

Dr. Sara Gebhardt Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Cathy Xu and Taylor Drake
April 1, 2019

Collection: Davidson College Archives

Title: Dr. Sara Gebhardt oral history interview, 2019 April 1

Description: Sara Gebhardt recounts her experience going from a largely liberal, diverse, and pluralistic environment in the suburbs of Washington D.C. to Davidson, which felt “20 years behind.” While at Davidson, she was a member of the field hockey team, studied abroad in Spain, and wrote for *Libertas*. During her sophomore year at Davidson, she wrote an editorial in the *Davidsonian* objecting to students’ erecting wooden crosses in front of Chambers during Holy Week. In the wake of the editorial and the ensuing controversy, Sara describes, she became a “known” Jewish student on campus, for better and for worse. This propelled her to become the first white student leader of the Minority Affairs Committee.

Biography: Dr. Sara Gebhardt was raised in Bethesda Maryland and graduated from Davidson in 1998. She went on to receive her PhD from Harvard University and now teaches adjunct at George Washington University and manages her own communications firm.

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Interview History:

Interviewer: Cathy Xu and Taylor Drake
Transcriber: Dahlia Krutkovich
Editors: Dahlia Krutkovich and Dr. Sara Gebhardt
Reviewed by Dr. Sara Gebhardt

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Setting Description: Zoom call with Dr. Sara Gebhardt in Washington, D.C. and Cathy Xu and Taylor Drake in Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina

Transcript Notes: The following transcript has been edited for brevity and clarity.
SG: Dr. Sara Gebhardt
CX: Cathy Xu
TD: Taylor Drake

Cathy Xu: Okay, so there are some formalities I have to go through just to make sure that everyone knows anyone else watching the interview later on can understand the information. Though, the name of the interviewers are Taylor Drake and Cathy Xu and the name of the narrator is Sara Gebhardt.

The location of the interview is Davidson, North Carolina and Washington, D.C., correct?

Sara Gebhardt: Correct.

CX: And the date is April 1st, 2019. The purpose of the interview is to document history of Jewish experiences at Davidson College, and so I'm going to have to ask you for oral consent because the recording of your interview will be made available and a transcription will be added to the Davidson College archives. These materials will be made available for research by scholars for scholarly publications and other related purposes consistent with Davidson College's mission and regulated according to any restrictions placed on their use by the interviewee or interviewer, and so before it goes in the archives and is made available to the public, we were just wondering if you would consent to—

SG: I, yes, I give my consent.

Taylor Drake and CX: Perfect, thank you.

CX: So just to start off, do you mind telling us a little about your relationship with Judaism before you arrived at Davidson?

SG: I grew up in a suburb of Washington, D.C. in Bethesda, Maryland. My mother was Jewish and my father was Catholic. The reason I mention where I grew up is because being mixed was very common. Many of my friends were of mixed religious backgrounds with their parents. Judaism is a matrilineal tradition. So, I had grown up, essentially, as a Jewish child with a Catholic father, which was its own thing. But that was very normal for most of my friends.

I was very close with my maternal grandparents, who were first-generation immigrants. Many of their family members were killed in the Holocaust, and so I carried that aspect of the religion, which is more cultural than religious, throughout my entire life before Davidson. So, upon going to Davidson, I considered myself Jewish. But I probably considered myself less religious than someone who is very devout, because of my parents having different religions.

But I was super close with my grandparents and my great aunts and uncles, all of whom had grown up in Orthodox Jewish households in New York City and had come from Eastern Europe as children escaping the Holocaust.

CX: So, what brought you to Davidson?

SG: Field hockey and the quality of the academics.

I was a very good athlete in high school and was being recruited in soccer and field hockey at the time. I feel old. It's 20 years ago that I graduated from Davidson. But at the time, in high school, I was a big athlete, but I also wanted a college scholarship and a small liberal arts education. As you guys know, Davidson is one of the few colleges that has Division I sports, offers scholarships, and that has an unbelievable academic reputation.

I was also a little bit of a rebel, as much as you can be a rebel in a fairly affluent neighborhood, with a very good public high school. All my friends were going to Northeast schools or aiming at Ivy League Northeast schools. I was going to go to North Carolina, be different, and be just as good as the Williams, the Amhersts of the world. I ended up at Davidson, basically, because I was recruited.

I signed a national letter of intent, and it got me into a school that was small and that had very good academics, so it seemed like the right mix... at the time. At 17 years old, it seemed like an okay choice.

A lot of the kids on the field hockey team then were from the Northeast, so it felt somewhat comfortable on the recruiting visit and, and I was swayed that way.

CX: Uh, so were you involved in Jewish life at Davidson?

SG: There was no Jewish life at Davidson. I had a very difficult college experience because of being Jewish.

When I went to Davidson, I felt incredibly Jewish. It was a place that was very isolating, and, in my opinion, there wasn't Jewish life. The college chaplain was very good to try to talk to Jewish students. There were maybe 12 to 15 openly Jewish students when I was there. It was something that some people I knew hid, which is crazy to think about. I started college in '94, and I graduated in '98. This was not normal. It was very strange coming from where I came from, which like I said, was a very diverse environment.

It wasn't that the lack of diversity and small Jewish population was unexpected, I knew a couple of Jewish students. I was connected with a kind of "big sister," who was Jewish and two years above me. Her family lived in Charlotte, so I would do Passover with her family, but that wasn't coordinated by the school. I think the school was there to provide support, but I would say there was no Jewish life at Davidson and... and it's very hard to imagine that that is even a thing now.

TD: How would you say you negotiated your Jewish identity within the field hockey team?

SG: That's a good question. Really good question.

I come from a liberal background— my parents were activists in the Civil Rights Movement. To me, the college felt very politically conservative, especially on the part of the student body, which was tied into a kind of a religious culture.

I was friends mostly with the athletes, because when you're on a sports team, that's what you do. Most of them, or, half of them, were from the Northeast: New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, so I had more of a rapport with them. I think they would have been exposed to more diversity in their high schools and their upbringing, but I don't really know. That was one place I felt safe and had a lot of friends.

I have a very formative story that includes me speaking out for Jewish people at Davidson when I was a sophomore. My teammates were good friends of mine, and I went through that event, where the entire school kind of found out I was Jewish, they really supported me.

There was a student group called the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and they used to leave New Testament Bible quotations on the field hockey locker room door. Now, I don't know if they were leaving them on every team's door, but given my experiences before that, I thought it was a little bit of a taunt targeted at me directly. And my teammates would rip the quotations down, and they always left candy, so I'd see the candy in the locker room, yet the posters were gone. To me, the candy was evidence that my teammates had hid the signs from me, I thought to save me from a little more discomfort or hurt.

It's a subtle sign, but my teammates kind of knew what I was dealing with.

As far as games, field hockey is in the fall, and this was not something new, but my high school was closed on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish High Holidays. Occasionally, at Davidson, I had to play on those holidays. I could have not played, but I always chose to play. This could have happened at other colleges, but maybe other colleges wouldn't have scheduled games on those days. My mom used to tell me about Sandy Koufax, one of the great Jewish baseball players in history, who used to skip games. I guess I should've followed his lead. But I didn't. I would just feel guilty, and guilty, and guilty.

Everything is fraught at 18, 19, 20, years old. Everything carries a lot of drama, I think.

TD: Could you share a little bit about the formative experience you mentioned earlier?

SG: Yeah, I think I stood up for non-Christian students, because I don't think there were a lot of Jewish students.

But my freshman year, I lived in Canon. The main school building was right in front of the entrance to the dorm.

So, my freshman year in the spring, around Easter time, there were three huge crosses erected on the lawn, between Cannon and Chambers.

Before this, at the beginning of my freshman year, hallmates of mine tried to proselytize me. When they found out I was Jewish, one girl asked me to go to church. You're surprised, but this lives with me every day.

She asked me to-- this one girl in particular asked me to go to church every Sunday.

And beyond the Jewish thing, there was racism that I kept picking up on. So, by the time I got to the spring of that year, when I saw these crosses, I just thought, “what is going on here?” They were enormous, massive crosses. I was told it was a Christian tradition, or it was a Davidson tradition. It was just really screwed up, and I couldn't believe it, but I didn't say anything about it. At the same time, my grandmother was [pauses] either had just died or was dying. And that was my mom's mother, so I thought of her as my link to Judaism.

That year, some people, I think they were seniors, wrapped the crosses in comic paper, and then put little bunnies around them. So, there *were* people on campus saying, “what is this?” or “why is this here, right in front of our place of scholarship?”

So anyway, fast forward one year, it happens again. This time, I lived down the hill, but the crosses were still there, and they were still in front of the building that we took all of our classes in. I was totally incensed by this, and I thought the people that spoke out against it the year before just kind of vandalized them, to be honest. I ended up responding that year, my sophomore year, by writing an editorial in the *Davidsonian*.

And in the *Davidsonian*, I basically wrote: “This is a Presbyterian College, I'm aware of that. The crosses should be, or, could be, better put right next to the church.” Mixing religion and education violated that idea of the separation of church and state that I thought was fundamentally American. In my mind, it totally went against the values intrinsic in a liberal arts education. When I wrote the article, I used words like, “I feel such-and-such,” so no one could really question what I had written.

I felt like Davidson had a brochure that recruited students by saying there was a growing population of non-Christian students, and when this happened, that wasn't seemingly true to me. Because how could they possibly allow this to continue? Where there are these huge, imposing crosses, right outside of the school building. In reality, a lot of students didn't like it. Christian, Jewish, whatever, they, they didn't feel it reflected their values.

Obviously, the students who put them up didn't notice that this would be a problem for other people. So, I wrote this article. The article's published, and as soon as it's published, all hell broke loose in my life. I got hate mail and the school then set up a forum for-- it was a religious forum to kind of talk about everything. And it was in one of those halls. Phi Hall maybe?

CX and TD: Yeah.

SG: And they promoted it with this yellow sign, which I almost tried to find before this, but I didn't have time. I know I kept it. But there is this yellow sign and had a big Jewish star— that was me represented in that star— and then a cross. And they were saying, come to this religious forum, and there is no other— there's like maybe two other Jewish people that I even know— so, clearly, I was the one.

I was put on a panel of about five or six students. And there was a Catholic and a self-proclaimed Buddhist. We know it was a very conservative place. And then there was the leader of the

Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and there was another leader of the other one the other group that was, like, IVCF? I don't know if that's still there. They were really homophobic, and they were a group of kids I really didn't like because of their aggressive intolerance of non-Christians and others, which now this is on the record.

But, Phi Hall was packed. It was "standing room only". One of the Christian groups had meetings on Wednesday night, and they all came into the Hall. I had my friends in the audience, which included my one Jewish friend, who I had a good sight of, which was important, and then some of some other friends. My roommate at the time was amazing. The administration wanted to talk about religious diversity and the question of "do we need these crosses?" This is it, basically, the fundamentalists were trying to allow people who didn't agree with them to talk. But, in my memory, all of the questions were directed at me.

TD: Wow.

SG: One person stood up, nearly crying, asking me how I was going to get to heaven without Jesus.

People asked me crazy questions. Crazy! Totally crazy questions just in that respect. And my, my roommate was a—is an Episcopal. She came from the kind of background where you'd think she would have kind of spoken for the students that were for the crosses. But she had—she stayed up all night the night before reading her Bible, and she defended me with the Bible. She found a passage that supported why this type of evangelism shouldn't be going on, and I was floored by that. One of the greatest moments of friendship I've ever experienced.

Then, there was a student who was maybe a senior? He said I should feel lucky because they used to put someone on a cross around Easter time and parade him around. So, this is where I'm just thinking, "What am I doing at this college?" It was insane. Some of the things that came up were crazy.

And once I identified myself as Jewish, it's a very small college; everyone on that campus knew it. It wasn't something I was hiding. I didn't care, but maybe I didn't realize how much discomfort, well, it's a worse word than that—prejudice—was against my point of view, because I decided to come to a Presbyterian college.

People kept saying to me, "you chose us," and my defense to it was, "No, you chose me." I was heavily recruited. I "upped" the school's numbers in everything. I was a very good student; I have a PhD from Harvard now. I could have gone elsewhere to college, but I was recruited to go to Davidson. And I chose to school for the many good things about it, one of which is probably the kind of course you're in [referring to HIS: 396 History of Jews and Jewishness at Davidson]. I loved the academics. But, but the rest of it [trails off].

I mean I had people coming up to me at parties after writing that editorial, asking me to get involved in minority affairs. I became the first white person who headed the Committee of Minority Affairs basically because of that editorial. And again, in 1994, '95, '96, and '97? The

college did not even recognize Martin Luther King Day as a holiday. The irony was not lost on me that I was the first non-black student head of this one organization, but I worked to basically pass that as a holiday. With other students, obviously, but it had failed repeatedly. It seemed like Davidson was decades behind the time.

So, in a way, that situation propelled me into these spaces that I might not have found. Afterwards, I got involved in an alternative newspaper and found some interesting people, who were not athletes and kind of out of my sphere. But the incident also really made me want to leave.

It was really, really horrible. In the aftermath of all of this, I went to some administrative office on campus, basically trying to figure out how I was going transfer. I couldn't stay at a school where someone's crying asking me how "I'm going to get into heaven without Jesus," and "you chose us, we didn't choose you." I mean, to say this kind of thing publicly seemed crazy. Because it seemed like the entire thing was just to say, "Just get in line, you. This is the school we have."

One of my professors in a Spanish class made some weird comments about being Jewish to me in Spanish. Nobody [knew] the word for "Jew" in Spanish, but I did. So things, some things just kept happening, and I just obviously wasn't very happy, so I walked into the administrative office, and you know how small Davidson is—was probably smaller, a little bit smaller than it is now. They just handed me the papers. I don't even remember saying anything. I mean they knew exactly why I was there. I obviously did not transfer, but that alone is telling. I was convinced to stay essentially because of Magdalena Maiz-Peña. Do you guys know her?

TD and CX: Yeah.

SG: The most amazing professor ever.

When I was, I think, a freshman, one thing led to another, and she found out I was Jewish and started cultivating my interest in Latin American Jewish literature. I basically stayed at Davidson to study with her. And I don't regret that at all. Because of Professor Maiz-Peña's care for and emotional and academic investment in me, the Davidson College library at the time had one of the biggest Jewish Latin-American collections that there was.

So, there were other reasons to stay, but I really stayed because I was convinced that I could make the school work for me in terms of what I came for, which was really the academics.

I mean it's 20 years later, and I probably wish I had gone to a different college.

TD: Yeah

SG: I mean, it's not even a "probably," it's a hundred percent.

TD: Yeah.

SG: I could have gone to the Northeast and not been a rebel and had not encountered almost any of any of that hostility, but obviously it was college, too, so I did have some fun. It wasn't all bad. I had friends that understood me.

People on campus would say to me, "if you're tolerant, you should tolerate the intolerant." I disagreed. So, I went abroad for a semester in the field hockey off season, and that helped a lot. When I got back my senior year, I chilled out a little bit. I tried not to get embroiled in these things, because, I mean, part of it is that I inserted myself into it.

I just, I just couldn't believe I was going to a school like that. Now that I think of it, I honestly don't think that they put the crosses up the next year. And I don't even know that! I don't even have the outcome in my memory, because I wasn't there. I was in Spain.

Yeah, it was a crazy, crazy time for me personally, and then there's people that I've met since graduating college, who either live in D.C., and for one reason or another, I didn't know them very well [while at Davidson], who have no idea any of that even went on. It's true that your own experience is your own experience.

I don't have a relationship really as an alumnus of Davidson. I don't go to the reunions, I don't give, and it's, it's all tied to the kind of experience I had. It's kind of sad, but I feel like the school used me.

TD: Yeah.

SG: And time gives you some perspective, but there are certain things in life that really, really grip you, and the way I feel about my experience at Davidson is something that I wouldn't say I've changed my opinion about. I wasn't overreacting, [Davidson] was really stifling for anyone who was even remotely different from a white, Protestant person.

It was really, really, really a place that didn't have much diversity of any kind: racial, ethnic, religious, it was [pauses] 1%? It was really different from Washington D.C. The school seems very different now, if I'm to believe that college literature—which I don't always, because it's not always true—but it seems like they've done a much better job of diversifying the student body.

Without real diversity, it's real hard to be a lone voice. I know I took a class on the Holocaust at Davidson, and that was really hard for me. It was a great class, but I felt weird, because I was the student in class that, I thought, had ties to this event. And I just felt protective of that history, because I didn't feel like people were going to treat it with the respect it deserved, just based on my experience at the college.

It was a weird college experience. Many people I still keep up with have really fond memories and have a sweet spot for the school. But I don't, really. I mean, I have that feeling about some of my professors there, and I still want to see them, I would like to hear from them. But I don't have a whole lot of connection to the place. A lot of it has to do with having gone there as a Jewish student, but it's not all that. I mean some of it just could be moving on, but who knows.

CX: I'm glad you got support from Dr. Maiz-Peña.

SG: She's incredible. She is my one of my favorite people of all times. I've been back to Davidson a few times since graduation. Well, never on reunions, because I boycott them in a sense, but the last time I went, I even stayed with her. We were really close. She really, she really helped me through all of that. And she knew what I needed. I am now an adjunct professor, and so I was really into school.

TD: Thank you for sharing that.

SG: Well, of course.

CX: So, you shared about your experience of antisemitism on the campus. I was wondering to what effect did you experience antisemitism in the Davidson town community?

SG: Um, I didn't, because I didn't really have an experience in the Davidson town.

I don't think that Davidson town was following campus events on the granular scale. I found the town very southern when I went to college. In terms of antisemitism in North Carolina, or even in Davidson, I didn't really experience it. I was in the library, or on a bus going to a field hockey game most of the time, so I didn't really do much. And the town, I think, has gotten better, because then there really wasn't much there when I was there.

I recall stories about the KKK meeting in a pub—the “Korner Pub”—in the town and hearing things about that, but I never actually saw that. But I believed it was happening

TD: Yeah.

SG: But I didn't witness any threatening events that made me feel unsafe in the town.

TD: You spoke a little bit about how you view Davidson now, and how your outlook is hopeful in a way, because there are enough Jewish students to have organized Jewish life. But, a lot of this project was inspired by the unmasking of students with the neo-Nazi affiliation, last November and the campus climate after that. What was what was your reaction to that event?

SG: Well, I texted a lot of people. It's really sad. I'm really saddened by it. And I give the climate of the country more credit than I would ever attribute that to that being just a Davidson thing.

Even with my experiences there, I know enough to know that that is going on, on college campuses everywhere. I'm very close right now to American University, where I have taught part-time, and there's all kinds of stuff going on, on that campus. Racial tensions and tauntings and just really terrible things. It was horrible to hear about what happened at Davidson, but I had thought that the way the college's response was swift, good, and appropriate.

If I had seen a swastika when I was in school, it wouldn't have surprised me, and I doubt I would have even reported it.

I think that what happened is in line with everything going on in the nation. I think it's a very scary time to be Jewish.

CX: I'd like to hear more about your experience at Davidson. You talked a bit about the support that you got, obviously, from Dr. Maiz-Peña and your teammates. I was wondering if you can talk more about your relationship with other students, faculty members, even the administration?

SG: Well, I had a couple of professors who I did an interdisciplinary major in Comparative Literature with, Dr. Maiz-Peña and Dr. Annie Ingram [now Merrill].

So, between— so I had a key to that little building do you— is that still there [referring to the Carolina Inn]? I spent so much time in that building. It was my home. I created that major after that whole thing happened my sophomore year, and it became my motivation for staying at Davidson. I thought, “I'm going to study what I want to study, I'm going to do what I want to do, I'm going to work with whom I'm gonna work with.”

It was helpful, so I would say I had a good relationship with the professors who advised me. I had a good group of friends, most of whom were athletes but not all of them. I'm trying to think. You know, my roommate in my sophomore year who read her Bible the night before that whole religious forum? She came into college with a very narrow worldview, the narrowest of any of my friends. During Davidson, her mind just opened, and, well, I'm still close with her now. She was a good support.

And I had boyfriends with whom I basically hid from the world. I mean, my sophomore year, I had my boyfriend who lived off campus. I spent a lot of time there and just not dealing with the regular campus life that other kids dealt with. And same with senior year, I kind of just let myself have a little fun and just be more normal. Not in the regular kind of everyday frat life type thing—I spent a lot of time with a select few people and a lot of time in the library studying.

But as for administrators, I don't remember anyone particularly helpful. I also don't remember going to seek help, so, I mean, that could have been part of it. The college chaplain, Rob Spach, he was very nice and accommodating. He tried to organize Passover Seder-type things. But I wasn't close with him. I just knew he was there, and he was a good support. Honestly, the Peñas, both of them, were my godsend at that school. Every day at the Carolina Inn, I remember, she would come yell for me out the window, trying to get my attention. I remember Dr. Merrill coming to a field hockey practice to give me a paper. I mean, this is why you go to Davidson, right? Because of that kind of personal touch.

It's weird how life works, but I don't feel that close to that many people I went to school with, but I'm still close with at least 15 to 20 friends, and I'd love to see them and hear about their lives and all of that. Some of them were very closely watching what was going on with me, and some of them were just totally clueless about it, so, that's college, I guess.

TD: I'm a little interested we said you got involved with an alt newspaper. Was this *Libertas*?

SG: It was, yes.

TD: Could you talk a little bit about your experience with *Libertas* and how you feel like you brought your experience as a Jewish student to that organization? Or if you shared your perspective after what happened sophomore year?

SG: It was more a place for the people who were different. I definitely wrote many liberal screeds. I mean sometimes, I find these articles that are around, I'm like, "Oh God! What was I doing?" It wasn't always about racism but oftentimes, it was.

A lot of my life had been poised to kind of fight against racism, because my parents were huge Civil Rights activists. My dad was a civil rights lawyer, and everything I saw at Davidson reminded me of some racist thing, so I would write about that, or just write kind of quirky things.

I don't remember after writing that editorial in the *Davidsonian*, ever really doing that again. I mean, it was probably one of the most powerful pieces of writing I've ever written in terms of how it launched my life. You know, it impacted my life, and *Libertas* at the time had an editor who was openly gay--

TD: Is his name Zac Lacy?

SG: Zac Lacy. Yes, one of my friends. Just horrible, horrible. If I look at everything, and I start piling up all these things that happened, there is no discounting that the Davidson environment was overwhelming to those in the minority. The one gay student, the one openly gay student at the time—because it something you couldn't be—killed himself. And that happened, he was a year older than me, but I was friends with him from *Libertas*, and it was just tragic. There are many of us who thought that the place killed him.

Now, probably not, but it was not a good place for people who were different, and people who were openly different. So, when I do "the synopsis of Davidson College and everything wrong with it," his death is always part of the story, too. The community just was not kind to people who were different and who were fighting to be different, like Zac was.

Libertas was an interesting group of people and fun in its own way, and I did it when I could. I was so busy with everything. I definitely do come across some of the things I wrote and shake my head about them, because they're just this kind of weird, alternative, not in a narrative form. Who knows what I was doing? Everyone's a poet, right? [Laughs]

CX: [to Taylor] Do you have any more questions about her time at Davidson?

TD: No. I mean, I might, we'll see.

CX: Okay, in that case, I was wondering about whether your relationship with your faith evolved or changed after your time at Davidson?

SG: It's since Davidson that I will almost never tell anyone straight up off the bat that I am *half* Jewish, because I'm Jewish. So, I mean, I used to play that card— when I was a little kid, because I got extra presents on the holidays. But I definitely felt a lot more Jewish when I was at Davidson.

I felt a lot of guilt for being at Davidson. Both of my maternal grandparents died while I was in college, and I just felt like, "God, I have betrayed everything that I'm even here." And so, when I left college, I was solidly Jewish, but I came right back to where I grew up in D.C., and I have continued to observe the High Holidays and be in the Reform tradition. I'm religious in spirit and culture more than I am in religion. But that's something that I have inherited from my grandparents, who kind of rejected the idea of, in some ways, of God, after the Holocaust. So, that kind of American Jew, Reform Jews, is a camp that I'm solidly in.

I would say, maybe being in college strengthened it, made me feel kind of more responsible, able to participate in the religion. I had never been to Israel until this past year. I went to Israel in November of 2018, and now, after going to Israel, I feel more strongly Jewish. Something happened there, where I feel a lot more connected to Judaism. I don't really know the answer that question, to be honest. I, I think that my time at Davidson solidified my Jewish identity more than this mixed religious identity that I had when I was little.

I mean, the reality was I was always Jewish. The synagogue and the rabbi, everyone's going to tell you, "your mother's Jewish, you're Jewish, you're in synagogue." It wasn't going to church, right? So, it's just something that I didn't, I didn't really think a whole lot about until I was at Davidson thinking, "Oh my God. I can't speak for millions of people." It made me appreciate the position that a lot of minority students have in a lot of situations, where they have to stand and talk for an entire religion, like I had to do that night. I wasn't equipped for it.

I wasn't trained for that. I now have a Masters and a PhD in American Studies, where I studied ethnicity, race, difference, the American Dream. All of these academic and personal interests certainly were influenced by my time at Davidson.

My essay for graduate school was all about that event I told you about. Well, the hook was that event and everything that happened afterwards. I had become a journalist after college, so my essay sort of tied together that article I wrote in the *Davidsonian*, of coming into my voice, and, and then my experience with being different and kind of being targeted in a way, in many different ways, My advisors brought it up in my dissertation defense, which was five plus years after I applied to graduate school.

But anyway, long story short, I still feel culturally Jewish.

I will never live in a Southern state, based on my experience at Davidson. I don't really like to travel to them. I always felt weird when I went to Georgia, or other places that my friends were from. And I don't know if I was reading into it or not—I'd see Confederate flags and get scared. There are things in life that I just decided for certain at Davidson. I will never live in the South, I will never go to a reunion, I will never do all these many, many things, and I will always be a

Jewish student who went there, and I will cultivate my Judaism. Probably the way that I have—before and since—but college has made me very much more aware of how hard life can be for minorities—beyond being Jewish.

But I think that it colored my view of, of the lack of progress the country had made at that point. Because, when I was going to go to Davidson and my high school classmates were saying, "Oh my god isn't that a religious school? It's going to be so conservative!" I didn't believe them. I mean, yeah, we studied these things in school [like the Confederacy], but was 1994! Unfortunately, they were absolutely right.

And then when I was in Davidson, I would tell everybody, "Oh my god! D.C. is so much better." And then, of course, I came back to D.C., after college, and saw the same Confederate flags. If you're looking for it, you're going to find it, right? You're going to find the racism, you're going to find the antisemitism. I wasn't finding antisemitism in D.C., but I did learn that if you were looking close enough, you were going to find these things everywhere.

TD: Yeah.

SG: In college, all I could do is tell everyone how great D.C. was. And I still think it's great. I love D.C., but it's not without its problems. Even though I still make a statement to you guys, about how I won't live in the South, I understand that there are terrible things everywhere. At Davidson, I was looking for it 90 percent of time. I was looking for it. Because I felt like if I didn't stand up, I just felt nobody would, and I had to speak out.

I still speak out about it now, and I will spend my life working towards making sure that we don't dial backwards in a way that will make the country hard for many people, like it is now. I am in the world as a Jewish person— as a Jewish woman— and I feel committed to continuing that, going to services and living a Jewish life. The Jewish people are activists for justice, and there are certain organizations that I am involved in. I don't know if that's influenced by Davidson or not, but I certainly felt very Jewish when I was in school, because I had to speak for all Jews, everywhere, at all times.

CX: Um there was something earlier in the interview when you were talking about the idea that you chose Davidson, but really Davidson chose you. I'd like to offer something from another interview we did, with Dr. Ruth Ault. She was the first Jewish professor at Davidson. And something that she said was, in her contract, they said it would be okay for her to be Jewish, as long as she respected the Presbyterian tradition. And so, it's kind of this idea, that Davidson wants you, but you have to [play] the quiet Jew.

SG: That is exactly what it is. I remember I took a class with her my freshman year. I think Psychology 101 or something.

That reminds me. There was some kind of vote, and I don't remember the situation. I was in Rusk and I think it was there that there was some kind of vote about the Board of Trustees having to be Presbyterian. Oh, no—it was do they, should they have to be an active Christian.

It wasn't even, "could they be a non-Christian", and I remember hands going up about this. I don't know how you do a vote on something like this. So people were voting against what that means [voting to maintain the current BoT rules], including my friends... I had friends of mine who tried to hide their views from me. So, I could do everything possible to elevate the college's reputation, but in the end, I could never serve as a trustee, not even as a "non-active Christian", which would be what? Someone who doesn't go to church?

TD: Yeah.

SG: But and I don't know if they allow non-Christians on there now, but at the time, we were voting on these issues, and some of my quote unquote "friends" were voting against my interest. I don't follow it, and probably I should, but that was also one of the reasons I don't give money. I mean, these poor fellow classmates of mine, who used to call right when we graduated college. Every year there was a drive for money, and they used to call, and they would get an earful.

I mean, it's possible that they've changed. But though that kind of tenor was exactly what I felt, which was, "Yes, come to college. Yes, it's fine to be Jewish at this school," because it's clearly a question that I asked, "Yes, we have support. Yes, there's religious community beyond the Christian, Presbyterian, but, no, don't say anything about it. Allow us to put these crosses in front of your face, in front of your school. Don't you know?"

And I experienced classmates trying to proselytize me, or tell me that they used to think Jews had horns on their head. Never in my life had I even heard that kind of talk. I could not believe that the well-educated classmates of mine were coming in with those kinds of feelings. And I wouldn't be surprised if they still had some of those feelings.

You know, it wasn't everybody, but it was a difficult place to be different.

TD: Yes. A lot of your story resonates with us and our experiences as marginalized students.

CX: I mean, I really connected to what you said about your CIS major, especially because, um, so, I just got approved for my major in Transnational Literature, so similar to—

SG: Oh, I've heard of it.

CX: Yeah, and that really stemmed from me not finding the support I needed in the classes that are available now. I realized that I needed to create my own experience in order to get the education that I need. So, that definitely resonated with me. I don't think there's that kind of overt discrimination, but there's still problematic speech and attitudes that are more manifested in microaggressions. There is a liberal presence on campus, though, so people are less open about their conservative views. But—

SG: Oh, okay.

CX: Yeah, but then again, we also surround ourselves with very liberal community, so I personally don't know too much about conservative student communities on campus.

SG: Well at least there's a liberal presence. I can't even imagine that. I'm surprised now to look at Facebook, or those types of things and think, wait, this person's liberal?

[Overlapping talking and laughing]

CX: Is there anything else to add to the record today? Anything you'd to say to future generations? That you haven't touched upon, maybe?

SG: Oh wow. Future generations of Jewish students? Good luck! Get out?

[Overlapping laughter]

SG: Well, I think the administration, is open to help students who are different, and Charlotte, North Carolina, seems to have a good-sized Jewish population, now.

I think that, Jewish students should find each other and make sure that their voices are heard, and I think that would be the first place to start. If it seems hard and different, I also think that, with my own experiences, it's never a bad thing to reconsider your choices. You don't have to stick through everything. But obviously, I think that it's important that people are aware of how hard it might be for a student who might look the same but has a very different religious tradition.

I think it would be worthwhile for students to support each other and then probably seek support from professors, the administration, the chaplain. The resources seem to be there.

It was a very trying experience, and I would hope that it's not like that for students now. And if it is, they should definitely not bottle it up and not take it. They should consider talking to people like me, or other people who have been there and try to get the best they can out of what Davidson does offer students, which is a lot of opportunity.

If you find your place at Davidson, you can find a good group of friends, or a good kind of group of study-mates or, what have you. You know, find the things that, that really inspire you. You can make it work.

I guess I shouldn't keep harping on this, but you don't *have* to make it work, which is something I think I thought: I had to make it work. And I'm grateful that I did, for the academics that I got, but for the social aspect of it, find your people and stick to your people, and I think that will help a lot.

TD: Yeah

CX: Yeah, definitely.

TD and CX [together]: Wow, thank you so much.

SG: Thank you!