

University of Virginia School of Law
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Oral History Interview Transcript
Cover Sheet

Narrator: Kenneth Williams

Interviewers: Addie Patrick, Sarah Zube

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Project Abstract: Lambda Law Alliance 40 is a multimedia project produced by Law Special Collections to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the University of Virginia Law School's chapter of Lambda Law Alliance (1984-2024). In collaboration with current UVA Law Lambda members, Law Special Collections conducted oral history interviews with past UVA Law Lambda members and officers from the organization's four decades to highlight individual experiences and document the organization's forty-year history.

Interview Abstract: Oral history interview with Kenneth Williams, class of 1986, via Zoom, on March 11, 2024. Williams discussed his time as a member and president of UVA Law's Gay and Lesbian Law Students Association, which later became UVA Law's chapter of Lambda Law Alliance. He detailed events and activities during his tenure, including a successful campaign for the Law School to have an official sexual orientation nondiscrimination policy.

Beginning of interview

Addie Patrick: Okay. Hello, today is Monday, March 11, 2024. My name is Addie Patrick. I use she/her pronouns. And I am the library coordinator at the UVA Law Library. I'm Zooming in from Charlottesville, Virginia. Today we're conducting an oral history interview with current and former members of UVA's chapter of Lambda Law Alliance. We're doing this to both document the group's history in our archive, and also to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the organization. So, to get started, we'll go around the room and introduce ourselves. And I'll pass it on to Sarah to get us started.

Sarah Zube: Yes, I'm Sarah Zube (class of 2026). I'm a current 1L at UVA Law. I use she/her pronouns. And I'm also Zooming in from Charlottesville, Virginia.

Kenneth Williams: And I'm Kenneth Williams, and I'm a 1986 graduate of the Law School. And I'm currently a professor at a different law school in Texas. And I use he/him/his pronouns.

Addie Patrick: All right, Sarah, if you want to get us started.

Sarah Zube: All right, awesome. Yes, thank you so much for speaking with us today. We really appreciate it and are really excited for this conversation. So, to start off, we'd love to kind of set the stage with when you first got to UVA. And we'd love to first hear what brought you to attend UVA and why did you decide on UVA?

Kenneth Williams: Okay, why did I decide on UVA? Let's see, well it was the best law school I got into—got accepted into, okay, it was—came down to UVA and Georgetown. And UVA was, I guess, a little higher ranked than Georgetown. So, I decided to go to UVA. I did have some qualms because UVA was in a small southern college town. Whereas obviously Georgetown is in big Washington, DC. So, I thought, you know, I had some qualms about attending UVA for that reason, but I decided to go ahead. And it was a better school and had a pretty good track record in terms of placing graduates. And so, I decided to go ahead and attend UVA. And I figured it was just three years, and I can endure the three years. You know, so that was the reason I decided to attend—a great law school and a very good track record of placing graduates and providing opportunities for graduates.

Sarah Zube: Yes, you mentioned that the location of Charlottesville and UVA played a factor into your decision. Were there kind of any different ways that different aspects of your identity influenced that decision? Whether in the positive or negative direction?

Kenneth Williams: Oh, yes, well, definitely. I had qualms about attending UVA, because it was in Charlottesville, and the fact that it's a small southern town, and Virginia at the time did not have a very good track record in terms of GLP, you know, gay, lesbian, people. And especially me also being African American, I thought it could be a hostile type of environment. So, it definitely had some concerns there. But whatever called, Virginia was definitely not a friendly place for the LGBTQ community members and allies. And so those were really my concerns. I was concerned that I'd be very isolated, attending school there, whereas if I had gone to Georgetown, of course, there would be the big city, Washington, DC, and I'd have a community where I wouldn't be so isolated. I'd have a community I could turn to, both an African American community and the lesbian gay community also. So those were my big concerns, but attending UVA, and just the fact that it was in Charlottesville was my big concern.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely. When you arrived for law school, what were your first impressions of Charlottesville and the University like? Did it kind of meet those expectations? Or did it surprise you?

Kenneth Williams: I would say that when I first arrived—well, first off, you know, being a law student, you don't know what to expect. So, in a way, it was kind of overwhelming. And, but in terms of, I guess, I was a little nervous still, that it seemed very, you know, kind of fit the stereotype that I had, a small, quiet southern town. And so, yes, I guess it was when I first arrived, I guess I was a little nervous about just being there and having a life there. And would I be totally isolated there? And so, in terms of meeting other gay people, how would I go about doing that? Because back then there was no internet, there was nothing like that. So how would I even be able to reach out to other gay people? And I looked at the list of student organizations, they provided us with a list of student organizations. And you know, like BLSA [Black Law Students Association] and a women's law, but there was no gay lesbian association, or any kind of gay lesbian group. So, I was really concerned. Well, how would I actually be able to meet and connect with other gay people at the Law School and at the University? So that was my big concern when I first got there.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely. What was kind of, yes, when you were there, what was the sentiment towards gay students like at the time?

Kenneth Williams: Well, when I first—I would say my first year, the subject of gay people, and the gay community, I didn't know anybody who was gay most of my first year. And the topic never really came up. And so, you know, there just wasn't really—it's not like—nobody said anything negatively. But also, nobody said anything at all. It was just not a topic that came up. We didn't take con law until second year back then. So even in class discussions, there was never any issue regarding sexual orientation back then. In the other classes, criminal law and those sort of classes, I don't remember covering any case dealing with sexual orientation. That was before like *Bowers v. Hardwick* [(478 US 186 (1986))] and those decisions. So, the topic really never came up. Literally. Even con law the second year, I don't remember the topic coming up. Now, UVA Law Archives

I do recall, though, I went to—there was a small gay bar in the city, close to downtown. And I somehow found out about it. I don't know how I found out about it, but I did. And I went there. And that's, it was toward the end of my first year. And that's when I, the first time I connected with gay law students, there were a couple of gay law students who were at the bar that night. And that's how I finally connected. I would say, this was well into my second year, my first year, I'm sorry. While I was in my first year, the second semester, my first year. So, the first semester I didn't, there was no discussion. I had no connection whatsoever to anybody gay at the Law School, or at the University for that matter. And, you know, obviously, your first year, you're so busy, for one thing—but still you wanted a connection, but I had none. Until, like the middle of my second—my first year of my second semester.

Sarah Zube: Yes, how did you feel—yes, did you feel that being able to later on have that connection, how did you feel that it influenced your law school experience?

Kenneth Williams: Well, it was great, because it felt like I had people I could talk to and relate to and do things socially with. That was important also, because we had different potlucks and gatherings. And that was nice to actually have people who were like me, who I could actually talk to, and it didn't feel so isolated. When I first got there, I felt very isolated. And once I was able to connect to other gay people, it didn't feel so isolating.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely.

Kenneth Williams: And remember, this was back in the 1980s. So, we're talking about, there wasn't, you know, there weren't openly gay, many openly gay people. Groups were very hard to connect to. There was no internet also. So, it was very difficult to learn of it, if there were gay groups or there were other gay activities going on. Gay social groups, it was very hard to connect to. Because there was no internet, there was really no way to connect to the gay community, the local gay community, even.

Sarah Zube: Yes, definitely. How did you find, kind of institutionally at the University, did you find that there was any support? Or did you also find that there was a lot of silence surrounding?

Kenneth Williams: I thought there was a lot of silence surrounding the issue. I know when we formed the group, we met with the Law School administration, we met with the dean, and he had a couple of associate deans attend the meeting, I remember that. We were meeting with them to ask them about—to explore the possibility of including sexual orientation in the non-discrimination policy. And I do remember Dean [of admissions, Albert R.] Turnbull (class of 1962) at the time, he kept bringing up the fact that that was a category that was not federally protected. And so—but yes, we brought—and Dean [Richard] Merrill, who was the dean [of the Law School] at the time, seemed sympathetic, and [Associate] Dean Turnbull didn't seem as sympathetic to the idea of doing that. But yes, we met with—yes, I think it was those two we met with. I do remember those two. I don't remember if anybody else was present, but yes. But a

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group of us met with the—we had a meeting with the actual dean. And I guess that would have been [Associate] Dean Turnbull. I do remember him being there, and raising the issue about the fact that it wasn't—sexual orientation was not a federally protected category. And I wouldn't say he was hostile, but he didn't seem as open, I would say, as Dean Merrill, to the possibility of doing that. And we did bring up the fact that there were other law schools that had done that, even though it was not federally protected at the time. I think—I do remember there were a couple of other law schools, like NYU [New York University] I remember specifically had sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policy. And so yes, so from that standpoint, Dean Merrill was very favorable, he seemed very favorable and open to the possibility of doing that.

Sarah Zube: What did it feel like to have those conversations at the time as a student? Yes.

Kenneth Williams: Yes. I mean, at the time, I would say—yes, I mean, I was impressed by the fact that the dean took time out to meet with us and to discuss—because at the time that was considered, I think, in society, like a fringe issue. And so the fact that the dean would actually take the time out to meet with us and discuss it. And the real possibility of doing that, I thought was very, you know I was impressed with that, that he was willing to do that. Because I didn't—I think we first contacted the—we didn't expect, from what I recall, we didn't expect to meet with the dean, we thought it would just be with the associate dean. We didn't think the dean would bother meeting with us over a matter like that. Because at the time, that was not a pressing issue in society. And so, but we were very pleasantly surprised and pleased that he took time out to meet with us.

Sarah Zube: Yes, that's incredible. And you also kind of mentioned that these conversations were also happening at other law schools and, more broadly, what other ways during your law school experience were LGBTQIA issues kind of being discussed and how did that influence your experience?

Kenneth Williams: Okay. At times at the Law School we, once we started the group, there was some discussion about—like I said, before we started the group, there were very few discussions about LGBTQ issues. When we started the group, we put on—I do remember we put on a couple of programs. And it was largely our group members who attended, like we had a speech by Professor [Gary] Peller and a couple of other—one other professor, Professor [William] Eskridge, I remember that. And I remember the attendance was primarily members of the group who attended. Outside the members of the group, we didn't have many others who attended the meeting. I attributed that to the fact that there probably were people, both gay and non-gay, who didn't want to go to the speech, for fear—concern that they would be considered gay. And so, yes, but yes, so we tried to put on a couple of programs to get a discussion going. I do remember when there was a billboard, there were bulletin boards at the Law School, each student group had a bulletin board. We finally did get a bulletin board, and we would put up articles if there was anything germane to sexual orientation, or legal issues, or, you know, just in UVA Law Archives

general, we would put up some notices. And we would always put up, of course, our notices about the meetings on the bulletin boards. But yes, at the time, there weren't really that many legal issues with respect to sexual orientation. I took a class on employment—you know, the classes that I took back then, there are classes now that I'm sure they spend a good amount of time on sexual orientation, like employment discrimination, criminal law, civil rights, you know, those sort of—. Back then there was no discussion. I don't remember ever discussing in class, any issue regarding sexual orientation in my three years. And I took criminal law, I took torts, I took obviously con law, employment discrimination. Several classes where today there would be extensive discussions of sexual orientation issues. But back then, like I said, I don't remember a single class in which we had any class time spent on sexual orientation issues. Even constitutional law, there was no discussion of—that would have been before *Bowers v. Hardwick* and there were really no other Supreme Court decisions dealing with sexual orientation. So, in terms of the Law School and legal issues, it was not very much discussed issue. Yes, obviously, we discussed it in the group and amongst ourselves, we discussed different things, but in terms of the Law School community, there just wasn't much discussion at all of sexual orientation issues.

Sarah Zube: Kind of turning to the group, how did you first learn about it? I think—did you mention that it was in a newspaper?

Kenneth Williams: No, I think I learned about it because I had gone to, I think I'd gone to this bar and I ran into a couple of members of the group, and they told me there was a group. And they told me, from what I recall, they told me there was going to be a potluck, upcoming. And they gave me the details about the potluck, and I attended a potluck. And that's how I basically got involved in it. But yes, I don't know. Yes, I don't remember it being in the paper. I remember, kind of running into a couple of students who told me about it. Former, a couple of students at the time. Yes.

Sarah Zube: Yes. Was there any kind of formal process to join it? Or was it mostly kind of informal word of mouth then?

Kenneth Williams: No, I think it was more informal, word of mouth. There was no dues, nothing like that. Nothing like that. You know, I remember we were having—we had a couple of potlucks. I remember having potlucks. And of course, we'd bring something but other than that, I don't remember. I don't remember if we got any kind of school funding. I don't recall that. I don't think we probably did. Because I don't know if we did anything that would have required funding, because we did have a couple of program speakers, but those were both in-house speakers, professors at the Law School. And so, we had potlucks and of course, we would bring stuff to that. And so, for the most part, we would not have had a need for money because we didn't have much in the way of programs. So yes.

Sarah Zube: Yes, what kind of what was the response from asking professors to do different talks? And what kinds of events did they do?

Kenneth Williams: Yes, they, the professors, obviously, we went to professors we thought would be open to doing it, who would be sympathetic. And when we approached them, they were more than willing. Professor Peller, I remember, and Professor Eskridge were both willing to speak to us. And there was no hesitation, I don't remember that, there being any kind of issue. And so, we, you know, there was—they agreed, readily agreed, and we set up a date and they agreed to give a talk. Now, I don't remember the topic. Obviously, it has something to do sexual orientation. I don't remember the actual topic. I just remember those two speaking to us and it being, you know, we publicized, it wasn't just for the members. We publicized it for the Law School student body. Anybody who would want to attend could have attended.

Sarah Zube: Yes, that's great. And then you talked about how there were potlucks being organized. Yes, what did being able to create that community and that social organization look like?

Kenneth Williams: Well, it was, yes, because it was good. Because I think a lot of people felt very isolated before we had the group. We had no real way to connect. And that provided us with an opportunity to connect with each other. We had potlucks and sometimes we would go—there was a gay bar downtown, and we'd go there sometimes and hang out and have a drink. And yes, so. And then we also learned there was a University gay group. And some of us would—got involved in that one also and we'd go to some of their events. And so, it definitely led to some social opportunities that we could have with other gay people. So that was a real positive for us.

Sarah Zube: Yes, that's fantastic. Did you see the group grow at all during your time in law school?

Kenneth Williams: Oh, yes, I did. I did. Yes, I did. And what was also very refreshing is that we had some members who were not gay, also, and so who were allies. And so that was also refreshing. And I think that also made some of the gay people in the group, some who were nervous about, I guess, being identified as gay, the fact that there were people in the group who were not gay. I think that kind of made them comfortable, because there wouldn't be necessarily the—. Like Michael Allen (class of 1985) was very well known in the school and he was also pretty active in the group. And I think he was pretty well known outside the group as not being gay, as being an ally. And so, I think that made some of the members of the group comfortable that they could be in the group, and that wouldn't necessarily mean that they were gay in other people's eyes.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely. What did the demographics of the group look like? Were there like a lot of intersectional identities, or did you find that it was more homogenous?

Kenneth Williams: It was much more homogenous, yes, I would say it was more male. I remember a couple of females, but it was predominantly a male—trans wasn't an issue

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back then at all. So, and you know, we certainly didn't have any trans students. And I was the only African—no, actually, there was an African American woman. So, there was myself and there was an African American woman. There was I remember a Latino, otherwise it was pretty much males and white, for the most part.

Sarah Zube: Do you think that shaped any of the conversations that were happening at all in the group?

Kenneth Williams: Maybe so, because we didn't deal at all with maybe issues that other groups, gay and lesbian people of color, might have that are different. So yes, I think that probably did shape the group, the conversation, some of the things that we did, and some of the topics that maybe that we chose. There was no real concern about addressing issues that gay people of color might have that might be different from the dominant community. So yes, I think that probably did shape the community, the group. Yes. I think at the time, the group was fairly new. And it was, a lot of it was just getting off the ground and getting members and getting people who wanted to be members, and feeling comfortable that they could be in the group. So that was a lot of it, just trying to get the group off the ground and get the group established. And yes, and we decided our project would be adding sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination policy. I do remember going back to that. I do remember, Dean Merrill assured us that even though it wasn't an official policy yet, that that was a policy of the Law School. Nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation. I do remember that. He was very adamant about that. There was no discrimination at the Law School based on sexual orientation. That was—even though it hadn't been officially, you know, official policy, that there was definitely, that was the practice at the Law School. It hadn't been codified, but that was definitely the practice at the Law School. Yes, so that was our big—to make, you know, the policy of nondiscrimination. That was a big, but yes, there was no discussion about any other issues regarding people of color, women who might have different issues. There was no real attempt to do that.

Sarah Zube: Yes, and it's amazing to see the groundwork that was laid by the group at that time, and see how far it's come now. And just seeing how diverse the group is now. It's really exciting. And so much of it does go back to how we started.

Kenneth Williams: Right, exactly. I mean, I've seen in the alumni magazine how active the group is and how definitely a prominent part of the Law School and that definitely wasn't the case when we were there. So, very pleasant to—very happy to see that. Yes.

Sarah Zube: Yes. How do you find yourself reflecting upon your time when—as part of the group and part of the University?

Kenneth Williams: Yes, I mean, UVA was a very good experience for me. My worst fears never were realized. I didn't have to endure any real, serious homophobia when I was there. So, yes, it worked out pretty well. The group, like I said, I think the group was very helpful. Because law school is a very stressful experience, and very stressful to

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feel isolated, being in a situation where you're isolated. And I do remember the first semester was very stressful, but law school first semester is going to be stressful. But then being isolated, in addition to that, was very difficult. But it definitely helped to be able to connect to other people who were gay and lesbian, part of the LGBTQ community. That's also interesting. At the time, we called the group, it was just the Gay Lesbian Law School Association. And now it's just the way the term has expanded, LGBTQ, LGBTQ, I guess now, so it's a much broader group now. So, we'd never had any thought to adding trans or even bisexual, nothing like that to the name of the group. That wasn't part of the conversation at the time, a consideration. So that's nice to see also, just the fact that the group is so well accepted, and the fact that there's so many different communities are accepted into the group.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely. No, it's really incredible to see and as a student, being part of it, it's so nice just to see how inclusive it is, just so many different identities.

Kenneth Williams: Do you have any trans students at the Law School? [Zube nods]. Okay, great, great. Okay. I think back then when I was in law school, I think a trans student would have had a very hard time, I think.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely.

Kenneth Williams: Yes. I think it would have been a very difficult experience for them. Yes. But that's great. That's great, to see how it's grown in acceptance and everything.

Sarah Zube: Yes, what would you hope for the future of Lambda?

Kenneth Williams: Well, I would hope that it would continue to grow. And I would hope that it would continue to be an important part of the Law School, and that it would also be active in terms of educating the community about LGBTQ issues and addressing issues that are important to different segments of the LGBTQ community, like people of color and the trans community. And that's what I would hope, and just continue to educate people about—because we always have to be vigilant, in terms of our rights. You know, we had [US Supreme Court Justice] Clarence Thomas write that, I guess it was the dissent or—concurring opinion in *Dobbs [v. Jackson Women's Health Organization]* (596 US __ (2022)), where he called into question same sex marriage and *Lawrence v. Texas* [(539 US 558 (2003))], those rulings on privacy. So, it shows that we always have to be vigilant, because there are always forces who are going to try to take those rights that we have achieved in this struggle away from us. So, I'd like to see the group not become complacent. And to realize that we always have to continue to be vigilant, we have to continue to educate, and we have to continue to work for—to maintain our rights and to expand our rights also.

Sarah Zube: Yes. What advice would you have for young law students and lawyers, in being able to enter the legal field as an LGBTQ person, and how we can best advocate for those rights?

Kenneth Williams: Okay. Let's see. So, I guess now you have a situation where law firms and all that I guess you have to pledge not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, I guess, in order to interview. And I would imagine most of the law firms, government agencies, employers probably have policies now in place. I guess I would try to seek out whether or not—what sort of, if you're considering a law firm or any kind of employer, what sort of support would be there in terms of LGBTQ employees? Are there LGBTQ employees at the law firm or agency, whatever, wherever you want to work, have an interest in working. Because it's just very important and very helpful to have people who are supportive. And people who are like you. It's very important to have people who have a shared experience. And so even though you're going into a place that may not appear to be hostile, it still is very important, I think, to have people there who have a shared experience with you. And so, I think diversity is very important. I think it's very important. And one way you can—so I think, if I were looking for a job, I would be looking for a place that values diversity, even though there's some backlash to DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] and all that stuff these days. But I would still be looking for a place that would value that because that's still very important in terms of your being successful. Your identity, I think it's very important in being successful, so that's what I would be looking for. My advice would be that. I mean, one big concern we had about when we were in law school, was just could you put something like you being a member of the group on your resume? And we had a discussion about that, and most people decided, no, you can't, because there would be too much discrimination against you if you did that. And today, I would imagine it'd be no issue at all if you put Lambda on your CV, there'd be no issue at all. It might even be a plus at some places. So, yes. So, that's a change that I'm very happy to see also, that you can basically be who you are, and feel free. Feel comfortable being who you are and celebrating the fact that you're active in the Lambda group and you don't have to hide that and it should be—. Your leadership, that should be seen as an important leadership position and opportunity. And law firms and employers should look at that very favorably.

Sarah Zube: Yes, that's really interesting about the resume comment. Yes, because I think I put Lambda membership on my resume and never had a second thought about it. So, it's really interesting to think about, yes, previously having to hesitate, and there potentially being negative ramifications for that.

Kenneth Williams: Right. When I was in law school, I do remember an episode where another BLSA member—I had an interview with a law firm, another BLSA member—somehow it got back to me, I don't remember all the details. But somehow it got back to me that the partner who had interviewed me had asked—. This student, this BLSA member had clerked for the firm previously. And he had asked this person, this other BLSA member, whether I was gay. And so, I don't remember how it got back, whether he was the one who told me that or—somehow it got back to me that that question had been asked. And so, that was disconcerting at the time. It was disconcerting. I don't know why he would have thought—you know, who knows? But anyhow. But yes, somehow that did get back to me. And that was a real concern at the time. Today that

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wouldn't be an issue. No employer would be stupid enough to ask that. They would ask the person directly if they had an interest in knowing, I guess. And for one thing, if they asked, you probably wouldn't want to work there [laughs]. Unless they were viewing it as a plus somehow, a plus, and so otherwise, you probably wouldn't want to work there if they were inquiring. But you know, definitely showed that there was definitely some hostility or prejudice, bigotry in the profession at the time in terms of hiring, so we had to be very careful.

Sarah Zube: Yes, absolutely. Yes. Did your identities at all influence your own career path?

Kenneth Williams: Yes, I would say it probably did, because, yes, I would say probably did. I ended up practicing criminal law and going into more public law, where I felt I would be more accepted with a prosecutor or government agency. And then I became a law professor. So, I think I did pursue avenues where I would feel more comfortable and where I'd be more accepted. Yes, because at the time, I just thought it'd be very difficult to work for a private law firm. And there'd be a lot of eyes on you in terms of your social life, and how are you carrying yourself and all that stuff. And whereas, there wouldn't be the same scrutiny if you go work for the DA's office or go work for a public defender. And then I ended up getting a position at the university. And, definitely, that was much more accepting place. So, yes, I think it did influence my career trajectory. I think it definitely did.

Sarah Zube: Yes. That's all the questions I have. Addie, I'm not sure if you want to ask anything else?

Addie Patrick: Yes, I, this has been really wonderful. Thank you. I had some—I'm all about diving as deeply into the details as possible. I know that memory can erase some of those, so—

Kenneth Williams: Right, it's been a long time. [Laughs.]

Addie Patrick: Yes. So, I think, with any of these follow up questions, you know, whatever details you have. But I was really curious about the gay bar and that you mentioned that was the place that you went to and met these other students. I mean, the Charlottesville restaurant and establishment scene changes so rapidly. I'm curious if you could describe, if you remember the name of this place, or if you could describe it?

Kenneth Williams: I definitely don't remember the name. I have a picture of it in my mind. I remember it being very small. It was like in the heart of downtown and it was very small, there was a very small dance floor. A very small bar area. It was just a very—I remember it being a very small place. I remember there being—yes, it was just maybe like kind of like a house or something. It was, had that look to it. But I definitely the—. Okay, maybe the name is, might be coming back to me [pause]. The Cha Cha Palace. I think that was it. Yes, yes. The Cha Cha Palace. I think that was it.

Addie Patrick: Okay, I'll have to look. I also volunteer at the [Albemarle Charlottesville] Historical Society. I'll have to look into that because these—

Kenneth Williams: Okay, okay.

Addie Patrick: —little things, they just, they come and go, and I wonder how long that—how that place got started and everything. But I'm glad it was there for—as a place for Lambda students to go.

Kenneth Williams: And you know, it was primarily, you know, non-law students who were there, but you know, there were people in town and—. So, it actually it was kind of nice in a way because it also gave us a chance to meet other gay people in town. Some of the, I remember some of the law students used to refer to them as "townies." You know, the people who were there who were not part of the Law School or the University. So yes. But I remember, I seem to remember it was the Cha Cha Palace, something like that. Yes. Yes, it was downtown, very small. Very small place. Very small dance floor. Very small bar area. Yes. But I do remember it being downtown. I remember that.

Addie Patrick: And let's see. So, you mentioned some of the other events that Lambda put on. Were there specific ones, and you talked about the nondiscrimination policy as well. Were there specific events when you were president that were—the seed was your idea that you pursued and wanted to see through?

Kenneth Williams: I think it might have been the nondiscrimination thing. I think that was when I was president. And I think that was my idea to pursue that. Yes, yes. So, I think that was it. And I do remember, I was the one who approached Professor Peller about speaking to us. And so, I thought—I do remember wanting to have some kind of program that would be available for the larger Law School community. So, I do remember, I was the one who approached Professor Peller. And he was completely willing to do it, agreeable. And I do remember being a well-received speech he did. I don't remember the topic, but I do remember it being well received.

Addie Patrick: And the potluck events, where were—how were those organized? And where were those hosted?

Kenneth Williams: Usually, they were at a member's apartment. And I do remember, yes, they were at members' apartments. And yes, how were they organized? I think we had decided we would have one like maybe once a month, or something like that, just to check in with each other, just to be able to spend time with each other. So, I kind of remember it being something like that, like, once a month, we were doing that.

Addie Patrick: And did, so did Lambda interact at all with other student organizations?

Kenneth Williams: At the time, no, we didn't have any kind of joint programs with other organizations. Yes. At the time, no, no. There wouldn't—it's not like today, where there'd be some intersection between some of the issues. At the time, there wouldn't have been, at least we wouldn't have thought of any kind of intersection with the BLSA or the women's law student association, or even groups like the ACLU. And I don't even remember if we had an ACLU chapter. But yes, there was no attempt to approach other organizations about any kind of joint programming. No.

Addie Patrick: Do you recall where Lambda met, if they met in the Law School?

Kenneth Williams: I do remember we did decide we were going to have—it's funny how it's all coming back to me. I do remember a discussion where we decided we would have a meeting, we would have our meetings initially off campus. And then we decided we were going to have a meeting on campus. I do remember us deciding that. We still ended up—I don't think we got anybody new. But yes, we decided because we thought initially it would be easier for people to meet, who were in the closet, off campus who wanted to remain in the closet. But we decided also that it was important to have a public, be public, have a public appearance and a public—. So, we decided, I do remember at one point we decided we were going to have a meeting at the Law School. And it turned out there was mainly the people who would usually come to the meetings. I don't remember anybody new, but I do remember that we had at least one meeting at the Law School. I do remember that. Yes. But for the most part, the meetings would occur at—. A lot of times the meetings were arranged around the potlucks also. So, we'd have a potluck and we would discuss what was next, what we were going to do. That sort of thing.

Addie Patrick: And so, maybe you already touched on this a little bit, but it sounds like when you had that initial meeting with the students at the bar, or you just ran into them, that the organization existed already, but then it very quickly became more formalized, or was it kind of formalized before?

Kenneth Williams: That's correct. No, from what I recall it was not very formalized, it was just more of an idea. And I think as time went on, it became much more formalized. And we got a couple of members who were very, also very gung-ho about—Michael Allen being one of them—I remember, wanted to make the group much more formal, and much more professional. Basically, to be on par with the other student constituency organizations like BLSA and the women's law students and Hispanic law students. Yes. So, there was definitely a push, at some point, to make it much more of a formal organization. But initially, I don't remember it being very formal. It was much loosely, a much more loosely organized group.

Addie Patrick: I think I have one more question. One more detail. Do you recall the end result of your conversations with administration about the discrimination policy? After that conversation, what happened next?

Kenneth Williams: Yes, I don't remember the end result. I know, probably, I'm pretty sure it didn't end up with a policy because I don't remember there being one enacted while I was at the Law School. So, I don't remember how the dean responded to us. I don't even remember, like, what was going to be the next step, how he was going to respond to us, or anything like that. So yes, I don't remember the—. I do, now it is coming back. Maybe there was some kind of memo from Dean Turnbull or something like that. Maybe there was something like that. It's kind of hazy, but basically, that it wasn't—. I do remember, Dean Turnbull was very adamant that it wasn't a federally or state protected category. And there was this, you know, I do kind of loosely remember something like that. I think there might have been a follow-up memo or something. I just don't remember exactly what was the follow up. But although I'm pretty sure there was no, the follow-up wasn't a new policy, a codified policy, I'm certain of that. Before I left law school, there was no codified policy.

Addie Patrick: Yes, there definitely seems to be, you know, the fact that this law firm that you mentioned earlier, that they were asking about your sexual identity, and you were working towards a policy to deter just those practices, there seems to be a disconnect there and—.

Kenneth Williams: Right, yes, exactly. It's certainly showed the need for one, that there needed to be a policy. Yes. At the time, I don't think like—I know the NALP, National Association for Law Placement, they have a policy all employers have to pledge not to discriminate based on sexual orientation, you know, other categories, protected categories. At the time, I don't think—well, I'm certain that wasn't a requirement of NALP at the time, that they pledged not to discriminate. And then, at the time, of course, you had the JAG School and all that stuff. So yes. But yes, I don't remember—well, like I said, I'm certain the follow-up was not the enactment, codification of a policy. I don't remember exactly. I kind of remember a memo maybe from Dean Turnbull, but I don't remember exactly what it said. And I don't remember. I don't remember the exact follow-up with us. I just remember the meeting. I think it was, I think the meeting sticks out because I think it was the only time I ever met with Dean Merrill. [Laughs.] So that's why I think I remember the meeting. One reason I remember the meeting, just a meeting with the dean at the time. So that was my first time ever doing that.

Addie Patrick: I guess first and last time.

Kenneth Williams: First and last time. [Patrick laughs.] Although I did see him at an alumni event some years later. So yes, but it was first and last time a formal meeting. Yes, that's right.

Addie Patrick: And sorry, I do—I just thought of one more. So, you mentioned again, that you had some interaction with undergraduate queer student or gay student union, or however they called themselves at the time—

Kenneth Williams: I think that was the Gay Student Union, I think that was the name of it at the time.

Addie Patrick: Do you recall any specifics about those [interactions]? You said social events and things, but do you recall?

Kenneth Williams: Yes, I do remember they would have dances on, like at the student union, they would have a dance like on Saturday night. I do remember that, going to that a couple of times. And they would have meetings, I do remember that because I do remember meeting like a couple of graduate students and who I became friendly with from the group. So, they would have meetings, regular meetings at the University. And they would definitely have some social events. And I kind of remember also, they might have had some programs regarding gay lesbian issues. I kind of remember that also. Yes, so yes, I was somewhat involved in that and I would go to at least go to the meetings and I do remember going to a couple of their parties, I remember that. So, they had social meetings, they had social opportunities. And they also had meetings, and they had programs also.

Addie Patrick: Did a lot of law students attend those, too?

Kenneth Williams: I don't remember a lot. I do remember a couple being involved. But I don't remember a lot being involved. Yes. But there were a few law students. Yes, I kind of remember maybe two, three, four law students who might have been involved in the University group also.

Addie Patrick: Yes, I have to—I mean, I think that the separation, North Grounds versus Main Grounds is probably, the geographic separation, was maybe a deterrent.

Kenneth Williams: Right. That's right. Because, yes, I'm sure it's probably still the same way. You tend to be very isolated at the Law School and very separated from the University.

Addie Patrick: Well, I think those are my follow-up detail questions. Sarah, I kick it back to you if you had any others.

Sarah Zube: I don't think any others for me.

Addie Patrick: Well, thank you so much, I'm going to—

Kenneth Williams: Sure, sure okay. I tried to remember as much as I could, but that was a long time ago. That was what, 1985, so what is this? That was what, almost forty years ago, right? Yes.

Addie Patrick: I mean, your recollections, what you've been able to remember are things that fill in, you know, these huge gaps in our collection, so I really appreciate it.

Kenneth Williams: Okay, great, great. Okay, great.

Addie Patrick: All right, I'm going to stop the recording now and we can chit chat a little bit after.

Kenneth Williams: Okay, sure.

End of interview