

A C T U P O R A L H I S T O R Y P R O J E C T

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Interviewee: Timothy Lunceford

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Interviewer: Sarah Schulman

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**ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Timothy Lunceford
April 28, 2010**

SARAH SCHULMAN: So, the way we start is you tell me your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

TIM LUNCEFORD: You mean the address.

SS: In general.

TL: New York City.

SS: Yeah. So, tell me. What's your name?

TL: Okay. Timothy Lunceford.

SS: How old are you?

TL: I'm 53.

SS: What's today's date?

TL: Twenty-eighth of April.

SS: 2010.

TL: 2010.

SS: And where are we?

TL: We're in New York City.

SS: On amazing Charles Street, where you live.

TL: Yes.

SS: Yes. Okay, good. So where were you born, Tim?

TL: I was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

SS: In the city itself, or –

TL: I was born in the city, yes.

SS: What were your parents doing at the time?

TL: My father was in the military, about to leave the military. What had happened; my parents were living in France, with my father in the military. My mother got pregnant, and she had some problems with her pregnancy. And then with not any knowledge of Europe or whatever, and having a baby, they decided to return to the States. I found them on immigration papers at Ellis Island, coming back. But they went straight to Atlanta, and I was born within two days, premature. And lived in Atlanta. And then my father ended up going into farming – cattle and beef production. And we moved to south Georgia.

SS: South Georgia. Were they Southerners originally?

TL: My mother was from North Carolina, and my father was from Georgia. They had met because my mother's parents had moved to Georgia. My grandfather was a granite man. And my other grandfather had been a nuclear scientist – had had an aneurysm, and actually was totally incapacitated by the brain aneurysm.

So, my grandparents lived only two houses apart. We lived about 220 miles away from my grandparents in south Georgia. They lived in Elberton, Georgia. And every weekend we would travel up to see my grandparents. So, I became good friends with my grandparents, growing up. Over the years, three of them died, and I ended up having just my mother's mother alive. So, she was my best friend through college. When I was at the University of Georgia, she would call me up on a Thursday night and say, Tim, you know, you're going down to see your parents? And I would say, yeah. She'd say, I'll be on the bus, and

tomorrow morning, I'll see you at 11 o'clock. And I or a friend would pick her up at the bus station, and she would ride down in my Catalina convertible, with me and two other friends, because that's how we covered gasoline. And she would always buy us dinner in Atlanta. And then we would end up, and when the weekend was over, you'd think she'd want to stay, because we were coming back the next weekend. But she would say, no, I'm going home. So, I would drive back to Elberton, and spend the night, and then go back to school in the morning.

SS: So, growing up in Georgia in the '60s, what were your parents' attitudes about all the social change that was going on at the time?

TL: They were very active in community organizations. That was sort of a sense of where I got a lot of what I do. But I knew I was different early on. In school, I had typical problems that gay boys have, and things like that. And I focused on the academics and had the fights that I was forced to fight, and things like that. But I never really compromised and tried to stay to what I was myself.

But I was – I had a problem when I was playing baseball my sophomore year in high school. And I broke my thumb in a fight on second base. And in the course of having my hand cast, and the treatment, they found out I had leukemia.

SS: Oh, okay.

TL: So, I went through leukemia at 13 and 14. And then at 14 – I had missed some school, but I still was in high school. But I had a guidance

Tape I
00:05:00

counselor that understood I wanted a little more. So, they told me about honors programs, and things like that. I had taken the SAT. And I got accepted to Birmingham Southern College for a summer program. And I went to a summer program. And then went back to high school, but got admitted, and I went to Stanford for one semester. And I didn't like California; I hadn't come to grips with my homosexuality just yet. It was in my face. I was working for a company in San Francisco and going down to Stanford during the week. And it just was too much for me. I was 14, turning 15. And I ended up going back to Georgia. And my parents had been University of Georgia alumni, so I ended up going to the University of Georgia.

SS: And what do you think your obstacle was? Were you religious?

TL: I was raised Baptist Presbyterian. I had problems in college when I started dating women. The girl that I dated for four years, that I ultimately got engaged to – she was Roman Catholic. That didn't set too well with my father. And in a compromise between she and I, she said, I don't have to be Roman Catholic, because I don't feel that way anymore. And we became Episcopal.

SS: I see.

TL: And so, we dated until my senior year in college. And then there were just these problems that I had. I didn't really want to be bisexual. I could be, and I thought I was. But I thought it would be easier to choose one or

the other. And I didn't like what I saw down South, and that was this whole culture of married men who fooled around on the side, and things like that. So, I cut off the engagement.

And then when I graduated, I got an offer by a company in north Georgia. And I moved to north Georgia, worked for them for a year. And then I had a boss there who was from New York. And he said, I want to put you in sales. And he pondered the idea of sending me to Houston. And then he said, no, I think you need to go to New York.

So, I came to New York, and didn't like New York City, because it was so fast. I lived on Second and 54th Street.

SS: What year was that?

TL: For a year.

SS: What year?

TL: That would have been 1980.

SS: Okay.

TL: And basically, I was able, with my sales territory, to move up to Albany. And I moved to Albany. And again, I pretty much came out there, with the community. But it was different. It was all government workers, and things like that. And then my sales territory got changed a little bit, and I moved to Rochester. And Rochester had an organized gay community. And I was in Rochester until 1986.

SS: So, in those years, those Rochester years – that's the beginning of the AIDS crisis.

TL: It is, it is. I had my first friend who lived down in the Southern Tier, but he was a gay man living in Rochester. And he got this disease that he totally withdrew into his apartment, and we couldn't understand about Dean; what had happened to Dean. And then he died. And his parents wouldn't tell any of us what happened.

Before it was over with, then we had other friends that were getting sick, but people weren't talking about AIDS.

My work caused me to come to New York City periodically. And I'd be down here, and all of a sudden, I started seeing messages about these men in Chelsea that were setting up a hotline. And I contacted Paul Popham. And then I ended up getting involved in GMHC, right at the beginning of GMHC. And Michael Shernoff asked me to join the 300 Men. And I happily, with the time I had in New York City, participated in those interviews. And then I did this study. Andy Humm was in my group. I became friends with lots of men in the community, and then I understood the urgency of HIV and AIDS, as it was beginning to be called, in '83. And I'd go back to Rochester, and it was this whole hush-hush.

And I think that set up a lot of the, I guess, internal anger that I had. Because in '86, I helped found Dining for Dollars in Rochester, with the local AIDS group. And we would have an evening where people dined at home,

and then all showed up at a downtown mall. And I organized silent raffles there, for fund-raisers; and started helping with the local group. But down here, in '87 — let's see —

I was at a candlelight vigil. And I met a guy named David. And I told him about how I was feeling about HIV, and concerned about getting it, and didn't understand all my friends dying around me, and things like that. And he said, you know, there's this new group that just got started, like two months ago. And he said, they're really tackling it, and whatever. And he said he had been to a couple of meetings, but he wasn't part of it. But he said, you know, they meet on Monday nights; seven or eight o'clock, and you can find out about them. And it was maybe a couple weeks after gay pride that year that I ended up going to ACT UP. And pretty much, that changed my life, because I was still going back to Rochester. And I had all this ACT UP mentality. And there, I was considered just a little too in-your-face. I remember — there was a problem.

AIDS Community Housing — not AIDS Community Housing; Community Health Network, a local clinic there — one of the doctors had called me, and said, we have a patient who's got a problem with Blue Cross, and is there anything you can do to help him get some of his AIDS meds, and things like that? And so, all I did was pick up the phone. I was hearing at the time. And I picked up the phone, and I called this woman that was at Blue Cross, handling his account. And I said, he's a friend o' mine. And I understand there's these two drugs he needs, and you're saying they're not on your formulary, and this man

needs them, and whatever. And she says, well, we just don't have any provision, and all that. And then I said, well, I'm in ACT UP New York. And we don't kind of like it when insurance companies deny treatment for people, and whatever. And before it was over, that turned into a whole mess, because she called the doctor and said that I had threatened to bring busloads of ACT UPpers.

TL: Blue Cross knew about ACT UP. And she said that I threatened to bring Blue Cross – lots of people up there for this guy. And she said that they were going to give him the medicine, but she didn't like that I called her. And that's when I knew that ACT UP could make a difference in people with AIDS' lives.

I had never threatened her. I had always been as nice as I am. But she had some information that I didn't have. And it really changed her mind about taking care of this patient.

SS: I just want to go back to a couple things that you talked about before ACT UP. Can you tell us about Paul Popham? What was he like?

TL: A sweetheart. He had an idea – Nathan Kolodner was in the group. Basically, they saw where government, community, and everything wasn't tackling what was happening in New York City. And by setting up this hotline, I think it helped a lot o' people. And I don't think they had any idea that GMHC would be what it is today. But I think it was more concerned about helping a fellow brother. There was –

SS: Now was he ex-military? I can't remember.

TL: I think Paul Popham was ex-military.

SS: Yeah, right. And he was corporate, right?

TL: He was corporate.

SS: Yeah.

TL: All of them were. Nathan was a lawyer. Everybody was professional.

SS: Right. Can you explain what the Three Hundred Men – just for people who don't know?

TL: Michael Shernoff was a psychoanalyst. And Michael had recognized — again, with Paul and the others — that there was a problem with the message to stop further infections, and what was in the minds of gay men. And so Three Hundred Men was just where we sat down, like you and I are talking right now; and they asked you simple questions that Michael had put down on paper, about how you grew up, what do you do — when you're with a man, what do you do, and things like that.

Tape I
00:15:00

And they used the Three Hundred Men study to create the study. And that was more like where we went and talked in a group. And there was more formal questions about our activities in that group.

SS: Is this study ongoing? Are you still –

TL: No. Study was only, I want to say six months — maybe longer.

SS: Okay.

TL: But no; two totally different programs, though.

SS: So –

TL: But that's what created the GMHC prevention programs.

SS: Oh, okay.

TL: That's something that should be said; that they used that information. So again, being a volunteer at GMHC, I would do Eroticizing Safer Sex programs at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center. I did those programs pretty regularly, including bathhouse, where I would go into the bathhouse –

SS: Which one?

TL: I did West Side; I did East Side; I did a couple that have totally gone away, like within six months after I went into them. But I would go into the community rooms, dressed down; have a towel; and bring lots o' condoms, and some literature. And then do an Eroticizing Safer Sex program, with a banana. Give men as much encouragement about safer sex – explain safer sex; that it didn't mean you couldn't get AIDS, but it would be a way to prevent AIDS.

And I did those programs until GMHC changed, and cut out the prevention programs towards the gay, gay men community, and really focused on, say, the club scene, or other areas where AIDS was hitting. I kind of feel that GMHC kind of left gay men like myself out of the boat when they stopped those programs, because there were lots o' men who don't end up in the clubs of New

York; that end up going to softball games, or having dinner with friends, or going home to see family and things like that; but they still engage in unsafe behavior. And those men weren't reached out to for several years by GMH—

SS: Why do you think that changed?

TL: I think individuals in GMHC had their own agendas, and recognized meth was just coming. Crack was there; meth was just coming on. And I think that there were so many men that were doing meth, and having unsafe behavior, that they just focused their energies on a more reachable audience.

SS: So, when you came into ACT UP, did you join a committee or an affinity group? How did you plug in?

TL: Well, in '89, I lost my best friend, a lover, to AIDS. And that was at Bellevue Hospital. And I was pretty much involved in ACT UP at that time. And I was going to demonstrations. I got arrested a couple o' times at the very beginning and didn't like it — really hated it — and that's because of some health issues I have. But I didn't like not being close to the medicine that I need. I don't think I really had that fire in my belly, either. So, after a couple arrests, I said, I don't want to be arrested, but I'll help people get arrested, and support.

And so — like a demonstration in Washington, at the NIH. I remember buying a whole bunch of water, to make sure people had water. I found nurses, when we had big events in the summer, that would be available to help people.

In ACT UP itself, I joined Treatment and Data. I wanted to know more about the science. I had actually, in '79, been sent the MMWR by a friend of mine in Georgia, who was an endocrinologist, and he knew I was gay, and he sent me the MMWR.

SS: What is MMWR?

TL: That's published by the CDC, and it's a weekly – morbidity and mortality rate document that they put out weekly. And that was something you could follow to see who was dying of AIDS. And he had sent me that in '79.

So, this all was based on that document, that he had sent me. And I ultimately had a subscription to MMWR. So, then it was just natural that I would go into Treatment and Data.

SS: Can you describe for people what Treatment and Data was like at that time?

Tape I
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TL: At the time, the –

A group of universities had been picked as the AIDS Clinical Trial group. And those were the people that were going to test drugs. They had already, in '83, Margaret Heckler had announced the cure for AIDS within six months. That was, you know, a puff o' dreams. But basically, they had brought out AZT. And if you remember, Burroughs Wellcome brought out AZT, at ever, how many, a hundred thousand dollars a year. And that was just too much for anybody to pay – even the high-priced Wall Street gay guys. So, ACT UP was

focusing on getting that price lower. That was just naturally for T&D to do the research, and find out more about how it was released, from the cancer vaults.

Burroughs Wellcome had not done any of the research on the drug; had just strictly put it in a test tube, and it showed it killed HIV in the test tube, and they brought it to market as a drug for AIDS.

T&D recognized that there wasn't a coordinated effort. Even the AIDS Clinical Trial groups didn't talk to one another. Things like that.

So, it was a way for us to go down to the AIDS Clinical Trial groups. We forced them to address the whole issue of community constituency groups. I ended up on the community constituency group for the AIDS Clinical Trial group, as a member of ACT UP.

There was so much. When you talk about women weren't being tested with drugs; kids weren't being addressed with drugs. Then the drugs they were looking at; some just didn't make any sense, and things like that.

So, T&D made an effort that people took on projects and found out more information about drug development. And the pharmaceutical companies — Merck, Burroughs Wellcome, which is now Glaxo Wellcome — and things like that.

SS: So, what was your role?

TL: I definitely followed a couple o' drug companies.

SS: Which ones?

TL: Glaxo Wellcome.

SS: Can you tell us a little bit about them, and what you were doing with them?

TL: Well, I had had herpes at an early age. And so, I took acyclovir. And I didn't understand how, in the triangle of North Carolina, how they control so much. And I didn't understand why the government had opened up the pharmaceuticals to just make all this money, at the sake of people dying. And it didn't limit itself to — remember, I'm a cancer survivor — I remember what drugs cost then. And it didn't make any sense. So, it was just natural.

With T&D, I did more stuff about organizing. When someone needed some research, I would do research. I had access to computers when I was about nine or 10 years old. I knew how to use the Internet.

SS: What was it like, dealing with the drug companies? Did you have direct contact with their employees?

TL: I called a few and met with a few. It pretty much was like status quo; like, this is what we are, and you're not going to change us, and we appreciate what you're doing, but no, we're not opening this trial. It's a trial for late-stage AIDS. People needed drugs. And drug companies weren't cooperating with the community.

SS: Can you think of an example when they said, no, we're not going to change, and you forced them to change?

TL: Uh, yeah. I think when ACT UP went down to Burroughs Wellcome offices, and —

SS: Can you describe that whole, what happened?

TL: I didn't participate, and I didn't go down. But I did a lot o' support, back up here in New York. But – by going into the offices – putting on suits and getting into the office – and then coming out, and saying, we're ACT UP, and you're charging too much – nothing changed down in North Carolina. They were good ol' boys. But ACT UP ended up deciding, on the floor of ACT UP, to go to Wall Street. And because some people had access to trading companies and whatever, they got into the New York Stock Exchange. And I think it's the only time the New York Stock Exchange ever stopped. And for them to lower the banner that read "Burroughs Wellcome Kills" – the price o' drug dropped to twenty-something-thousand dollars the next day. That couldn't have been any more powerful, by a group of community people against a big corporation.

Tape I
00:25:00

SS: What was the environment inside T&D? How many people were there, and what was the atmosphere like?

TL: A lot o' different people. Some people were strange, some people weren't strange. I think everybody was strange. People wanted to do their own thing. Chris DeBlasio, composer; I never knew he was a composer, in T&D. He never talked about his life; all we talked about were drugs. Charlie Franchino, a chiropractor; a Fire Island kind of guy.

Everybody was serious in T&D. That was what was amazing about the energy in T&D. And we'd go to the floor to make reports, you knew

people listened. There were probably 700 people in the community room at the Center. And basically, it would be a T&D report. People would bring up, you know, Burroughs Wellcome has done this, Merck has done this. What we can do. We had zaps. You could tell people to make phone calls the next day. They learned how to do a fax thing, where you taped paper together, and put it in a fax machine, and you could fill up somebody's fax machine all day with this fax. Those were pretty ingenious.

Sorry, I'm just –

SS: That's okay.

TL: – I'm just thinking.

SS: So, who was the leadership of T&D at the time?

TL: I would say – I'm going to have to pull up names, too. Chris DeBlasio was pretty active. Can we stop for a minute?

SS: Yeah.

TL: Okay.

I hate this, when I forget a name.

SS: Okay. Well if it comes back, just remind me.

TL: Uh, Scott.

SS: Scott Wald, Scott Robbie, Scott –

TL: Uh –

SS: – Slutsky?

TL: Bob Rafsky wasn't in T&D, but he came to T&D meetings pretty regularly.

SS: Let's talk about Bob Rafsky. You want to tell a little bit about him – what he was like?

TL: Yeah. Bob always told me he never got AIDS except by oral sex. And I never understood that. because I thought oral sex, you couldn't get HIV. When I had been at GMHC and we talked about all the prevention, oral sex was here, and anal sex was here. And one through a hundred. And it was kind of weird. But that's what he always claimed. But he had –

SS: Do you think he was lying?

TL: I think there's lots o' ways you can get HIV, and not have a penis up your ass.

SS: Um hm.

TL: You can have other things; other things that have been up other people. Things like that – I don't think we'd get into splitting hairs. But he was so vocal about that, that AIDS was this panic, because anybody can get it. And I think that helped a lot o' people, because people didn't ask questions. But it can also cause a lot o' hysteria.

SS: Yeah.

TL: But he had a lot of anger. And he spoke well at meetings, with that anger, to get people involved. People could see how – and I think that's one

thing about ACT UP at that time. You had a lot o' people that spoke because they had convictions about AIDS, and – it was – energetic to see that.

I know that with all the people in the meeting, I had a hearing problem, I was hard of hearing. And I am the one who went to the front of the floor and said, we need the first seats for the disabled. So, there was Ken, who had some kind of neuromuscular disease; there were a couple of other – Harry Weider, and a couple of other people that had disabilities, that ended up not being forced to the back of the room but could participate in the meetings. It helped me a lot.

Tape I
00:30:00

Being on the front row, there was a problem, at one point, where somebody resigned as chalkboard queen. So, there was a good year that I was chalkboard queen at meetings. And writing down stuff. That helped me, because being hard o' hearing, I got everything. So – phone numbers – what to do the next week, and things like that.

Going back to T&D, that I knew what had happened at the meetings, so I could bring up things that maybe we needed to talk about.

The Community Constituency group met quarterly. So, there was always a trip to D.C. I helped organize — and I can't remember the year — but in T&D, I had this idea that we have an AIDS treatment activist conference, and we have it before the AIDS Clinical Trial Group. So, we put that together. I contacted a Holiday Inn in D.C.; said we want to bring down a hundred people; we need, like 50 rooms. And you know, they, it was in Chinatown.

And – one thing that came out o’ that is Wayne Thompson, who was ACT UP DC; Wayne and his lover, who was – Wayne and – he had been in New York, and then he went to D.C., and they became lovers. And – basically, they met at the AIDS Treatment Activist conference, and became lovers. And Wayne was the first funeral in front of the White House.

SS: Oh, really.

TL: And –

SS: Were you there for that?

TL: I was.

SS: Can you describe that?

TL: That had been arranged, because – they had traveled around during the candidacy period for the U.S. president, and they had dog-tagged a lot o’ candidates, and they did it in a hearse, and talked about all the people dying with AIDS, and how nobody talked about AIDS. And when Clinton was elected president, then there was this dialog that Wayne and – sorry, the brain’s not working right.

SS: That’s okay. His boyfriend –

TL: But his boyfriend, but basically, when he died, Wayne picked up the phone and called Bill Clinton’s office. And said, we want to have the funeral in front of the White House. And Bill Clinton okayed it. So, it was the first time. And there you had, in the lawn, behind the fence, all these black-suited guys with guns. And you had, we walked from Liberty Plaza down Pennsylvania

Avenue. And there are pictures in the files of the funeral. But it was an open-casket funeral.

And I was down for Tim Bailey's, when they tried to bring his body out of the casket. That was total chaos. There were government people trying to take over the body, and the body ended up coming out of the casket a little bit, and things like that. And they were – Michael Callen had said he always wanted his body hung on the fence at the White House. Michael Callen was a friend of mine. I had done a fund-raiser in Rochester and got the Flirtations to come up to Rochester for that. Michael Callen and I would end up meeting weekly down at John's Pizzeria, on Bleecker, and talk about life, AIDS, and what was going on. And I was able to see him sing his last concert, in D.C., after the March on Washington, in '93. We drove out to somewhere in Maryland. And there, he sang a solo. And he had just lost one lung. And then it was maybe six months, eight months later, that he died. But –

There wasn't a long distance between D.C. and New York at the time. And it was easy to drive down, take a train down, take a bus down. That's pretty much what we did. We had protests at the White House, protests at the NIH, protests at candidates' offices, and things like that. And you could always go down for the day – leave early in the morning and come back in the evening. It would require a day off work, and things like that.

Tape I
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SS: You said that your best friend-lover died in '89.

TL: Stephen Petrino.

SS: Stephen Petrino. And so, were you trying to get treatment information for him out of T&D?

TL: Up until '89, I was. Up until '89, I was. Because what had happened – I had been boyfriends with him up in Rochester. He lived in Toronto. And then came down to New York, and I met him one day socially. And then he ended up being friends with me and my lover at the time.

And it was kind of strange, because we lived in Queens; I lived in Forest Hills. And we'd invite him out for dinner. And then he'd say, well, I don't want to go home tonight; can I stay here? So, we had an extra bed, and so we would let him stay in the apartment. And then before it was over with, it'd be one night, and then it would be two nights, and it would be three nights, and all that.

And he lived in Sunnyside, New York. And one day, I got a call from his mother, on Long Island. And his mother said, you're a friend of Stephen's. And I said, yes. And she said, are you close? And I said, yes. And she says, well, your name's in his wallet as an emergency number.

And I said, well, that's good. What's the emergency?

And she said, well, he was here, and he went back to New York. But we haven't heard from him in five days.

And so, I said, well, what's going on with him?

And she says, well, he's talking crazy. And she proceeded to tell me what was going on.

And this just shows you what was happening in the late eighties, is he was seeing a doctor up at 83rd Street. And the doctor was injecting bat feces into his body, into his veins, as a cure for AIDS. Stephen was in the first stages of dementia at the time this was occurring. So, what would happen is he would see the doctor, and then he would end up in Central Park.

And somehow, he ended up giving away close to twenty thousand dollars. People would ask him for money, and he would say, let's go to the ATM. And he would go to the ATM and give them money. And this doctor – Reveni was this doctor's name —

JAMES WENTZY: Hold that thought. We have to change the tape.

TL: Okay.

SS: –vici was the famous drink-your-own-urine guy.

TL: Yeah.

SS: I remember him quite well.

TL: Yep.

SS: So, after that, did you try to get real treatment for Steve?

TL: I did. Basically what happened was, I waited three days, and sat in Revici's office. And while his staff tried to say, you can't wait here, whatever. I stayed there. And Stephen showed up, and he shuffled in. He already had a shuffle, where he couldn't move his legs because of some of the neuromuscular problems he was having.

And I said, Stephen, what are you doing here? And he said, I'm coming to see the doctor. And I said, what's going to happen? He said, he's curing me of AIDS. And I said, come on, Stephen.

So, we left the office. And we walked down Fifth Avenue. And we got on the subway. And he lived in Sunnyside. And I guess that was the biggest humility I had, in AIDS. Because we got on the No. 7 train, and it was right at four o'clock in the afternoon, so the train was kind of packed, and whatever like that. And Stephen was pretty much out of it mentally. Stephen didn't walk normally, and whatever like that. And we're standing on that thing. We went through the tunnel, and right as we come out o' the tunnel, he says, I have to go to the bathroom.

And I said, we'll be home soon, Stephen.

And then a couple minutes pass, or whatever like that. He says, I don't use a bathroom anymore. And I looked down, and there he was, going to the bathroom. And it was diarrhea. And – it was coming out. And then you saw a couple people get up from the subway and leave. And before it was over with, the whole subway had emptied.

And so, we're getting off at Sunnyside stop on the 7 train. And we're going home. And he's shuffling. And every once in a while, he would shuffle his leg out, and try to get whatever was inside out of his leg, and whatever.

But we got home, and I put him in the shower. And took his clothes off, and gave him a good bath, and put him in bed. And said everything would be okay.

And then I called his doctors and said, what's going on; I don't understand this.

His doctor was at Bellevue. And his doctor says, well, let's see him tomorrow.

So, I took him in the next day, to see the doctor. And the doctor said, well, he's just too anemic – he's got too much crap in his body, and things like that. We need to have him in the hospital.

And Stephen went in in January – January 8th – January 12th – January 8th. January 8th, 1989. And he died on June 8th. And he never left the hospital, other than to come out into the garden.

And it showed me pretty much how he could get good treatment, but he could get bad treatment. And I was staying with him pretty much every day. My lover understood it at the time. And we had another friend who was a close boyfriend of mine, up in Rochester. Donald came down and saw Stephen, because they had been boyfriends at one time. And Donald died in 1990. So – Donald had known how much involved I was in ACT UP and things like that. So, he said, can you introduce me to some AIDS organizations?

So, he comes down, and he's got all of the tubes tied to him, and all that kind of stuff, where he did the drugs at night, and things like that. But he would walk. So, we went to GMHC, went to Harlem AIDS Project, went to SMART, whatever like that. And had started a program; Stop AIDS in Our Country, for kids. And it was called STOP. And he had gotten some funding through some local Rochester organizations. And he put out hygiene papers, that he would go to the elementary schools and reach out to kids. So, a lot of the council people in Rochester liked what Donald did.

And then Donald said, I want to take this nationwide. And so, he came down here, stayed at the Plaza Hotel. He had been an Enron salesman; had lots o' money. And so, he gets a suite at the Plaza Hotel, and there we are, going out and meeting all these things. And he'd say, I'm tired, I have to go back. So, we'd go back.

And then he says, well, I think we're going to go to L.A. So, we went to L.A. And this was to meet Magic Johnson. And so, he called Magic

Johnson's office, and they set up the appointment. And we stayed at the Universal Studios hotel there. Telly Savalas was our next-door neighbor. He lived there. And we ended up going to APLA, and all these organizations.

Donald had a problem. There was a drug at the time that was given to you in silver balls. I forgot what that drug was. I'll look it up and send it to you. But he had these silver balls, and you hook the silver balls up to a line, and then you would give it to you. And it was supposedly killing HIV.

But we had a problem at the airport in L.A., where all those silver balls fell out of his luggage.

SS: Eh.

TL: And so, there I was, running all over for those balls. But anyway, we ended up being short two balls.

SS: Oh.

TL: So, he called his friend Michael Galena [Glassman], from Boston, where they had grew up. And Michael had AIDS. And said, yes, I have some I can let you have.

So, we drove out to Venice Beach. And we're out at Venice Beach. And I open the door – and Donald was walking slow at the time. And I walk up to the house. And there's this guy coming to the door. And it had three panes, and I could see the guy's face. And I just totally lost it. Like I couldn't believe who it was. And Michael Galena was Ed Dinakos, who was a porn star for Colt Studios.

SS: Oh, okay.

TL: And it was totally eye-opening for me at the time. Because here, Jake Tanner of Colt Studios was his lover.

SS: Okay.

TL: And so, Michael opens the door, and he's got late-stage AIDS. And so, he gives us the balls and whatever, and it's good for them to see, and they hug, and whatever like that. And then Michael invites us to a party out in Hollywood, or something like that. And we ended up going to that party.

But the meeting with Magic Johnson was to me really eye-telling at the time. And that was, Donald had an appointment with Magic Johnson's office, and I had talked to them once. So, I knew the appointment was established. And it was, he was at a Walden Books. He had just published a book. And he was doing a reading at the Walden Books. And he was going to meet us after the book reading, book signing, and come out, and then we were going to go with him to his car. And we were going to have an interview with him, for Donald to talk about Stop AIDS in Our Country, to his next appointment.

SS: Okay.

TL: And what ended up happening is, Magic came out, and said, hello, Donald, hello, Timothy, and whatever like that. I'm in a hurry, I gotta go. And we never met with Magic Johnson.

And so, I ended up calling the office and said, what is this? Why didn't we meet with Magic Johnson?

They kind of apologized, and said, whatever. But it was clear that Magic Johnson was into the notoriety, and not dealing with all of AIDS the way he should have been dealing with AIDS at the time.

We ended up coming back to New York, and I took Donald to Rochester, and then there, we had a big party, where we showed video and things of the interviews we'd had, and how people were going to start addressing more elementary AIDS prevention in elementary schools. And Don got lots of applause in Rochester, and things like that. But he died six months later.

SS: What about – so in ACT UP, as we all know, everybody was sick and dying all the time, and everybody was dealing with that. But there's also this whole party side of ACT UP, right?

TL: Right.

SS: Did you have fun there, too?

TL: Yeah, I did. I liked the Swim Team.

SS: The Swim Team!

TL: The Swim Team was a group –

SS: Who was on the Swim Team?

TL: I'm trying to think. But it was a group of young men, who always stood at the back of the row. I'm not going to name names right now.

SS: Oh, okay.

TL: But basically, they all wore black leather. And they got labeled "the Swim Team." I had been standing back there, talking to a lot of

them. I knew them. But by this time, I was at the front row. And so, you'd always see them back there. And they would always be smiling. But they were the party boys. There were parties they would have.

Tape II
00:10:00

I remember one party. They always gave the speech at the beginning of ACT UP, that, you know, if there's any police in the audience, please identify yourself; tell the group that be aware; there might be police in the room, so if you've got anything that you don't want to say, don't say it publicly, and whatever like that.

And we had gone to the Holiday Inn at 57th Street. And we were on the roof there; it was a swim party. And there it was. And lots of things were happening. People were loving on each other, and things like that; hugging and whatever like that. And there were these two guys that just – they had gone up to two of my friends, two of my Facebook friends now. And it was crazy, because they didn't want to do anything sexually. But they would lead up to the tease.

I looked at them real hard. And then what happened; as I went to the bathroom, and one of them pulled out a phone and made a call. And I knew he was a police officer. And I walked out to the pool. And I walked up to both of them, and I said, I've identified you both. And I don't think you should be here. And if you want to be here because you're doing something legal, that's fine. But I'm going to tell everybody that's here that you're police officers, because you're not part of ACT UP.

And in less than two minutes, they left the party.

SS: Okay.

TL: That was clearly all the time we were having. Sorry –
The church. When it was decided that we were going to have the protest at St. Patrick's Cathedral, I called Sean –

SS: Sean Strub.

TL: – Strub.

And I said, I don't have a cell phone. But I think a cell phone would be great to have. But what I want to do is I want to find out all the pay phone numbers. And I want there to be a communication network up when this is happening, outside with the protest, the way people are going to be moved around –

SS: Um hm.

TL: – as well as the counter-protesters, and anything that happens inside. And so, I went up and laid out a gridwork, and got all of the payphones on the street. And then Sean gave me two cell phones. And I ended up handing those to somebody else. And then we basically had a communication network, because people had phone numbers and locations where there were phones, and they could call each other. And then when the stuff started happening, there were people that were running to the cell phones that were calling press, and things like that. Because at that time, there weren't a lot o' cell phones –

SS: Right.

TL: – available. I remember one – one event at that. And that was – I had started to do legal observation. And that was more of what I did in the ACT UP demonstrations; wear an armband; work with a lot of other people; work with the marshals that would be at street corners when traffic was there. But at this particular thing was, I wasn't going to be inside. I wasn't doing anything. And there were counter-protesters, so I was in that area there. But then I saw these two guys with work boots on, or whatever like that. And I saw one of them put his foot through a Rockefeller window door. And then the two cops ran. And they ran across the street over to Saks Fifth Avenue, and there was a wagon for them to get inside. But they had actually been agent provocateurs, and created a scene of damage, and then before it was over with, somebody was trying' to, one of the Rockefeller people were trying' to say, these people did it. But they didn't do it. And that's when I had to say, no, it's those two guys over there, standing at the van. They're the guys who did it.

So, it was clear that there would be agent provocateurs in any type of public event that we had, where we were protesting AIDS and HIV.

SS: Oh, sure. When did you leave ACT UP?

TL: I still go to meetings periodically.

SS: Okay.

TL: I've never, I've never said I'm not part of ACT UP. And that's one thing that has bothered me about the AIDS crisis, is how immediate the AIDS crisis was, from '87 to '94. And then from '94 to now, how it's just an

Tape II
00:15:00

afterthought for a lot of people. We saw committees formed, and Housing Works was the Housing Committee, and then Housing Works gets created, and T&D ended up being TAG – and I went to TAG and helped found TAG. But then it got to be more, in TAG, writing a lot of technical papers, which I don't have that technical experience.

So, I stayed in TAG for a long time. I still get mail from TAG. I'm part of TAG on Facebook, and whatever. But I saw that a lot of people ended up leaving ACT UP and using the experience in ACT UP to do something else. And then there's other people who didn't – just went back to regular work. But somehow, AIDS is not – not a crisis anymore. And I've never understood that. That's been a real problem for me. I think that's why I like the Oral History Project, because we can talk about AIDS then and now, and we can see a difference. When you look at, right now, the epidemiology in New York City, gay men that are 18 to 30 – the rates are astronomical –

SS: Yeah.

TL: – the last few months.

SS: Yeah.

TL: Why is that?

SS: Why is it? What do you think?

TL: I don't think one message makes someone not get AIDS. I think it's a continuing program, and I think you have to have programs – like the Eroticizing Safer Sex programs; the parties at Fire Island, and things like that;

where you talk about AIDS; you talk about alcohol, you talk about drug use, and how that limits your thinking and behavior.

And I think too, there's still, there is a lot o' wannabes out there. I was disturbed when barebacking started. I was disturbed at a lot o' people who said barebacking was okay, because they had been in ACT UP, and they had been part of the AIDS crisis. So, there were all these disjoints that didn't make sense the last few years.

But going to ACT UP, I've been able to participate in meetings. Now that I don't hear, and I'm deaf – they've tried to make the meetings a little more accessible.

SS: How many people were at the last meeting that you went to?

TL: Twelve.

SS: Okay.

TL: But there can be as many as four or five. I'm pretty much on the loose rules of Robert, and if there's less than five and I'm there, I say, I can't participate in this. And I would leave if they didn't make a change, and say, we're not going to vote on anything tonight. But that does happen with ACT UP now. I helped ACT UP go up to Harlem. And the whole idea there was being in a church, we would get more people. And it turned out – it didn't happen.

So, I don't really know what this disjoint is with ACT UP. But I do know that ACT UP, the name, still carries a lot of weight.

SS: Um hm.

TL: So, if you sign on to a letter, I think it means something. If you end up making a phone call, I think people still understand what – and ACT UP still has a phone tree, with something like 700 names on it. So, people get the message. Just a lot o' people don't act.

SS: Okay, I just have one last question. Is there anything important that we haven't covered, before I ask you?

TL: The Church, the NIH – only that after the Community Constituency Group, I was asked to join an AIDS vaccine evaluation group. I had been at the New York Blood Bank, and started their program, where they had a community group that reached out for some research that the New York Blood Bank wanted to do. And I had got that board started; left that board.

And then the University of Rochester had contacted me and asked me would I be their representative.

So here I was, down in New York, working in a financial institution. And I walked into my boss, and I said, you know, I've been chair of this group in Rochester, but I have to go to Washington quarterly. And she was from Haiti – but she was from the aristocratic part of Haiti. And so, when I could tell her about all the work I had done, trying to get AIDS drugs to people in Haiti, she somehow had a disconnect. And I told her that I was chair of this board. And that was a total change in her. She said, well you have this board. Yes, go to the meeting.

And I said, well, going to Rochester, it's 350 miles from here. I'll have to go to the meeting on a Monday night. I won't be able to work on Monday, because I'll go up for the weekend, to my house. And then I'll come back Monday night, after the meeting. And I'd be at work on Tuesday.

And then, to show how she didn't understand the Haiti problem, or AIDS at all – we're at a meeting of all the workers. I was an auditor for the bank. And she says, Tim, you're taking off Mondays. Everybody's going to think you're drinking, and you can't show up for work on Monday. You need to show up for one of these Mondays that you're missing.

And I said, Denise, I'm sorry, but I'm chair of this board.

And what ended up happening is, I ended up becoming national chair of the AIDS Vaccine Evaluation Group. So, I had these meetings to go to in Washington quarterly, plus the monthly meetings in Rochester. And then – we worked on a prevention vaccine, as well as a therapeutic vaccine. And the idea there was that someday there would be a vaccine that people could take, like smallpox, and not get AIDS. And then there would be another that could help people with AIDS not die of AIDS. And so, I did that for three years. And I still think the vaccine work is – a valiant effort.

SS: Oh, sure. So, here's my last question.

TL: Okay.

SS: So, looking back, what do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what was its biggest disappointment?

TL: Biggest achievement, I think, is putting their name on the face of the Earth, so that other people could see that we could try to end AIDS in our lifetime. With ACT UP Paris; ACT UP Atlanta, ACT UP Rochester; ACT UP San Francisco; there were ACT UPs all over the world. They did lots of things to help people with AIDS. I think that's the greatest achievement.

The worst – being misunderstood. Being misunderstood. I think you had people who were fighting for their lives; you had people that were concerned about other people. And the messages were all out there, that were true. But somehow, you still didn't reach people. And you know, you could go down to the NIH, and you could have somebody yes you to death; and then do something totally different. You clearly knew that you didn't meet the minds of everybody you met.

SS: Right. Okay, thanks, Tim.

TL: Thanks.

SS: That wasn't too bad, right?

TL: No. Well, I, was I okay?

SS: You were beautiful! Thank you! That was great. You're the only person who's mentioned Paul Popham, in like a-hundred-and-something interviews.