

Reminiscences of Henry Kenyon January 29, 2021

Narrator: Henry Kenyon, Champlain College Class of 2024

Interviewer: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Location: This interview was conducted virtually, via Zoom

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Duration of Interview: 18:08

Transcriptionist: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Introduction

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Henry Kenyon, Champlain College Class of 2024, conducted by Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director, on January 29, 2021. This interview is part of the Champlain College Archives COVID-19 Oral History Project. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Interview Transcription

[Start of recording]

Donnis: Okay, we are now recording. So I will start out by introducing myself. My name is Erica Donnis. I use she/her pronouns. I'm the Special Collections Director here at Champlain College. And we are here to conduct an oral history interview. Henry, could you introduce yourself to us, please?

Kenyon: Yeah, my name is Henry Kenyon. I'm a first year Digital Forensics major with a minor in Psychology. I'm from Saint Albans, Vermont, and I use he/him pronouns.

Donnis: Thanks, Henry. So let's start out with the first question, which is kind of open-ended: "I came to Champlain College because ..."

Kenyon: Yeah, I decided to come to Champlain College because it has an excellent program for my major. Being a native Vermonter as well, getting to go to college so close to home and just being near my family is really important to me. And the major that Champlain is able to offer for Digital Forensics students is phenomenal, probably one of the top in our country, I would believe.

Donnis: What were your first impressions of Champlain College?

Kenyon: So, I've toured a lot of schools in the U.S., primarily on the East Coast. And when I decided to tour Champlain College, it was ... my primary reason, you know, staying close to home. And so when I got to come on to campus, I think it was like the summer, so maybe June or July of 2019. And I was with one of my friends. And getting to walk around and see campus was pretty beautiful. There was a lot of inclusiveness for the LGBT community, which is really important to me, and just getting to go to school

in this really inclusive environment, and close to home, is really important to me as well. I really liked all the Victorian era mansions and how the first years get to stay in those. I think that's pretty cool. And I really liked the major that they had for my program, and I think it was pretty cool. So I applied.

Donnis: So what were your first few days on campus like?

Kenyon: My first few days on campus were probably my first few days of independence. I've never really been on my own that long before. I've never really out of my mom's kitchen before. I've never really had a meal that didn't come from my mom. So I was kind of just on my own. And having that sense of independence was really cool but kind of scary at the same time. So I was like all right so like, "time for dinner." Where am I going to go get dinner? Oh, I have to go to the dining hall. And like I didn't really have anybody to interact with because we were in quarantine, and I didn't have a roommate. So it was just kind of me, myself, and I for the first two weeks of school. And then, you know, getting to see the occasional friend outside. And I don't know, I feel like Champlain College was able to give me a good experience despite it being COVID for the first few days of college.

Donnis: So you said that you lived on campus this fall. Which residence hall did you live in, and what is your dorm room like?

Kenyon: Yeah, I actually moved res halls since then, but I did live in South House. I was on the first floor. And my room was really cool actually. It was a quad meant for four people, but I was the only one in it. And so, you know, there was four of each set of furniture, and there was a private bathroom. And so I was kind of all set in there. I didn't really need to go anywhere except, you know, to get food and see my friends. So my dorm was really cool, but it was just like too big. I felt like it could be a classroom. Like it was just enormous. And so it didn't really feel too homey for me.

Donnis: So did you do anything to make it feel more like home?

Kenyon: I'm pretty decorative, so I tried to decorate it a bit, and kind of bring some of my items that I had from like my bedroom in my parents' house to school, and see like, maybe that will make it feel more homey. But it just felt too big in the end. And being the only person in there was kind of isolating. It was like a quarantine but it was never ending.

Donnis: Where do you spend most of your time on campus?

Kenyon: I spend most of my time in the Global Ireland Business Center, up in the pavilion, where you can overlook the upper half of campus. I like all the glass windows and getting to sit by them. You know like watch the sunset or watch it snow or like watch the sun rise. Half the time I'm up at like 3 a.m. and doing work, and the other time I'm asleep at 1 p.m., taking my afternoon power nap. So, I mean, my schedule for school is like, I have classes at 10 and they get done at 2, and that's about it, so I kind of study whenever I want. And getting to go into that Ireland Center is just really cool, because of all the views. And the environment's really nice as well.

Donnis: Tell us about attending college during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kenyon: So it's really funny, actually. I was a junior in high school last year, and I ended up skipping a grade in November. And so by the time it was January I was like "oh yeah, like big senior season." And I had two weeks to apply to the eighteen colleges on my Common App. [Common Application]. And by March, I had gotten all my acceptances. But then COVID-19 started coming around, and I was like, "oh,

like do I want to go to college during COVID?” But I was pretty persistent on going to Champlain. And so you know, I put my enrollment deposit down. And by August, I was a little worried about going to college, just because I had like a really large student loan, and I wasn’t sure if Champlain was going to be able to deliver like the quality of education I was looking for. And so by the middle of the first semester, in like mid-October, I felt that Champlain did their best and tried to provide students with a good quality education despite their being a pandemic.

Something that I kind of like yearn [for], from regular learning, is the aspect of being able to go into the physical classroom and being able to sit next to my peers and being like, “Hi, I’m Henry,” and just like, you know, be able to introduce myself and get that like physical interaction that I need. And I know that was really hard for Champlain to do, but I did have a few classes last semester, you know, where I got to see some of my peers, socially distanced, and with masks on and everything. And I think despite the COVID pandemic, Champlain did their best. And that, I give it like a ten on ten. It was okay.

Donnis: So that kind of leads into my next question, which you’ve touched upon already, but I just want to raise it in case you have anything you want to add: How has Champlain College handled operating during the pandemic?

Kenyon: I feel that Champlain did very well compared to other colleges in our area, such as like St. Michael’s. They got like 30 cases. And then UVM [the University of Vermont] had a really big uprise in cases. And like Norwich [University], they had like 70 cases the other day. And Champlain has had 16 since the beginning of August last year, which I think is pretty phenomenal. I think they’re doing a really good job in making sure that all of their students are following the Burlington health pledge, that everybody is participating in routine testing every week. And there’s not really much more that they can do than what they’re doing right now, and what they are doing right now is pretty good.

Donnis: Has your college experience been different than how you imagined it?

Kenyon: Yes. When I was imagining going to college, I was going to have like, a couple roommates, and like a bunch of friends, and, you know, get to go out on the weekends, and party. Not party, but [laughs] like get to see my friends on the weekend, and you know, like get to explore Burlington and like do all these fun things. But like with the pandemic, it’s just been like, I’m going to go to bed at like 7, maybe I’ll finish this Netflix series I’ve been watching. There’s not a lot to do, because like I don’t want to go out and put myself in a social situation where I could get COVID. And so the college experience in general, I’ve had some of it, but I’m missing a lot of it, and that’s just because of the pandemic.

Donnis: Tell us about a memorable class from your fall semester.

Kenyon: One class that really sticks out to me was my SYS 140 class I had with David Ginter that was Introduction to Systems Fundamentals. And I really liked that class because the professor was able to form an accepting and inclusive environment. And so we would go in there, and we would talk about like what’s going on around the state, or like what’s going on around the country. If any students in the class had any concerns or like worries about like COVID or anything in their lives he would like stop what we were doing with instruction, and the professor would like address that, and then we would like talk about current events as a class. I really liked the professor was able to also keep the environment of like academics and like another environment of like current events and what’s going around in everyone’s life beside from school, just because academics aren’t our number one concern, especially during a

pandemic. Like my number one concern is like my health, my safety, what's going on around my country, and then school. And so I just liked that professor and how he was able to kind of fit all those environments or all those like situations in one place, and made it feel really accepting.

Donnis: Can you tell us about your class schedule for the fall? How many classes did you have in person versus remote?

Kenyon: Let's see, so I had six classes in the fall. I had Forensics and Systems, I had a Criminal Law class, an ITS [Information Technology and Sciences Division] internship at the Leahy Center [the Patrick Leahy Center for Digital Investigation at Champlain College], and then I had two Core classes. Out of those six classes three of them were in person, so both of my Core class, and then my Systems class. Half the time I would find myself in the classroom. The other half the time I wouldn't, just because sometimes I'd go to the class and I'd be the only one in there, and then all eighteen of my peers are on the LCD [monitor] in front of me. And I was like, "oh, like why aren't you all coming to class?" And so like some days, we would have like a day of the week like we would all go, and there would be the other day of the week where it would just be the professor in there, and we would all like feel guilty, but like nobody else would want to go to class, just because class was really short. It was like 40 minutes and then you could leave. But despite the flex hybrid model that Champlain was using, I feel like the online classes were just as successful as the in-person classes would have been.

Donnis: If you could change one thing about your first semester at college, what would it be?

Kenyon: If I could change one thing about my first semester it would be how I gripped mental health. I feel that my mental health at the beginning of the semester was like spot on and like ready to go and that like halfway through the semester, I just kind of like fell down. And I was just kind of in a dark place for a bit, trying to like slide by with school and do like 10 hours of an internship every week and then work a job to pay my student loans. And it was just kind of like depressing. I was like, "wow, I don't have a roommate, I can't go see my friends." And this was like the time period where like we weren't allowed to go visit other people in our dorms because of COVID, and so I kind of just felt isolated and by myself. And I wish that I would have gone to like Student Health and asked like, "hey can I speak to somebody about like my mental health?", or like, "can I get involved in the counseling program?" But I just kind of isolated myself in my dorm and kept to myself and just texted my few friends on my phone. I'd be like "hey, I'm depressed, LOL." And we kind of decided to like deal with that with them. But I wish I was a little more proactive on my mental health the first semester. But I definitely took that experience and now I'm in the second semester, and I'm like "hey, Henry, we're not going to do that again. Like you gotta go talk to somebody, just like walk down to health services and be like, "hey." So, yeah.

Donnis: When you look back on your first semester at college, what do you think you'll remember the most, and why?

Kenyon: I think I'll remember all the friends I made. Going to high school in Vermont, I had a lot of friends, but the amount of people from my high school that went to Champlain was very minimal. There were six, and I actually don't talk to any of them. So coming to Champlain it was like a new opportunity to make new friends, and a new opportunity to like revise my own personal persona, so like how people perceive me. And I like getting to meet new people, and I'm in a really good friend group, and we get to hang out, like once or twice a week, and go on all these adventures downtown, and that experience is really important to me. I won't forget that.

Donnis: So how do you connect with your friends, both those at Champlain and those outside of Champlain?

Kenyon: I like to take the aspect of like Google Meet and Zoom that we do in class, and I'll like make a calendar invite and we'll hang out, and be like, "hey, who wants to go like we're going to hang out." And so for my friends and peers who aren't in Burlington, or who I can't see, we'll hang out on like Google Meet and we'll like gossip for like hours on end and just like listen to music. But for my friends who are on campus or like in the Burlington community I can see them. We'll go on a walk on like Church Street or we'll hang out outside. And this was at least for the fall semester. We haven't been able to do this what with all the snow, but I plan on like going skiing with my friends this spring. And that experience hasn't really been interrupted because of COVID just because everybody I have been hanging out with has been really COVID safe. And we've been wearing our masks and doing routine testing and maintaining six feet.

Donnis: How about your family? How have you stayed in touch with them?

Kenyon: I'm actually pretty blessed to be going to college near my family in a pandemic, with the current Vermont guidelines in place, where I've been able to go and see my family. I'm one of the few first years on campus with a car just because I serve in the Vermont Army National Guard. I have drill weekends. I like am required to go to [them] in person. So I needed my car on campus to be able to go to those. So having that luxury I was able to see my family a lot during the fall semester. Whether it was just like picking up mail or like going home for a meal, like once every like three or four weeks to see my mom. It was nice to be able to see my family during the pandemic in person, but I definitely connected with them over the phone as well.

Donnis: So that's the end of my prepared questions. Do you have anything that you would like to add?

Kenyon: I feel like I really touched upon my bases. And Champlain being able to provide a good quality education despite there being a pandemic. Being a first year in college during COVID was definitely scary at first, but once I kind of adjusted to the new like societal norms of like getting tested and like wearing a mask and doing my classes online, it kind of just felt more routine. I feel like it was only scary at first because I had this like schema going for me where like going to school meant going to the classroom and making all these new friends, and like bumping into people outside. While as now we're in a pandemic, and I'm going to classes like in my pajamas from my desk. So it's just been a really big transition, but overall, where I'm standing now, I feel that being a first year in college during this crisis isn't as bad as it was when we started.

Donnis: Well, thank you, thank you so much for sharing all this with us. It's really great to get your perspective on things, and I really appreciate it.

Kenyon: Yeah.

[end of recording]