

Whitman LGBTQ+ Student Organizations and Walla Walla University

Excerpt from Interview with Chris Wolf '98, July 24th 2019.

00:22:23.21 **Wolf** I actually, I just had a memory of—one time we had a panel, we took a panel of people to talk at Walla Walla College, which was the Seventh Day Adventist college in College Place. Which is a pretty conservative religion, pretty conservative school. But somehow someone there invited a panel of LGBT people to come and speak on their campus, which I thought was really awesome. So, I was invited to come speak and I think I was the 'B' on the panel, [laughs] in the alphabet stream. People from the audience could ask questions, 'cause they'd, you know, 'they'd never seen a queer person before.' They had questions, which was great. I remember a guy stood up and asked me, "Okay, so if you're bisexual, does that you mean have to have a boyfriend and a girlfriend your whole life or you'll never be happy?" That had never even occurred to me before anyone could think that, but it was really cool that he asked it.

00:23:31.00 **Wolf** So, the way I answered it, I just remember the moment, I said like, "Well, let's say that you think people with blonde hair are really pretty but you also think people with dark hair are really gorgeous, like both of those are beautiful to you. It doesn't mean you'd have to have a blonde partner and a dark-haired partner your whole life in order to be happy. It probably means that you could be attracted to or happy with either one. Or even something different! It would be fine." So, I just said, "No, I'm a very monogamous person, I could ever only be with one partner but it might be a man and it might be a woman. I don't know until I meet someone and fall in love and then that's the person." And the guy was just like, "Oh! I've never thought about it that way before, okay." So, it just was a really special experience for people to be really honest with questions and answers and get to know folks that are different from ourselves. Yeah, I remember that being a really fun conversation.

00:24:42.06 **Robson** Yeah it sounds really cool. We always wanted to do a little more outreach to the local schools, but it can be hard sometimes.

00:24:53.04 **Wolf** Yeah, you can't just insert yourself into someone else's program. I think it was one of the professor's or somebody at Walla Walla College that had invited us to come speak. I don't even know how that got set up. We jumped on the opportunity obviously.

Excerpt from Interview with Jed Schwendiman, June 21st, 2019.

00:47:50 **Schwendiman** Oh, the other thing I haven't talked about but this was an annual tradition. For many years, [pencil drops in background] we would get an invitation from a faculty member at Walla Walla University who was teaching a—I think it was a sociology course, it might have been a public health course, I'm actually not sure. But every year, we would get an invitation to come bring a panel of students to this course, let's say a psychology course, to talk about what it was like to be part of the LGBT community. And it was a great exercise because the—and we would have anywhere from five to eight students who would go and be on the panel. In fact, I think I was on the panel once, and sometimes we would bring faculty with us. But we'd be in front of this class, and it was usually a class of about fifty or sixty students and it was on the other side of town. Nobody knew them and they didn't know us, and they would ask us these crazy questions! Like "How can you be Christian and gay?" [chuckles] Everybody on the panel would get a chance to introduce themselves, and talk a little bit about themselves, and then answer questions. That experience became this great bonding activity because, you know, sometimes the questions were crazy, and sometimes the questions were really heartfelt. I think of it as one of the kind of community outreach service things that we did, but it was a chance for our LGBT students to talk about themselves, but also kind of to take a step outside of their life and think about what would it be like to be LGBT at Walla Walla University, a religious school where it was clearly not so accepted. I think it made them feel grateful to be at Whitman and they got to know each other, the other panelists, a little bit better, which was kinda cool. So that, yeah, that was always fun. I think that was a highlight of the year.

Excerpt from Interview with Bex MacFife '11, November 21st, 2019.

00:53:16 **MacFife** There were also—okay, one of the most moving things that happened to me—I think during all of college but also as a GLBTQ intern, also in Walla Walla, was when I and a few other people went to Walla Walla University—the Seventh Day Adventist church—I think this was my last year, my final year, to be on a panel—on a queer panel for a sexuality class. It was like psychology or sexuality... something like that. To sit at the front of the room with a bunch of other people talking about our coming out stories, talking about our identities and how we moved through the world and what queerness means to us to a crowd of people who had no idea, but were really genuinely interested and curious—like would ask questions that seemed like the simplest question—that we were explaining a lot of the basics. I would have expected them to be mean about it and they were just— they just didn't

know. They just hadn't had opportunities to think about it—to talk to people and there were so many people who were like, "You are the first gay person I've ever met," and I'm like, "I doubt that." Sort of having that space to really represent the range of sexuality—I think that was one of the most meaningful things, and recognizing how powerful it was just to tell my story, and how [pause] my story was worth something, like my coming out experience, my being an intern, my having the safety-ness of my social network. I was able to see the contrast of the people who didn't have that context, who didn't have that support. That was mostly the Seventh Day Adventist's school, so it wasn't necessarily Walla Walla at large. I think there is a spectrum of Walla Walla where it goes from Walla Walla University to the town to Whitman College. That was when Whitman College and Walla Walla University kind of intersected and that was when I was like, "Oh, yeah, people really don't know." Which makes sense! Not everyone dedicates their whole time to understanding the letters of the alphabet that we use. It is kind of cool when I realized that I can just use them naturally and explain them comfortably. That is kind of a privilege that, kind of like a special thing.