

**A C T U P**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**P R O J E C T**

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Interviewee: **BC Craig**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project  
Interview of BC CRAIG  
June 23, 2008

**SARAH SCHULMAN: Okay. So just start by saying your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.**

BC CRAIG: Okay. I'm BC Craig; I'm 44. It's June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008.  
And we're in my apartment in Brooklyn.

**SS: In Park Slope!**

BCC: In Park Slope.

**SS: Now the very first question is, what does BC stand for?**

BCC: BC doesn't stand for anything. BC is a name that I made up for myself when I arrived in New York. So in some ways, it sort of comes together with my joining ACT UP, since I joined ACT UP right when I came to New York, because I didn't know a single person here. I had this terrible childhood nickname that had followed me for years and years and years. I couldn't take it. So when I moved to New York, it was one of my agenda items, was to change my name. And I could not come up with one that I really liked. It was sort of committing to a new identity. So I thought and I thought, but I couldn't come up with it. And the first time I met somebody, I put out my hand, and that's what came out of my mouth. And so that has been it.

But it gave my students lots of fun, trying to think of horrible things that BC could stand for.

**SS: And what's your real name?**

BCC: Elizabeth.

**SS: Oh, okay. And no one calls you Elizabeth.**

BCC: No one.

**SS: Okay. Now they will start.**

BCC: Excellent.

**SS: So where did you grow up?**

BCC: I grew up in suburban Philadelphia. In Montgomery County, sort of north and west of the city. Though the area I grew up in was more rural than suburban.

**SS: So did you live in one of those houses where there was a house next door? Or was there more land around it?**

BCC: When I, actually, the house I first grew up in, when I was young, was in that kind of neighborhood; a sort of working class, house, house, house, small yard, kind of place. But we moved when I was, I don't know, eight, let's say, to an old farmhouse, with 50 acres around it, or something like that, that was in the same area, but was just a more rural version of it.

**SS: And why did your parents want to do that?**

BCC: Uh, two reasons. They bred Great Danes, for a hobby. So there was the need for space for the dogs. And my father is of rural stock. He grew up out in western Pennsylvania, in the coal-mining region of the Appalachians, and had grown up in farmland, and I think that he was never very comfortable in that sort of more suburban development. And this place was this very kind of run-down, 18<sup>th</sup>-century barn, basically. And it was something they could afford, but that had land and setting that he was more comfortable in.

**SS: And was your mother also a native Pennsylvanian?**

BCC: No. She was from New York; Long Island.

**SS: So how did they meet?**

BCC: College. My father had a scholarship; he was the only member of his family to go to college, but he had a scholarship to go to Johns Hopkins University. My mother went to Goucher College, which is sort of the sister of Johns Hopkins, but without any of the academic credentials. It was more of a kind of finishing college, I guess you would say, and they met at some mixer or something like that.

**SS: So they came from different kind of class backgrounds?**

BCC: Definitely.

**SS: And did that play out in your family?**

BCC: Definitely.

**SS: How do you think that influenced you?**

BCC: Oh, I think that I was much more influenced, in some ways, by my father's background than I was by my mother's background. I was led to believe, as a child, that my mother's parents were very intolerant. They didn't, they thought my father wasn't good enough for their daughter, and such like that. And so we grew up with this same kind of disdain for them. And so I was much more influenced by my father's family, also in part because it was a big, sort of rambling family, with lots of cousins, all about the same age, and so we spent a

lot more time with them. So their values and background and way of looking at the world, I think, had more influence on us than my mother's did.

**SS: What was their way of looking at the world?**

BCC: Well, what were some of the things? Why did I become a teacher, I think has a lot to do with that. This is a family that, as I say, they were farmers, what we called dirt farmers. My father always says that they were Scotch-Irish people who left these horrible, rugged mountains, where nothing would grow, in Scotland. And then came across the coast, through Pennsylvania, until they found the same mountains. Let's stay here! And started farming, to no particular avail; then started working in the coal mines. Then the coal mines dried up, and there was essentially no work. And the big break in my family was when my grandfather, during the war, went to, outside of D.C., and got a job in the post office. Which was like, security and a step up in the world.

And I was raised to believe that the best kind of job you could get was a civil service job. There was going to be steady income; we were not raised to business. We were raised to, you work hard; you make money; enough to feed your family. And you look for security over everything.

So my father went to college, which was a big change in their family, but he immediately went to work for the government, in the Department of Agriculture. Worked there for 45 years, or something like that.

**SS: What did your mother do?**

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BCC: She actually was an English teacher before I was born — so I don't have much memory of that — and went back to school later on, and got an MBA and was a tax accountant. And again, it was that kind of thing like, we're not accountants, that kind of thing we do. So again, it put her in this sort of different place.

**SS: And were they community-involved? Were you involved in a church, or some kind of –**

BCC: Definitely involved in a church. I was raised in the church. My father –

**SS: Which church?**

BCC: – was not a believer. Say it again, please.

**SS: Which church?**

BCC: Presbyterian Church. Although there's some background to that as well. My mother's family is Jewish up through her grandparents. And her grandmother converted to marry my grandfather, who was Irish Catholic. She was raised as a Catholic. She converted to be a Protestant when she married my father. And then I converted back again, and now have been Jewish for maybe 15 years.

**SS: Oh.**

BCC: But I was raised in the Presbyterian Church; a kind of every Sunday, 12 years in the choir, youth group twice a week. That kind of deep involvement in the church.

**SS: And do you think that that carried with you later in your life?**

BCC: I think that it was a big part of my political thinking for a long time. The church that I belonged to, that we belonged to, was not particularly political, or even necessarily progressive, beyond that kind of general Christians take care of other people, and put themselves out in their responsibility to take care of others. But I, as I got more radical, through high school and into college, actually did a lot of my early work, because I was involved in the Latin American solidarity movement with the more radical Catholic and Christian branches of religion, and the importance of faith in social justice work.

**SS: And you came into that through your church, or through high school?**

BCC: Neither one.

**SS: Oh, that was later.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Well, let's start with high school. You said you got political in high school?**

BCC: In high school, I was very political. At odds with this rather Republican area that I grew up in. But in this kind of thoughtless way, I think of it. I read Marx as a 13-, 14-year-old, and was very set on how we were ignoring all of the benefits of the Soviet Union. Right now, it's a little shaky.

**SS: Did you join a party, or something like that?**

BCC: No. In that way, I didn't have access to it. It was a small town, and there wasn't that kind of thing. But I left home when I was about 17. I went to Philadelphia. And actually, at that point, got involved with Movement for a New Society. I don't know if you're familiar with them.

**SS: That was a spin-off of something.**

BCC: I don't think of Movement for a New Society as a spin-off of something, but it may be.

**SS: Okay –**

BCC: In Philadelphia, it was a – a community of social justice activists; maybe 18 communal houses, working together, also as a community, doing both – not just social justice work, mostly around militarism, many of them Vietnam era activists; but also very invested in the idea that how one lives is as important in political life as the actions one takes publicly in the more political theater. So that, where we get our food, and how we interact with each other, and what kind of work we do is all part of our social justice –

**SS: And how did you find them?**

BCC: Well, there was a little bit of an accident to that. I had moved into Philadelphia; I had nowhere to stay, I was looking at, I don't know, probably some community center or something for places that were looking for roommates. And I had 11 numbers, and they were the 11<sup>th</sup> number, and they were the only one who said, come on over. And I went, and met these people who were — I was 17. I think the woman who owned the house was 63. A wonderful

woman; she was the first adult lesbian I had ever met. And the rest of the people in the house were maybe 30 to 40 years old; something like that. And there they were living out this image that I had dreamed of in suburban Philadelphia. And for some odd reason, they allowed me to move in. And I moved in with them. And that was really, in many ways, sort of the beginning of my active political life.

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**SS: How long did you live there?**

BCC: I lived in that house for a year. After that, I moved into another communal house, which was a women's-only communal house, in the same sort of community — about three blocks over, or something like that — and lived there for another year and a half, or something like that. And stayed connected to that community for another year or so, before I started to move on. But those were the only two years I lived there; two and a half years.

**SS: So were you out in high school?**

BCC: No. No no no. I came out, I came out when I came, when I moved to Philadelphia.

**SS: Okay. In the context of that Movement for a New Society.**

BCC: Even before that. Even before I first went to there, I was on my way to coming out. I think that, it was pretty clear, I think, to most people around me. When I came out to people, people were like, this is a surprise in what way, exactly? But to me, it hadn't ever presented itself as an option. Once I knew that it was an option, I was right there.

**SS: So what was the lesbian community like in Philadelphia at that time?**

BCC: Small. It didn't, there wasn't a lot of distinction. There was a gay community, which I think of having sort of this lesbian sidecar to it. So that most of the bookstores and community centers and bars and things like that were all mixed lesbian and gay, and more dominated by gay men. And then there was a smaller lesbian feminist world, that didn't so much mix with that same community. And I played in, I would say, three different communities there: that more gay and lesbian community; the lesbian feminist community; and then this wider, broader social justice community, which included a women's peace movement that I was part of for awhile.

**SS: Because there's a huge Quaker influence in Philadelphia.**

BCC: Right, and I worked for the American Friends Service Committee and the Quaker movement was a big part of how I learned to do civil disobedience, do civil disobedience trainings, facilitate meetings, etc.

**SS: So just for historical purposes, who were some of the leaders, or visible lesbian figures, at that time in Philadelphia who were influential to you or –**

BCC: Hm. It's tough. I feel like I remember sort of spotty names. I worked on the, the Lesbian Hotline, with people like Susan Wendell, who was a poet at the time, two women named Jean; I don't remember their last names. We're talking about 30 years ago.

**SS: Right, right.**

BCC: I'm sorry, I don't remember the details well enough.

**SS: Okay, okay. So you were working in the gay community; you were very young, you were working in a broader peace movement and did you have a job?**

BCC: I was at school at first. I went to Temple University. And then, the economy in Phila-, this was, we're talking now, this is '82-'83, or something like that. The economy in Philadelphia was just unbelievably bad. We had lost all of the industry. And as a matter of fact, a lot of the work that I did was around what we called Jobs with Peace; this idea of trying to connect military funding to the loss of industry in Philadelphia and the skyrocketing unemployment rate in those early Reagan years.

So I ended up having to leave school because I didn't have enough money to continue, and started working as a chef in downtown Philadelphia, and did that for a couple years, before I finally went back to school, at night, and finished up.

**SS: And when did AIDS come into your radar?**

BCC: Hm.

**SS: Is there something going on with that door?**

**JIM HUBBARD:** Is there a cat?

BCC: There is.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: If you want it to stop, open that door quickly.

**JH: And then the cat will come out?**

BCC: The cat will come out and then close the door again.

**JH: Okay, but the cat won't make more noise in here?**

BCC: No.

**SS: Come in cat?**

BCC: No? Okay, close the door.

**SS: Lesbians and their cats. When you were in Philadelphia, AIDS was not on your radar.**

BCC: Actually, the closest was that one of my friends, when I was in Philadelphia, because back at that time, the bookstore was, a central piece of the gay community was Giovanni's Room. And Joe Beam worked at Giovanni's Room, and I met him there and through a girlfriend I had later, and I used to hang out with him. And he was probably the first person I knew who died of AIDS. But it really wasn't on my radar. And after that, I did a lot of different stuff. I lived at the Women's Peace Encampment up at Seneca for a year –

**SS: Oh wait; stop; must discuss that. Now of course, one of the interesting things about Seneca was that it was the coming together of all of your worlds. It's the coming together of the straight women's peace movement –**

BCC: Yes.

**SS: – and the lesbian movement.**

BCC: Yes.

**SS: So through which door did you arrive?**

BCC: Well, none of those, as a matter of fact.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

BCC: That's not quite true. I was doing women's peace stuff, but specifically Latin American solidarity women's peace stuff.

**SS: With which organizations? Like CISPES?**

BCC: CISPES mostly. Although we did a sort of women's affinity group of that. And I had done a series of actions with Quakers in Philadelphia. One involved — boy, I wonder if I want this on tape — one involved a minor — intrusion into a military base, an Air Force base, which, the judge decided to give us three months for, which I was perfectly prepared to do. This was, this is back in a sort of different style of civil disobedience. And I went to court with my toothbrush in my pocket, ready to go to jail for three months. And then he decided to continue the case. I think he didn't expect us to call his bluff on that. He had no intention of putting us in jail for three months, but we didn't realize that.

And there I was, I had finished school, I had quit my job, in preparation for this. And I thought, what next? And so I went to Seneca. And while I had been involved with Seneca for a long, sort of known about Seneca for a long time, and lots of my friends had been up there, and things like that, I had not really imagined going up there. And I was there what would be the year of

1985 to 1986. So we're talking about two or three years after Seneca was really the hot thing to do, which you'll find is a theme in my political life. I'm always a little far behind what everybody else is doing.

And so I went, and I stayed there for about a year before moving to Boston. In Boston, I did a lot of Latin American stuff –

**SS: Wait. We can't blip over this. You lived at Seneca for a year. That's incredibly important.**

BCC: Mm.

**SS: And it's a year of your life – Because having been there, since I can visualize where you were, and how you were living; I mean, you were living in the mud, right –**

BCC: Well actually, in fact, I got there in January 1986. So I got there in the snow.

**SS: Oh my god.**

BCC: And I was totally unprepared. I had never lived in that really rural, unheated version of life, as well as just out in the middle of nowhere. And this is Seneca after the crowds have gone, after the journalists have gone home. And spent maybe three months there, where it was really like me and four or five other women; folks rotating in from other places, but a very small group of people, trying to run the Seneca media machine from inside this, the house, if you can remember it, until spring came, and we started to do actions again. But yes, then living in the mud; but first living in the snow, is my strongest memory.

**SS: So what kinds of actions did you organize up there?**

BCC: Well, we did a couple of big actions while I was there. But even that was beginning to slow down. So a sort of bigger, calling all the troops in kind of action, to walk to the main gates, and demonstrate there –

**SS: Of the army base.**

BCC: – yeah, exactly. One of those bad actions where you, you remember the kind of action we used to do with the balloon, with the thing tied to it that said, if this was nuclear radiation, then you'd all be dead now? Only it was a very hot day, in, say, July, and we didn't realize that the helium would not work as well. And so we released the balloons, and they kind of bobbed sadly across the road, instead of releasing with some sort of fanfare. We didn't really know what we were doing at the time.

And then much smaller actions, which I now, when I look back on it now and think, if we did that today, I swear to God, we'd be in Egypt right now. We would, we just cut through the fences of this military base all the time. Every night, we'd go in there, play havoc with their things, and never think a thing of it. You just can't imagine how you would begin to do something like that in today's climate.

**SS: Well, you believed that you lived in a democracy, on some level.**

BCC: I'm not sure it's even true in democracies, people are mostly happy with the idea of people wander around on the military bases, but –

**SS: Right.**

BCC: – but yes, I think that at the time, we, they arrested us. But even, it didn't, it wasn't an arrest that felt like it was in some way really, really threatening, as it would be today.

**SS: Okay, so then you went to Boston.**

BCC: Then I went to Boston.

**SS: And what did you do there?**

BCC: I continued doing Latin American solidarity work; started doing more gay and lesbian-centered stuff. What did we work on there? Oh, foster care was the big issue for awhile there.

**SS: Oh, because they wouldn't let gay people have foster children.**

BCC: Exactly. And there was a lot of abortion rights work at that time. We're talking now here about eight-s'-, oh no, in '87, I was working on the National Gay and Lesbian, the CD for the National Gay and Lesbian March on Washington. Which is — now it's all coming back — which is where I first got introduced to AIDS. Because we were very hot on the idea that this should be about gay rights; this was the radical arm of this march. And we were very hot on the idea that this should be about gay rights, and it was planned for the Supreme Court. And the, late in our process — we had started planning this sometime in '86; and this had been a national effort, trainings all over the country, representatives from many different groups — and late in that effort — because,

when did ACT UP get together? March '87, something like that? — they came to us, and said, no no, this should be about AIDS.

And at the time — and I remember with some shame at this point — we were very skeptical of this.

**SS: Who's we? Who else were you organizing with?**

BCC: Oh boy. The only one I remember from it specifically was Amy Bauer, of course. Now she was much more integrated with ACT UP, and I think may even have been part of brokering this meeting. I can't, for the life of me, remember the other people who were involved in this. Leslie —

**SS: Cagan?**

BCC: — Cagan. But a variety of other people; I have no idea who they are now. And they came and presented this proposal, that we should move it to something more aimed at government. We should make AIDS the major focus on it. I think that we were skeptical largely because at that point, there was still this resistance to the idea, at least among the people who were involved here, of making AIDS define the lesbian and gay community; that it would turn us into victims, essentially. At a time when we were trying to say something different, that it would give people an excuse to isolate us and segregate us from the rest of society, and treat us in this more negative way. And while it was a cordial conversation — I don't think it ended badly — we, in the end, rejected that suggestion, though obviously many members of ACT UP came and did the civil disobedience in '87, in October of '87.

**SS: What was the organization that you were organizing this for?**

BCC: This was an ad hoc, a group of ad hoc organizers from all over the country — some from Boston, some from New York, some from Washington, some from California — who had come together to organize a CD that was going to be attendant to this march on Washington. And at the time, the big, people we disagreed with, it had nothing to do with ACT UP, it was actually the national march organizers, who were doing this much more, what we felt like was some sort of sedate, kind of vaguely stated demands, and we were looking for something sharper and harder edged, and there was a lot of back and forth about whether we were essentially endangering the march by trying to create a civil disobedience attached to it.

And it was remarkably successful in its organizing. Some 800 people got arrested, or something like that. But I think that AIDS was just not, at that moment, for these women, largely women — there were men involved, but it was almost entirely women — it was not the primary issue that they were going to organize something like this around.

**SS: So at this point, you had a lifetime commitment to civil disobedience. What was behind that?**

BCC: Oh, I don't know. In Movement for a New Society, with the Quakers, I had been trained in old-school, Gandhian philosophy; the importance of nonviolence. That's where I learned to do civil disobedience training. And at

that time, a civil disobedience training was a six-hour ordeal, that involved not just how to roll into a ball or how to go limp or what information to give the police; but, let us now learn about nonviolence and its traditions, and why we believe in it.

Which, over the years, at ACT UP, I managed to shrink down into about an hour and a half or two hours, and finally changed my point of view on it, to thinking that that wasn't the most important thing that people had to know before they did civil disobedience. But for me, it really came out of that idea that the purpose of activism was really that old-school kind of speaking truth to power; and that you had the responsibility to be willing to do what was necessary to let government know that people were not simply going to go along with oppression and injustice when they saw it.

And I don't know where that started, but I've been doing it a long time.

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**SS: Well, it's defined your life, honestly.**

BCC: Yeah, yeah. That's right.

**SS: Okay, so they came and said, we want to do AIDS. You said, no. You came down –**

{LAUGHTER}

**SS: It's true. It's hard to admit, but it's true.**

BCC: It's fine, it's fine.

**SS: You made your amends later. Okay, so you came down; you had this famous CD, at the Supreme Court.**

BCC: Yep.

**SS: Which is, a lot of footage and photographs and all this. And that was when ACT UP made its big appearance –**

BCC: Yep, well on sort of the national scene, right, yeah.

**SS: So then how did you come into ACT UP, or how did that happen?**

BCC: Well, there's actually two steps to that. One is that when we came back to Boston, there was a lot of energy and desire to continue moving forward. And again, you start to see this beginning of a sort of integration of the lesbian and gay thing and ACT UP in Boston. I feel like in Boston — this is just my perspective; I'm not saying that this is what was true broadly — but from my perspective, AIDS had not hit in Boston by now — we're talking about 1987, moving into 1988 — in quite the same way that it had in New York. And what you had was a beginnings of a group who wanted to be ACT UP/Boston; and a larger group, of the people who were the core of who activists were in Boston — largely women, not entirely women — who, again, were still not quite sure they wanted to follow the ACT UP model. I think that they had picked up on some of the skepticism that some women had already found in ACT UP, about whether it was a welcoming model, and whether it fit with their sort of ideas about what activism was, and things like that.

**SS: Is that Cindy Patton?**

BCC: Among other people, yeah.

**SS: And so they started AIDS Action Boston? Is that what –**

BCC: Mass ACT OUT –

**SS: Mass ACT OUT, okay.**

BCC: Mass Act Out was the first group. And you could see there, there's that, it's like a sort of homage to ACT UP, but we're not quite, going quite there. We're not going to be your stepsister, in Boston.

**SS: And was there an ideological difference?**

BCC: I think that there was already some version of the, the kind of questioning of the drugs into bodies mind-set that had filtered down to Boston. I also think that it was that a lot of the people were people who had been involved in, I can't remember what the lesbian and gay group that was – that did a lot of the foster care work, and had been working on passing the gay rights bill in Boston. I can't remember what it was called. But a lot of these were the same people, and I think that they weren't yet prepared to completely get rid of the lesbian and gay agenda in favor of an AIDS agenda. And so it was also some of that desire. As well as, again — and this came up in the group — some difference in process. Since again, these were a lot of women who had come out of the, sort of more of a women's peace tradition: process being very important; consensus as an important part of how one makes decisions, and making sure that everybody feels heard, and things like that, as opposed to a, the more urgent model of

communication and decision-making that you see in ACT UP. And that began to be a tension in that group, even before I left.

**SS: Do you mind if we discuss that a little bit?**

BCC: Okay.

**SS: Because I have some thoughts about that.**

BCC: Okay.

**SS: Because when you were talking about the earlier women's peace movement and these kind of actions that really didn't work that well –**

BCC: Yeah. {LAUGHS}

**SS: – and having lived through that as well. It seems like there was a real boldness and a direct recognition that the system was corrupt –**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: – and an alienation from the system –**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: – and a willingness to confront it directly.**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: But a lack of entitlement.**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: Because I don't think that there was really a belief that people could be heard.**

BCC: Exactly right. that's, or at least, I don't know if it's exactly right, but it's exactly how I see it. I think that we were a people — and now it's

sort of hard to say this — but we were a people who had devoted our lives to speaking against the system, with no actual belief — and I would say explicitly — no actual belief that that would have any effect beyond that it was the right thing to do; and therefore, as I say, a lack of urgency about why it should happen faster or happen in a more effective way; because there wasn't really, I'm not even sure that was entirely the goal of what we were doing.

**SS: Well we had no access to power –**

BCC: Right.

**SS: – as lesbians and ACT UP had access to power.**

BCC: Exactly.

**SS: So that's a big difference.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: Because, in thinking, people make fun of lesbians and over-processing.**

BCC: {LAUGHS}

**SS: But the truth is that if your movement is the only place you can be heard –**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: – then your agenda's really different than if you actually believe that the media and the government are going to listen to you.**

BCC: I think that's right, and I also think that there was an attempt to use the process to redress what they, people perceived as this silencing. We

weren't going to, there was very much a sense that ends did not justify means; and that the means themselves; since the ends were so far away from us, the means were crucial. And so you had to take care, all the time, that the means were right and appropriate, and took care of people. And so when I came to ACT UP, it was a revelation to me, of a different way of thinking about what we were doing.

**SS: But what did you feel about suddenly having access because you were with men?**

BCC: I'm not sure I ever felt like I suddenly had access –

**SS: Okay, okay.**

BCC: – because I was with men.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: It's not the kind of work I ever did. In ACT UP, my work was really always about — or maybe always until I moved into the later stages in City AIDS Actions, which was very late in the work — was always about street activism. It's the only, it's really the only skill I bring to the table. And I was never a person who was very much involved in big meetings or even talking to the media, really. And so I never saw it as having more access or not more access.

What I saw as the entitlement things were, big changes were the extraordinary amount of money we were talking about. Having spent years and years in activism where it was like — Let's put on a demo! Okay. If everybody brings their own poster board, then all we have to do is pay for the markers, or

something like that — was about the kind of budget we were talking about. And early in the first fall that I was with ACT UP, they were working on a CDC action — is that right? — in Atlanta. Have I got that right?

And it was, let's fly a hundred people to the CDC so we can have an action there. And I was like, are you serious? You're seriously going to fly people? And then put them up in hotels? And then pay per diems for them?

Having come from this, years and years of, you get there how you can get there; you sleep on church benches; there's often a place where they're handing out sandwiches; it was just a completely different thing, in terms of the resources.

**SS: What did you feel about that?**

BCC: I don't know, it was, it was odd to deal with. At that point, I wasn't organizing anything. I was a member, not an organizer. So having the money didn't make any big difference in my work.

I did then and was always concerned about what its impact was on people's long-term commitment. Because there's a weird cause and effect which comes first thing that as the people went away, the money went away; the money went away, the people went away. And that there was a way that we sort of forgot how to do actions if we couldn't kind of produce them with the 300 silkscreen posters and the sound equipment and the, everybody having a walkie-talkie, or whatever it was that we felt was the crucial issue for that particular action.

So I do think that that had its negative effects. But it also allowed for actions on a scale and with a sort of extravaganza quality to them that brought a lot of attention, and that was effective in its way.

**SS: So how did you get to ACT UP?**

BCC: Okay, I don't want to get distracted with this. –

**SS: So now you're in Boston –**

BCC: I went to live in Nicaragua for a year.

**SS: Oh, okay. Who did you go through? Which organization?**

BCC: APSNICA: Architects and Planners in Solidarity of Nicaragua; there we go.

**SS: And how were you an architect and planner?**

BCC: I was neither one. I was a builder.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

BCC: So I went as a volunteer with their group, and did building in this tiny town up in the mountains in northwest Nicaragua. And, as many things; after many people had already done that. See, this is again the late-to-the-table kind of message. And was there in time to see the Sandinistas get voted out of power. Which was depressing.

And then I returned to Boston.

**SS: Wait a minute, we got to go back. Okay, so, because don't forget: you sat around in high school, reading Marx.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Okay. So then you went to build the Sandinista revolution.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Now, what was the role, what was the lesbian and gay relationship –?**

BCC: Almost none.

**SS: And that was okay with you; you were willing to do that?**

BCC: Yeah, there was this weird, there was this weird partitioned life, where I, the Latin American solidarity stuff — which, again, had this big religious piece to it; not my work necessarily, but a lot of the people that I was working with — had some split. When I was in Philadelphia, there was a sort of lesbian movement around that, and that was somewhat earlier, when El Salvador was more in the news, back in the early '80s. But later on, there was very little lesbian or gay presence in that movement, as far as I can tell. When I went to Nicaragua, it was as though I had sort of given up that identity entirely, until I came back.

**SS: Were you told to keep it undercover? Or you just –**

BCC: No. But it was not a particularly comfortable situation in that sense. The reality was, Nicaragua had never seen a woman that looked like me before. And they really didn't know quite what to make of me. They were very pleasant people, but they really, there was actually a man who once was like, you're a woman? He said, where are your – {LAUGHS}. So –

**SS: There's a lot of lesbian action in that period –**

Tape I  
00:35:00

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: – for other people –**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: – in which either lesbian identity or gay liberation; or even things like abortion rights –**

BCC: Yes.

**SS: – are put on hold, and –**

BCC: Absolutely.

**SS: – ignored.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: I mean, how do you understand that now, looking back on that?**

BCC: Well, at the time, I didn't necessarily — and it's the tru-, this is true a little bit today as well — I'm never willing to necessarily feel like the gay and lesbian piece in isolation is enough to drive me. And there's only been small moments in my life when I worked on that in its kind of own world. And I think it's largely because I'm troubled by the pieces of the gay and lesbian movement that what I see is, everything is perfect, except this one small piece. And if we could just take out the homophobia piece, and replace it with the tolerance piece, then everything would be fine. Rather than seeing homophobia and its attendant problems as connected with all of these other issues. Which may go back to the reading Marx part.

So for me, gay and lesbian stuff has always been connected to other things, and I've moved in and out of different movements as I was moved by them, and not taken, and not seen that as necessarily my primary work. It's my primary identity. The truth is, I lived in a lesbian ghetto of various sorts for 10 years, until I worked in ACT UP. But in terms of my work, I didn't necessarily feel like that was the most important thing.

**SS: But I'm asking the opposite question.**

BCC: Oh, I'm sorry.

**SS: Which is, lesbians being willing to work on issues in which they're not included.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: So it's not the broader picture; you're trading one narrow picture for another narrow picture, only the second one excludes you.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: What is the psychology of that? Because that was a phenomenon of that era?**

BCC: Yeah, right.

**SS: Yeah.**

BCC: Right. No, I think it's true. And as a matter of fact — we'll probably get to it at some other point — but I actually think that played out in ACT UP quite a bit.

**SS: Tell me now.**

{BOTH LAUGH}

BCC: I'm sorry, I was trying to stick to a narrative.

**SS: That's okay. Forget that.**

{MORE LAUGHTER}

BCC: Well, I feel that there was this way in which there was a whole group of lesbians who were big leaders in ACT UP and AIDS — in even a bigger scale — and that it was tough, once again, to be in a movement where you could never — wow, this is going to sound bad — you could never have the moral high ground, because you were never the principal person that this was about. Which is not to say that there weren't lesbians with AIDS; but that's not primarily what was going on. And I think, actually, the various attempts to make lesbians and AIDS a focus of ACT UP work, or the AIDS movement generally, were some kind of ejaculation of that movement of wait; we are real people in this movement, too; we are not just facilitators of other people's movement. And I think it led to tensions that played out in other ways ideologically, but that had some of that behind it, that sense of, we're giving an enormous amount here, but not recognized for our role in this in the same way that this is principally about gay men. And when it isn't about gay men, then it's about heterosexual people of color, but it's not about this group of largely white lesbians, who had been — and I see it very much the same way — at the forefront of a number of movements, many of which we were almost categorically separated from the actual subjects of the movements.

**SS: So what was the draw?**

BCC: {SIGH} Well, largely, I'd like to think that largely, it was about the fact that you couldn't look around and see this catastrophe and not feel like you had some responsibility to do something about it. Part of it is that many of us are addicted to street activism, and that's where street activism was happening at the moment. Part of it was about the fact that it was, you can't look at AIDS and not see it about homophobia and lesbian and gay issues more generally; although as you know, there was this constant tension about how much space lesbian and gay issues should take up in ACT UP, and whether that was a distraction from the AIDS-specific focus.

Tape I  
00:40:00

**James Wentzy: We have to change tape.**

**SS: Okay, you were going to say, Seneca prepared you –**

BCC: Oh, this is just a small way in which I felt Seneca prepared me for ACT UP. Because the tradition of the work that I had done before with Movement for a New Society, with the Quakers, and even with some of the women's peace action movements, was that there was no place for, certainly anger; and even, in some cases, joy. There was no place for emotion, because it was about doing what was right. And Seneca had much more of that sort of irreverence to it— you made me think of it when you were talking about mud wrestling — and it changed some of my thinking about how you could come to activism.

Tape II  
00:00:07

And by the time I got to ACT UP, which was a totally different approach to that sort of visceral anger, which was so different — again, going back to what we were talking about, about this sense of, this lack of urgency. Things were bad, of course they were bad. The government was corrupt; of course the government is corrupt. It was more a sense of bearing witness than it was of this kind of palpable anger and desire for change. And it took me a little time to acclimate myself to it being acceptable.

And part of the Quaker tradition is, we are never angry at the individual who is just the, just the representative of the government. He is a soul that can be won over to the good side, and you're never angry at him, you're never fighting him. You are just being clear that you will not take part in this system. Completely different than what was going on in ACT UP; this rage in the streets was really a change for me, in terms of the way people presented themselves in activism.

**SS: But isn't that the difference between Protestantism –**

BCC: Yes, probably.

**SS: – and Seneca, which was like, Jewish goddess  
bohemianism?**

BCC: {LAUGHING}

**SS: No, seriously.**

BCC: Probably, probably.

**SS: And more urban, in some weird way, even though the Quakers – anyway; I want to ask you something else about this, or frame it a little bit differently.**

BCC: Okay.

**SS: You come from, there is a very influential milieu inside ACT UP – of people like yourself, who basically were revolutionaries, and had a vision of trying to change global politics, the role of the United States in the world, using certain kinds of tactics, like direct action and civil disobedience –**

BCC: Right.

**SS: – who went from movement to movement –**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: – looking at what movements were happening – and going to those movements with these agendas.**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: That's really different than people who had been apolitical their entire lives, and came to ACT UP because they were threatened –**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: – or their friends were threatened.**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: What was the tension between those two trajectories?**

BCC: Oh, I think it's significant, that tension. I think it has to do with the disputes over what issues we would take up. If you see AIDS as — and the treatment of AIDS, really, more — as a manifestation of racism and classism and homophobia, and those as they are connected together by a majority who's seeking to dominate over all other people; and as a parallel to lots of other things that are going on in the world; then it's easy to see this movement over here as connected to you, or this action as inevitably connected to the work that we're doing in AIDS. If you were first largely apolitical to start out with, so that you weren't necessarily making all those connections; and second, more personally affected by what the outcome was; you're looking for a much more direct line to what you see as the end goal that you're looking for; a cure, certainly treatment. Or, even if you weren't personally affected in that way, personally affected in the sense that your friends, lovers, etc. were involved, and so it might also be about education or prevention. But in that kind of close-in world, to AIDS the disease, as opposed to AIDS, the social and political effect.

And so I think that that, that's what plays out, and I think what eventually becomes the TAG/women's split, I think. But I think it goes through the entire history of ACT UP, not just, it tends to, I think, we focus on that one as being the kind of big, volcanic example of where those two things came into conflict. But you can see it when you just think about the way that; I can remember reading — TITA.

Tape II  
00:05:00

**SS: Oh, Tell It to —**

BCC: It took me a minute, took me a minute. –

**SS: Tell It To ACT UP?**

BCC: Tell It To ACT UP. This voluminous, people writing in, and every week it would be, these people, who don't care that I'm dying, and just want to push their own agenda, would be essentially how you could categorize anybody who was trying to make a bigger connection to issues of race, issues of women's health, or of other movements that have dealt with this. And I think in some cases there was a lack of respect for people who were more personally affected, and their interests. And of course it went in both directions. But there was also a certain lack of respect for people who had seen what the connection between the government and drug companies could produce if left to their own devices and things like that. But as I say, I think there was some inevitability to that.

**SS: But looking back on it with hindsight, which of those strategies turned out to be the most effective for people with AIDS?**

BCC: Oh, you really think it's one rather than the other?

**SS: Well I don't know, I'm asking you. What do you think?**

BCC: I'm just, I guess I think that they both have their, had important influences. I would never argue that the T&D movement wasn't crucially important to what had happened. Though sometimes, looking back, I think of myself at demonstrations for drugs that I didn't have the vaguest idea what they were supposed to do or what the science behind whether they should be

moved into trials or not moved into trials, or lower their prices or not lower their prices. I had no idea what I was talking about. I don't know why I was at those demonstrations. But I think that it was important work for the people who were doing that research, and I think it had an impact, and it changed the relationship, beyond AIDS, of people in communities that were affected by various illnesses and health problems to the government and to drug companies; and you can never, I think, change that, the effect of that.

But at the same time, I think that if AIDS, if ACT UP had only ever been about that, then the AIDS movement would have been much less – effective. I think that it had to be contextualized in terms of the other arguments; the other relationships: to issues about housing; issues about needle exchange; issues about education in the schools, and things like that. Or it would have been easy to swallow up the world of T&D into a kind of government, regulation-government table, and it would never have had the impact that it did.

**SS: Well I think the question is, what's a person? Because you say, people with AIDS –**

BCC: Um hm.

**SS: Who are the people that you're talking about?**

BCC: Yeah, heh heh.

**SS: But when you say you didn't know what the drugs were for, you trusted your leadership.**

BCC: Yeah. And I wasn't troubled about it at the time. But when I look back on it, I think, I was arrested to get the TAT inhibitor released from Hoffman-La Roche. Hm. As it turned out, I don't think that was that important. But I think that if I looked back and I had any message, it's that I'm not sure that a lot of drug policy should be made by a floor vote. I really think that there is maybe a different way that we should go about making those decisions. And in that way, I think that T&D's breakaway and the formation of TAG was probably a really appropriate thing to happen.

**SS: But on the other hand, it reveals a movement relationship of faith and respect for people whose are-, because everyone had their own arena. So you didn't always have to be personally persuaded.**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: But kind of trusted –**

BCC: That's right. That was certainly true for me. And, you think about that, and you could imagine that going bad places, where everybody's sort of following influential leaders in a large social movement.

**SS: Do you feel that that happened?**

BCC: No, I don't, as a matter of fact. I don't ever feel, looking back, that I did anything, was involved in anything, even when I was, as you say, following a leader of somebody else's arena that I was not strongly involved in; that I feel, that I have strong questions about. I think that people were doing the right thing at the right time, which was saying, for instance, we are not going to,

it's not appropriate to only be — heh; of course, now, looking back, I wonder if this was true — but it's not appropriate to only be testing AZT and its analogues over and over and over again. Let's look at some other drugs.

Now whether it was really a good idea to push that Compound Q idea? In the end, I'm not sure. But I think, I think that I don't feel like I was compromised in some way, or involved in something that I feel was morally questionable, or something like that, because we pushed for things which in the end weren't the answer. The drug companies were spending an enormous amount of money on things that in the end weren't the answer, either.

Tape II  
00:10:00

**SS: Okay. So you came to ACT UP –**

BCC: {LAUGHS}

**SS: – you moved to New York first? Or were you involved in –  
did you move to New York to come to ACT UP, or –**

BCC: Largely. I wanted to go to graduate school. And I had a couple of choices, and Teachers College was one of them. And I really wanted to come to New York to work with ACT UP. And so I put the two pieces together.

**SS: So you came to New York and then, what year was that?**

BCC: Fall of 1990.

**SS: Okay. And you were enrolled in graduate school.**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: And that's when you came to ACT UP?**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: You were in graduate school while you were in ACT UP.**

BCC: Yeah, sure.

**SS: Okay. So how did you enter into the organ-, did you already know people in the movement?**

BCC: Very little. I had a friend named Amy Beth. I don't know if you –

**SS: Sure!**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Who's transitioned since, right? Is that –**

BCC: No no. Her old partner, Rachel –

**SS: Oh, that's right.**

BCC: – Lurie, right? has transitioned; who's now Samuel.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: But Amy has not.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: She and I were, had met in Boston. She had then since moved to New York. She was one person that I, moved to New York, although she moved to Indiana fairly soon after that, and so wasn't a huge part of that. But she did introduce me, I remember going to a Seder, maybe even before I moved here officially, that spring, before I moved here; with Gregg Bordowitz and Catherine Saalfield [Gund] and Alexis Danzig and John Kelly; that sort of group. And so I had met a couple of people. But other than that, I knew no one. And

then not that long into my first fall here, though I had already started coming to ACT UP meetings, I got involved with Alexis Danzig.

**SS: That's right.**

BCC: So that was another sort of, that probably was a fast track to getting more –

**SS: But isn't that the best recruiting method? –**

BCC: {LAUGHS} I don't know why we don't do more of that.  
{LAUGHS}

**SS: Okay, so you became married to ACT UP. And then –**

BCC: In fact, I did.

**SS: Is that when you became a facilitator, at the beginning?**

BCC: No. Actually, the first fall – I was just sort of following along. I went to a couple of actions. I went and did Day of Desperation, but I didn't take any organizing role. The next spring –

**SS: Oh, wait. Can you just describe Day of Desperation?**

BCC: Okay. The only piece I was involved in on Day of Desperation was the Grand Central action itself. I was involved in an affinity group with Alexis. I have no idea who else was in it.

**SS: Do you remember what it was called?**

BCC: No.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: {LAUGHS} It was all part of that Affinity 500 idea. So I think that the specific affinity groups were a little less defined, in some ways. And was there in that sort of cat and mouse, cops and robbers kind of effort to get inside Grand Central while they were trying to keep us out in various ways. We came in up through the subways, or something like that. And did that fabulous action. For a little kid from a small town, that was quite an amazing scene, that takeover of the grand hall in Grand Central Station.

But, it is a perfect example of the mistake that was often made in ACT UP; where we made getting arrested the point of the action. Because the scene in Grand Central; that takeover, the draping of the banner on the, the arrival boards, the noise; that, in and of itself, that was the action.

But there had been this plan: we were going to get 500 people arrested, all at once! And the cops didn't arrest us.

And this is a thing I have learned over years and years and years: you never make your plan be based on what the cops do, because it's so easy for them to kind of diffuse the situation by simply refusing to arrest you, and you have to walk away kind of meekly at the end of it, because you didn't have any plan of what you were trying to do besides get arrested.

So then we sort of all wandered out into the intersection; sat down, and got arrested. And it got news. But, in the end, we were sitting in the intersection for what, exactly? It didn't have a very clear message. I think the Grand Central piece of it had a better message.

**SS: But back to your earlier comments: Day of Desperation was against the first Gulf War.**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: So that was ACT UP acting like a mass left-wing organization –**

BCC: In the sense that it was anti-war? Is that what you mean? But I don't think that its principal point was antiwar. I think its principal point was, why are you focusing on this war, both money and media, when there's this crisis here that we need to be focusing on? So I think it wasn't so much, we care whether you have this war, as we care whether you pay attention to this war instead of paying attention –

**SS: I thought it was Money for AIDS, Not for War. Or Fight AIDS, Not Arabs –**

BCC: Right. ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS and Not Iraq. One of my favorite rhymes. Right, it was. But I think that the point of that was, focus on this, not that; not specifically, we're against this war. But it's a great synergy. When we talk about these two groups of people, who have this sort of maybe wider political background, and people who were more focused specifically on AIDS; that's a great synergy between the two that I think wasn't a problem. But I never thought of it as specifically, as being hugely antiwar. But I think also that the, for the Day of Desperation, the power was in so many of the affinity group

Tape II  
00:15:00

actions that happened before Grand Central; obviously especially the MacNeil/Lehrer actions, and things like that.

**SS: Okay, so that was your introduction.**

BCC: That was my first really big action. I had done a couple others before that, but that was my first big one. And then, in the spring of '91, my real entry point was that I had, I was there, for some reason, we weren't in Cooper Union; we were in – am I remembering this right; the Minetta Lane Theatre? Is that a real theater, or did I just make that up?

**SS: Um hm.**

BCC: The Minetta, Minetta, we, there was some reason we couldn't be in Cooper Union, we met there instead, and, and this group of people who I had never seen before presented the beginnings of an action which was going to become the Target Bush 30 Days of Actions in September, 1991; and made just an ungodly hash of this presentation. The budget numbers were really badly done, and things like this, and I felt really bad for them. And I, of course, I had no idea that they were really cool, like totally, leader people in ACT UP, but to me, they looked stumbling, and they were getting a hard time from the audience, and I thought, I'm going to go work with those folks. And that's how I started working with the Marys.

**SS: Oh, okay. Who were the Marys?**

BCC: The Marys: Barbara Hughes, Steve Machon, James Baggett, Ken Bing, Joy and C-, no no, Carrie [Yamaoka] wasn't involved in it at that point,

or at least to my eyes, she wasn't. Joy Episalla; Mark Lowe Fisher; Tim Bailey. I don't know if I'm leaving anybody out. Probably.

**JW: Jon Greenberg?**

BCC: Jon Greenberg. Sort of, that folks. And they had, they were really fronting this action in Kennebunkport, and the Target Bush thing. So I got involved with them, and started going to their meetings. And those meetings were big and chaotic, and somehow I fell into the role of facilitating them, and then facilitating — we would have these reports to the floor that would be multi-pieces. This person would be reporting on how we were going to do housing up in Maine, and this person would be reporting on the buses, and this person would be reporting on the media, and this person would be reporting on the budget, and like this. And so I started facilitating that — those presentations to the floor. And that's how I got involved, sort of one step later, in the next quarterly election, in becoming a facilitator for ACT UP. It came through that.

**SS: Who was your co-facilitator?**

BCC: You mean for the —

**SS: When you became an ACT UP facilitator, who was the other—**

BCC: The other people who were facilitators, there's always four facilitators at a time. The other people were Amy Bauer, Ann Northrop, and Aldyn McKean. I always remember, because they were the three A's. Yeah, and then I started facilitating —

**SS: So what was it like to facilitate an ACT UP meeting?**

BCC: Well, I started when we were still at Cooper Union and still, say, 600 people; moving down. And it was completely different. I'd been facilitating meetings for years. But we're talking about a meeting where there's 25 people in a room, and it's a, who had their hand up first kind of thing. This was, the mics moving around, and people shouting each other down. So it was quite a change from the kind of facilitation that I had done before.

But, I always felt it was a piece of work that I did okay at, and made a contribution, and that I felt comfortable with, because of the kind of work I had done previously.

I certainly had my bad nights, where I felt the floor had gotten away from me entirely; where I hadn't hit the right point, where I should have cut off a discussion and tried to sum it up and move to a different point or something like that. There was a lot of egos to balance, and a lot of, raw pain and anger that didn't fit into that model of, okay, you've had your turn, and now let's hear from other people, in quite the way that you would want it to. And I had never worked with Robert's Rules of Order before. That's just not the tradition that I came out of, but –

**SS: What were some of the big debates that you facilitated? Is there anything that stands out in your mind?**

BCC: Well, I was a facilitator all that last fall in '91 when TAG was breaking off; well, T&D was breaking off. And that had its, certainly its

tough moments. But so much of that happened; the screeds happened on paper as much as they did, at that point, it was almost like two groups of people who weren't talking to each other anymore. And I always felt it was like an old married couple who'd been arguing for a long time before I got there, and there was no way for me to get to the root of the debate. So that was a big one.

And there was, at that point, as we went in from '91 into '92, with the falling numbers; there was also the big debate, which would then continue for the next four years of my facilitation, about what to do with ACT UP. Should we be moving back to the past, or did we need to create a new future? That kind of debate as well. Those periodic eruptions of, we need to have a strategy meeting, and spend two hours, thinking about who we are and what we're going to be and what's the best kind of action, and where should we put our energy, and stuff like that.

**SS: Let's get back to the Bush action.**

BCC: Oh yeah.

**SS: Can you tell us what the purpose of it was, and how it was carried out?**

BCC: Well, the big kickoff – it was actually, everybody thinks about that Kennebunkport action, but the truth was, it was meant to be this 30 days of action. The whole month of September, we were going to, we were calling on people all over the country to do their own actions, all that month of September, and then there was a follow up action on, I'm going to say October 1<sup>st</sup>

— it could have been September 30<sup>th</sup> — at the White House. So it was really a big project like that. And a little bit like the CD in '87, it was this national thing, trying to organize nationally, trying to farm out; here's a, a handbook on how to do actions. Here's some suggestions of the kind of work that you could do during these 30 days of action. Here's a national calendar of what people are doing in different places.

And a lot of it, got superseded by the logistical problems of trying to move a couple thousand people up to this tiny town in Maine for that one day, and that got most of the media attention. But a lot of that national organizing was a big part of the point of it as well.

When I think about the Kennebunkport action, or the whole Target Bush idea, I think about the main point being that we were just going to force Bush to talk about AIDS; that he had continued to be silent, continued not to respond, and that we were going to try to make him deal.

And we had more specific demands. As a matter of fact, I remember that there was a 25-point plan, or a 30-point plan; some enormous thing, which we then carefully lettered out on this 50-foot banner, and unrolled it three miles from his house, or as close as we could get to it. Which was carefully vetted by meeting after meeting after meeting, to create this list of demands. But I never felt the demands were as important as the central idea that we were just going to try to force Bush to respond to the issue of AIDS in a way that he had failed to do up to that point.

**SS: And what was the result?**

BCC: Uh, he said — and I quote — I was much more moved by the march of unemployed people last w- I think the week before, or something. When people are out of a job and unable to feed their family, that's something that you can really feel.

**JW: Because they have family.**

BCC: Exactly.

**SS: How many people went to Kennebunkport on that?**

BCC: About 1500, I think.

**SS: What did you do with people who were very sick, on an action like that?**

BCC: We had sort of, sometimes I felt like we had more – set up to deal with medical care than we needed, in some ways. Lots of really sick people didn't come to those actions in the way that you'd think they might. But we did organize doctors and nurses — I can remember doing it really clearly — so that they would be on hand to respond to that, and we had wheelchairs and we had people to push them. But I can remember at different actions — I don't remember if it was specifically Kennebunkport — concerns about whether we would need to have the ability to have IVs; whether we would need to have the ability to have different other kinds of very special medical care. But for Kennebunkport, the things I do remember is organizing this sort of cadre of doctors and nurses who would come up and be prepared to be on hand in case

there was need for that kind of support. And obviously, we had a support tent, and water and food and things like that.

And at that time, it was always, it was pretty standard, is my memory, that PWAs and people who were positive were the sort of front of marches. So there was frequently that kind of wheelchair look at the beginning of marches, at least back at that time. That petered out.

**SS: Okay. Now I want to ask you about Scott Sawyer.**

BCC: Mm.

**SS: So Scott was your roommate at that point?**

BCC: No, Scott, I never lived with Scott.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

BCC: Yeah. We came close to living together, but we never did. I lived with James Learned.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: So you know, we're trying to piece together all the money, financial stuff. And we've interviewed Dan. What's Dan's last name?**

**JH: Williams.**

**SS: Williams.**

BCC: Uh huh.

**SS: And he was very forthcoming about what happened with him, and all of that. Scott Sawyer, we don't know where he is.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Do you know?**

BCC: No. No idea.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: Haven't seen or talked to him in years.

**SS: So obviously, there's an issue there about money.**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Can you tell us that story, from whatever you understand?**

BCC: I'm afraid I can tell you what I've heard –

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: – but I'm afraid I don't have any personal information about it. I think this was what – was this '95 or '96? Boy, time – the organization was running out of money in a way that made sense anyway. So I think that there was ways in which, that there was a loss of money didn't immediately raise flags for the floor. But there was a lot of kind of up and down with money that was not easily explained. And I think at that time we only had Scott as the treasurer, whereas before, there had always been two treasurers.

Whether electing Scott treasurer was ever a very good idea was its own question. But again, you have to remember it in the context of, by then we were very much a dwindling organization with lots of people who were burnt out. And it was actually getting hard to get people to take elected positions, like treasurer, like meeting manager or workspace manager and things like that. And

so I think that people were more happy to have someone do it than concerned about what might be potential issues with him.

And by the time this all came down, I was far less involved with the ACT UP floor than I had been in the past, because I was, we were doing City AIDS Actions at that point, which had started to break away from ACT UP more. And this came to me, in no different way than it did to anybody else who was on the floor. There was essentially a presentation on the floor that,—

**SS: Who made the presentation?**

BCC: No idea.

**SS: Can't remember? Okay.**

BCC: That there was money missing.

**SS: How much?**

BCC: I'm going to say something like forty thousand, fifty thousand dollars; something like that — but this is based on absolutely no knowledge at all — and that it was, that there was great concern that Scott had been involved in, calling it what it is; embezzling the funds. But I don't have any personal knowledge of the bank accounts, before or after, or whether Scott was involved. This was just what I would say is the general consensus.

**SS: But had he already disappeared at that point?**

BCC: He did not appear when the announcement was made. And I certainly never saw him again after that, and I'm not sure anybody ever saw him

again after that. But I don't think he had disappeared long before that was discovered. I think he was still largely involved.

But there had been some other problems, where he had sort of walked away with merchandise and things like that. And, he had been a good friend of mine. We had been close friends. We had not only worked on a lot of committees together, but he — I'm sure you know this story — he was arrested in Houston, at the Republican convention, for, at that, I think it was a Falwell event, and was charged with attempted murder.

**JW: RNC Convention.**

BCC: One more time.

**JW: RNC convention.**

BCC: Yeah, the Republican convention in Houston, in '92. Which I was down —

**SS: Please explain: charged with attempted murder —**

BCC: Because, oh, because the police officer said he bit him. He was HIV-positive. And he wasn't the only one arrested, of our, of the ACT UP group, it was also James Learned and Kim Edwards. And at the time, most of the ACT UP folks that I knew had already headed back to New York. It was the last night of the convention. And, you had to imagine how bad Houston was during that week. We'd been beaten up on Monday night, at the ACT UP demonstration. It was not a good scene. And the idea of these people going into the Houston jails during the Republican National Convention was not a pleasant thought. And I

spent two or three days with Ruth [Finkelstein] — that's actually how Ruth and I got together — going from Western Union office to Western Union office, gathering up these five hundred dollars that people would put on their credit card, and wire to us. We went around with this paper bag full of cash in the glove compartment; ten, fifteen thousand dollars that we had gotten from all these different places to try and bail these people out, because we couldn't find a bail bondsman who would take our business — we were outside agitators; they weren't going to trust us — and trying desperately to get Scott out before they tested him, which was the big issue.

And eventually what happened was his mother lived in Houston, and she actually put up, I think her house or something like that, to get him out eventually. But that was the sort of event that brought Scott and James and I closely together. And so I thought of him as a, as a close friend. But I won't say there weren't any incidents over the — that was in '92; this was in, let's call it '95, '96 — over the next three or four years where there was odd stuff about money, or stories about his life and where he was going and what he was doing, that didn't really make sense or didn't pan out in the long run. There was just stuff there that didn't fit. But I don't know any more about that specific embezzlement charge than that.

Tape II  
00:30:00

**SS: And you never heard from him again.**

BCC: No. No, I have no idea where he is. I guess I always assumed he went back to Houston, but—

**SS: Okay, let's change the subject entirely.**

BCC: Okay.

**SS: What was it like to have a girlfriend who was a major figure in ACT UP?**

BCC: You mean Alexis?

**SS: Alexis. I know you had many girlfriends in ACT UP.**

BCC: No.

**SS: No. Okay.**

BCC: Alexis was the only girlfriend I ever had in ACT UP.

**SS: Oh, okay,.**

BCC: At first I thought you were going to ask me about Ruth, because she was a major figure on the other side.

**SS: No no no. We're coming to that.**

{LAUGHTER}

BCC: Other side; that sounded terrible. I said that, I didn't mean other side.

**SS: Other side is GMHC –**

BCC: Right.

**SS: – not the Republican Party.**

BCC: The bad guys!

**SS: Right.**

BCC: It was interesting, because Alexis really was quite a dominant figure. And as I say, it gave me kind of faster entrée into that world of ACT UP. I'm not sure that I would have gotten as quickly involved in some of the stuff as I did if I hadn't been with her. And it also gave me a social connection to lots of the people in ACT UP — Jill Harris, John Kelly, Amy Bauer — who I had met before in other kinds of organizing, but didn't know socially. That was important, I think, to my kind of entry. But the truth is that Alexis moved away from ACT UP during a period not long after that — after Day of Desperation — I didn't really do any work with her for some period of time. I worked with the Marys. And then later, in 1992, I worked with another group of people, starting Campaign'92, and I don't have any real memory of her. She came back and did more work later. But I feel she had done a lot of work, especially on that women and AIDS stuff, before I got there. And so my sense of being in ACT UP, besides that original period, is not largely —

**SS: I think what I'm asking you is, what was the social life for lesbians like inside ACT UP?**

BCC: Yeah; I feel like I was only tangentially involved in that, to be honest with you. I really felt like, in a little bit like the sort of old married couple argument between the women's treatment group and the Treatment and Data Group, that that women and AIDS scene; that sort of lesbian group of powerful women, was set and solid before I got there, and I'm not I ever really

moved into it in any real way, besides possibly, as you're suggesting, as Alexis's girlfriend, and maybe really not even that.

**SS: Okay, well then let's get into the GMHC–ACT UP relationship. So your girlfriend was from GMHC. But what was the ideological difference? Why were they the other side?**

BCC: I didn't really mean to say the other side {LAUGHING}.

**SS: No, but I mean, you're not the only person who said that.**

BCC: Some of it was long old standing. The feeling that they – weren't activist enough. Even as simple as they were too service-oriented and not angry enough. But other stuff had to do with the fact that, especially as we moved on later, so that there was more government institutions and government communication with AIDS service organizations, that GMHC really took that dominant role, like they owned that; they owned that place at the table. And they didn't necessarily have a responsibility to share it with other people. And in this case, I'm not just talking about ACT UP; I'm also talking about smaller AIDS service organizations. And, I'm, as I say, I'm from a different school of politics. I'm always very skeptical about people whose activism is tied up with their funding. And it was hard not to feel like GMHC's place at the table was closely connected to the fact that they were receiving an enormous amount of money, when once there was money, once there was Ryan White money, once there was AIDS Institute money, that GMHC had that. And so that put them in the position to broker all of the communication between the city and state government,

certainly, if not the national, and the rest of the AIDS community. And so that was just a setup for feeling like we were at some loggerheads. There was never a way that that was going to feel perfect.

And then there were more specific incidents, having to do with lesbians and AIDS; having to do with recognition around different issues. And in 1992, the big issue that actually has to do with Ruth is this issue about United for AIDS Action; UAA, right? United for AIDS Action, which they organized with all of these other groups, that lots of ACT UPpers were really angered by, because of the way that they agreed to, it was so much at odds with the way that we –

Tape II  
00:35:00

**SS: Can you explain it for people who've never heard of it?**

**What it was, and why there was a conflict?**

BCC: Which part?

**SS: United for AIDS Action.**

BCC: United for AIDS Action was a demonstration — maybe not even demonstration — was a rally, at the Democratic National Convention in 1992, which was here in New York. And they had gotten many, many, many groups to sign on to this, and be part of it, and organize for it. And it was really *the* AIDS thing that was happening at the Democratic National Convention. I think it ended up being the largest protest of all the many protests that you can imagine went on at the Democratic National Convention. And it was very different from the way that ACT UP tended to do demonstrations, so that it, first, it was obviously permitted, but also it had the big stage, and it had the celebrities,

and it had long speeches, and nothing else. There was no real activism to it. It was a show of strength. And it had been an important show of strength. You have to see it in the context of that whole AIDS Campaign '92, and the way that we had, I think with some successful inside/outside strategy, really broken through in both the Democratic and Republican parties on the need to, you have to address this issue, about AIDS.

And so UAA came on the heels of that. But for ACT UPpers who went, the way that the police dealt with it was by penning, in this very tight and rigid way, all the way down the street, so that people were strung out, with big spaces between the pens so that the traffic could go through. So it had this completely alienating and uninspiring quality to it. And then a group of ACT UPpers — I'm going to say from ACT UP/Philadelphia, but you hate to go historically on the record with something I have such a hazy memory of — got into a scuffle with the police, and that led to a break off march; and that led to people being beaten by the police, and arrested, and an enormous amount of bad feeling between ACT UP and GMHC, both for setting that up — they felt setting ACT UP up, in some ways, by agreeing to this, to the police, by creating such a disempowering and unactivist kind of event, with the power that they had to create something; and then, they felt, by not following up with the police, by not support — by not offering, essentially, legal support for people who had been arrested at essentially their event.

**SS: You should read David Barr's testimony on that. It's really the opposite.**

BCC: Really?

**SS: Quite interesting.**

BCC: The opposite in what way?

**SS: Well, take a look at it on the website.**

BCC: Okay. Um hm.

**SS: It's the opposite. It's very interesting. How much time do we have left on this tape, because I want to get into something huge.**

**JW: Three minutes.**

**SS: Three minutes? Let's change tapes.**

BCC: You want to get into something huge; I'm scared.

{LAUGHS}

**SS: You need to go to the bath—**

**SS: Okay. I want to talk about political funerals.**

BCC: Oh, yeah.

**SS: So, can you just – because in the Marys, you had three major deaths.**

BCC: That's right.

**SS: So can you tell us how the political funeral thing came to be and what your involvement was, as detailed as you can?**

Tape III  
00:00:00

BCC: I think I was involved pretty much from the beginning. Because after I'd worked with the Marys on the, building up to the Target Bush action, they invited me to be part of the affinity group. And we started playing with that idea early in 1992, and writing what would be that manifesto based on David Wojnarowicz's writings about political funerals, and creating what was then going to be the Stumpf/Kane.

**SS: I don't know what that means.**

BCC: Stumpf/Kane?

**SS: Yeah.**

BCC: Stumpf/Kane was the name that we gave to this false-front organization, where we had put out what was largely written by Mark Fisher, though it had more group process to it than that. I have a big memory of being in James Baggett's office and working on this draft that was, I know that, I know I, I think I'm sure I know that you'll be shocked by what I do and his plans for making a videotape. His plans for his own political funeral, which became what we mailed out, more broadly, under the name Stumpf/Kane, which was named after two earlier Marys who had already passed: John Stumpf, Dennis Kane who basically — and now, again, when I say this, I think, what? — asking PWAs who might be interested in having a political funeral to contact us, to begin this movement of doing political funerals. And of course what we imagined was that that would — that would be other people, and not us, but that's not quite the way that it —

**SS: So how many people contacted you?**

BCC: As far as I can remember, we had one or two sort of tentative beginnings of conversations, but never anything serious. Which, frankly, isn't all that surprising. But, because I'm sure that that read really oddly to people.

So we did, I think, two different kind of –

**SS: And this came from David Wojnarowicz saying, when I die – do you remember the language?**

BCC: I don't remember the language. I have it in my files, but I don't remember it.

**JW: Drive my body five hundred miles an hour to Washington D.C and dump my body–**

BCC: Exactly.

**JW: -on the steps of the White House.**

**SS: Right.**

BCC: In some ways, I was more struck by the, I'm afraid of my friends becoming professional pallbearers. Which at the time seemed so apt. We used to play a game of planning our own memorial services: what kind of music do you want? It seemed like an appropriate activity at the time.

So yes, it came very much from his writing and our sense that there was this need to move further. I think that was part of the big effect of working with the Marys on my political work, is that they were much more willing to say,

a kind of by any means necessary: what more do we need to do? Not in a loose-cannon way: it was well planned, it was well, it was thoughtful. But what needs to happen, until people are going to pay attention to the fact that we're dying? And the political funerals felt like an outgrowth of that. When we read David's words, it seemed like, yeah, right? This is something we could do.

But, as you know, that all went badly awry.

**SS: Well, who had the first one?**

BCC: The first one was Mark's.

**SS: Mark Fisher?**

BCC: Yeah.

**SS: Okay. And so he had explicitly told you beforehand?**

BCC: Absolutely.

**SS: And what was that conversation like?**

BCC: Well he, this was all part of this conversation, because his writing was what would become that manifesto of, I want to have a, I want my funeral to have meaning. So it was part of that conversation, that that's what he wanted.

But – would I swear that he was really planning his funeral when he was writing that? I'm not positive. But it was clearly what he said. And we acted on it, though not with the five hundred miles to the, to the White House.

**SS: So where did he die?**

BCC: He died in flight, or just after reaching ground. I'm sure you've heard this story. He got sick – after the action we did after Casey v. Pennsylvania; July 1992, I guess. He did community service for that bust, and got sick. And died coming home from Italy, I think, although again, it was a long time ago.<sup>1</sup>

And we decided to have a political funeral for him, and carry him up Sixth Avenue to Bush headquarters.

**SS: So –**

BCC: It was right before the election.

**SS: – how did you get the body? So he came off the plane, and was dead.**

BCC: Right. I don't know. This is a piece that I wasn't involved in.

**SS: Okay.**

BCC: I'm assuming that his family and friends were involved in this, but I don't know.

**SS: And how many days after his death was the funeral?**

BCC: I'm going to say it was three, two; three, something like that.

**SS: Was he embalmed?**

BCC: Yes.

**SS: Okay.**

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Mark Lowe Fisher's death, see the interview with Russell Pritchard, pp,

BCC: Yes.

**SS: So then tell us what you did.**

BCC: So then we were at Judson Memorial. It was a rainy night. Several people spoke. I remember Michael Cunningham speaking. He's the only one I remember speaking. And afterwards – I think it was widely known; it wasn't a big secret that we were doing this. As a matter of fact, we flyered. I think I still have a copy of the flyer we, we're going to have a political funeral, we're going to do this.

And – I was one of the first pallbearers. Joy and I were in the front. It turns out we knew nothing at all about actually carrying a body any distance. There was men behind us, taller than we were. And the effect was to drive the weight of a coffin — which is fairly heavy — onto our shoulders, which was hard to take for any distance. It was pouring out, we had these umbrellas over us to try to keep the rain off us. And it's a long walk from Judson Memorial all the way up to, I don't know, somewhere in the fifties, I think, or forties.

**JW: Forty-third.**

BCC: Forty-third? And, we switched on and off, all the way up. And, god, I don't even remember what we did there.

**SS: Well, how did people react to seeing you walk on the street with a coffin?**

BCC: Very calm, very quiet. We were, it was very silent. There may have been a drum; I might be mixing that up with another political funeral. But other than that, it was almost entirely silent. And people stop on the street. Of course, it was a rainy night, so there wasn't a ton of people out.

It was already dark by the time that we were out on the street, and so I don't have the sense of the streets being full of people. But people would stop and stare. And of course, the visual was a little ruined by all the umbrellas, so you could tell that people weren't quite sure; was this real? Could that be real? So there wasn't as much shock and reaction as you might have thought. But I remember mostly the silence, both from us and from anybody sort of passing by.

**SS: So you got to Bush headquarters.**

BCC: Yeah. I have to tell you, I have a strong memory of Judson Memorial, strong memory of walking; I have no memory of what we did once we got to Bush headquarters.

**SS: So you don't know what happened to the body.**

BCC: No.

**SS: And was he cremated?**

BCC: I don't know.

**SS: So you don't know if he later was part of the Ashes Action.**

**JW: That was before.**

BCC: The Ashes Action happened before that.

**SS: Before. Okay.**

BCC: The Ashes Action was –

**SS: This was after.**

BCC: – yeah, the October bef-...no, wait, no wait; that's not right.

Yes, it happened October, this was in November. Yes.

**SS: Okay. Okay, so that was Mark.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: And then what was the second one?**

BCC: Timmy [Bailey]. He died –

**SS: Now was he part of Mark's funeral, or was he too sick at that point?**

BCC: You know, I don't remember him there. I think he must have been too sick. And I know that Jon was too sick to come that night, because he was, it's his speech that Michael read that night.

**SS: Jon Greenberg.**

BCC: Jon Greenberg, yeah. Tim, I don't have a picture of him there, but I couldn't say for sure he wasn't there. I think he wasn't. And we, so he died – I remember him dying right after Gay Pride. Because at Gay Pride, everybody was, sort of had this sense of waiting. In, what, '93. And we, the funeral was beginning of July, in 1993?

It's funny, I had forgotten, until recently, how close together Tim's death was and Jon's death was. Somehow in my mind I had them separated.

How can you imagine that you would forget that something like that happened within two and a half weeks of each other?

But, so his funeral was completely different. Again, I had nothing to do with the body piece of that. I think Barbara [Hughes] and Joy and Carrie; maybe Michael Marco; took care of bringing it up, and we met them there, in Washington. But that was an unbelievable scene.

**SS: What happened?**

BCC: Well, we first were just going to drive there, and then the police sort of surrounded us, tried to take the keys away from Joy; wouldn't let us go, and –

**SS: Wait. Where were you when the police came?**

BCC: We were in a parking lot. I'm not exactly sure where. I just have this image of us sort of all milling around in this parking lot, with the van.

**JW: The Capitol.**

BCC: Was it at the Capitol? And – then we proceeded to settle into these negotiations, and back and forth. The police saying – I just remember Joy boy, you just couldn't forget Joy on that day. She was just so grief-stricken and enraged and, the cops saying they needed this paperwork, and her saying – what? You think he's not dead? Let me tell you, he's way dead! She was just really right out there. Back and forth, Eric Sawyer calling Bob Hattoy, trying to get somebody who would negotiate this. All of which, I think, probably in the long run, was a mistake. It just let them settle into the idea that they were going

Tape III  
00:10:00

to keep us there. We might have made, might have made more sense just to act. But, none of us had a whole lot of confidence in the fact that we knew what we were doing with this body.

**SS: What was the stated goal?**

BCC: The stated goal was to take his body to the White House. And then bring it back again. As much as we talked about the idea of, dump my body on the White House lawn; there was no way we were going to leave someone there. But at least that. And then, the scene everybody's seen, of deciding to take his body out and walk with it anyway, and the struggle with the police, over this coffin. And then finally, the decision to take it back; that we weren't going to do it, we weren't going to do that to Tim; it wasn't the right thing to do. But I just, it's hard to imagine ever being involved in something like that.

And then Jon died two and a half weeks later. It was a very different kind of funeral. We called it a political funeral, but in some ways, it wasn't a political funeral in the same way that Mark's and Tim's was. In some ways, it was more of a public funeral, or a community funeral, or something like that. Had a totally different feel to it. But I think by the time that Jon died, that was the end of the political funerals. We had buried too many of the original people who were, who had been thinking of the idea. It was too painful to think about continuing on with that.

And I don't think – there may have been another Ashes Action, later on?

**JW: There was a second one.**

BCC: There was Ashes Action 2? But there was never any attempt, really, to organize the idea of political funerals again.

**SS: Well, Jon's funeral was in the East Village.**

BCC: Right.

**SS: So nobody tried to stop it.**

BCC: That's right. It was a completely different feeling. It was very much more of a kind of, the way funerals can happen in other countries, where people carry the body, literally, to another place. It's not a point of controversy. And then people spoke over his body, and there was angry words, but mostly there was loving words for him, and the work that he had done, and talking about him. So it had a really different feel to it than either Mark's or Tim's had. Mark's wasn't a struggle, but it was clearly political. And also, because – Timmy was sick, and had been for awhile. But Mark's death was out of the blue. It wasn't like people had been expecting that in quite the same way.

**SS: Can you tell us a little bit about each of them? Who was Mark Fisher, what did he do?**

BCC: Mark was an architect. And the truth was that all three of them were people I knew only in sort of work context. I was probably closest to Mark. He had been very – he had reached out to me in a big way when I joined

the Marys. And so I had worked with him the most, and knew him the best. And he was just a great guy. He had that great ability to be angry without being bitter. And so to work with him, to talk with him, to think with him about what we needed to do to get people to realize this felt empowering rather than just out of control. And so I always really appreciated that about him. And I had worked with him mostly on that, the 30 Days of Action, that Target Bush, and then on this Stumpf/Kane piece. As far as I know, that was the only two pieces I worked with him on.

And Timmy I knew more, sort of more at a distance. He was never – the difference with Tim was that he wasn't a big organizer. My work has always been in logistics and planning and stuff like this. And Mark had some shared work with that. Tim was more a, he went to actions, he did design work and things like that. But he was never out front in planning actions, and so I never had as much to do with him.

And Jon I knew only from around the floor, because he worked, although he was a Mary, he also worked on a whole lot of different other issues, especially the alternative and holistic stuff, which I had much less to do with.

Tape III  
00:15:00

**SS: Okay. Now I want to move on to City AIDS Action. Can you explain to us what that was and how it began?**

BCC: Started in the fall of 1993, when it was clear that Dinkins had lost; not that that was a big question. And we decided to plan an action for the first day of Giuliani's tenure. Day One, Job One. Day One, Job One, AIDS.

And began planning that, probably in November or something like that, for January 3<sup>rd</sup>. And that got about 500 people; did a fair job on that.

And I think that we originally thought of that as something that was a one-time action; not a big deal. But it wasn't that long after that that Giuliani began doing things that made it clear that he was going to be a sort of ongoing problem, and especially the threats to cut the Division of AIDS Services, DAS, which brought more groups together, and created the iteration that was Target Rudy; which, with Housing Works and Stand Up Harlem, called the Brooklyn Bridge action — see if I get this right; right — which was the first sign of what it was going to be like under Giuliani, and how different it was going to be like under Giuliani than it was under Koch and under Dinkins. Because we had taken for granted the general feeling that if we had enough people, and took the street, we would be allowed to take the street: based on that kind of practical thing that the police felt that just letting us go meant that the streets would be cleared faster, and so it was more efficient to just let us walk and move and be done with it. And that had worked for us for a long time.

And on the Brooklyn Bridge action, we moved a fair amount of people — at least a thousand — onto the Brooklyn Bridge, up the ramp at the, I think it's Boerum Place, or something like that, from the Cadman Plaza onto the roadway; started into the roadway a fair distance; and the police stopped us. And we sat right down. We're not moving.

**SS: How many people, I'm sorry?**

BCC: About a thousand. But, I don't know. And we sat right down. Fine; we'll block the street. Make us.

And they said, you're not moving. And we're going to start arresting you; you'd better move.

And the thing was that we hadn't planned it as a CD, and we had brought a lot of people from Stand Up Harlem and from Housing Works who were not prepared to get arrested. And we weren't totally prepared to do the support that was necessary to work with people, especially who hadn't necessarily been experienced with doing civil disobedience before. And we stood up and walked that group off that roadway and onto the ramp, onto the pedestrian ramp. And that was the beginning of the end of street activism in New York City for us. It was just, it was so clear that we had been defeated. And we got better at planning, who we were dealing with and what are we willing to risk and things like that. But it was that moment that was, wow; that day is over. We're going to have to start to use different tactics.

So we did that Brooklyn Bridge action. And then it became clear that even though DAS was saved, that there was an ongoing threat to city stuff. And that was really new for me. All the work I'd done before, including when I was with ACT UP, was this much more general kind of stuff; national campaigns, international relations, abortion rights; big things. And all of a sudden, I was working in this much more specific and local context, about very specific policy stuff. And I hadn't really been involved in that kind of thing before. But we

decided that we were going to take this on. And that was, a lot of the Marys — Carrie [Yamaoka] and Joy [Episalla]; James Baggett and Robert Monteleone; Drew Kramer; Andrea Daley; Barbara Hughes; oh, I can't remember; Barry Paddock; folks like that. And we turned that into an ongoing committee called City Issues.

And then of course, that was happening in the context of a lot of ACT UP falling apart. And most of the people in that group had ceased going to the ACT UP floor meetings. I was still going, and was probably still facilitating for a good portion of that. But mostly, there started to be a bigger and bigger breach. And some time in 1995, we decided to form — it wasn't a separate organization, but one of the things we wanted was, we stopped calling it City Issues because City Issues, out of the context of the ACT UP name, didn't have any meaning. And so we changed the name to City AIDS Action, and it was partially a sign of the fact that we wanted it to be able to have meaning standing alone. And it wasn't an explicit attempt to break away from ACT UP, but it was maybe a pragmatic attempt to break away from ACT UP.

**SS: And when did you leave ACT UP?**

BCC: I did my last real action with ACT UP in the spring of '97.

The tenth anniversary action I think was the last action I did with them. And we were still doing joint actions with ACT UP all the way through that. But the truth was — and now I can't place this; I think it happened in 1996, but I couldn't swear to it. It was around the time with the Scott Sawyer stuff.

We had such money problems that the floor decided that the way to deal with the money problem was to get rid of the workspace. And for me, that was a back-breaker. The workspace, to me, especially given the kind of work we were doing, and I thought, we were doing a lot of organizing with local community groups and with individual DAS clients. And the workspace symbolized to me the kind of organizing that I believed in in an activist organization; that's a place where people get together; where people make materials for actions, where they can meet and discuss and plan. And in a city like New York, where space is at such a premium, to give that up in favor of what felt like to me things like a zillion trips to meetings of various kinds — which felt like the kind of work that other community-based organizations were doing in spades, and not necessarily what we needed to be joining onto, represented a group that was taking a really different turn from the kind of work that I wanted to be doing. And I think from that point, I stopped being a real member of ACT UP.

And that was a significant change. From the time I started with the group in 1990; to some time in 1996; I bet you could count the number of Monday meetings I missed on the fingers of one hand. It was that much the plan around which my life worked. And for me to stop going to Monday night meetings was a big change in how I was relating to that group.

**SS: Do you guys have any more questions?**

**JW: Was the '94 Stonewall 25 a City AIDS Action?**

BCC: Yeah.

**JW: Well, you took the streets then real good.**

BCC: Yeah, we did. Well actually, there was another big action that I loved that City AIDS Actions did, besides the '94 Stonewall. Somehow the '94 Stonewall was a good action. But it felt like the kind of action that was like – because you were pissing us off. You know, Giuliani said, you can't have Fifth Avenue for this thing. And we said, yes, we can, and we're going to take it! And, we made it into — and I think it was real — we felt like the Stonewall piece, in an interesting parallel to that '87 action — we felt like the Stonewall 25 should have an AIDS piece to it. And so we made this march up Fifth Avenue, that was not permitted, be about AIDS. And while I liked that, it felt a little bit like, because it's our right to take the street, so we're going to.

To me, a better action that City AIDS Action did that was about taking the streets was March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1994; which was a combination action, with Puerto Rican rights groups; student groups; anti-police brutality groups; the City Is Ours action, where we planned, with Housing Works, a shutdown of the Queens Midtown Tunnel that was a, just a brilliant act of logistics, to pull everybody together, and pull that off, when the cops were trying so hard to stop us. And just work together really well with the whole message of those years of working on the Giuliani thing, which was that here are really all these issues connected. Here is housing and here is hospitals and here is schools and here is funding for social services, all put together.

But I would say that if I think about the years with working with City AIDS Actions, it's not so much the street activism that stands out for me; it's the town halls we had for DAS clients; it's that we spent all this time in DAS offices, handing out the DAS Bill of Rights, and trying to educate the DAS clients, and trying to organize them into their own kinds of activism.

As I say, it was like a different kind of work for me. But that's the kind of work that it was about, really, more than those big street actions anymore.

**SS: Jim, anything?**

**JH: Is there anything we haven't talked about that you want to talk about?**

BCC: No.

**SS: Okay. So then our last question is –**

BCC: Oh. {LAUGHS}

**JH: You don't get off that easily.**

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

BCC: Mm. ACT UP's biggest achievement was – I think, broad, rather than narrow. I'm, I know there's lots of things about specific kinds of treatment, different kinds of regulations, changing the CDC definition; all sorts of things like that that were crucially important to the lives of individual people with AIDS.

If I had to say what was their, the biggest achievement, though, it's the broad ideas, like health care is a right, that I felt had a real impact. That people who are sick have a voice in their care. With the doctor, on the doctor level, on the hospital level, on the sort of regulatory level, and the pharmaceutical world level. And I think that that's become a model for lots of other groups involved in fighting for people with different health problems and different healthcare issues.

And that even though there was no end of tension around this, connecting the issues of AIDS activism to things like healthcare financing and to issues of care for the other, the minority, were very successful, and I think became, as I say, models that other groups have taken up, and it's changed the landscape of activism in a way that was really important.

What was our greatest, what, disappointment?

**SS: Yeah, or however you wish to phrase that. Shortcoming.**

BCC: I don't know. There's a way in which you can always be disappointed about what we didn't get done, or the fact that it ended at all. But the truth is, it's the history of revolutions. All revolutions come to an end. This book that you were pointing to before has a line in it about, all revolutions are destined to fail. Because the purpose of revolutions is to paint a picture of utopia. And that's easier to fight for than it is to maintain. And I think that ACT UP had some of those problems, and that, we got to the point where we had solved — solved — had had responses on many of the fronts that were the most obvious, in

the same way that civil rights did and other kinds of social movements; and were left with the stuff that was deep and entrenched, like poverty, and other things that we didn't know how to deal with. And so, yeah, in the sense that it's disappointing that we never got deeper that way.

And it's disappointing to me, and always has been, that too often, we allowed ourselves to go for the carve-out, where we fought for the need to protect people with AIDS about benefits, about housing, about treatment; and were willing to say, okay, only people with AIDS; we were this special class. Rather than seeing, yes, this was a group of people who had rights and entitlement and access, rather than saying, so this gets us to see where the system breaks down for all these other people who are in this same position about disability, about losing one's job, about lack of control over one's life as a person with health problems. Too often, we were willing to go the exceptionalist route, instead of making partnerships with other groups who could have made those changes deeper.

And people could argue, in the lives of people who are literally dying, that was the important, expedient thing to do. But in the long run, it maybe didn't have as much impact as you'd like to see.

**SS: Okay. Thank you. Boy, your ability to remember exact dates is really impressive. My god.**

BCC: It's stuff that has to do with demos and things like that. Those, when you plan around them, you spend six weeks, six months, whatever,

saying, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1992; it's the, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1992 was the AIDS is a Primary Issue. I remember the date and the slogan of practically every action I ever worked on. I don't exactly remember what happened at most of them.