

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

**Narrator:** Robert “Bob” (Elmo) Schwartz

**Interviewers:** Addie Patrick

**Place of Interview:** University of Virginia School of Law

**Date of Interview:** June 21, 2024

**Recordist:** Randi Flaherty

**Other People Present:** N/A

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**Transcribed by:** Jane McBrian, Addie Patrick

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**Project Title:** Lambda Law Alliance 40

**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 Robert “Bob” Schwartz, class of 1980, in-person, on June 21, 2024. Schwartz discussed his experiences as an openly gay student at UVA Law prior to the founding of Lambda Law Alliance; his work as treasurer of the undergraduate school’s Gay Student Union; and his memories playing for the North Grounds Softball League.

*Beginning of interview*

**Addie Patrick:** All right. Hello, today is Friday, June 21, 2024. My name is Addison Patrick. I'm the curatorial specialist here at the University of Virginia School of Law. And today we're doing an oral history interview to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Lambda Law Alliance here at UVA Law. So, would you please introduce yourself? Give us your name and when you graduated from the Law School.

**Robert "Bob" Schwartz:** I'm Robert Schwartz. People call me Bob. Class of 1980. And my nickname at law school was "Elmo." That's a nickname I—came from the commune out in Nelson County. And there's a story behind that, but people here know me as Elmo.

**Addie Patrick:** Okay, I'm very curious about the story. But I'll get started with the first question, which is, why did you decide to attend UVA Law?

**Robert "Bob" Schwartz:** Well, I actually—I wanted to get involved in communal living. I spent the summer of '73, in a Jewish sort-of hippie commune out in Texas, and I liked the communal living, but Texas was not my turf. And I retreated back east. In fact, all the people there went to different places. This one went back to Wisconsin, and these two went to San Francisco, and I came back east. But a group of people that we'd met were looking—that I had known from the previous summer—were looking for land, and they found this gorgeous 490 acre plot in the Blue Ridge Mountains right across the street from the National Forest. And we all met here in the spring of 1973. And plans were made to buy it and we had to come up with a \$52,500 downpayment, and everybody, you know, this is fifty years ago, everybody pouring a little bit in and we got it done. We got it done. And, at first, there were two houses on the land. So a lot of people were living in town, or they were living near Afton. I was on JPA [Jefferson Park Avenue]. I was in Zion Crossroads for a while. But eventually we built additional housing and I moved out onto the land.

**Robert "Bob" Schwartz:** And I was working at the University Hospital. I had been a hospital ward clerk in college, full-time job at night. And I'm good on medical terminology. I became a medical transcriber at the University Hospital. I lived behind the Corner. And I came in with a key whenever I wanted to. And I would do all the overflow work, so I could go swimming during the day, show up at 6:00 p.m., work till two in the morning. And I loved that job. I was making very good money because they were paying me piece work. And at night I'd go back out to the commune and hang out with all my, you know, and we do all the stuff. We had therapists, we had doctors, we had woodworkers, we had computer people. We didn't have a lawyer in the community. And we got into this big dust up with VEPCO [Virginia Electric and Power Co.], right? They wanted to run 55,000 volt power lines through our pasture and we didn't really have the power, the political power, to do anything about it. I said, I'm going to law school. I bet I could do more with a law degree than a creative writing major. And so I said okay, I'm going to go to law school.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** But I was a shitty college student, you know, I was top 1 percent in high school and never got an 'A' during five years of college. I was a confused little gay boy who'd lost his—basically his teenage years, you know. And I sort of figured all of that out after college. And I just—I was going to get my—I was going to get my law degree, and be—and hang out my shingle in Lovington, [VA,] right? I was going to be the fifth little lawyer in Lovington. But with my crappy grades in college, I said, I've got to really murder the boards. And I said, If I don't score 760 or above, I probably won't even apply. That was when the—when it was 800. And 760 came from a *Doonesbury* cartoon, if you are familiar with *Doonesbury*, the Joanie Caucus character, she had the same thing and she took the law boards and she scored 760. And everybody was so amazed. I said, All right, that will be my target. So I'm looking for—and I got to 773. So I said, All right, I'll give it a shot. And I applied to the three schools here in the state, because I didn't want to move if I didn't have to. Washington and Lee rejected me immediately. William & Mary accepted me immediately, took my deposit, refundable if I got into my first choice, which was here. And all other five—the other schools, all the other schools put me on the waiting list. So, I was on the waiting lists for Antioch [University] and American [University] and BU [Boston University] and Northeastern [University] and here. And then I got this letter. In fact, it was on the first day of summer, June 21, 1977, I got this letter that said, We're happy to invite you. Son of a gun, exactly this day, it was the first day of summer. And I said, Hallelujah, I didn't have to move!

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** And that's, I mean, I didn't know it was a school of the caliber that it is. I mean, I had already taken automotive—I wanted to learn how to change oil and put, you know, I had done that at Piedmont Community College, I said, Well, I can go to the local community college here for law school and it turned out to be that they let me in. I went undergraduate to Brown [University]. The editor-in-chief of the [Virginia] *Law Review* that year was a Brown alumnus. The editor-in-chief for the next year was a Brown alumnus. And between my boards, my Brown, my in-state, I had been here for three years, and three wonderful recommendations from professors, teachers at Brown, with whom I'd stayed in very close personal touch over the years. And they basically said he was a fucked up kid in college, but he's hungry now and ready to go. And they, you know, took a chance on me. And that's how I ended up here.

**Addie Patrick:** So, when you got here—well, okay, so I guess the next part of this. So—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** You can't ask me, what did I think about Charlottesville, I'd been living here for three years.

**Addie Patrick:** That's true. Well, my next question was going to be whether or not, so, you provided a thorough response for why you decided to go here. But did your identity have any role in that decision?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No.

**Addie Patrick:** No?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No, my identity was solid by then, I knew who I was and I was out to everybody. And it was not like I was coming here to prove a point. And it wasn't like I was coming here to hide anything. I just was coming to law school as—I was twenty-eight years old, and I'd hit my stride. So, that was it. I said, I know how to do this stuff. I must know how to think like a lawyer, I did well on the boards. It just wasn't an issue. And I came here. And my god, they had a softball league, I didn't know they had a softball league! Every small section was putting a team in the softball league. And I got involved in that. And the guys would, after the game, you'd go over to Cafe North, I don't know if it's still there. But it was—you'd get your—a Coke or a sandwich or something. And they want to talk about which girls were the cutest and this, that, and the other, and they'd say, Well, what about you? And I'd say, you know, I think Martha Ellett (class of 1980) is, you know, and Martha Schoonover (class of 1980). We just had these beautiful—and they said, So you want to date her? I said, No, no. They said, Well, who would you like to date? I said, I don't want to embarrass anyone around the table, but there's a lot of good looking fellas in this class. And they'd go, Oh. So. I said, Yes, I mean, I—when I came out to myself, I was so fortunate, first person I came out to was my girlfriend. And she says, Oh, my gay friends at Harvard told me about—she had gay friends at Harvard. And she gives me this book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*[, by George Weinberg, (New York: Anchor, 1973)]. [phone rings]

**Addie Patrick:** So, you were describing how you would, after softball games you would—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Yes! And, you see, once Barbara gave me that book, and I read it, and then I went to the public library, I was going to see what they had. Son of a bitch. I grew up in Larchmont and Mamaroneck, New York. These enlightened library books had every single book that was positive, post Stonewall, about gay rights. This was in 1973. But they already had gay American history. And they already had Dennis Altman's book [*Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972)] and they—and I'm reading and it rang—It was the gay version of everything we saw in the late '60s with African American students. You don't have to be ashamed of the curly hair and the flat nose and the this, and the that, and the color of your skin and dark isn't worse than light and all—and Frantz Fanon, right, whites, you know that? An African thinker, F-R-A-N-T-Z, Frantz Fanon. His book was called *Black Skin, White Masks*, [(New York: Grove Press, 1967)] something like that. And we don't—and I said, Yes, I get it. We're just a statistical minority that pops up at random in the world, forced into a corner by standards that we didn't agree to and probably are wrong. And the best thing we can do is just be right out there where people can see us. And then there's going to be a—like Harvey Milk said, some fourteen-year-old kid in Iowa is going to feel like there's a glimmer of hope in the world. And that was the way I decided to live my life, starting in around 1974.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** So when I got here, you know, like even back then, every time you came out new to somebody, it was not the easiest thing. But it got habitual,

and I just did it. And so I was this big loudmouth. And then the first grades that came out were from our small section, and I had an 'A' in Civil Procedure. There were two 'A's' out of 30 of us. The first 'A' I'd had in any course since high school, and that's a true story, never got an 'A' in anything in college. And people knew that it was me. The way that they made—the way that they made your grades anonymous, right, was they had you listed alphabetically, but they sliced it up, okay? And they blacked out the names, they redacted the names, but they put like three together, they didn't put 30 individual lines up there at random. They—and so if you knew your social security number, you knew where you were. And once you knew who you were, you knew who were the two people alphabetically in the section who were above you, or below you, or on either side of you. And somebody said, Elmo got an 'A.' So here it is, like, January of '78. And I'm getting, well I guess we finished up in January, maybe it was February, whenever the grades came out, all of a sudden, you know, I was one of the stars who'd gotten an 'A' in Civil Procedure, which was a, people thought, a pretty abstruse type of a thing. So now, I'd spoken up in class, I'd always been very active in class. I had good personality, gregarious personality, my grades were good. And I was on the softball field out there with everybody. And it was like, I was cruising, you know, and, I mean, I'm not somebody who's inconspicuous, so I was somebody that everybody knew who Elmo was. Anyway. So, but that—I'd already been that before I got here. I was that at the hospital when I was working as a transcriber. I was that when I was playing intramural softball here with the undergraduates and grad students, so, it just—by that time, it was second nature.

**Addie Patrick:** Did you feel like [construction noise] did you feel like [construction noise]. Yes, okay. So the impressions—so you had, it sounds like, a good rapport with your classmates based off of your—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

**Addie Patrick:** —your activities. But did you feel like there were maybe varying impressions of LGBTQ people?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Of course! Of course there were in 1977 and '78. But there also were straight people who got it. There was a—there was a guy a year or two ahead of me named John Copacino (class of 1979), C-O-P-A-C-I-N-O. John had earrings. He was a straight guy, but he had earrings, he was wearing earrings! I wouldn't, I wasn't doing that. And you knew there was a community of people, eight years after Stonewall and nine years after Stonewall who got it and who understand. And these were bright kids, they'd gone to good schools, they'd had friends who'd come out, you know, the tide was growing. Maybe we didn't have the critical mass yet. And yes, there were people who'd gone to frat schools and Rugby Road and this and that, who didn't quite get it. But I was sort of hard to deny. Because I was not—I didn't strike out in any aspect of law school. You know, my grades were good. My sports were good. My friendliness with people was good. I was the one that didn't join an outline group, isn't that what they call them? Outline groups. I didn't do that. We had people, we had—I had a classmate who played pro hockey in Switzerland, came—flew back for one week of class, did his

outline for the week and graduated law school on everybody else's class notes. I didn't miss a class, I think I missed one class my first year and I went home every night and I typed up my—typed up my class notes. Because I learned in college, if I scribbled my class notes, I had no idea when it was time to study for exam what is written and why—this symbol meant that.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** My best friend was my roommate in college and my valedictorian, our valedictorian in high school. Paul went and typed up his class notes every night all during college, I said, I'm going to do the same thing and I did! So at the end of the semester, people would loan me their outlines, which, they didn't help me, but I would trade them for Xerox copies—photocopies of my class notes which everybody loved! You know, and that story about look to the right, look to the left, one of you won't be here. That was not how it was. We expected every one of the 360 to graduate. We thought—and we'd be locked in arm. And we mostly were, and everybody was rooting for everybody else. And nobody was hiding reference materials. And I said, if you left a stack, if you left \$10,000 bills, and a gold ring, a diamond watch or something on the library table and left for a week, it'd be there when you got back, unless somebody had handed it off to Mrs. [Virginia] Haigh, Mrs. Haigh, the librarian, who would be holding it, waiting for you to come back because it was, that's how it was here. And I was a visible guy, you know, which I was okay about that. But I mean, I love the people that are here. I made great friends. I think this is the loveliest group of people I ever spent three years, best three years of my life were here. Because it was the first thing that I did, after I figured myself out, that involved being surrounded by a community of people that I could talk about anything to who were bright, who were smart, the same type of people that I gravitated to in high school and college. So I mean, to me, it was heaven to be here.

**Addie Patrick:** So I want to, I want to talk now, let's see. Well, okay, so we, I think still on the same thread, because I want to get into your involvement with the gay—the undergraduate gay student union, too. But before we get there, I think while we're still in a little bit more general space, I want to ask if there were any conversations about national issues related to LGBTQ rights, or whether you saw that material come up in your coursework or lectures at all.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** It was not a topic of conversation among the majority straight classmates you had, that was not on their agenda. It wasn't even enough in the public agenda for anybody to be vigorously opposed to it. And I made friends with all the different constituencies here, you know. The Black students, we played softball together, I knew each other, we knew each other. The Christian group that met at 7:30 for prayers every morning, I was friends with them all, especially the ones that played softball. And, in fact, I broke down in tears. The very first semester exam period, I was thirty-two out of thirty-five days, from the last day of class to the last day of exams, I was in the library at least, at least ten hours. And the pressure on me and I just—we were at the U-Hall, we were watching UVA play against UNC, North Carolina men's basketball. And I don't know, the pressure got to me, it was a Saturday night and I just broke down in tears. And it was the loneliness hitting me of being here all by myself. The only gay

person I knew here, but also just, you know, and I just started crying in the middle of this basketball game. And I happened to be sitting with the Christians, the Christian prayer group, Barb Ryan, I think she's Barb Ryan Dixon (class of 1980) now, and some of the Dale Ditto (class of 1978), and some of those folks, and they just put their arms around me and they just, you know, I felt like I had a family and a community here. But gay rights was not on the agenda. It was like sort of people were starting to figure it out. And, and they were getting to know me. And I'm sitting here thinking, you know, I'm my little stealth queen here. Because I got 360 classmates, and they're going to have kids, and a lot of them are going to have a kid coming out to them in fifteen years. And it won't be the first time they had to meet somebody. So, but it wasn't on the national agenda. It was for somebody like me, because I was reading the publications and donating to the causes, but not here yet. Not yet.

**Addie Patrick:** So, how did you get involved with undergraduate [gay student union]?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Well, I knew there was a gay student union before I was here, you know, I was—you'd see stuff for them and dances and events when I was working at the hospital. And so, hell, I would go to a dance on Saturday night hoping to get lucky. And I met a lot of wonderful people, made a lot of good friends. One of my friends, very close friends, was Law School Class of '76. He says meeting me is what helped him come out and of course, we're very, very close friends today. We're on speed dial with each other. And I just met a wonderful bunch of people. So I got involved in the gay student union as a person who went to events. Now I'm here in school. And so now I'm in, in a different capacity. I'm a student member. And this freshman kid who was out and became the president of the gay student union, his folks cut him off when he cut out—he came out to them. And he basically emptied the group's treasury to pay his tuition and make it through his first year. And here we were at—because we were having these dances, is it, I forget. What's the main library on, Carpenter? I forget, it starts with a 'C.'

**Addie Patrick:** Clemons?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No, you walk up the thing, and it's on the right, you walk into the Grounds off of University Avenue, and it's off on the right, whatever it is.

**Addie Patrick:** It used to be Alderman Library.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Maybe it was—that was it, Alderman Library. So it didn't have a 'C.' All right. Anyway, there'd be a keg of beer, and food services would bill you. So here, it's the end of the semester, and they get this bill from food services for, I don't know, \$700 of refreshments and beer and stuff that hasn't been paid for, and there's no money in the treasury. Holy hell. So John Curtin, Class of '81, and I, we said, We're going to, we're going to do this. And so I think John became the president, and I became the treasurer or the other way around. And what are we going to do? Well, we're going to have a dance every Saturday night at whatever the place was. And we did. Three bucks, all the beer you can drink, and a DJ, and we had a disco

DJ, and it was absolutely great. And the kids from University of Richmond would come, and the ladies from Sweet Briar [College] would come, and boys from Virginia Military Institute would come up, and the kids from Harrisonburg would come down and, and it was, it was great. And I would go home, I must, yes, of course, I was the treasurer, because I would go home at the end of the dance every Saturday night, with like, \$1,000 or \$1,100 in small bills, ones and fives. And back then, the Virginia National Bank branch over at Barracks Road, they opened at eight in the morning. So I would be there Monday at eight with this stack of bills. And I mean, we built the treasury up like that [snaps fingers], because we had this dance every week, we paid off the bills. And all of a sudden, we had money to do other stuff. You know, wear blue jeans if you're in favor of gay rights, right? You remember that? And all—nobody wore blue jeans that day, right? Because they didn't want anyone to think that, you know, this is the late '70s. And so many different things that we had. We painted Beta Bridge, we had speakers, we had a Gay Pride Week. And we had the money to do it, because John and I, and then we handed the reins off to the next crowd. But that's how I got involved officially. I'd gotten involved originally just as a gay guy in town looking for a place to go dancing and meet people.

**Addie Patrick:** Did you find that there were other law students that were involved?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I did, I did. Very cautiously. But one of my classmates, I told you about my room—my friend from Class of '76, he and I and another one of my classmates, the three of us rented a house together off of—not Barracks Road, what's the next one up there, Aviation or Hydraulic or some such thing, in that area. And we took a house, and we rented it for two years. And we were roommates. And so I knew Joe and I knew Gordie. And Lawrence [O.] Snead [III (class of 1979)]. Joe knew—Joe and Lawrence had both been at Princeton together. They were classmates so they knew each other. And eventually, somebody might feel sufficiently comfortable to sort of come out to me privately. And so there was some and there were women. But you know, there were a number of women that I got to know, one of whom became I think a statewide public—got elected to office in California, and sort of went underground for a little while. She wasn't ready to be out in politics in the '80s, or whenever the hell it was. But yes, some of us found each other.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** And somebody told me, you know, there's this professor named Charles Whitebread. And so I went and introduced myself to him. And he said, Yes, he said, we just talked about what courses are you going to take? And he says, You want to learn something that'll help you, learn tax law. He says, Don't think you're going to go out there and win the Supreme Court case on gay rights. But we could talk to each other. And he loved California. And he spent his summers in Santa Monica, and eventually visited at USC and eventually joined the faculty at USC [Gould School of Law]. And Richard and I, after we met, it was the first time we were together, we took jobs in LA. And Charlie invited us—he taught us about sushi. He said it was the one great athletic thing that he could do is he could work chopsticks better than anybody he knew. But so, Charlie Whitebread was a great friend. And we sort of, there were other people openly closeted, you know, naming names. I don't think anybody's surprised to



know that Professor [John C.] Jeffries [Jr. (class of 1973)] was gay. But that was not anything he spoke about. And in many ways, you know, he clerked for Justice Lewis Powell, on the Supreme Court. I know at least two people who clerked for Justice Powell who are gay, who were never out to him, and he reluctantly cast the fifth vote against gay rights in *Bowers v. Hardwick* [(478 US 186)] in 1986. And you're sitting here thinking, what we got in *Lawrence v. Texas* [(539 US 558 (2003))] nineteen years—we could have gotten five to four, nineteen years earlier. But anyway. But yes, people, that's—sometimes you run into somebody at a dance and you were surprised to see them there. That's, you know. There wasn't a—if we had 360, let's say there were forty gay or bi people, queers in the class. Believe me, I didn't find that—I didn't meet them all.

**Addie Patrick:** So, can you tell me more about some of the specific activities, aside from the dances, that you did through GSU?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Well, like I said, speakers, Gay Pride Week. Writing to the *Cavalier Daily* if an issue came up. It was—it wasn't like we had an office anywhere and an agenda. We just were folks that had created a space that was safe for us. So, I can't really think of much. But the night we decided to paint Beta Bridge, that was fun. That was fun.

**Addie Patrick:** Can you talk more about that?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Well, yes. We got out there with about six of us. And we had all the buckets and the paint brushes and everything. Richard was there. My partner, my husband, you weren't allowed to have husbands back then. And we painted it all blue and orange. And, of course, the words: We come from old Virginia, were all is bright and—in huge letters—gay! So, we finished and we were delighted. And within thirty seconds, half the fraternities on Rugby Road were out there and totally covered it all up. And we were a little bit angry, but we were also, you know, we'd been heard, we'd been seen, and we're going to keep coming back until we wear you out, you know? So, but that was—that's how that happened. We just decided to do it as part of Gay Pride Week that year. I think it was probably the same week that Franklin Kameny came and spoke, you know who Franklin Kameny was? He was fired from his, I think, State Department job for being a homosexual. And so he became sort of a really a hero of those days when gay people walked around, equal rights for homosexuals, wearing coats and ties and, and dresses with crinoline under skirts and stuff. So anyway, that's about all I remember about that.

**Addie Patrick:** Do you recall, so I think it was '78 or '79, the [National] March on Washington [for Gay and Lesbian Rights]?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Oh my God, do I remember it. God, do I remember that. Yes. Of course, we were so close to Washington. It was in October [1979]. Richard was in college. He was in West Georgia College, about fifty miles west of Atlanta. They had a whole group that came up and chartered a bus from West Georgia. And so I got to see

him there. And I sent you that wonderful picture of him with his curly hair and everything. He would have been twenty-two. He probably looks like he's seventeen. But he was twenty-two. And I was thirty. And it was so exhilarating. I think, I think we felt like we'd gotten a hundred thousand marchers. A hundred thousand people was so much in '79. And then the next one was '87. And I think we were close to half a million and the next one was '93, the first year of Bill Clinton's presidency, and it was even huger than that. But it was a very heady thing in '79. Just to be there, to see so many people walking like that, and just in your face. We're here and we're not going anywhere. You know, and you can't—we're not—you can't put us in, you know, it's not like the Holocaust. We don't—you could get rid of the last one of us, we keep popping up like weeds in other people's families, you know. People ask how do you know? How do you know? I say, think of yourself—think about a bunch of tulip bulbs, right? If you had a bunch of tulip bulbs, could you tell what color they were going to come up as? I don't think you could. They don't say red and yellow and—you don't know till they bloom, then you know what flavor you got. And I said, That's how it is with us. Nobody knows. And then you find out. So, is the environment going to be welcoming to you if you come up that flavor or that variation? And we wanted to make sure that it would be.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** And so. And this, you know, by that time, there was already enough of a movement, Howard Brown, who was the health commissioner of the city of New York had come out real early like, like '71 or two. Leonard Matlovich, who was in the military, I think he was on the cover of Time Magazine in around '71—"I am a homosexual"—and he was a marine or soldier, whatever he was, They gave me a medal for killing a man and kicked me out of the army for loving one. And so people were slowly, slowly, slowly coming out. And it was this celebrity, and it was that celebrity and it was, you know. And then like a Tennessee Williams might sort of—we talked about people being openly closeted, you know, and Barney Frank in the [US] Congress, or Fred [Frederick C. Langone] before that in the Boston City Council, and it was just slow, it was a slow thing. And each person must have had his or her own particular threshold that was, for them, enough is enough. And I'm ready to be out there. And I'm ready for my family and friends to know. And I'm ready to live a life where I get to seek the things I really want and not the things that I'm hoping I'll grow into which it turns out, I've learned I never will. That's a phase that's not going to—it's not a phase you're going through. As somebody said, You don't—you don't choose what attracts you. What—you don't choose what arouses you, that's it. You don't choose what arouses you, you discover it. And then, what are you going to do about it? And that's—it was a tide that was growing.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** And I mean, you know what it's like now, we're forty years later. And I mean, you talk to people about now it's this, May I touch you, all this consent stuff, right? When I was in high school in 1963, we'll say '64. If you were going out with a girl, you put your arm around her in the movies, and you'd move your hand a little bit closer on her. And if she wasn't interested, she told you to go away and you go away. But if you didn't try to cop a feel, quote, right, then you weren't going to get anywhere because no girl was going to be open about that. It's like you had to convince everybody. You couldn't do that today. You couldn't do that today. But if you wanted to

have any kind of a necking or thing, you had to make a move and be ready if you didn't get pushed away. What boy could put an arm around another boy's shoulder in high school in '64? Because maintaining deniability was the thing. So that's where I said about losing a whole decade of your life. All these other folks are learning how to flirt and meet and do and this. And we're off in the corner, scared that somebody will find out, you know, who we are and what we like. And thank god for the queens that did Stonewall, because they got shit started. And then I saw it. I saw it early enough that in 1973, at the age of twenty-four, I was ready to look in the mirror and say what I'd been saying behind closed doors to myself for a few years, Bob, this isn't going away. You know, you need to get—in fact, I didn't come out into gay pride, I came into gay resignation and sadness. This is like, I don't know, diabetes or asthma, something I'm going to have to live with. And then when I started reading all that positive literature, I came to say, Oh, no, I'm not living with this horrible condition that I was cursed with. I'm living with this additional blessing. I was given a sexuality and an ability to love and hurray, and that—everybody came along on their own pace at their own time and they knew when it was time to open the door and step out. Some people still haven't. Like, I won't say, but the state fruit of South Carolina. Anyway, we'll just leave it at that.

**Addie Patrick:** I want to get back really quickly to the march again. So do you recall some of the specifics about how you got or how that group was assembled to go out to Charlotte—or up to DC together?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I don't know. I think by that time, there was the National Gay Task Force, which then became the National Lesbian Gay Task Force. But I think they were one of the organizers. I don't think Human Rights Campaign had come along yet. The Radical Fairies I think, had started. *Gay Community News* was a huge gay community paper out of Boston that was very politically in your face. And I don't know who the gay activists were. And in this coast, and that coast, and in the Chicago, somebody put the damn thing together and the word got out. And people came who were ready to come. That's what I remember. I wasn't an organizer, I just showed up, knew what time to be in which corner and, and we marched.

**Addie Patrick:** Let's see, I think, I want to move now because you talked about, you know, the importance of being visible at the Law School and how that's a decision you made before your time at the Law School. And you mentioned a little bit softball, too, so I want to move to that now. How—well so you said—it sounds like you were involved with softball prior to getting to [into Law School]—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I fell in love with baseball when I was six years old, listening to Dodger games on a transistor radio, you know, by the beach. And all I ever wanted to do was play baseball. And I did. We lived—we were the eighth house from the school yard. And we didn't have a set dinner time at 5:30 [p.m.]. My dad worked downtown, he was his own independent insurance broker. He took the train home when the day was done. So, we could have dinner at 8:00 and we could have dinner at 9:00, we could have dinner at 6:30. I was always the last kid leaving the school yard. I was always the kid who in the last ray of sunshine. And then like I said, it was a block and a half to my

house. It's not like I had to go anywhere. And that's all I ever wanted to do. And so I got into the Cub Scouts softball league and the Little League. And it turned out my dad was a catcher, and he had played catch with me and I learned how to throw and catch. I learned how to field and throw and catch before I knew how to hit worth a damn. And because of that, I made the all-star team of Cub Scouts each of my three years. The catcher, then the first baseman, and then the pitcher. And I—just anything I could do that would play baseball. Dad took me to a Yankees-Red Sox game in '56. I was seven years old. We sat in the—we sat in the bleachers so we could see Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams. '57 he took me to the last Dodger-Giants series at Ebbets Field before the two teams moved west. So and then we had nothing but Yankee Stadium. And then the Mets came along, so we had National League ball again. So, I'm going to games at the Polo Grounds when the Mets were still playing there.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** One of their players was Joe Hicks, a graduate of Lane High School here. And when I moved here, Joe Hicks had retired from baseball and he was the head of the recreation committee, the sports and recreation—parks and recreation department for the city of Charlottesville. And I'm playing—everywhere I went, I had my New York Mets cap. He says, I used to play for the Mets, we got to talking, and he said, Have you ever thought about umpiring? You seem to know what's going on. So Joe Hicks got me into umpiring. And I—everywhere I went I wanted to play. I was on the—I was on a team that won the intramural championship one year at Brown. The pitcher was the men's—captain of the men's softball team, our shortstop was his wife, the captain of the women's—not softball team. Captain of the men's ice hockey team and his wife, the captain of the women's ice hockey team, was our shortstop. You know, it's all I ever wanted to do was play ball. That's—I wanted to play ball. I wanted to enjoy my school. And I mean, when I got here, I played—I played in leagues. We put a team together in the commune, our name was Unconditional Amnesty. That will you know, that was the big issue for the Vietnam veteran. And it just I never stopped playing, I never wanted to stop playing. I stopped playing last year because of diabetic neuropathy in my right ankle, and I simply don't have the stability. So at age seventy-four, I had to stop playing softball. And so then when I came here, I didn't know they were going to have a softball league but they did. You know, hello, fish out of water, fish in water. So.

**Addie Patrick:** So, you said earlier that when you got here all the sections were in softball teams or how—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-J-K-L. Yes.

**Addie Patrick:** Was that like a mandatory thing or—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No, it's just everybody did. Anyone who wanted to play softball played. And the people that you most got to know your first year, were the thirty people in your small section, I assume they still do it that way. Our criminal procedure—our Criminal Law was scheduled sections A, E, I, you know, K and L. Torts would have been B, D, F and L. And that's how it went. And so you, you were meeting just about all

of your classmates, if you—if they weren't in your Contracts class, they were in your Torts class. If they weren't in your Torts class, they were in your Property class. And then you know, who wants to put a softball team together? So there were enough people and that's just how it happened. It just happened. We were Section L, our first year name was 'L and Damnation.' But the guys didn't like that. And we changed it to the Statue of Frogs—Statute of frauds, right? Statue of Frogs, and we had this t-shirt that had the statue, it's all frogs. And we won a couple of champion—we won the—we won twice. We won the regular league twice.

**Addie Patrick:** So, you were at the Law School when I think the softball league was fairly new—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Very new, very new.

**Addie Patrick:** —do you have recollections of—did you know folks that got it started or?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I didn't. They had a twentieth anniversary of the softball league article in the alumni magazine, and there was a picture of the team that won the first championship. One of the guys on the team was Gary Goldberger (class of 1979). Gary was a year ahead of me. So I had played against him. One of the guys on the team was Will Shortz, who was the crossword puzzle dude. And he graduated in '77 so I never met him. But when I got on the Sunday puzzle, right, like, they pulled my name out of the hat. He said, You got any questions for Will Shortz? I said, Do you still play softball? He said, No, I don't, just table tennis now. But we just meet—we met people. I never saw Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy Jr. (class of 1982), who was a year behind me, on the field. I never saw Thurgood Marshall Jr. (class of 1981) on the field. I played against Lewis [F.] Powell III (class of 1978), one of the handsomest guys in the league, and one of the nicest, nicest people you would ever meet. He was on Law Review and he was smart. But he was. I mean, all the sportsmanship was always great. But I remember some of the celebrity players, or the people whose parents were celebrities, I think, Anne Kleindienst (class of 1979). And you knew who was playing softball. And it was—it was the thing that people talked about it and it was—and they looked forward to it, and who's going to win the championships, and who could come up with the cleverest team name—the Soiled Briefs, the Meretricious Act Persons, the Tortfeasors—that kind of stuff.

**Addie Patrick:** So I had—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** It was the number one thing, I'd say two-thirds through, you know, half, 50 to 60 to 65 percent of the students were out on the ball field one time or another, it was a way to blow off steam. You didn't have to go anywhere, you just had to walk across the street.

**Addie Patrick:** One thing I see that's like a connection between your activism in the gay student union, and your involvement in softball was that you wrote about both in the paper. So how did—how did you get into writing and publishing in the local papers?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Ed[ward R.] Koch (class of 1980) was one of my classmates and he was the commissioner of the softball league. And I think Ed asked me would I write a softball column for the [Virginia] *Law Weekly*, I said, That would be fun. So I got to spend a lot of time and I became familiar with the teams that were playing that I didn't know very well, because I wanted to be able to report accurately. And I got all the scores. And I knew a lot of the players. And I tried to come up with a lighthearted sort of thing and kept using like, I started—the 'Elmo' thing from the commune. Well, there was Jake the Snake, one of the kids at the commune and Jeff the Peth, Kristen the Piston and I became—they called me Elmo the Pelmo, all the, you know, the six and eight year old kids growing up on the commune, so I was E.T. Pelmo. So that's where I got my byline. And then I decided I was going to create a like a drag persona. And I became Elma von Pelma, Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, because that—I pulled that out of some gay novel that was very popular at the time. And it was just like how much more in my face—in your face could I be, and I'd throw in these little sexual puns and innuendos in there. The not-so-straight—there was a team called themselves the Straight A's. I kept calling them the Not-So-Straight A's. And I don't know. And people liked it. People liked it, it was lighthearted. And I could get away with it, because it was me. And people knew who I was. And I felt like, why not? Let's have some fun here. That's how that happened. Ed Koch asked me if I would do that. Ed Koch was a good commissioner for the league, really.

**Addie Patrick:** I had—So we have just a few minutes left. But I wanted to go back, before we get into sort of some larger reflections, which I feel like you've already started to do. I wanted to go back with a follow-up question about GSU stuff for one moment. You talked about—so you were living on the commune and then at some point you purchase, or you were renting a house off of Hydraulic, and I recall seeing in the clippings that I sent you, like, mention of a meeting to potentially form a gay student group through—at that house or—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No.

**Addie Patrick:** No?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** No.

**Addie Patrick:** Can you talk more about—this is an in-the-weeds question, but.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** But I don't remember, what did I say?

**Addie Patrick:** There was just a small snippet in the *Law Weekly* about, like, potentially having a meeting, maybe through the gay student union and the address location was, I think, this Hydraulic Road home, but—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** It would have been on Solomon Road. 1724A Solomon Road. I don't remember having had a meeting there. I just don't recall that. There was no chance that we were going to have a pride group here at the Law School, that wasn't going to happen. And we may have gotten together to plan Gay Pride Week on—now that's possible. We had, you know, three of us living in one house. And that would have been a good place for the officers to get together one evening and plan who we're going to invite as a speaker, and what events were we going to do. But I don't have a recollection of that.

**Addie Patrick:** Why do you say that you don't think the Law School would have formed a—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** It wasn't ready yet. I don't think we had more than three or four people that were willing to be openly gay to all of their classmates, there was half a dozen that were willing to be openly gay to me. And I don't even mention the names now, because I have no idea what these folks are doing. You know?

**Addie Patrick:** Well, I think from there, I want to take a step back now and my next question for you is a broad one. But how do you reflect upon your time at UVA Law?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Best three years of my life. Because it's when I became an adult again, really. I mean, I'd done my homework I, I got here, and all of a sudden it was, Yes, you really can. You are the person capable of achieving that you always were going to be back when you thought you wanted to be a pediatrician. And before you ran into organic chemistry, and came eventually to realize that you were a humanities person and not a science person. Because I had always taken you know, it always meant so much to me that I was smart and that I was at the top of my class. My best friend who was the valedictorian in high school lost the spelling bee in seventh grade to me, because he got a word that no one in the room could have spelled. And he still is not happy about that. But I mean, I loved that about myself. And we started doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle in like ninth or tenth grade in ink. And it was like, I lost confidence in college. And I had to build it back.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** And a lot of it was coming to terms with being gay and feeling good about it. I remember climbing into the trunk of my shitty little Chevy Vega, and installing by myself a radio in the trunk, a radio tape deck thing, and I was like, I can do this and running the wires to speakers that I put in and learning how to do an oil change and learning how to pack the bearings and you know and learning how to—and then I got here and I was scared to death. I didn't I—the reason I didn't miss a class was I was scared to death if I missed the class I was going to fall behind. And I mean, I like I said I put my, I put my nose to the grindstone and I missed one class that year and I spent all those long hours in the library during exam period, and then I saw all these grades, you know, I think I had two 'A's' and three 'A-'s'. So. And I was so in everybody's face that when I got invited to the Law Review, I got my letter in the summer. Emerson Spies, who was the dean, and what happened was, he was shocked to see me. He was like, Oh, my God, I thought he was just—all I can think of is he thought that some windbag

and look at this kid. He's—and he gave me an 'A,' he gave me an 'A' in Property. So anyway.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I was—it was like I was a grown up again, it was like I really was who I'd always thought I could be. And I interviewed for one job my senior year, and got it. Richard and I were going to travel. We weren't even going to take jobs. And this legal aid thing popped up in March of my senior year in Norfolk, [VA,] and Richard and I had met in Norfolk. And he said, What do you say, we got friends down there. All right, let's do it. So I applied, I drove down to Norfolk, they interviewed me. And I think I had the gay student union stuff on my resume. And the managing attorney calls me the next morning, Well, we want to offer you the job, he said, Well, I and the other gay attorneys here at legal aid are going to be so thrilled to have you join us. So, you know. But I, and from there, I just, I had a job. I was playing softball, I was umpiring. And I had a boyfriend. Those are the three things I wanted: baseball, a boyfriend, and a job. Because I am a very humble guy, I was living in a commune, you know, typing medical records, and that I made all the money, it was nice to know that, that was my backup. If absolutely worse came to shove, I could always keep a roof over my head transcribing medical records. But to feel like I was—it wasn't that I was a professional. It was that I was—my life was good and I was moving on all eight cylinders. That's the way I feel about the three years here. I guess I had it the first day I got here, but I didn't know it. And it solidified. And the confidence that I built up doing that just was enormous, enormous. It just set the stage for me here.

**Addie Patrick:** So now that Lambda—Lambda which didn't exist when you were here—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** —and was started by two straight boys, who I assume had gay friends who weren't ready to come out and do it. Isn't that something?

**Addie Patrick:** Yes [laughs].

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Well, Lambda.

**Addie Patrick:** So now that they just celebrated their fortieth, what do you hope for the future of a group like this?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that it's not an insult to say 'queer,' okay? We do that all the time. I didn't think it would come to that. I don't know what the group is. You don't want to say, yes, it'd be nice cliché to say, Oh, live for the day when we don't need it. That's no, that's, it's not that. All I ever wanted was to—I would like to have—I'd like to see a world where two gay people can go to the senior prom together in high school, and start dating each other in eighth grade, if that's what they want to do. And and there's self awareness, and there's meaningful adult sex education. [phone rings]

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I don't know, I want the path to be easy for the youngsters. And the rest will take care of itself. If there's a gay student union, if there's not a gay



student union. If there is a Jewish community center, if there's not. The people that want that to happen, they'll be there. They won't be ashamed. You don't have to change your name, or get your nose done. You get to be, you know, two generations ago, if you were Jules Garfinkel, you became John Garfield. And if you were Melvin Kaminsky, you became Mel Brooks. And now if you're Barbra Streisand, you get to be Barbra Streisand. And it's the same thing. I just want a world—if there's a group, if there's not a group, that's not the point. We had a mission then, there's still probably is a mission. When I saw that there's some openly trans graduate here who's got a job and was able to get the job that she wanted. And it not that not be an impediment to her. That's what it was about. It wasn't about the having a group. Although it's nice to have social clubs. I mean, you want to hang out with friends of yours, but most of my friends are straight people, you know, my community. We had a bunch of queer Jews in Atlanta, who met for Passover Seders and Hanukkah, lighting the candles. And then it turned out we had three or four people in this social group that wanted a place where they could actually do worship services. So the group changed into a synagogue. We actually became a congregation in 1985. And we were a very hip, in-town congregation. And a lot of liberal straight Jews raising kids found that our congregation resonated with them more than any of the others. This one said, My car didn't feel like it belonged in that parking lot. Or I, you know, that was a place where you had to have a tennis bracelet or something. So they started coming to our synagogue, and now we're probably about 75 percent nongay. And we've got, I joke about it, I say, it's the synagogue I grew up in, it's the synagogue I wanted to be in. It's just a synagogue. We've got multi generations, we've got straight, we've got gay. I didn't want to be in a gay synagogue. I wanted to be gay, in a synagogue. And that's how it is.

**Addie Patrick:** And do you have—

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** That's—I didn't want to be in a gay group. I wanted to be gay wherever I went and get away with it, you know. And by the way, I'm six feet tall, and I got broad shoulders, and I'm good at sports, and I'm smart. I could get away with a lot of shit that a lot of people couldn't get away with. And so in that sense, it almost was my duty. I could do stuff that other people weren't free to do. Nobody was gonna beat me up in a corner for being a sissy. Although I like to tell, I like to say, you know, Are you cisgender? I say no, I'm sissy gender, you know, but whatever. I don't know that's, that's about the best I can do for you here.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Elmo! I had a friend who speaks Spanish. And she used to call me boy. She'd call me 'el muchacho.' El muchacho. She'd go, 'el muchacho!' So then she started, she'd make these person-to-person calls to 'Elmo Chacho' when she wanted to talk to me. So, we had three guys at the commune with the first name Bob. Bob Schwartz, Bob Elcox, Bob West. On the bulletin board was Bob S, Bob W, Bob E. I said, it looks too much like Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm getting myself a name that no one else around here is going to have. And I took Elmo from my friend Marilyn. So I started being Elmo in like 1976. And, in fact, when—I was the first person called upon in my very first class, [Professor] Stanley [D.] Henderson's contract class, and I raised my hand, he says, And you are mister? You are? And I didn't know what to say. "Bob

Schwartz." And one of my classmates said, That surprised me. The first question he got asked was what his name was, and he stumbled over it. But that's where that came from. Stan Henderson. Everybody loved him. If Stan Henderson, if Professor Henderson hadn't met, hadn't seen you in ten or fifteen years, and you bumped into him, he would greet you by name. And every—he—beloved, beloved professor. I was so happy to see his picture down on the wall in the library. I don't know, I felt, I felt like I was here where I supposed to be. I was at a high level school, as bright as everybody else, where I could do the work and was ready to be there, which I was not at seventeen years old. I had no business in college. But I had, I belonged here at age twenty-eight.

**Addie Patrick:** I have one more question, but Randi do you—So my last question for you then, is what advice do you have for current and future LGBTQ students?

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Be thankful that you found your path. For ones who are still in the closet, you have nothing to be scared of. I'm telling you that the best thing you will ever do for yourself is come out and live your true life. I have so many friends my age, who like older men. And so in the course of my life, I've met so many older men who came out after the last kid had graduated high school, and they're starting their life at age fifty-two and age fifty-three. And I would say don't let that happen to you. If you're openly gay, and they don't want you at that firm, there's another firm. When I moved to Atlanta, excuse me, when I was interviewing for jobs in Atlanta, with my grades they had to—if I wanted an interview with that firm, they had to talk to me. But nobody was hiring Jews, forget gays. They weren't hiring Jews, maybe there were one or two firms that would hire, that were hiring Jews and they were majority Jewish firms. That's how it was in 1980, in 1978, '79.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** I would say, the only way you're going to be happy is, and to thine own self be true, and it shall follow the night the day shall never, thou never shall be false to any man. It's it—that's it, be yourself don't lose your time, don't lose your years, and be supportive of those around you. Honor the ones who came before and clear the way for the kids that are going to come behind you. Who knows what issues they're going to have, that you don't even think about now. Nobody thought about trans rights back then, nobody—at my synagogue has got a dozen trans kids growing up at it. Who knew? Who knew? You know, Beth became Leo, Sam became Scarlett. We didn't know in 1980 that that was going to be—and a lot of people said they wanted to, like sell the trans kids down the river to get the equal rights for gay and lesbian people. And so I'd say be open, because something's gonna come up that looks weird to you. And a generation later, it's going to be like bread and butter. And so that would be my advice. Be open minded. Let yourself be yourself. Honor the ones who came before and clear the path for the people coming behind you. And vote.

**Robert “Bob” Schwartz:** Oh, okay. Okay, one more thing I give—when I mentor kids, there's two pieces of advice I give everybody. You are not allowed to commit suicide. Lawyers apparently are the second highest suicide rate of any profession. I don't know why, I think a lot of it is we think we're all going to become millionaires. And when we

don't, and we can't live to the lifestyle we thought we were going to get, it's like we have failed. And I mean, the lawyer who closed my first house killed himself. I taught him bankruptcy in a seminar when I was doing a CLE [Continuing Legal Education]. They'd asked me to put a CLE together. And it was just heartbreaking. I tell them, You're not allowed to do that. You're not allowed to do that. And the other thing I say is diligently read the disciplinary reports in the bar publications. Because what you're going to—I thought everybody who got disbarred, got disbarred because they embezzled funds from escrow. And there's a lot of that. But what I've seen is that what really happens to a lot of people, they get disbarred for not being attentive to their clients and their cases. The rent's coming due, and here's somebody willing to pay me a \$2,500 retainer, I make up these numbers. And so you take it, but it's one case more than you really have the time and energy for. And so you put it off, and you put it off, and you put it off. Now you're lying to your client, I'm waiting for discovery to come back. I'm doing depositions. And all of a sudden, you get found out. You accepted fees, and you haven't done the work, and you've missed the deadline or your client—it surprised me how many people got disciplined for that. And so I those are the two things I tell every kid that I am helping along in the path: no suicide, don't lose your bar license, and read up and find out what it is—what's the stuff that people do. I couldn't resist saying that. It has nothing to do with gay rights. But it is—I've had classmates who suicided you know, that's, I can think of two or three or four in my class who died by suicide. Bright, lovely people. And it's absolutely heartbreaking, right? A permanent solution to a temporary problem. That's my advice.

*End of interview*