was accepted, I decided to come here.

DUNN: What was the atmosphere like on campus, when you arrived during your time here? Pretty overview, but (laughs).

- WANG: Yeah, it was, preppy was big. It was pretty preppy. I think, I was just really happy to be here. It was really awesome to be in a women's environment, where for me anyway, I didn't worry so much about like dressing up, and wearing make up, and when I was in high school, my family dress code was pretty strict, so I dressed up a lot, and I didn't have to. I could wear jeans, I could wear overalls. Campus was pretty politically active, maybe not so much as in the '60s, but it felt pretty politically-charged, although I'll be darned if I can remember about what, and lesbian politics were big. I lived in a house where there were lesbians, a couple of couples, and it was uncomfortable.
- DUNN: What house was that?
- WANG: I lived in Hubbard.
- DUNN: You started in Hubbard?
- WANG: I started in Hubbard, yeah, and lived there sophomore and junior year, and yeah, it was, one of the couple's was really well-integrated, and wasn't really out as a couple, and then there was another couple that lived upstairs on the top floor, and kind of had a reputation for being outrageous and flamboyant, and in retrospect, I don't really think they were, but they were sort of, they weren't preppy, and they weren't waspy, I think it was just much of a class thing, as it was easier to say they were different because they were lesbians, than to say they were different because they were different class-wise, or from a different place, or whatever. I still think that class is the big issue that nobody talks about here, and Smith not being any different from, I'm an Episcopal Priest, it's not any different from any Episcopal church really, I think.
- DUNN: Do you remember convocation when you came in, and what it was like?
- WANG: Wow.
- DUNN: Because they talk a lot about convocation becoming –
- WANG: Yeah.
- DUNN: – rowdy when President Conway took over, and we're very curious.
- WANG: Yeah, I remember Rally Day, and Rally Day and all our fun hats, and Rally Day was kind of a blast. Yeah, I don't so much remember convocation.
- DUNN: Maybe that's significant, just kidding. (laughs)

WANG: Yeah, you know. Who knows. Maybe I didn't go, although I was sort of a bit of a goody two-shoes. If you're supposed to go someplace, I am going to go there. Probably why I'm a priest, you know.

DUNN: So what was your house atmosphere like at Hubbard, and then you lived in Hubbard for sophomore and junior year.

WANG: Yeah, then I moved to Hover. You know, Hubbard was yeah, it was kind of mixed, and then folks graduated. Some of the folks who were the sources of contention graduated, and we got a crop of freshman, and it wasn't clear that I was going to get a single, so while I would've gotten a single for senior year, but truthfully, I really wanted to live in a co-op. I wanted to spend less for dining, and have a little more flexibility. I worked for the athletic teams, so I ate at Davis a lot junior year, you know, grilled cheese, and tomato, and blueberry yogurt shakes every night for dinner, like three nights a week, no creative imagination. But you know, being at Hover, man, I could make my own food, or take leftovers, or heat up food when I got back. It was a less — there was less pressure. I want to say there was less pressure to conform, and that's not maybe entirely true. There was less pressure to conform to the preppy main stream.

DUNN: At Hover?

WANG: Yeah, in Hover there was less of that pressure, although there were a few folks who were in Hover, who weren't sort of the feminist/lesbian — the person who was my work partner was really an outlier, and had been away I think for maybe some mental health time off, and it was very interesting because she was really clueless about what was going on in Hover, and it was yeah, it was interesting that she was, and she was intense and interesting, and I don't think I ever got to know her really well, but yeah. Hover was an interesting place to live. We cooked all our own food, and planned our meals, and worked at the co-op, the food co-op in town so we could do our grocery shopping there.

DUNN: Oh, that's cool.

WANG: Yeah, it was pretty cool. We had the good parties on campus.

DUNN: Yeah?

WANG: Because I guess, at that point, the drinking age was transitioning up, and so there's a lot of pressure in the houses to make sure that underage folks didn't drink, that's changed. It meant that there was a lot more scrutiny, I think, on parties, and I think maybe the political atmosphere around lesbians on campus, also meant that there was some scrutiny, and there were sometimes issues if women wanted to dance together or

whatever at a party, and you know at Hover, we danced a little, but we mostly just had a good time, and it was not so pressured, I think.

DUNN: What happened if women wanted to dance together, would there be contention around it from other people, or –

WANG: I think that it was one of the things, the sort of the source of the complaints, and the queer history exhibit, that it contributed to those complaints, and to uncomfortableness and to gossip, and just the kind of uncomfortable background noise of homophobia, and uncertainty, I think, also.

DUNN: So, Hover house known, when you moved in, did you know it was a lesbian house?

WANG: Oh yeah.

DUNN: Yeah?

WANG: Yeah.

DUNN: Very well reputation?

WANG: Yeah, I mean — well I don't know about, I don't know if it was very — yeah I mean I guess it was, and you know, it retrospect I don't know that it was all that wild, really. I mean, we had a dog that lived with us, and a couple of cats, and none of them behaved very well, (laughs) maybe we were more outside, but I think it was just that all the outside folks who were in all the other houses, in Hover, we were all in the same place, so we looked a little more outside. Yeah, it was sort of like you just picked all the outliers, and put them in one place instead of — and so that means that maybe the person who was my work partner was the outlier, and we got to be the mainstream. So it wasn't as outrageous I think in a lot of respects, as some people think.

DUNN: Because it might have been (unclear) at the time?

WANG: I mean, you know, people were offended if you didn't wear a bra, or didn't shave your arms, or didn't shave your legs, and those things were a big deal back then. And in retrospect it all seems pretty silly, because they weren't really things that mattered a whole lot.

DUNN: Were you aware of your own sexuality before coming to Smith, or was Smith a part of your awareness?

WANG: You know I think it was coming, and I think Smith sort of blasted the door open. I don't know if it would've been different. I think it would've taken longer if I'd been someplace else, but it was much more

— I think it was easier probably at Smith, than it would've been if I had stayed at Delaware, or gone to some other co-ed school, and safer, a lot safer.

DUNN: Did you feel accepted here, on campus? Did you feel like an outsider at all?

WANG: You know, I think so. I will say, I am an outsider, you know, I'm an outlier, and that's my role. It's probably one of the reasons I'm a priest. It's one of the things that enables me to have good boundaries there. I can't say that I have particularly good boundaries when I was at Smith. It's something that I learned, but yeah, it was a good place to be. I have a couple of really close friends that I've stayed really closely in touch with, and you know, after 30 years, if you can say that, I think that's a lot.

DUNN: Were there other members of Hover house, or were they just random people that you had met?

WANG: Well it's inter — I was a bio-chemistry major, and I lived at Hover senior year, and I worked with the athletic teams, and I was really involved at the chapel. So, my friend Beth is somebody I knew from the chapel, and she kind of wrestled with the sexuality thing a bit, and you know, ended up being straight, and married, but really wrestled with what it meant to be a straight feminist, and she was an English major, and that was always a big struggle for her, and I think, we were in the midst of political correctness battles, and you know, the only politically correct feminist was a lesbian, and there's a lot of kind of political pressure, and it wasn't about sex, it wasn't at all about sex, it was about politics, so I think that that was hard, for I know it was hard for her, as someone who was pretty, you know, she was kind of questioning, but I think a lot of that was political for her. She wanted to be accepted, so it was an interesting dynamic.

DUNN: Would you like to talk a little bit more about the clubs and organizations? You mentioned the athletics association. What were you doing there?

WANG: Oh, yeah, I was a student trainer, which meant I taped a lot of ankles, and helped like take people's height and weight at the beginning of the year, when we did physicals, and just sort of kept an eye on games, and provided first aid, and sort of athletic-related, gave the folks who needed ice for their ankles or their knees, made sure that folks got appropriate care if they needed more serious care. One of the advantages of that was I traveled with the team, and because I wasn't playing, I mean players did drive, but I was checked out to drive the school vans, and so some really funny things used to happen driving vans. Like we went to Tufts once, and somebody, not my van, did a Chinese fire drill in the

middle of, I think Ball Square, or one of those roundabouts not too far from Tufts, and in the fall of 1979 was the first march on Washington for gay rights, and a bunch of us checked out. They conned me into checking out the student government car, and seven or eight of us, I don't know, max capacity, piled into this old station wagon, and drove from Smith to DC, and camped out on a friend of mine's floor, so that we could be at the gay rights march in '79, and that was a riot, and I think it was against the rules, I think we went too far, but we didn't know that we weren't supposed to go out of the state or whatever, but it was a great thing to have been able to be there, because we wouldn't have been able to be there otherwise, and we had stopped at Dunkin' Donuts, and gotten a box of doughnuts, and then somebody took a purple magic marker, and you know, wrote I don't know, "Smithies going to Washington," or "Smith Dykes going to Washington," or "Honk if you're Queer," or something, and put it up in the window, and you know, waved and honked at a lot of people. It's a long drive. It's a really long drive.

DUNN: Did anybody ever find out?

WANG: Yeah, not as far as I know. Maybe somebody said something after the fact, but I don't remember there being any repercussions.

DUNN: Awesome.

WANG: Yeah. Probably I think maybe they tightened the rules up after that.

DUNN: They're definitely different now.

WANG: Yeah.

DUNN: We'd get in so much trouble.

WANG: Yeah.

DUNN: But I love it. How was the march on Washington, the first march on Washington?

WANG: It was amazing. It was amazing. I grew up in the DC area, and it was the first time, my parents moved maybe my first year at Smith they moved away from DC, and or maybe even before my first year at Smith, so I hadn't been back to DC as an adult, or as a queer person, and it was just amazing because literally like oh my gosh, I have never seen so many queers in my life, anywhere. You pulled into a gas station in Arlington, and there were boys, gay men at the pump next to you, and some lesbians across the street, and dykes on bikes, and various women's motor cycle organizations, and it was — if I hadn't grown up in DC, and didn't have kind of an impression about DC tourists, cherry



blossoms, whatever, it's just everywhere, all of these gay and lesbian people, it was amazing. It was really, and I hadn't been out very long, so it was really stunning. That was really stunning.

DUNN: It's amazing. You talked a little bit about issues, and struggles with class, a little bit about sexuality. Did you notice any other things happening during your time here, with religion, or race, like what was the tensions happening, discussions happening on campus?

WANG: Yeah, I mean I think, I think there was some stuff happening around race that I probably, because I was so involved with the gay/lesbian stuff, it kind of washed over. I'm Asian-American, so it's always been interesting for me to kind of take a step back and look at the conversation on race, which is often black-white, or has in the '70s and '80s, and it was really very black-white, and I think at Smith it was very black-white. What I remember about Smith was it was the first time in my life I'd ever been around other Asian women, in any number, and that was, you know, I was a science major, you know there were tons of us, and there were women from Chinese American, and Asian Americans, and there were women from Hong Kong, and Singapore, and Malaysia, and I don't know if there was anyone from mainland, but you know folks from all over, Korea, and it was really incredible to be around other Asians, because I'd only really spent time with my father, and sort of incidental people in my father's life who weren't — my father doesn't really have family, so I found myself seeking out Asian culture, and Chinese culture, and all of a sudden, here I am at Smith, and here it is. That was, it was a great experience for me, and maybe one I didn't take in as much as I might have, if I wasn't embroiled with, well you know I had my fingers in a lot of highs, and was really busy anyway. But it was great to be, you know, just to know that in my chemistry lab, there was me and four other Asian women in a class of 15 or 20, and it was more inclusive, and more diverse, and made me feel less outside, because I'd always felt kind of outside because I've strongly identified with being Asian, even though most people say I don't look Asian.

DUNN: Were you involved with any of the lesbian organizations on campus?

WANG: Yeah, I was on , you know, I belonged to the Lesbian Alliance, and did workshops, the house workshops, where three or four of us sat and told our coming out stories, and took questions from the floor.

DUNN: Did you do this house to house?

WANG: Yeah, in different, you know, in a bunch of different houses, and I can remember — people ask the same questions a lot, so that was a good, they got predictable, but at one point, three or four of us had done a whole bunch of these together, and we got really tired of telling our

stories, and we changed stories. We traded stories, and in retrospect, not such a great thing to do, but at least we told the stories of people who are in the room, and did fess up to it at some point, but we sort of knew each other's stories so well at that point, but I realized that one of the things that's harder I think about being older, and forming community as we get older, and are outside of school. I talk with my colleagues about this is, we don't have time to tell our stories. We have to figure out how to transmit all that information about who we are, and where we come from, in mini-packets. We don't have the luxury, or we have to be able to create the time to do that, and in many respects that was one of the huge gifts, both of those workshops, but just about being in a place where we lived in small houses, and sat around round tables in the dining room at breakfast, and lunch and dinner, and had conversations with each other. It was really important, and foundational, and I miss that, and I kind of mourn that, because clearly there's some shift in the dining culture, and the house culture, at Smith.

DUNN: Did you find any hostility when you would go to the houses?

WANG: Yeah, there was, and oddly enough, I don't really remember. I mean I remember that it was there, I don't remember what it was. I think probably, you know, yeah it was there, but you know, I mean we were Smithies, we were fairly civil. I mean, maybe, and I think if people were really upset they wouldn't come, you know. Yeah, but much more civil than a lot of the discourse these days, I think yeah. It was the '70s and '80s (laughs).

DUNN: Great times.

WANG: Yeah. We still had candlelight dinners, and table clothes, and cloth napkins, and tea.

DUNN: We still have tea.

WANG: Oh that's good.

DUNN: Lots and lots of tea, every Friday, four o'clock tea.

WANG: Yeah, yeah.

DUNN: We still have that. What other kinds of organizing would the Lesbian Alliance do? Workshops?

WANG: Yeah, I mean, truthfully, I think workshops were big. They were starting, I think I probably, there was clearly some political stuff going on, but I don't remember if that was sort of as I was graduating, so I was trying to figure out what I was doing, and you know, I think I may have just missed some of the really big — there was a little bit of political

stuff with the administration wanting the Lesbian Alliance to be more accepted. I think the meltdown at Sessions House happened while I was still here, but I can't remember that for sure.

DUNN: What was the meltdown?

WANG: You know, there were some lesbians at Sessions, and parents of some freshmen got upset, and called the administration, it was sort of a do. And Lesbian Alliance was called in to do a workshop there, and I seem to recall that it kind of, it didn't really seem like it escalated. I think also there were some women safety issues in the greater valley. I volunteered at the Rape Crisis Center in UMass. I can't remember when, and I remember a take back the night, and I couldn't tell you what year it had been, but in the community, and that was a big doing on-call overnight on-call for hotline for the Rape Crisis Center at UMass. That was pretty intense, and that was work that I continued when I went to seminary. I worked at the battered women's shelter, and that was a good, I think the political work with the Lesbian Alliance, and with the Rape Crisis Center, was a really good training for the work that I did when I was in seminary.

DUNN: Had Take Back the Night started on campus at all yet?

WANG: I think that may have been like the first year, because it's sort of coming somewhere out of the recesses (laughs). It's amazing how much I've forgotten. You know, we're trying to remember where buildings are on campus, well there are so many new buildings, but just remembering like, Parsons, Annex, I couldn't remember, any that other co-op, the mainstream co-op that still exists, yeah.

DUNN: Did you have any really inspiring professors while you were here, or mentors?

WANG: I took a bunch of Afro-Am studies classes with Jenella Butler. She was awesome. Did psychology of women when it was psychology of sex roles, with Carla Gold, and that was the hot course, and that was sort of the new art history or something. Dick Ungsworth who was the chaplain, was I think really critical in my formation, and just sort of the group of women at the chapel who took that work seriously, and Dick invited the admissions deans, and some of the interesting preachers and professors from the various divinity schools around the country, to come and preach, and then visit with students. So I met Joan Forsberg, who was the dean of admissions at Yale, Cynthia Plub Howard, who was a young Episcopal priest, Smith alum preached, Flemming Ratlidge who was an Episcopal priest, Jim Forbes who was at that time the preaching professor at Union, and went on to be the pastor at Riverside, and is now recently retired from that, Peter Gomes, came, and Peter Gomes came senior year, as I was trying to decide if I wanted to apply to

Harvard for seminar, and I'd been to Yale, and I loved Yale. I was talking to Peter, like so I can't decide if I should, I really like Yale. Can't decide if I should apply to Harvard. He's like, well what did you like about Yale? I said well it was a great community, it reminded me a lot of the community at Smith, and it was close, and it was friendly, and it was warm. He said, you'd hate Harvard. So I didn't even apply. I probably wouldn't have gotten into Harvard either, but I was accepted to Yale, and I went to Yale, and I was actually later able to share that story with Peter, because he was a mentor of a priest that I worked with. Yeah, so that was kind of fun to be able to share that. I'm hugely grateful to Stans Cordellis who was my advisor. When I went to him and said, I'm applying for seminary, will you write me a recommendation since you're my academic advisor, I was a terrible science student, a really terrible science student, and I expect that he was relieved that I wasn't planning on going into science, or asking him for a grad school reference for science. That would've been wicked cheeky on my part, but he said to me that his chaplain at Princeton, his Greek Orthodox chaplain, had been his chemistry professor. So he didn't think it was unusual, or peculiar at all, and he was happy to do it. So that was a real gift.

DUNN: So coming out of Smith in 1981. What did you expect as a Smith graduate, in terms of, I mean for you, this was very different I feel like from a lot of people we wrote in here, in terms of merit, work, family, but it was a lot?

WANG: Yeah. And I was kind of lucky I was young when I graduated. I went right to seminary, and spent three years in seminary, and kind of got to do the whole, what we had done with the Lesbian Alliance, all over again. (laughs) Only with guys. We had a Gay-Straight Coalition that was designed to be a dodge, so that folks can say well it's gay and it's straight, and folks who needed to, can say well I wanted to a friend, and maybe see if we can convert, whatever, it was a much different time, but it really was an alliance. So, yeah, we did a lot of those same sort of educational stuff, and I think that I was, you know, when I became an Episcopalian, it was not a real friendly environment for women in the ordination process, and it was really not a friendly environment for out-gay folks. I couldn't have gotten through the process anywhere probably at that point, as an out-gay person. But I think that being at Smith really equipped me to kind of dig my heels in, and do what I need to do at Yale, and to be involved in the wider university. There was an umbrella gay and lesbian group that had been founded by two of the folks who were I think a year, and two years ahead of me, that pulled representatives from all the gay and lesbian groups on campus at Yale, together into one room, to talk about planning events, and how organizations can support one another, and we had the first gay and lesbian awareness days on campus at Yale, and we had a pink triangle, campaign at the divinity school, where we passed out some salt, and

pink triangles for the gay and lesbian awareness week, and lots of people who didn't identify as being gay and lesbian, more out of solidarity, and that was pretty cool. And then of course there was the reintegrating into co-ed society thing, which was different, and interesting. That's mine.

DUNN: Oh is it? Okay.

WANG: You know, I was sort of startled, in October when the beards started showing up. It's sort of funny the things that you miss, you know, but I think I was really well prepared academically and I think I worked a lot harder at Yale, and applied myself a lot more, and still had a good time, but was really able to kind of get into the participating in the student government committee process that we had, and it really stood me well than when I finished seminary, and was out, you know, if you have Smith and Yale on your resume, you know Smith and Yale and an Asian surname, I worked in non-profits, so you always get at least a hard look and a phone call, and I know that I was hired. I was the director of religious education at a large, very wealth north shore, north of Boston, parish, and I know one of the reasons they were so charmed by me was because I had gone to Smith, and I had gone to Yale, and I wore my suit and my pearls, and did that, north shore matron kind of deal.

DUNN: I'm like trying to figure out where to go. What difference, I mean, we kind of were just talking about this, but what difference has a Smith education meant to you? Would you make the same choice if you had to do it all over again?

WANG: Yeah, I think if I did it all over again, I think I would apply myself more at Smith. I spent a lot of time doing a lot of extra-curricular and social stuff, and it probably would've been good if I had, maybe, I think I might have majored in education, because that's what I've been doing for the past, it was a long time, I was ordained recently, and in the interim, I've worked in non-profit organizations, doing educationally-related out-of-school informal education and sciences, informal education, safety, and prevention education, curricular development, program development. I wrote a lot, tons. I did a lot of training, that I wrote a lot at Smith. I got some of those skills reinforced here. I worked for organizations that promoted family and women's issues. I worked for campfire boys and girls right after they went co-ed. It was still really a women's organization. I think that having this background was really helpful there, and understanding that kind of organization, and I think we are sort of, well, I can speak for myself and say a person of my background, a woman of my background, was expected to, in addition to whatever they might do professionally, and family-wise, to also participate and volunteer in charity, or foundation, or other work like that, and I've always worked in non-profit organizations, doing that

kind of work professionally, but because that was part of the value that was instilled, I think somewhat here and somewhat in my family, as an expectation, and you know I liked it, and it was, I think, maybe culturally, the culture of organizations like campfire, and girl scouts, and camping organizations are a lot more like Smith, than they might be like some place else. That's been, so I think that's been helpful in being able to navigate, certainly working with boards, and those folks, trying to recruit board folks, and I do that now in my role as a parish priest.

DUNN: Oh. Do you have any advice for current or future Smithies, especially in the state, I feel like there's a lot happening right now, that I feel very similar to what was going on?

WANG: Yeah, I think it's important to be out in the world, and not just in the library, in the books, in the classroom, but to not neglect either of those things, and to get out from behind your computer, and to not have all of your social time and relationships electronic. To take advantage of the face time, because I don't think, once we leave the academic environment, face time goes away in the way that we have it here. You know, work is really different. Having a family is really different. I realize being back at reunion, I have a 13 year old, I'm a parish priest, I'm a part-time priest. I do some volunteer community work. I've become very solitary, and it's like there are so many people here, and everybody's — it's like oh yeah, yeah, that's right, I used to do this, some other time than Sunday morning, you know. I think that taking advantage of that, and taking advantage of all of the different opportunities that are available. I didn't go abroad, because I transferred. I'm really glad that folks do that, and there are lots more interesting opportunities, internships, but also just the stuff that's on campus, is huge, then using those resources that Smith has, after you leave campus, is also huge, and not forgetting that the networks are, you know, they're incredibly — I don't ever go anywhere, ever, that somebody doesn't have a connection. You know, there are two women who are reunion-year with me, who are from the congregation that my family worships in, you know, and everybody's got a aunt, or a grandmother, or cousin, or niece whatever who went to Smith. So it's important to keep track of those, and make them part of the network, and part of, because it's a strength, it's a huge strength.

DUNN: Okay. Can you talk a little bit more about what you do now?

WANG: Yeah, I'm an Episcopal priest in the diocese of Maine. I'm vicar of a small congregation in a semi-rural, semi-vacation community, a lot of retired folks. Most of our communal life focuses around Sunday morning worship, so I preach every week, which is a little bit like writing a paper every week, one with set bible passage that's determined by the church. I spent a lot of time fidgeting with people, listening to their struggles, being present. I do a lot of funerals. I spent a fair

amount of time with people who are dying, people who are in the hospital, and I spent a lot of time with people who aren't part of my parish, and who sort of come upon me because I'm out there, in my white collar, and they know that I'm a clergy person, and often because they know that I'm a queer person, in ways that, so I often have contact, and am able to spend time with them around significant issues. I'm mentoring some gay seminaries, which is really fun. When I was applying to seminary, I wrote, you know, in code, on my seminary applications, that I wanted to work with women, and people who felt disenfranchised from organized religion, and what I really meant was that I wanted to work with lesbians, and I didn't have the vocabulary at that point to say queer folks, but I'm finding, and I put that away when I went to seminary, and just said, oh I really want to be a parish priest. I want to work in a congregation. I thought that doing those two things would be mutually exclusive. And I was called to this little tiny parish, I'd say 25 people on a Sunday morning. In that congregation, there are at least eight of what I call the gay offspring. They're folks who are affiliated to that community. One of them's 70, one of them's my age. A couple of them are adults, older teens, and their primary connection with that community is that their parents belong to that community, who are gay or lesbian, or queer, and that's not why I was called. That's not what the search committee was looking for when they called me, but it's become a big part of the ministry that my congregation does, and the ministry that they give me room to do, in the diocese I work with, integrity, which is the GLBTQ affinity group for the Episcopal church, and chaplain to the main chapter, and I work with young people just in my capacity as a priest, and I was recently invited to give an opening prayer at a GSA, gay-student alliance rally in Portland, honoring and trying to promote a safer environment for queer kids in schools, and the impetus was I think the third youth suicide of a high school kid in Maine, but I was really stunned that they wanted a religious person to come and pray at the beginning of this rally. I was so moved. I was so moved, and you know, I think we talk a lot about, there's a lot of hoey in the church, a lot of stuff about the gay-straight divide, or churches having issues with that, but it's as hard to come out Christian in the gay community, and to be out in that role, so it was just so, it's really wonderful to be affirmed by a group of young people in that role, and sort of in both of those places. Yeah.

DUNN: That's amazing.

WANG: You know, maybe some of them will come to Smith.

DUNN: I hope so. We always want them to come to Smith. (laughs) Thank you so much for your time.

WANG: Oh you're welcome. Thank you for asking me.

- DUNN: Is there anything you want to add, any last minute, since we have you here? (laughs)
- WANG: This was great.
- DUNN: Was it the same lesbian kind of circular relationships happening then, as there is now? (laughter)
- WANG: You know, I suppose. I suppose. It's a closed community. Everybody, yeah, I think and I also think it's also greatly exaggerated. It's always greatly exaggerated.
- DUNN: How so?
- WANG: It looks, I think that — oh well, somebody was just reminding me that there was a rumor about Hover House, that there was a bell that rung at midnight, and when the bell rung, you had to get up and go to another bedroom.
- DUNN: That did not happen.
- WANG: Not as far as I recall. I slept through it. (laughter) You know?
- DUNN: Oh my goodness.
- WANG: Maybe before I was there, but certainly not, I think it's apocryphal. I think it's one of those stories that people who have nothing better to do with their time, make up because maybe they wished that's what they were doing.
- DUNN: Did you hear about it, when the house closed?
- WANG: Yeah, and I can't remember sort of where or how, but yeah it made me sad. Made me sad.
- DUNN: Was there any talk about it, like within people you were still talking to, or that you can recall coming from campus? Was it pretty obvious why they were closing it, or did they make up?
- WANG: You know, I think what I heard at the time was you know, that it sounded like spin. It sounded like it was too small. It wasn't cost-effective, blah, blah, blah, and you know, we all understood that there were political overtones, and yeah, maybe we could've done things differently, and it would've been easier, but the reality is, I don't think we were that outside. You know, we were just outside enough, and it's sort of the whole, if you want to say something bad about somebody, it's like commie, pinko, queer. Those are still, those are the things that people are able to say in public spaces, and use those epithets.



DUNN: Well again, thank you so much.

WANG: Well, you're welcome.

DUNN: It's been wonderful talking to you.

WANG: It's been fun. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Thomas Goodman, July 2011.*