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ORAL HISTORY
P R O J E C T

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Interviewee: Aldo Hernandez

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of Aldo Hernandez

March 17, 2003

00:01:12 **SARAH SCHULMAN: If you could say your name, how old you are, today's date and the address of where we are for documentation.**

ALDO HERNANDEZ: Okay. My name is Aldo Hernandez. I'm 46 years old, and I live at 299 East 8th Street.

SS: And today is?

AH: Today is March 17, 2003.

SS: So, Aldo, the first question I want to ask you is, do you remember the first time you heard the word AIDS?

AH: Yes.

SS: When was it?

AH: It was in Long Beach, California, in '83, '84? We were looking at one of those magazines called *Frontier*, or – I think that was the free gay weekly from L.A. and the Valley, and it had an article about GRID, and we were all talking about it, and then the word AIDS came up. And somebody said, "No, it's not GRID anymore, it's AIDS."

SS: Do you remember when it first entered into your real life?

AH: Yeah – well, my first thought, right after that moment when we were doing that – I thought about, we were all drinking, sharing something, and we were drinking, and we were all smoking, and sharing, and I immediately thought, how does that effect what I'm doing right now? Passing this glass around the room, like you were having a drink or a beer or wine. So, I was concerned about that for a little bit, until I started reading up on that. Was that your question?

SS: Yeah. So, from the beginning, you felt that you could be getting it from people you know – like, that was an immediate –

AH: Oh, well possibly. There was a guy I was seeing at the time, a year earlier, and he was – I lived in Long Beach, and I had these storefronts and we all lived in this place, and sometimes we modeled for a painter, and we were nude modeling. And he had some spots on his ass and his legs. And I just thought it was funny that he had this big, kind of purple lesion spot on his ass, and I used to joke about it to him. I said, “Well, you know, when you go modeling, you’re going to have to put something on that.”

SS: So this was your boyfriend, this guy?

AH: More or less – sort of, kind of thing. We were kind of just having this kind of cute little thing going on. And so – to me, it was kind of like my boyfriend. But, it was never really that solid. But we were living next door to each other. I had these storefronts. And I just remember we would laugh about it. And this was in '82. I'd say, “Oh, put a Band-Aid on it.” Just thought it was some sort of bizarre pimple thing. And, I don't know how much he really knew, because he died later in 1988. But, I just remember that. And then, years down the road, seeing the same thing when I started seeing KS lesions and realizing, oh, it's the same look.

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So, that was going back, and at the time, we were all sharing drugs intravenously, sometimes. And I wasn't doing a lot, but I realize that this person had more, and this person had a lot of other relationships and people and stuff. I found out later, through other people, when I came to New York, that he had full-blown AIDS and had gone back to live with his parents. So that was a real eye opener. And then of course, in 1988, that summer, he died, and then I really started having flashbacks and, you see the person's image on the subway and all that sort of thing, and I got tested again. I think that was the second time. And it was around that time I went to ACT UP.

SS: Do you think that his death directly contributed to you going to ACT UP? Or, do you think it was just part of the landscape?

AH: It was just part of it. What really contributed to me going to ACT UP was my friends who were or are still – some aren't around anymore – being HIV-positive and feeling like I wanted to do something, or know more about it.

SS: So when you tested, you tested negative, when you tested?

AH: Yes.

SS: And yet, you still wanted to be part of the AIDS community?

AH: Well yeah, absolutely. They're my friends, they're my family. I wanted to know more. I hesitated for a long time going, because I thought well, if I go and there's a lot of hot guys there, I might get caught up more in that. So – and that was in '87, early '88. So, I didn't go. I kept up on what was going on with it all. And then, when Ray Navarro moved here, the first thing he said to me was, "Where does ACT UP meet?" And, since I had met him in L.A., and then, he was staying at the place I had in Brooklyn. I said, "The Community Center." So, that's the first thing he did, the first week he moved here, that summer of '88 – in June, I think, it was. He just marched his ass right over there.

SS: Okay, so let's go back and talk about Ray Navarro, a little bit. So, how did you meet him originally?

AH: Through friends. A friend of mine – David Bradshaw, who I still know, and he mentioned Ray – said Ray was moving to New York. Oh, and also Iris Rose and Melanie Munõz – they were part of this group Watchface. And I knew Iris from Long Beach, California. But they had been out there doing a performance at MOCA, where

David also worked, and they said, “Oh, this guy that we met there – this technician – he’s really great, and we think he’d make a great roommate, and he’s moving to New York.”

So I happened to be out there that summer – I guess it must have been ’87 – or that fall – and I met him, and we got along right away. We were just instant friends, whatever. We went to a place called Vacilon, this kind of Latin gay club that was inside a beauty salon, on the weekends. So – and, that’s what I mean. And then, when Ray came here, he was very active in doing, whatever. And, as you know, his mom was too. And so she was always very much about going out there and participating. So when he came and did that, it was just like, natural for him. And then, I was also talking to their friends, and I was friends with Hunter. I think Hunter was staying here then – I’m trying to remember.

SS: What was Hunter’s last name?

AH: Reynolds. Anyway, I remember in October, we both went together –

SS: You and Hunter?

AH: Yeah. And, I don’t recall now yet, if he knew he was positive at that time or not, but the point for me wasn’t anything to do with me, as it was to do with a variety of people that I knew that were good friends of mine, that I knew that they were. So, I wanted to know more about what I could do or just – right? I mean, there was this –

SS: So did Ray already know that he had AIDS, when he moved here?

AH: No. He just wanted to help. If he knew, he wasn’t saying it. That was a real touchy thing, because my dentist took him on, and the first thing he did is confidentially – he said to me, “You know, I need to talk to you. Does your friend, Ray,

know that he's probably HIV-positive?" And, I said, "It hasn't come up." And he said, "Well, I can tell from giving him a dental exam."

SS: Why did he go to you and not to Ray?

AH: Well, I think because he knew me not just as a patient, but as a friend. He's a gay man and he went out and so, we'd see each other at places. Or, I'd dee-jay. So he just mentioned it, you know. I don't recall if he mentioned it in the office or out. He said – and I thought it was okay for him to ask me, you know?

00:10:00 Ray's just one of those people. He reminded me of Adele Davis – the nutritionist, who died on tour of a heart attack, but she was too busy telling everybody about how to eat well. And he would do that. He would just exhaust himself trying to do things, but at the same time, his own issues I think were something that he just didn't want to be bothered with sometimes. And he never – I don't feel that he was trying to deceive anybody, myself, at all. I'm not going there with that. But I do think that it wasn't as important to him than what he wanted to do. He was always trying to make something happen. And, the other issue is that his boyfriend, who has also now passed away, did tell me later on, that he knew that he had it, and he knew that he had given it to Ray. And that's something I could never tell people at the time.

SS: So, Ray and Anthony [Ledesma] were living downstairs –

AH: I had to live with it, right.

SS: And were you involved in taking care of them?

AH: Sometimes, yeah. Myself and a lot of friends – we took turns when things got bad and they got worse. I mean – like that issue I just mentioned – that was really difficult because all of a sudden, Ray's sick, his boyfriend's crying because they're

having problems getting along, and he divulges to me that he knew – way, a long time before, from his dentist, two years before – that he was. Probably saw him and found out he was – but, he just was so angry that his boyfriend was seeing other people, that he just didn't tell him. And that's something I couldn't even tell anybody until – after they were both gone, of course, I mentioned to Ray's mom. She was very forgiving about it. They had already infected each other – so to speak, I guess – for lack of a better way of putting it. And who knows what else, because Ray really resented – I mean, Anthony, Ray's boyfriend, really resented that he thought that Ray was more promiscuous – and that whole dynamic of relationships that – people love each other, but they're always out to up the ante or get back at each other.

SS: Ray's mother was so involved, but – I mean, wasn't she an exception, in terms of people's families?

AH: Yes. And she's still involved. She's very involved, to this day. Yeah, how I knew of her as – Ray would always mention – a couple of times he went back to L.A. – things about his mom, kind of like, “Oh, my mom, she's always in my stuff,” because his mom would send these articles. She'd clip out the newspaper articles and send them to him to read, and she was quite an activist herself, on different issues and Latino issues and women's issues and different issues where she lived. So, she really worked within her community that way. So there was this kind of like — how do you put it? I guess, like a lot of kids, have with their parents. Kind of – they challenge each other because they kind of have the same thing, but they don't want to be thought of as copycats. I just know that Ray was always like, “Oh, my mom, she's always involved or taking over.” And they went to some demonstrations together. And I remember when I

gave him some stuff to take back to back to California, because we were involved in the censorship issues then – with Art Positive, and all that. And, he came back and was really happy how him and his mom went to some demonstration in L.A.

But he always had this – I can't find the right word – he always had this kind of, "My mom, she's always so..." you know, like when people think their parents are trying to be really young or be involved in things. He didn't say it that way – I mean, he was pretty intelligent – but anyway, I didn't know her. All I knew is when Ray got really sick and he was staying over on Second Avenue, where Jenny used to live.

SS: Jenny Livingston?

AH: Yeah, and they were staying in that loft. And it was February, and I don't remember if they were moving downstairs then, or not. They had to move out, anyway. There was a lot more going on than death. But, he got really sick, and I'm trying to remember – I'm not sure if he'd just come back from the San Antonio Film Festival or what – he just was ignoring the pneumonia, the walking pneumonia, and he got put in an ambulance, I remember, that night. It turned out that he had meningitis, but I don't think we knew until after he got to the hospital. But, he already had pneumonia. And anyway, there in the apartment – the situation is really bad. They're both pretty ill and the phone rings and I end up talking to his mom. And she doesn't know. He hasn't told her that he's really ill – that's he's got this pneumonia, and all the other complications. And I just tell her, and she goes, "What do you think I should do?" And I said, "I think you should come out here as soon as you can," and that's what she did.

SS: Right. But, how about when your other friends who got sick – how did their families – what was the standard behavior from people's families?

00:15:00 AH: Well, with my friend David White, his family really didn't know how to deal with the sexuality issue, so, his mom was kind of helpful to some extent, but was basically uneducated and didn't want to deal with that. The father even refused to accept his son as being gay, so, he couldn't even attend the memorial.

But, there was this certain love from the child to the parents. There was a certain amount of civility between them, but they didn't always really care to understand much. If their child is okay, fine. I know, in Ray's boyfriend's case – in Anthony's case – I think that his family – I remember meeting his mom and siblings and they were just – they just came to visit. His father came the weekend that he passed away. I was with him at St. Vincent's, with Anthony. And then – until his father arrived – and he – you know, he was just so alone. He was in a different situation than Ray. Where Ray had a lot of support and a lot of love and you could really feel it, that he was really conducting his own life and his own passing on his terms, as much as one can. And his mom and everyone else helped to do that. Whereas with Anthony, he was so much more alone there and much more scared. So, I remember seeing him for two or three hours at the hospital one afternoon, until his father arrived. And then, I just remember him really hugging his father and wanting to be with his father, and he died within a couple of days. And then, his father took everything of his and put it right in front of this building.

SS: Outside on the street?

AH: Mm hmm. I had asked him to leave some things, because Ray's mom wanted some things, and other people wanted some things that had been left with Anthony – you know, because he also wanted a lot of Ray's stuff. But he flipped, too. And without saying another word, the next day, he just put everything in plastic trash

bags and put it all in front of the building. And of course within a week, you saw everyone wearing it in the park, because in those days, there were so many homeless people in the park, which was all right. But, it was also so – just you know, disrespecting his friends and the people that did really want some of the things that were part of his life and his boyfriend's life. So that's one way somebody's parent handled it. I mean, I don't know about you, but I've been to a few of these things – you know, we can go on and on. Well, then there was Mark Holmes and the way his parents went to the memorial in D.C., and there was –

SS: What did they do? Tell us.

AH: Well, I went to this memorial in Washington, D.C., and I met David Bradshaw there, and a really good friend of his, Mark Holmes, who was this great video maker and amazing personality from D.C. and you'd see him in California. And his family – I think his father worked for the government, CIA or whatever – and his parents were really nice. They came to the memorial that was done at the 9:30 Club and across the street. Then there was this really shocking incident, and I just couldn't say anything, because of his parents being there, but I was aghast. Spaulding Gray got up and he said, "I'm working on a new piece about people with AIDS and is there anybody in here that would like to be part of it?"

SS: At the memorial service?

AH: Yeah – it was more than just for Mark, that part – the second part of it – it was across the street from this thing. Now, outside were two people that were HIV-positive – that had AIDS – that couldn't get in, because they were not on the list, and all

the people inside were drinking their \$50 champagne donation in their tuxes, all the hoity-toity young couples. Great. I'm not saying they're not nice people.

And I thought, this is a fucking irony – classic irony – where I just barely got in. I'm watching these guys trying to get in. There's people trying to advocate on their behalf, but the door people are just like, "No, there's no more room. It's sold out. There's no more room." And these two people – one's on crutches, one's in wheelchair, another one's just trying to get in – and I'm standing outside with them thinking, well, should I even go in? And then I go in and I listen to this and I'm thinking, why don't you just walk right out the door for the people that can't even get in here – that you're trying so much to contribute to? And I was standing right next to Mark's parents, and I thought, I can't do this to them.

At that point, it wasn't about what I could just do for Mark, in his name or whatever. It was more like, his parents wouldn't understand. And that was a really hard choice, because I really wanted to – you know of course in those days, it wasn't that difficult to say, "Hey, why don't you just walk outside the door and help these people get on with their lives instead of looking for palms for your popularity contest?" It really didn't sit well with me. I just knew that his parents – that would just be such an affront – to have somebody that knew his son – not that they knew me so well, but I just felt like – that's what I mean about different parents. Sometimes, you do say things, and some other times you don't want to cross that line, because they have such an image of their son and their family, that I think it would have kind of upset them to see somebody –

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SS: Well how did it affect David White, the way his family acted?

AH: Well David was a really beautiful person that way, and he went back to California and lived in a bungalow and our friend Gail helped take care of him, and other people. And a couple of times I went with him to APLA [AIDS Project Los Angeles] and things like that.

He kind of conducted the best he could. What got me with that issue is when I went out there the last few days – it was during Gay Pride week here – and his mom and his aunt, who he loved, were already out there. And his aunt had gotten a tattoo like David's because she loved him so much. That's so dandy. And I was there. And a friend of mine, Robby – who was also very close to David White – was staying there, and our friend David Bradshaw was down the street. And I stayed there the first night, and his mother and his aunt told me in no specific terms, I couldn't stay there. There were just too many people, even though I came out from New York to be with my friend, and also help take care of him. He was in really bad shape. And when I got there, he actually was lucid for a few minutes and said hello – as one can, when one's just lying there and barely able to breathe – and you know, said, "Aldo, you're here. I love you," etc. And, there was a certain lucidness that he had.

But he had made it very clear to me that he really loved his parents, no matter what. And he also made it clear that there were certain things that he wanted his friends to have, that he didn't think his parents would understand – some of his art work, and some of his journals and things. So they said – I'll never forget what people come up with. Since you ask, I'm telling you these trivial little stories. She said, "There's a hair in the bathroom sink, and it's not mine. And I just can't live in this situation!" You get that one, right?

SS: Yeah.

AH: So, I said to my friend Robby – I said, “I’ll be the fall guy. You stay here, and I’ll take the rap. They just want more space and more room, and they just don’t want us around. But, if I leave, then they’ll put up with you,” – you know what I mean, instead of both of us leaving. I said, “One of us has got to stay here with him. So I’ll go and stay at our other friend’s house.” So, I did. I said okay, fine. And I thought that was so ridiculous, but people just act out so many ways, when it’s not turning out the way that they thought. Yeah, here’s your son – you know, they love his friends, but underneath, she’s probably thinking, “Oh, his faggy friends,” and “Who gave it to my son?” Because somebody always gave it to your kid – he didn’t just – or she or whatever, right? It’s always somebody else did it to them. So some of those things – I didn’t really try to latch on to that stuff, even though it was upsetting at the time. Like I said, you just keep going. It’s real time. You’ve got to survive. It’s about my friend. It’s not about his parents. And I remember having to come back and not wanting to. And I came back and then he died actually, on the solstice, I think. What was amazing is he turned gold when he died. He had some sort of liver thing, and his whole body went gold, just like the walls of his room – which is ironic, because he worked a lot with finishing and creating environments and things. So it was kind of magical. You just went, wow.

And I think the same thing – he was somewhat at peace. I don’t think it was a real frightening – I know that he got up one late night and talked to Robby for five or 10 minutes. And I used to sit around in the daytime and just played music or things that I thought he might appreciate. And the caretaker would come and go – just to keep him comfortable. He was just very thin and he could barely breathe. So, they had the

memorial at the Zen Gardens off of Sunset Boulevard, and I didn't attend. I had just flown back to New York, and then I found out he passed away – just days after I got back. It was Gay Pride Sunday, and then he died that Monday. Then I found out that his father didn't go out there. And, I thought that was really lame – because he couldn't accept his son being gay or something. And I just thought well, they're going to regret that later, but it's your life.

SS: So, when you moved here from Long Beach, what was your goal for yourself?

AH: I think to do what I wanted to do with art and music. I moved from Long Beach. I was living with somebody and that relationship ended, so I went and got a job on a cruise ship, going up and down the coast. It was a great way to get away. And, I came here on one of the holidays that you get on the ship, and I liked it. I really like the variety and just the energy. It was January '85, and I went to Area.

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And I'd been here in '78 for a few days, but I hadn't really experienced the city much. I had stayed in a hotel and was just getting a visa. But I just liked the spice of the city and the variety – the energy – and really felt like I could do what I wanted – and the gay community of it. I just liked that. I wanted to be somewhere where I could just do what I wanted, and I didn't have to think about constantly being in a car or any of the issues – not that I wasn't out. You know, I'd already lived with somebody and all that sort of stuff and had a relationship kind of thing. But I just knew that it was a great place to do something creative that I wanted to do. So, that's what I did. I came here and I worked for Harry Fox, which is the music publishing house. And then I worked at MOMA.

SS: What did you do there?

AH: I was a Development officer. I worked for the Development officers and Development Director. So, I helped together the presentations and fund-raising packages and stuff. So I learned a lot about artists. I learned a lot about CEOs that donate money to museums.

SS: So were you at MOMA when the AIDS issue started to come up at MOMA?

AH: I was at Creative Time. For MOMA – in '86, I ended up getting a job as Development Director, whatever. I think we had a different term for it there, because it was such a small place – like, five of us – at Creative Time. So I did all the fund-raising there with Cee Brown, the director. I was there for three and a half years – I think up until '90 – I think the fall of October of '90.

SS: So, what was the AIDS activity with Creative Time, while you were there?

AH: Well, we would get a lot of proposals from different people, and it was a really great place to be, because we were very forward thinking, and everybody had some sort of input that worked there. Even though there was – Alison was the programming person, and Cee was the director.

SS: What's Allison's last name?

AH: Hu. And even the accountant had a say in that – he'd been affected by a lot of different issues with AIDS. So it was interesting, because we got different proposals, or we would actually seek people to invite them to bring us something.

SS: So before you came to ACT UP, were you working with ACT UP through Creative Time?

AH: I was already at Creative Time. I'm trying to think if – I think I was already at Creative Time, when I joined ACT UP.

SS: Right, so I'm saying before you came to ACT UP, was Creative Time funding projects that overlapped with ACT UP?

AH: I think so. We were involved with Karen.

SS: Who's Karen?

AH: Finley. We were involved with Gran Fury, but I'm trying to think if that was – we were involved with Gran Fury for awhile, I think. I mean, I know that Cee really supported them a lot, and I did, too. I know that we helped with the subway. I know we were involved with Kissing Doesn't Kill big time, because –

SS: How did that come about, do you remember?

AH: I think that – what's his name, it begins with an A – he lives on Great Jones Street.

SS: Loring.

AH: Loring McAlpin. He had a lot to do with it. And who else was it? Tom Kalin or whatever? I just know that somebody came up with the idea. It must have been somehow connected to Gran Fury, because anything that Donald and all those people – they talked to Cee and stuff. Somehow they wanted to do this thing, and I think – you know, I know that we were immediately – we're like, whatever we can do, and thought it was a great idea. And, put it through our processes and always had committees go through this stuff. But, I think that everyone just thought it was a great idea and then, we

put a big billboard of it outside the Anchorage, as part of Art in the Anchorage. And then, passed on to Chicago, where they – I think Gran Fury directly worked on that, but I think we somehow might have been involved helping fund that. It ended up on buses in Chicago and then New York.

SS: How much money would Creative Time give to a project like that?

AH: I think – part of that – that one, might have been four or five grand at the time. Some projects only got fifteen hundred; some projects got fifteen thousand. I think one of the Gran – later on, the poster project for Gran Fury got more. Or, we had a project like Martha Fleming and Linda LaPointe who did a project at the Battery Maritime Building. It was more of an historical project, but bringing it all the way to today. And so, they dealt with issues, including AIDS in different ways, but they dealt a lot with history and architecture. But, that project, I know we fundraised – I did a lot of fundraising for that, and so did they, the artists. They were really good.

So generally speaking, I think, anywhere from three to six thousand dollars was standard for an artist's project, for funding – whether it was in the Anchorage or not. The Gran Fury projects seemed to be different, because it involved a lot of printing – some more than others. I think the Kissing Doesn't Kill probably came to more in the end. It's funny, because even though I did the fund-raising, I didn't always – I mean, it's been quite a few years since then, for me to retain the exact totals of everything. I think that we might have spent fifteen or sixteen grand on the poster project.

SS: Which poster was that?

AH: The subways. It had palm trees, or something. I think it was a bit difficult for the commuters to read that.

SS: So, you were doing all this arts administration and art development.

What was your training? Did you go to art school or did you before?

AH: Well, I had taken art courses in college, and I'd also worked as a social worker – you know AFDC food stamp county welfare department worker. When I was 18, I was already doing that, so I was the youngest one in my county. At the same time I was going to college. So I had some experience in pushing papers and filling out forms. I also had worked at Cal State Long Beach, in the library, since I was very involved in –

SS: Did you grow up in Long Beach?

AH: No, I lived there for five years.

SS: So you were born in Cuba?

AH: I was born in Cuba, and I grew up in the inland empire – Corona, California – the navel orange capital of the world. And that's somewhere near Riverside, past the mountains, past Santa Ana and Orange County. I think it's a big suburb now. At the time, it was a really small town.

So I grew up there and then I moved around to Riverside, and I traveled quite a bit. I traveled around the world, and I ended up living in Long Beach. I had friends there, and I ended up living there in the late '70s. I've lived in a few places. I lived in San Francisco in '76-'77. And then, I lived in Long Beach and ended up working at Cal State. I loved it. I worked there, lived there until I guess, '82-'83. I was living with this guy and I went on this cruise ship thing for a year and I moved to New York in the summer of '85.

SS: Okay, so you're working at Creative Time, and you're making your own work, and when did you start dee-jaying?

AH: I really started dee-jaying a lot in 1990.

SS: Okay, so that's later.

AH: I was doing parties before that. I did the parties for WHAM and other things. That was the first time, I think, I ever got paid for something – was a benefit. They did pretty well, and I bought my first mixer. I would do it for fun. I always had records, since I was a kid. So, I was really into music a lot.

SS: So, you used to go out a lot in the late '80s?

AH: Oh yeah, yeah.

SS: So, how was AIDS affecting the club scene, around the time you came to ACT UP — around '88 or so?

AH: How it was affecting the club scene, where, here?

SS: Mm hmm.

AH: I really remember it affecting it for me – because there was a period before I lived here that I read about. When I moved here, I was reading all about the closing of the bathhouses and how everything had changed. And I remember going to the Saint, and then they closed later, and all this sort of stuff. So there was a whole other legion of people that were really heavily affected by it, and I just knew – it was just starting to come into my realm.

I think it was really starting to affect things when I was in ACT UP, in the late '80s. I guess it just affected us, because it was an outlet to get out, and it was very conscious, too, because there seemed – not to be hate – but there seemed to be a division between the people that thought it was fine to do what you wanted to do. And some people started to feel that it was kind of hedonistic to just go out.

SS: How was that expressed – that difference? Do you remember any incidents or conversations?

00:35:00 AH: Well, I remember that when we created the “erotic space” at Meat, that was something that came out of the fact that people would make out in the back of the club, or they’d lock themselves in the bathroom, like people do, throughout lifetime, whether they’re straight or gay, whatever. And, we just thought it would be great to have just a small area that was – what we thought was an erotic space, because it wasn’t really for full-on sex, but – so if people want to make out or feel each other up, that they didn’t have to be in the bathroom or had to be odd. And it just became kind of like this very high school kind of sexy thing. And right away, we realized that there had to be somebody watching it or it could be out of bounds.

SS: What year is this?

AH: This is in ’90 then, when I started doing the party. And it became kind of an issue for some people because, the problem was well, are people having unprotected sex? Unsafe sex. Yeah – right away, if you have somebody in a bar, and you’re serving drinks and they’re drinking, and then they’re in this space, it’s your life, and you’re responsible, but the truth is that now you’re inebriated, and you can do something that you’re not really quite sure that you would do, if you weren’t. And I can attest to that. I was the first one to find myself at four in the morning, going, what am I doing back here, doing this? And I immediately realized that this is not going to work if I don’t do something here. And it really just came out of – it wasn’t why we started the party, at all. It actually evolved over months, where we were like, no – and then, well if there’s people making out here, then why don’t we just kind of make sure we have somebody

watching it situation, without stopping it. But, we're not going to have sucking and fucking here – just to be to the point about it.

SS: So, you hired a monitor or something?

AH: Yeah.

SS: And who was the monitor?

AH: Well, there different ones. The first couple were okay, and then best one was actually Raffi, because he was sexy and everything, but he knew the score. It was kind of a great little corner, if you're making out with somebody, or you want to go a little bit further than you might right at the bar, but it wasn't about penetration. Let's put it like that. There wasn't oral and anal sex or anything like that. So we didn't really allow that. And that's where the discussion with some people, I know – that was some point at ACT UP – somebody got up there, and I really contested it because I thought, first of all, I haven't seen you in my club, and I know you wouldn't pay to come in. So, what you're hearing is hearsay, and it's possible that something might have happened for a minute and it was taken care of. And I'm not saying that that couldn't happen. But, to say that people are being irresponsible, when in fact, I felt – and I still do feel this really strongly, and I even spoke about it once in Albany at a health workers conference – that you want to create a situation where young people can really experience their sexuality to some extent. I'm not saying that they have to have full-on sex – to experience some sort of erotic pleasure and connecting it to express themselves for who they are, in a situation that's actually safer and better, than if they just end up when they really, really want to have this experience, and they end up compromising themselves with a stranger – which

has happened to thousands of people – men, women, straight, gay, bi, whatever – different combinations.

And so many people, when they tell their sexual history – there's always that story where they just gave into somebody. Either they were date-raped, or they were told it was fine to fuck somebody or not do this or do that or just – it's okay, because they didn't know, and they really wanted that experience to grow up – or, in their mind, to grow up, to sexually evolve. And, if you're in a place like that, you can actually do something with somebody – make out, maybe you might masturbate a little bit, but it doesn't mean that you're having full-on sex, but you can actually have some sort of experience with this person – in this case, a person of your own

sex – which isn't as common as making out. If you're a guy and girl, you can do that in the park and nobody's going to say anything. Now, if you're 21 years old, or 23 years old, that might be one of your first experiences, and it can really change you, if you compromise yourself – whether it's in an alleyway or in somebody's bedroom, that you don't know – versus, just having something kind of pleasant. Sure, then you can go home later, if you like the person to continue – and that's what we encouraged. And, I think overall, it was a really positive thing. But, it's a lot more work, than just having – saying, we're just going to let people do whatever. It wasn't about just letting people do whatever, but it was being militant about eroticism, which is the whole thing with Art Positive, too.

It wasn't like – I never really went to bathhouses. I always wanted to go with my boyfriend or whatever. I thought that would be fun and meet somebody and do that. And a lot of my friends would go, and it always just didn't seem like the right time, even

though I wasn't against it, because I just felt, it has to be the right feel for me to want to do that. I'm not saying that I didn't go places like that, but it wasn't something I did a lot. But, I also feel strongly – I think through my own experience – that I wanted people to have something that they could make their life their own, without it being so separate.

00:40:00 And, it's already separate enough, that when you're gay, that everything is so fragmented. You do this here, and you do that there.

SS: So, what I'm really interested in is that on the floor of ACT UP, there would be discussions about what was going on in the clubs. What was the interaction between ACT UP and the nightlife?

AH: I think generally speaking, it was really good. The incident I brought up was because it was so related to what I was doing, and I was so surprised that I was being questioned, but at the same time – hey, it's going to come up, and I remember putting a sheet out saying what I had to say.

But generally speaking, I think it was great. And I think that that was what was so amazing about that group. It wasn't about trying to shy away from any words. How can we make our lives better? The situation is here, and instead of saying, I can't be sexually active, or I can't have my life, or I can't go out, or I can't go to a club or a bar, it was more like, how do we do this better? And, how do we do this right? And, like Ray and myself would go La Escuelita and hand out condoms. It doesn't seem so novel now.

SS: What happened when you would do that?

AH: Oh at the time, it was like – first, you had to find a waiter or waitress that would let you do it, otherwise you'd get kicked out. Because just the thought of bringing

that issue into that kind of a space becomes a problem for some people – like you’re trying to rain on their parade. And so we would put them on the trays and get somebody who was sympathetic with our cause, and then they would put them on the drink trays and give it to people – just to get the idea of people playing with these things and using them and looking at them. That was just a small thing, but I’m just saying there were little –

SS: Did you choose that because it was Cuban owned or because it was a Latin place?

AH: No, Ray chose it, because it’s important to reach out to your community. He was very adamant about educating the Latin community, also, because those other people, as you know – like Rob or Christie and all those people.

SS: Did you find that safe sex information or condoms were not getting to the Latin community in the same way that –

AH: Yeah, it just takes more, because of the social environment. When you have a different social, cultural access of behavior there, you don’t just all of a sudden say, “Hey, would you like a condom?” That might work fine in some Wonder Bread group, but it’s not going to go – like, why are you bringing that up, do you got something that you don’t know – so, it’s a challenge. In the beginning, when a lot of women who were straight would say, “Well, I’m trying to get my boyfriend to put on a condom, but he’s like – why should I? Do you have something? Do I have something?” So I think that in order to break through that custom, and create a whole new environment where it’s okay to bring the condom or other safe sex protection into the equation, you have to introduce it, and make so it doesn’t become suspect – like somebody’s got something

that's dirty or bad to hide. And I think the literature thing was good. We did that at Meat a lot. And it was ironic then, because we were just –

SS: Meat was at 14th Street, right?

AH: Yeah. And that started in '90, and like I said, I had been dee-jaying at different parties, but then that became a full-time thing. It was the Clit Club on Fridays and then Meat on Saturday. It was great, because we would put all these things out, but it was an interesting time, because we really worked on our own. We weren't trying to run a sex club or anything, but we would put condoms in the bathroom, on the bar – mostly on the bar, but you couldn't use them there, the way you were meant to use them. But at the same time, you kind of had to provide them if you were having any kind of quasi-sexual environment. So, it was really just kind of an odd combination. Because once you introduce a condom into your environment, it almost – but the good thing is, for a lot of people, it's the first time they can actually have one. They're not having to pay a bunch of money and they can play with it or take it home and think about it later.

SS: Were all the clubs having condoms available?

AH: I think there was a program, and some did. I wasn't taking the tally on that. I think that's something you can talk to GMHC about. But they had a program, where you could get them really cheap, or for free – a lot of literature, and a lot of condoms. Sometimes we would buy them, and sometimes we'd get them free.

SS: So was Meat a place where ACT UP guys would go?

00:45:00

AH: Some people. But I wouldn't say it was strictly that, or a majority. Meat was really about being yourself and being independent. And I really wanted a place that you could just be any type of person. Obviously, mostly guys went there. It was about

just enjoying yourself. You didn't have to look a certain way or dress a certain way or be part of a certain group. The music was kind of progressive. We were trying just anything that we liked that was new. We showed a lot of visuals. We were always showing different images – not just sexual images, but all kinds of artistic things – slides and decorating and had different – my friend David White used to do a lot of the different themes every week.

But it was definitely – the idea was a place where we could go that wasn't expensive. It was \$5, and you could have a good time being yourself, being out. It was kind of modeled after a party I went to in San Francisco, and I know – not so directly, but I remember seeing their posters and it said, "Dark, loud, sleazy, queer." And, I just thought, okay, that's great. And it was at a place in Valencia – 14th in San Francisco in '89 or '90. It also had Evol, which was a girls' party there. They had Fridays or something – a small little club. And, I just remember liking the vibe at this place.

SS: Was there a difference between people who would go to bars, and people who would go to ACT UP? Was it like two different groups of people?

AH: There was a large ACT UP contingent every Friday night at The Bar – at 2nd Avenue and 4th Street, and all these hot guys were there.

SS: Why do you think they liked The Bar – the ACT UP guys?

AH: Because it's cheap, and you could talk and it's kind of sexy and you know – it's a neighborhood place. The price is right. I mean we had such little money, we would sneak beers in – and the beers I think were only \$1.50, \$2 – and at that time, that was even a lot. So we'd go across the street and come back in. But, I remember going there from midnight until 4 AM almost every Friday for a year or two, it seemed.

SS: And what were the other clubs that ACT UP guys went to?

AH: People went to a lot of places. I think there were different promoters that were connected to ACT UP at one point or another like Chip.

SS: Chip Duckett?

AH: Yeah – that people sometimes went to their events, but I don't think – I think, if anything, The Bar was where you'd see the most per number – I think when there was an event in a club that was supported by ACT UP, or that it was helping ACT UP – a lot of ACT UP people would come. And there were some great events. I remember going to Sound Factory for an event, for Keith Haring. I remember going to the Palladium for an event.

SS: While Keith Haring was still alive?

AH: I think he'd just passed away. I think.

SS: It was like a memorial kind of thing?

AH: I'm trying to remember now. It was a long time ago. It definitely would have a lot to do – it must have been after he passed away. I remember – but there were really great celebrations. There was a Voguing event at Tracks one night that was really amazing, where I think we all did – Robert Vasquez and all those guys did some sort of skit. It was a fund-raiser for one of the groups in ACT UP. There was something at the Palladium, I remember. So there was different participation and events. Just, right now, I'd have to dig in my brain to get the chronology of it all correct, but –

SS: Let's talk about your work inside ACT UP. So, you came with Hunter to your first meeting, and do you remember how it impressed you or what you saw?

AH: Yeah, I was really impressed, overwhelmed with the way that people really were committed to participating. And everyone was like – I’ll do that. And, everybody worked in different ways, and all kinds of people expressed themselves. I mean, all kinds – from the straightest, most conservative person, to the most liberal, wild, whatever you want to tag them, revolutionary, anarchistic-y type. And so, it was literally the entire spectrum of the city was in that room. And people were ready to do their work. And every group – whether it was what they called the Swim Team here, or the girls over there – the different groups – they weren’t really divided by sex so much, as by just, maybe interests.

00:50:00

SS: What was the Swim Team?

AH: That was the nickname for a lot of the guys that were always at the back of the room, and I wasn’t aware of that term until it was – I think it was in the paper or something. And, it was just funny, because there were a lot of – they called them the Swim Team.

SS: Do you remember who was on the Swim Team? No.

AH: I wasn’t on it, and I wasn’t worried about that.

SS: Was it a status thing?

AH: I think so, in a way. But, I just remember seeing a lot of good-looking guys and somebody made some comment. There was a lot of different people there, of all types of people. And, I think that some people, once you really got to know them were just great. It really wasn’t about – but people kind of hung out with their tribes and their groups. And so in that sense, yeah – that was there in any group, and some people might call that a clique, but things got done. I know Mark said that to me – Mark

Harrington. He said – we’re talking about something one day and I’d just gotten to know him, and he was a believer that smaller groups of people can sometimes achieve some great stuff, than just the whole room spending hours. And I saw that in action a lot there, in different ways. And, I saw how that could work. And then of course, being in the art world I thought well, I should address that issue too, in our own community – where it seems so upfront and it seems so cutting edge, but you slice the veneer and it’s the same prejudice as anywhere else. Certain people don’t get certain jobs because they might have AIDS.

SS: Really, in the art world?

AH: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It happened to friends of mine, it happened to people here in New York. I mean, the whole issue with the Bill Olander issue – the New Museum and the whole thing was Kostabi and all that –

SS: I don’t know that. Could you explain?

AH: I’m just saying –

SS: This is an historical document, so tell us.

AH: There’s a lot of homophobia in the art world, too – even though people say, “Well, so many artists are gay,” – but the truth is, you still have to – you’re either in or your out. As in many professions, it can work against you or for you, depending on who you’re playing your cards with. So it was kind of the wake up call, we felt, to talk to our community.

SS: So, what happened with Bill Olander and Kostabi?

AH: That was in *Vanity Fair* and places like that. I think, though – what I heard was that he created a show, and left Mark out.

SS: Okay, but say who he was and –

AH: He was a known curator at the New Museum and he was gay, and I believe he was already known to have HIV then. I can't be too specific, but he was known – out – he was out, he was gay. He was a curator in the art world. He was known for booking a lot of up and coming artists. And apparently Mark was left out of the show, and he got upset. And that seemed to be the seed of his comment – in an article where Mark Kostabi was interviewed in *Vanity Fair*, where he made this infamous remark that gay men are basically no use to the human race, since they don't procreate. And tying that with AIDS and, basically, people with AIDS and gay men are no use to the race – and, it just became a real controversy because the comment was taken back and it was thrown out again.

SS: Do you think there was resentment against gay men in the art world?

AH: Oh sure, sure. Yeah, yeah.

SS: For what reason?

AH: I think for the usual reasons I just expressed of competition. It's a good excuse, it's a good scapegoat. Well, that fag, he didn't hire me because he wanted to hire so and so, or he wanted to pick so and so for his little show. Or, this or that. And, I think people used sexuality as a scapegoat.

I think – we even do it amongst each other, even if it doesn't have the same seriousness, you know? You could say, "She's being such a bulldyke," or she's being such – or "He's being such a big fag about it." People use those terms in their own communities a lot – just to make a point. And then when it's coming from outside, it's obviously a deeper slam. It's definitely like a put-down. I mean, you get that with the

00:55:00 race issue all the time, you know? How it's perceived one way or the other. So at that time, it was important for us to talk to the art community that we were working in. So a lot of us that worked with artists or were involved in that scene, decided to create this group, Art Positive, to more directly address our own scene and wake people up. That this is actually going on in your own community, and let's be out in the open about it.

SS: So Art Positive started as a committee of ACT UP?

AH: Yeah, just as a smaller group where we had these ideas and so – as you know, in ACT UP I'd say, "Well, you guys really want to do that? Go off and break off and focus on that issue?" And we focused on the issue of the Kostabi thing, where we felt that he was out of line, by slamming into gay men and people with AIDS. And whether it was meant or not, it was just not a funny throwaway comment, because of the effect that it has on people. It just reinforces that hate and the stereotype. And so we thought we should put the word out that this person's a fool, and that he's not – that you shouldn't be buying his work and supporting him for this kind of prejudice. And then him turning around and saying that he didn't mean it. And then, a week later, saying in another newspaper on Page Six, saying that he did. And, that people working the media using issues like AIDS and sexuality and gay and lesbianism to further their own agenda – as a marketing ploy basically, to keep his name in the paper, which was one of his better talents. His talent was – I mean, a lot of his work is based on that. And I enjoyed a lot of his artwork. I'm not saying that I didn't. In fact, he had been in a project that I had done a couple of years earlier – an artist calendar project. So it was coming more from – we really disagreed, and other people in the group knew him, too. And we really were upset, and we just felt his responses were really bad. Like he was just playing it both

ways. I'm sorry, I'm not – you know – and all done in public. And that kind of media manipulation – we saw right through it. And, that was one of the good things in ACT UP, you really had a variety of people that could help solidify an idea.

And then we went after the issue of the Mapplethorpe censorship – which was also important in a lot of ways, because Robert Mapplethorpe – I believe that he was out as HIV-positive then. I think that he – I'm not sure if he was even still alive then. But the whole issue – and then that whole – how we felt we really wanted to – we felt it was all tied in. It wasn't just separate that, here's AIDS. Here's HIV. Here's being gay. Here's the fact that some of us work in the arts. There were a lot of us that worked in places like Creative Time, museums, galleries, and how you had to – depending on your position or your job – some of us – yeah, I could be out, my boss was out. We did a lot of great projects with different artists that were gay and straight, but a lot of places people weren't able to be out, even though they were in the art world. So that was, I think, important. I don't think it was the most important thing that ACT UP needed to do, but I think it ties in, and it did. I remember when we did the thing at the Metropolitan, and it was just to bring attention.

SS: What did you do at the Metropolitan?

AH: Oh we had – in one or two days, we put out the word to have a demonstration about the Mapplethorpe censorship that was going on with the Corcoran, and all the art censorship that was beginning – which is now, as you know, has come to fruition. Forget about getting any funding from the government if you have anything to say that has any sort of upward, up-front, sexual, political, AIDS-related agenda. It's just not going to be that easy. And I saw it coming very clearly then, and the division lines

remain. I remember going to the Capitol with all the different arts groups, and knowing that the straight art groups only liked us because we were bringing all the people, and then pushing me back to the speakers and everybody was – I remember Reno saying, “Get up there on stage and say what you have to say.”

And I thought that would have been the right thing to do, in a way. But I thought no, they’re going to play this out. And they kept pushing it back, because they were scared that I was going to say something like “butt-fucker” on the Capitol steps. And I just let them hold me back. And you know, it was a cold day and there weren’t a lot of people, but – and then I did – I said what they said – everyone’s scared that this is what I’m going to say, so I’ll say that first, and then I read my little statement and took pictures of the audience. And then I told different people – whether it was the administrator of Artist’s Space, or the other people that I had sat around with on Boards with, or committees. Some of them I really respect, but I really disagreed with them, and that was
01:00:00 – I said, “You only support us as long as we’re there for you, but you’re not really together with us. You’re not supportive of the gay and lesbian, transgendered agenda here, in connection with political art and with AIDS.”

SS: What was this event?

AH: Oh, we all went to speak about anti-censorship at the Capitol. During that whole brouhaha they went all with the Artist’s Space and all that – my point was –

SS: You mean around the Nan Goldin show – that thing?

AH: The Artist’s Space show, in that time period. And I just felt they weren’t really supportive of what we were doing. They thought it was just too unapproachable. I understand in the establishment how that would be. I sit around different tables of people

– Boards of Directors listening to people say things. But I still felt if we don't take on the larger social issue now, and we keep hiding and saying, "Oh okay, we'll just talk about this now, but we can't talk about gay and lesbian issues, because we just want to talk about censorship at the moment." So they just wanted our support, to support their issue, which was art censorship. And we were like no, it's hand-in-hand with the sexuality issue, and the cultural issue. And they're like "Well, that's a really big thing." Yes it is. And it's not going to happen overnight, and it's not going to happen in a month or one day – it's going to take 10 years. But if we don't deal with that now, then we're just – and I was like no, we're not with you anymore, because you're not with us. You don't want us; you want the numbers that we can give to your censorship issue, because now your funding is in trouble.

SS: So did ACT UP pull away from these coalitions?

AH: Well, Art Positive certainly did, after awhile. We went off on our own. We were definitely about militant eroticism, and connected it to the HIV issues and ACT UP issues and AIDS issues. We were not about to say, "Well, we're just going to talk about censorship right now." No, it always had to be connected to other issues – AIDS issues and sexual issues. They were all tied together. So that to me was like – no, you don't have our support anymore. I just said, that's it. I'm out of this, because it's a false umbrella. You know what I'm saying? They only wanted us as long we would support them, but if we just stay in our place – because the cultural, sexual issue was just too big for them. And look where it got them? Nowhere. They just "took it up the butt" – as they say – that's supposed to be a bad thing, but –

SS: Well what did they say when you guys pulled out as a coalition?

AH: Oh you know, come have coffee sometime. It just didn't matter. It was just so ridiculously lame, and I knew what was happening then. I had been an arts administrator all those years and finally, it was just going down the tubes. And to me it was like, if you don't want to work with us and we're out and you're really just – oh I don't know, I really need to wrap this comment up. But it's not supportive if somebody says oh, they like you, but as soon as you're out, that won't work for you to bring that issue on the table. If the sexuality issue isn't on the table, along with the other issues, you know, then it's not real. It is connected to that. All those issues were connected to AIDS and censorship – the sexuality.

SS: So what kinds of things did Art Positive do after that, on its own?

AH: Oh, we did a lot of different actions, but we never really were trying to get – the whole – our thing was always street action, and just doing it immediately, because we knew people in the different groups. We weren't trying to be another Gran Fury at all. And it was really more about – if we had an idea, we just got it out, as cheap as we could. We went to Philip Morris, because they were playing both sides of the fence. They were like oh, here's some money for Jesse Helms to keep him in office – which definitely was definite problems for some of the issues that we were trying to get going with the government, whether it was health care or gay rights issues or AIDS funding. And on the other hand, they weren't giving money to some of the better arts groups in the city that were also funding some gay, lesbian oriented work.

SS: Like who?

AH: Karen Finley – I know it was a real issue for her. Other people – a lot of other people, too – dance companies, visual artist groups, not-for-profit groups like

Creative Time, that were using some of that funding that we would get for Philip Morris – to fund a variety of projects. Some of the Kissing Doesn't Kill money came from Philip Morris.

SS: That's interesting.

01:05:00 AH: Yeah, and that was a real issue for me. I like my work – fine, I'll take your money – but I'm going to tell people what you're doing. I'll go to work, then go to the boycott. I don't think I was being hypocritical, and I had to make some decisions myself. I mean – Karen, I remember her talking about it, saying, "What do we need to do here?" Speaking up on different things, like at BAM. So, people have to find their own way about these things.

SS: Who were the people in Art Positive?

AH: Oh, it was basically 12, 18, 24 people. This guy Murphy, Hunter. Of course, Bill Dobbs was involved for awhile – the personality that he is. And Jim Fouratt was involved for a while; Diamanda Galas was there, for a while. And that was the thing – it was very fluid. People would come and go in different issues that involved them, and support in different ways. So, it was very loose. Was it – Ron Murphy was his name? I'm trying to think. Tracy Mostovoy was involved for a while, Lola Flash was involved for a while, Dennis Davidson was really involved. Once he came to the group, we did a lot of work together. Gosh – I'm seeing the faces and I'm trying to remember all their names – this one guy who worked at a gallery in SoHo – Rhodes? I'd really have to – that's the kind of stuff where if you'd asked me before, I would have looked up their names, but I'm drawing a blank with all their names.

SS: So did you work with any other groups inside ACT UP besides Art Positive? Did you ever go to the Latino Caucus?

AH: I went to a lot of the meetings for a long time, and I stopped going around Cooper Union, because I was so frustrated then. And I remember one of my friends was really, really sick, and I just couldn't take the arguing about the procedure – the discussions about how the meeting should proceed – went on so long, that I just left. I just said, this is fucking ridiculous – an hour and a half, discussing process. And, I couldn't do it anymore.

SS: Did you ever go to the Latino Caucus?

AH: Yeah, I was involved in the Latino Caucus in the inception of it, and then, after it got going, I kind of left. I didn't really feel I had the time to do it right. But I was one of the initial people that was involved with Ray and Robert Vazquez, Robert Garcia – what's his name?

SS: Moises Agosto?

AH: Yeah, Moises I think was involved from early on. And that's what I mean when I say names – I feel bad, because I know I'm leaving really important people out, but –

SS: Why did you guys start it? Or, how did you start it?

AH: It was just an idea to focus on issues that you're working on – just like the Art Positive thing. It wasn't that that was the most important thing, but here's some of those people that work in the community. We're addressing it at the meetings, and people say, "Well, you're the people that really know this or want to work with this, so all of you that are interested in working with that, get together." And, that's how those

things would happen. And that's how Latino Caucus happened. You have a bunch of Latino people that want to help their own tribes, their own families of friends, communities. And you've got other people that want to help with them, too – whatever race they are, it didn't matter. And, you get together and start working on the issues that you've brought up to the room that are important and work on them in tight groups, and then you bring that to the floor. That was the way that worked. And I think the Latino Caucus was different because – yeah, it was a caucus that had its own way of doing things, but it was important, it was the time. There were so many Latin people affected by AIDS. And so they were standing up and saying hey, can we do this, can we do that? Just like I mentioned, one little thing that we had done was going to a bar, whatever, and handing out condoms or literature. And it wasn't always welcome. So, the Caucus was one way of solidifying that, and working with different groups. We marched in the Puerto Rican Day parade for the first time in 10 years. First gay group in ten years.

SS: How did that go?

AH: Oh, it was intense. It was great. I mean, I'm Cuban, not Puerto Rican, but I supported them and they wanted my support, so I went with the other 30 people, and a lot of it was exhilarating and a lot of it was getting words thrown in your face, up and down the avenue, you know? All the dirty, nasty things that people could cough up, and just keep on marching and then of course, at the end of the parade you're left there in the middle of 86th Street going, hmm, now we have to fend for ourselves because both the supporters aren't there, and the people that hate you might be around the corner – and I don't think we were able to handle ourselves. But it was definitely tough a couple of times, during that day. And overall, it was exhilarating and really empowering to be with

01:10:00 other people and show our bodies and just show that, here we are. And a lot of people in the audience loved it.

SS: Did people from ACT UP who are not Latino show up for that? Was there support from the rest of ACT UP?

AH: It was a small contingent – maybe 35 people. We had people of all races participating, marching. Mostly it was Latino people, but I think everyone was welcome. I don't remember there being a large number of people that showed up to march with us, but I don't think anybody looked at that as –

SS: What about the women in the Latino Caucus? Were you still in the Caucus when they came? Like, Marina Alvarez and –

AH: I remember her. I don't remember seeing that many women at the meetings. I remember Ray's mom being at all the meetings and then dragging me to some meetings that I didn't even want to attend anymore. I didn't want to attend, because I just felt that I was so involved with other issues, and felt that I was spreading myself too thin – between my work and my friends – spending time with them, and my work, and the other committees I was involved in – Art Positive and – I don't remember so much about that. I just know that those things were starting to take off, and I was kind of moving on.

When I started to lose some of my dearest friends, I really did just kind of get more and more into the music. I really did. I think I just had Meat for two months, and I was playing at the Clit Club that night when Ray passed away. And I just thought well, what would he do? And since we both really showed a passion for music – it was one of the things that we both loved – I thought well, he would probably – if it was me – if it

was reversed, I would have hoped that he would have done what I did, which was stay there.

SS: Let me just ask you one last question Aldo. Looking back on ACT UP, from this point of view, what would say was its greatest achievement? And, what would you say was its biggest disappointment?

AH: Oh, the greatest achievement has been – it's really multi-faceted. First – that it really did empower people. And that word has been mentioned a lot since then, but it really made you feel that you counted and that what you do, and what you do in your life, and every action that you do and everything you say really means something, and can be part of something that can evolve into something over months, over weeks, over days, over hours – and to see that actually in action, and come about. And just the honesty and the will and the commitment of people to do – just that service and just that not knowing why, but knowing that they have to. There's something in them, in their subconscious that knows – that means that they had to be there. People were warriors on the front lines, and it wasn't something that people went and got medals for. You just did what you wanted to do, and nobody even thought of themselves as a warrior or on the front line. They just did it. It's just like a feeling. And I felt like – when I stopped going – I was feeling like, now it's a turn for more people to take on that torch and do what they can, because for some, you can do it. I can only do it for so long at a time, I think. Emotionally, I was just like dead. But I really – for a long time, it became such a natural thing for me to be involved and honored to be around so many people that were such doers, that made so many things happen from so many walks of life.

01:15:00 And some of them – when I still see them – I’m just amazed, in those years, I didn’t know what half of those people did other than when they were there or demonstrations or actions or working in meetings. I didn’t know anything else about their life. That they were playwrights, or they worked on Wall Street or anything else. And, that wasn’t as important unless you developed that sort of relationship with that person, which wasn’t the basis for validity at all. Your validity there in ACT UP was based on your work there, and those issues – not on anything else. And, I think that really speaks for what the group’s greatest achievement was. And to coalesce the present, the past, the future and the humanity, and the AIDS issues, and really see it – where it’s been and where it’s going.

And the clarion call was put out. So the rest of it – in the last 10 years – it’s like, all that fumbling – I mean, ACT UP called it, right away. I’m not saying that was the only thing, but that situation, which spread like wildfire, because it had to. People had no where else – nobody else cared. You know, you’d remember, you’d be there, and then across the street, we’d find out somebody was getting completely disrespected and mistreated across the street at the hospital. And, everyone would run across the street. I’m just saying, we just did the best we could. And really – people from all walks of life. And that’s something that’s just so amazing – that that can happen. And, I think it happened because people wanted to help their fellow people, and themselves. But when you think about it, a lot of the people that I know – we could be there because of our families and friends.

So I was always amazed when I’d just find different stories. And so, it really was a disappointment later on, when they started kind of falling apart. There wasn’t as much

support because of this so called promise of so-called management, which is just to me more corporate PR marketing media talk for saying, “Well, we’ll just put it with the other things that you pay for.” And so, we’ll manage your feelings about your being ill or your family’s illness and how much you’re going to pay for that – just how, in the bigger health industry picture –

SS: You mean managed care? Is that what you’re talking about?

AH: Yeah, how AIDS – and this was already talked about so much in advance, in ACT UP, before it became such an obvious thing that the health industry was going to co-opt the whole, entire thing. All this was all foreseen, and nobody else wanted to pay attention to it. The people that weren’t affected – whatever – for different reasons – it just was fumbling around. The public just didn’t want to be there with us. And we saw it right away, as a group. I mean, I just have to say we because people really tried. And yeah, all of a sudden it’s like, well if you do this and you do that and you do this, and then, we’ll take care of you like this, and then, when you’re not well, you’ll be over here and then, bye-bye. But it’s okay, because that’s it – that’s how it works. And that’s bullshit. And that’s what everybody got spoon fed throughout the ’90s. Well, now we have this for you. If you have this much money, you get this much pill and you get this much time, until you feel terrible. And that’s the place that we didn’t want it to go, and still be able to help people in different ways.

It’s completely been co-opted. People still get sick, people do waste, people still do die, but it doesn’t have that urgency, because everybody’s saying, “Well, did they take that? Did they try that?” Well, you know, it’s back to that old thing. Well, those are the choices, otherwise – oh, okay. It’s kind of like what they’ve done with cancer and other

things. These are the devices that we're giving you to work with. Anything else is a charlatan's remedy, or it's going to be bought out by a company so that nobody else can have it. And I just have to say that, because I really see how that goes, you know? It should be the Corpse-oration, not the Corporation, because that's really what it does, when everything works in that media marketing structure – the way that it's set up. Does that make sense to you?

SS: Yes, I understand.

AH: And that's what I think the biggest – the biggest disappointment with me and ACT UP was just that the procedures, I felt, took over. And that was a personal thing for me. The group went on and did some great stuff after I left, but I really felt that – and I don't feel that the political actions that were caught up and slammed by the newspapers – I don't think that necessarily hurt as much as different healthcare people couldn't agree on what needed to be done, and therefore, it was just co-opted as another manageable disease. I don't even know – I know that ACT UP meets now, but I don't even know whether chapters are left or anything.

SS: What are you doing know?

AH: In what?

SS: In life.

01:20:00 AH: Obviously, I'm dee-jaying, and I have the record shop. And between that and life in itself, that's pretty much all the time. And I do keep up with some of the newsletters that I'd get about different AIDS issues, but I don't really involve – I think because – in my life, I'm around lots of people that are positive or not positive. And it just seems like, if that's an issue on that particular day – like, last night, I'm having a

conversation with Julie about our friends, then that's what I do. If there's something I can do, I do it. Or, if I can connect with somebody. I'm not involved at the level that Patricia's involved in – which is great.

SS: Who's Patricia?

AH: Navarro. She's very involved in Council, in California still – the AIDS Funding Council, I believe. So I think that everybody should do what they can do, and I don't really feel it's about – like when I did a lot of time and work in ACT UP, I don't feel that it gives me a little brownie button or anything. I really don't believe that. I really feel it's what I wanted to do, and I did it because I wanted to. So I feel what anybody can or wants to do in that field is great. It should be like a guilt or –

01:21:08