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Interviewee: **Maxine Wolfe**

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Interviewer: **Jim Hubbard**

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ACT UP Oral History Project

Interview of Maxine Wolfe

February 19, 2004

JIM HUBBARD: Can we start by having you say your name, how old you are, today's date, and where we are?

MAXINE WOLFE: My name is Maxine Wolfe. I am going to be 63 in April. I'm 62 and whatever, and we're in Brooklyn, in my house in Park Slope, in my kitchen. Today's date is the 19th of February, 2004.

JH: Did you grow up in a political family?

MW: No.

JH: So, where did your interest in political action come from?

MW: Although my family was not all political, my parents were very – my sister and mother were very politically – how can I even describe it – sort of – her father, it turned out, who I'd never met, because he died after he got to this country, had been a leftist. But, she didn't have any lefty politics that were, like, about particular parties or doing anything. What she had from him was this total basis of how to be in the world. So, when I was in public school, and everybody was pushing us to vote, I would ask my mother – my mother was an immigrant, too – who are you voting for? And she would say, I'm not voting, and I would give her this whole long line – how could you not be voting? You're an American now, blah, blah, blah. And she would say, none of them are for us, none of them are for the working class. But she never said more than that. It was never, don't you do this or, this is what the politics of the world are, or anything. And my father was, pretty much – didn't say anything about politics.

But then, when I was in junior high school, there was a girl who moved to my neighborhood, whose father was in the Communist Party and it was that period where the communist party was supposed to live amongst the working class, so he moved the

family into my neighborhood, and she went to school with me, and we became friends. I was really pretty young, because I was sort of precocious in school. So, when we were in – I guess we were in our first year of high school, she took me to hear The Weavers sing when they were blacklisted. And, believe it or not, they sang “This Land is Your Land” and it belongs to all of us, and I believed them.

And I had no idea who they were, or what the politics about that were, and there was a – she brought in another guy who came from our school and he walked out and he called them commie pinkos, and I had no idea what he meant. And, I had listened to the McCarthy hearings at home, and I knew that there was something really bad about that, but it was not until I was in high school – which I guess was in 1955 – that I actually put all that stuff together in that kind of way.

But, I also grew up in a household which is sort of peculiar, in lot of ways. My parents were Jews, they had no books. They were working class Jews. They were not even working class, they were poor. And it was mostly about struggling to survive and there was no big push for people to go to school – contrary to every stereotype. But, they had that kind of sense. And they were secular – except for, my grandmother lived with us, and she had gotten more religious as she got older, but my mother was not, at all, and neither was my father. But, they would make me take off the Jewish holidays from school. The Jewish holidays in New York – the schools were not closed until there were enough Jewish teachers to make it a problem.

So, up until the early sixties, you had to take those days off. And my mother would always say, you take off those days, because you let everybody know you’re a Jew. So, it was that kind of political stuff that I got from home that was more about

standing up for yourself, being who you are, not letting other people push you around or tell you how to be – it was always that kind of stuff.

My mother used to say – when I would come home and I would say, everybody else got a different answer on this problem – when I was doing math – and she would say, if everyone jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, would you follow them? And I would say, no, and she would say, so if you think the answer is right, stick with it. It was that kind of stuff, and just knowing what our lives were like, I guess.

JH: So, you grew up in Brooklyn?

MW: Yeah, I grew up about 30 streets from here – believe it or not.

JH: And which high school did you go to?

MW: I went to New Utrecht high school. That was an interesting thing. Lots of things sort of come together in your life, when you see them in a pattern that's not there initially. That was a huge high school, it had three thousand students. There were forty kids in the academic track, which is why, whenever anyone complains about schools today, I say, excuse me, that was my experience.

So, I was one of those forty kids – forty kids a year, right? And I never even knew what difference that made, until I got stuck in a regular English class in my senior year, and the kids were learning to spell banana – which is where my older sister was in that track – that's how she went through school.

But, when I got to college – and I was the first person in my family ever to go to school – people came from middle class high schools, where they had classes in, like, the bible as literature – all these special classes. And in my high school, boy, there was, like, one English elective a year, on that order, because there were hardly any students that

were in the academic track. So, it wasn't like you could take English literature this year and The Bible as literature that year, and a special program in this, or a special program in that. So, yeah, I went to – and then, to Brooklyn College.

JH: So, even though you were in a family that didn't have any books, you ended up going to college, getting a Ph.D.

MW: I loved to read. My family doesn't have very many people who went onto college, even in the next generation. And, in my generation, I made my younger sister go. She was one of the first BA nurses. She was going to go nursing school and I said, no, you can go to Hunter College, they have a BA in nursing.

And, I have one cousin who's my age, who eventually finished a BA degree. It took him many, many years, and his sister who's way younger – there's about 20 years difference – and she, I think, just finished her associate's degree, and she's in her forties. And, otherwise, nobody in my family went to college. And even a lot of them – next generation, my kid's generation – a whole bunch of them have never gone to school. So, it's pretty much working class.

JH: So, you were in college in the late fifties and early sixties. Did you continue political –

MW: That's when I really got more involved. I guess it was in college. I started out just doing stuff in school. I was in this peer counseling thing and sort of service organization and stuff like that. Small things. I was always very committed to civil rights. I always found that really fascinating, and I don't know even why or how – although, I would also say, that's the other thing that was sort of strange about my family

which is, no one ever said a word about anybody, negative – never, ever, ever did I ever hear any of that in my house.

Tape I
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And, I had a high school teacher who taught history and I don't remember his name. I just remember that he used to walk into the classroom – he was very much about the Constitution – and go, I was speaking to Justice Brandeis the other day, and he said blada, blada. And, I used to go to the public library, which is two blocks from my house. I started doing this from the time I was ten, and I would go and I would take ten books. I had no idea what books they were. Nobody told me about books. I would just pick out ten books at random, and I would read them, because I loved to read. And one of the books I took out in the fifties was Lillian Smith's – do you know who she is? Actually she was a lesbian. She was a southern woman who wrote *Killers of the Dream* and she wrote *Now is the Time*. And she as a big civil rights activist, when it wasn't good to be a civil rights activist. She lived in Georgia. And the only reason she got away with it for a long time was because she came from kind of an upper middle class family. She lived with her lover. They ran a camp for kids for 30-some-odd years. There's a wonderful book called *When Will I Be Heard*, which is all about her, trying to push for civil rights and being basically censored out of every newspaper. Nobody would publish any letters that she wrote, any things that she wrote. Her book was banned because it was about a black and white relationship – one of her books. And she also, actually wrote a book about a gay man, that had a gay male character in it. And, she was one of the people who was invited to the first SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] convention, to speak.

So, I found this book of hers, which was called *Now Is The Time*, and it was about why people needed to push for an end to segregation and for civil rights and stuff. And, it was just, like, totally something – I couldn't even think there was anything strange about it. I thought it was, like, totally right on, you know. And I don't know how that evolved, but it just seemed to be.

JH: So, civil rights was the first place you did political work?

MW: Yeah, although I never went south, or anything like that. Part of it was – I couldn't even imagine doing that. I, sort of, was not in the purview of anybody I knew. So, I basically did stuff here.

I started graduate school in January, '61, while I was working. I went to school at night, because I graduated in January '61, from college. And, I was really pretty young. I went to college when I was 16, so I was 19 when I graduated. I did stuff like, to unseat the Mississippi delegation from the Democratic convention, and some work with Brooklyn CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] around economic issues in Brooklyn. And, went to demonstrations – went to the '63 march on Washington, the Martin Luther King march – like that – just did whatever I could sort of connect up with. I wasn't organizing it, or anything like that. I didn't know any of the people who were organizing it. I wasn't, like, politically connected.

JH: How did it feel to be at the '63 march?

MW: Amazing. It was pretty amazing. I thought it was a totally amazing event. I just thought it was really great for so many people to be there. And, I especially felt – I don't know, it was just like, it was sort of like – I can't even explain it, it was so amazing.

JH: Do you remember any of the speeches?

MW: You know, I don't. Who ever listens to speeches when you go. It's so amazing, you go to a rally – they play that speech of his over and over. Do I know if anybody around me even listened to him? You know what I mean? Except the people up front – that's what they always do at a rally. And I certainly was not upfront. No, but afterwards – but, I did know that it was amazing. I have a button that's from that march, and I knew it was an historic moment – that so many people were out there, and willing to be out there, compared to all the other stuff – I mean, up to that point, a lot of stuff had gone down in the south, and people had done all kinds of actions and stuff like that, but the scale of that march was bigger than I had never known about in my life, other than having, eventually knowing that there had been large demonstrations, like, you know, of workers and stuff, years before – but not, like marches like that.

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JH: What were you studying in graduate school at the time?

MW: Psychology. I got a Ph.D. in psychology, actually. And I was married, at that time, too. I got married when I was 19.

JH: So, right out of college?

MW: Absolutely, that's what everybody I know did. It's really hard for people to believe that about me, because I think that people do not understand how much the world has changed. But, the world that I lived in was a working class immigrant world, in which most of the things that people think about today – whether it's artichokes or wine – dry wine, not kosher wine – or – I never even knew what a college was like. Nobody I knew had ever gone to college. I didn't know what you did all day. When I went to college – when I was going to go – I couldn't even envision what a day in school

like that would be like. Nobody I knew had ever done it. So, my whole world was very constrained by that kind of everyday life.

So, even my going to demonstrations – you know, what people would say is, she's different. Or, the fact that I didn't wear make-up – she's different. Or, that I didn't like jewelry – “she's different.” That was the way people sort of dealt with it. It was very ecumenical. It wasn't, like, people didn't say, oh, you're a freak. They would just go, oh, she's the different one. There were certain things that you just did. So, you got married.

JH: Where did you meet Mr. Wolfe?

MW: I met him, actually – I went to work at a summer camp and he was working there, and his cousin, I think, introduced us or something. That was a pretty amazing summer, too, because I met the man who eventually became my oldest friend, who's also gay – who died a couple of years ago – Ed [Rogowsky]. And he worked there that summer. And he was at Brooklyn College, too – but that's where I met him, it was my first summer after my first year at Brooklyn College. That was also amazing, too, because I had gone to one camp, which was a Jewish Federation camp, where you don't bring your own clothes. I don't even know if you know those camps, but they were for poor kids. You bring a little shopping bag, and in the shopping bag, you would bring underwear, toothbrush and shoes. And then, they would give you everything else – like shorts, tee-shirts, everything. But, they would also expose you to a lot of stuff. I started doing toe dancing there, and stuff like that. They had amazing stuff at that place, but anyway –

JH: There was also a socialist influence.

MW: Yeah, totally. I didn't say that, either – it was through my mother, who was a member of the Workman's Circle. The Workman's Circle is a Polish *landsmanschaft* – which means, a people's organization. Then, it was totally secular, lefty. I had no clue that's what it was. So, I went to study Yiddish, because my grandmother lived with us, and everybody spoke Yiddish. Nobody in my family ever talked about Zionism – Israel didn't exist. So, what you did was, you went to study Yiddish, not Hebrew. I never went to Hebrew school. The only thing you studied Hebrew for was a Bar Mitzvah and nobody got Bat Mitzvah-ed. I went to this place called the Labor Lyceum. I had no clue, until I was in my twenties what that was because I would just say the Laborlyceum – one word. And then, I realized it was the Labor Lyceum. And it still exists, it's in New York. They're very progressive. They support all the stuff that you would – they would do anti-Iraq stuff and whatever and they're still very socialist and whatever. What was I saying about the socialist stuff before then? Where was I before said that? About the Workman's Circle?

Tape I
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JH: Summer camp.

MW: So, that was the only summer camp I ever went to. So, then I went to this summer camp and there were all these rich kids there, you know. And, I came with one pair of jeans and one tee-shirt and something like that. What did I own? But, it was at that camp that, not only did I meet Ed, the two women who were the head of two different divisions in the women's – were dykes. And I didn't even think about it then, except that they were always together. And I was lying about my age. I was really supposed to be 18, but I was 16, and I lied to get the job. So, in retrospect, I realized why they got panicked, because we went out one night – we took the kids on a camping thing

– and we were sitting around and having a beer. And then one of them asked me how old I was and I said that I was 16 and they both freaked. And I thought it was because I was drinking the beer, but I think it was because they were together with me and I was 16. And I saw them once more, and I came back to Brooklyn, because they both lived in the neighborhood and stuff, but that was it. So, it was interesting. That’s where I met my friend, Ed, and that’s where I met the man I married, and that’s where I met these two dykes. So, yeah, we met there, got married, and then I spent 10 years figuring out how to leave it.

JH: But, you had the sense of yourself as being different when you got married?

MW: Yeah, it’s hard to put myself back in that headset. I just think it was, like, expected. It was a way to leave home. It was a whole number of things, and I just knew it was wrong three days after I did it, and I had no idea what to do about that and I, seriously, spent 10 years trying to figure out what to do.

I had some interference. I did all kinds of stuff and I ended up, eventually, having two kids, over the last couple of years, because when I left him, my youngest daughter was a year old. Then, when I tried to put a story to it afterwards, I say that I did what most men did with women, which is that I stayed until I got my Ph.D. and then I knew I could support myself and I left. But, I don’t think I ever thought about it in that way, at the time. It wasn’t conscious that I did that, but it was true. So, you know, that was interesting.

JH: I want to go back in time, for a second. Do you have any memory of the Rosenbergs?

MW: Very vague. When I see things about them, it's as if I was there. And, I don't think it's just because I've seen things about them, but nobody in my family talked about them. There were lots of things that people didn't talk about then. My parents didn't talk about the Holocaust, for example and my mother lost lots of family in the Holocaust. So, people didn't talk about it – at least, not in my household. But, it's hard for me to believe that I was not aware of it, because it was so omni-present, and I was a voracious reader. One thing that my family did was that they read newspapers. My mother and father, both, got the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily News* every day – two newspapers – a morning and an afternoon newspaper. We all read the newspaper.

JH: Not the *Jewish Daily Forward*?

MW: No. Is that odd? No. Even my grandmother didn't read the *Jewish Daily Forward*. I don't know what she read, to tell you the truth. Actually, I never saw my parents – other than the newspapers, I never saw my mother read anything, until we were all out of the house and then she became a voracious reader and said she was always was, but she never had any time, because she always worked. She was not a stay at home mother.

JH: So, when did you consider yourself a lesbian?

MW: Sort of in the late seventies – middle seventies to the late seventies. I was with a man then I was not, then I was with a man and I was not, then I was not.

JH: So, even after you left your husband –

MW: Right. I had a relationship with a man for awhile, and then I didn't.

JH: When does feminism come into the picture?

MW: Actually, that was interesting – feminism – because, again, nobody I knew had anything to do with the feminist movement – nobody. But, I was hearing about it.

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And so – let's see, it must have been in the late sixties – it was, sort of, like '67 or something. It was around '66 – I can't even remember exactly what years it was. No, I know exactly when it was – it was '68, because it was after I had come back from Denmark. I had been hearing about all kinds of stuff. I knew some women in the neighborhood that I was living in, and I asked them if they wanted to start a little group. And I was also talking about – I also got a job at the graduate school, and we started a little group of four of the faculty members – four women that I knew there – two were from there, one was from somewhere else. But, also, I tried it in my neighborhood. And the thing in my neighborhood that was really interesting was that three of the women – their husbands told them they couldn't do it.

JH: This was a CR group?

MW: Yeah – told them they couldn't do it, which was really interesting. I couldn't believe that people would actually accede to that. I just didn't even believe that people did that, you know? So, then we started doing some stuff – we started talking about some stuff at the university – the group of women. The problem with that was that it really got down to, what would you do, comes the revolution, and people said they would write about it. And two of us said, we would be behind the barricades, and two people said they would write about it, and that was the end of the group.

So, then, basically – I wasn't involved in any of the feminist – because I really got more involved in lefty stuff, because one of those women was a leftist and I started going to stuff with her, going to a lot of – this is all that stupid, lefty split stuff – like, she

belonged to the International Socialists – which had been a split from the original – SDS had split into International Socialist Organization and then the International Socialists and the Prairie Fire – all those splits that happened after SDS. And she was in IS – International Socialists – which was like a Trotskyist group, in the United States, and their group in England was actually called the International Socialists Organization, just for confusion's sake. So, she got me involved in doing a whole lot of stuff with them, and I did. I did a lot of stuff about the Krugerrand and strikes and a lot of lefty stuff. But, it was actually interesting, in that, that sort of pushed me away from the left, because people – when Sheila Rowbotham wrote her book, *Women's Consciousness: Man's World*, which was, like, a lefty feminist take on what was going on in the left, a whole bunch of us wanted to have a discussion about this, in that group, and, like, everybody kind of closed ranks, and everything that was important about that thing, they didn't want to discuss. And that was when I said, I can't do this – this is not, like the way I want to do this stuff.

JH: The women as well as the men?

MW: Yes. I brought a friend of mine – it's very complicated, but it was, like – they tried to construct a meeting in which we could discuss anything that had to do with Marxist politics, but not anything that had to do with your personal expression of sexism. So, that there was no way to discuss how the meetings were run, or how the topics that were chosen to work on, or anything like that, was actually a reflection of the sexism in the group itself. You could only talk about, where did women fit into Marx – like, when he said worker, did he mean man or women, and if he met woman, what difference would

it make? But, the fact that men were in the hierarchy of the organization, telling women what to do – that was something you couldn't discuss.

And, I had one other experience, in that when I – actually, when I first came back from Denmark and one of the guys suggested that I get involved in this group that was putting out a newspaper that was called *New York Worker's News and Perspective*. And, so I said, okay, that sounds interesting. So, I got involved in doing it, and it was, basically, sort of a lefty collective that was putting out this newspaper. I had no idea where they fit on the spectrum of things.

Tape I
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JH: And where did they fit in the spectrum?

MW: They were kind of, like, white-skinned privileged people. That was the end of the spectrum that they were on. And, so, what happened was that around the time that Nixon vetoed this daycare bill – which was, I think, around 1972 or something – we were writing an editorial about daycare. And so, we wrote this line that said – which everybody wrote at the time – what percentage of women now with children under six were in the workforce or something? And we were saying, how that increased. And the editorial board, which is all men, wanted us to add – oh, and of course, the women got relegated to writing that editorial about daycare – and, they wanted us to add – which is what they added to everything – and, triple for people of color. And it was untrue, because women of color had been in the workforce forever, starting with slavery, when they weren't even paid, and then working. My mother worked. So, what you were saying there was, white middle class – more white middle class people, women, had worked into the workforce. The number of black women in the workforce or working class women in the workforce hadn't increased at all.

So, we had this huge argument, because I refused to add that to the end of the line, because it was untrue. And, then I left that newspaper. I just said, if that's the way – if what you're about is, like, rhetoric, and you lie, what's the point? And I really think, in the years that I was in the left, a lot of what I learned was really important to my future organizing, but it wasn't politics. It was about doing politics. There's a whole history on the left of – which is not any different than the mainstream, in a way – of constructing the image you want them to be, and not really saying what is. And, I know people can say, that there's a lot of views of what is, but I'm one of those people who believe there's some basic there. There's a wall, there's a wall. You can say it's white, I can say it's gray, whatever. But, it's there.

So, when the *Guardian* newspaper used to be in New York – I knew people who wrote for them, and they would take the article and change the whole thing and use the people's names, as the by-line. But you didn't have anything to say about how they re-wrote your story to fit their image of what should be in there. And so, nobody would ever want to say that there were 20 people at a protest – it was always better if there were two thousand. But, then, I always thought, well, if you want to get people out, why should they come if there are two thousand? But, if you say there are twenty, and we need forty, maybe you'll get some people. It just never sat well with me, that people constructed a story. I used to say, the world is bad enough. You don't have to manufacture a world that's bad, you just have to describe it. And, if you lie, people know, and then they don't trust you. So, if you're organizing, you don't want to tell people that every week, four thousand in your factory die of exposure to X, when actually, every week, four people die. It's bad enough that four people die. And, if you

say four thousand, all those workers know it's not true, and then, they don't believe you. So, if you really want to organize, you have to have some authenticity in what you do. So, that was a lot of what happened to me when I was on the left. Eventually, I also took courses at the Marxist School, which was in New York – like, the history of socialism and communism, and I read Marx. All of that was in the mid to late-seventies. And even there, everybody would get up and tell you a different story. That school was a Trotskyist school. And then, you know, the Spartacus League would have somebody in every class, standing up to tell you what the truth was. And then, they would give you their version of Trotsky, or their version of the Russian Revolution or something. So, by the end of that period, I just really didn't want to have anything to do with lefty parties, as such. I still felt that I had left politics, and that's when I got involved in CARASA. I actually went to march on Washington with the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists, in 1979. And, it was that year that I also joined CARASA.

Tape I
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JH: So, what you gained from leftist politics was a strong belief in looking at the world as it really is.

MW: Looking at the world that it really is and organizing unorganized people – which I learned even more of, when I got into CARASA. But, the basic pattern on the left, at this point – the Trotskyist left, and even the other left, because they would all, like, come together on point, was a very top-down model of organizing. And it was a feel good model of organizing, and I think there are times when that's not a bad thing. But, you have to know what you're doing.

I'll explain what it is. When they would have a demonstration, okay, they would get in touch with the leaders of other groups that they knew. All their organizing was

about groups. It was not about people. It was not about really trying to organize unorganized people, it was about getting groups to be together in coalitions to do some demonstration. The problem with all of that, is that every group says, they have more people than they do. Most of the people who you speak to in those groups, don't ever talk to anybody in their organization. They can't say who's going to come to a demonstration. So, you would get a flyer, and it would have four thousand organizations endorsing this demonstration and twenty five people would show up, because there was no membership, in the sense that you think, like, that eventually something like ACT UP would have. There was no membership. There was basically a leadership with no membership. And there was no way to construct a membership, because unlike unions and stuff like that, people were not organizing unorganized people. They basically wanted everyone who agreed with them already. And they would look for the vanguard of the working class. That's how I got involved in International Socialists. Here I was. I was the perfect candidate for the vanguard of the working class. I was from a working class background. I had gotten a Ph.D., and I had good politics. So, whenever any events would happen in that whole period from '68 until the end of the seventies, anyone from any organization would try to recruit me, because I was the vanguard of the working class.

So, you could get vanguard people. You could get a few people. You would recruit a few people, but it wasn't about mass organizing, at least for that whole period – it was not about mass organizing. And, everybody had to agree to a set of principles that organizations had, and they would fight forever, over the wording of those things. So, it was very closed in. So, one of the things that I learned, from that period and later on was,

that that top down model didn't speak to most people. It made you feel good – also, people would go, and they would hand out leaflets in Greenwich Village. They didn't go and hand out leaflets in Flatbush. They didn't go to hand out leaflets in Brooklyn anywhere. I used to say to people, and I still do, that if you are not connected, you wouldn't know that any politics had taken place. Nobody hangs up flyers in this neighborhood. In the middle of Park Slope? Seven thousand flyers. People still think that it's an ungentrified neighborhood of lefties. Why they think that, I don't know? They don't live here.

But, in this part of the neighborhood, which is totally working class, totally diverse, hardly a leaflet up on a lamppost. If I don't stick them up, I don't know who does. And that's always the way it's been. So, that's what I mean about feel good. So, you go and you hand out all these leaflets, and you feel like you're doing something for the revolution, but you're not reaching anybody, you're not changing anybody's mind, you're not changing the politics of what's going on. So, I learned that one, too. And, I think that the other good part of it was – I did read all this leftist stuff. I read a huge amount of lefty writings – Gramsci, Marx, Trotsky – all that stuff. And, I also, like – I met people, when I lived in Denmark in '67, and also, when I lived there in '78, I met – and I traveled. I met a lot of lefties in other countries and got to know a lot about leftist politics, in general, around the world. And that was good. I learned a lot of good stuff.

Tape II
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MW: In 1978, I had a – you asked me why I went to Denmark, and I lived in Denmark, the first time, in 1967, and the way that I ended up in Denmark in 1967 – which, actually was also the way that my marriage started ending – was that, I had traveled to Europe in the sixties and met this guy. When I was with my husband, I met

this guy on flight to Copenhagen, who's still a good friend of mine – Jørgen [Nielsen] – and, he showed us around Denmark. And then, we started writing, and he came to visit in the United States. Then we went to visit there, then I got this idea, wouldn't it be great to live there? Because I had never lived anywhere outside of Brooklyn. I figured, why not?

So, I applied for a fellowship to work with somebody – I was in graduate school – actually, I had gone – I sort of skipped things which was – you know, I worked, and then they asked me to come to graduate school and they were starting the Ph.D. programs at the City University, which didn't exist before 1960. I started going to school at night, and then I was asked if I would come back full-time. And so, I was a full-time graduate student with a fellowship for awhile. Then, I went to work in advertising for a year, because I got crazed about graduate school – like, it was too ridiculously out of touch with the world. And then, they called me up and asked me to come back to teach, because some woman had finked out and they gave me a whole year's teaching and stuff.

Then, I was writing my thesis. They had these fellowships, and I applied for this fellowship to work at this University, and I decided to do Copenhagen, because Jørgen was there, and I knew him, and I had been to Denmark. And my husband applied for a job, which existed in Denmark at that time – I don't know if it still does – but, they would hire Americans and Brits to teach English in the public schools and to kind of go circulate in the schools, so that kids could hear what a real accent was, and not just learn the language from a teacher who had learned it from another Dane, who had learned it from another Dane. And so, he got that job. And I was pregnant, also. So, I had my daughter in June, and then, I was going to go. And right before I was going to go – was Jimmy

Carter the president then? I guess. They decided, because of the brain drain, they didn't want to give fellowships to people to go abroad. I think that was that period. Well, anyway, when I first applied for it, you didn't have to have your Ph.D., you could have research experience, which I had a lot of. And then they decided that you had to have your Ph.D. So, anyway, I never got that fellowship, but we had already gotten tickets and everything, and he had the job teaching in the public school, so we went for the year.

So, that was the first time I was in Denmark, which was interesting, because it was really great to get out of here, because all the Vietnam War was happening, but, on the other hand, as soon as we got there, I was in an anti-Vietnam war demonstration. That taught me that you can't run away from the world – like, there's hardly any place you can go in the world, where you're not going to be, like – if that's where your head is at, it's going to happen. That's how I ended up in Denmark, and I have been back there many times, and my friend Jørgen is still a friend of mine. He was, actually, just here this past summer with his wife.

JH: So, when you came back, did you go and do more anti-Vietnam work?

MW: I did some stuff then, but also, that was the beginning of the women's movement and stuff and the, sort of, lefty stuff. So, it was all tied together. I ended up doing some of the anti-Vietnam war stuff, but not organizing a lot, because, you know what? A lot of the lefty groups were not doing that at that point. They were doing more other kinds of things. There were big coalitions that were doing stuff in the early seventies around Kent State and whatever, but there wasn't a lot of small lefty focus on that. I think it was because SDS had broken up by that time – everybody was scattered, and whatever took place, took place. But, not from those people.

So, in the late seventies, when all the stuff about the parties and stuff just got to me – and I was also more out at the time, I joined CARASA, which is the Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse, because I wanted to do stuff, and I actually thought – this was totally wrong – but, I actually thought that I would rather argue for my Marxist politics in a feminist group, than for my feminist politics in a Marxist group – that's what I said to myself. But, I had no idea that CARASA actually was mostly socialist feminists – it wasn't, like, feminist feminists. It wasn't radical feminists. It was socialist feminists. And, some of those people were also connected to parties, like Barbara Zeluck, who had been in International Socialists – she was someone who went to the CARASA meetings. But, I didn't know the other people. They weren't anybody that I knew. I just went. And, I started doing work with them. And, I actually – Meredith Tax – I don't know if you know who she is –

JH: No.

MW: She wrote many socialist things and she was a socialist feminist. And, she was in that organization and she was really relieved when I came, because I got involved in the national committee which was, to kind of do stuff on a national basis, and at that point, they were trying to start a national reproductive rights organization, that did eventually become the Reproductive Rights National Network, which I was on the steering committee of, eventually. But, at that point, it was just a thought and I helped – I got on that committee, and I helped write the grant to get it and stuff, and that's when she left the organization and I sort of focused on that, and I had done stuff on daycare, and I had done stuff on abortion rights and then, in the organizations, Stephanie Roth was there and Sarah [Schulman] was there, then, too.

And I did demonstrations against Califano – I think his name was Califano – who was the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, at that time. I think it was Joseph Califano. So, I did a lot of reproductive rights stuff. But, it was also driving me a little crazy in that organization, because people were also doing the same kind of thing, where they were organizing with other groups and not really with women – even though they said they wanted to do that.

And then, Stephanie kind of did this presentation one time about how they didn't have any lesbian politics. So, I got on the committee to do stuff about that, and I think Sarah eventually got involved with that committee, too. I think, then it was called the Lesbian Action Committee. No – it was Lesbian Rights Committee or something. It eventually made it to Lesbian Action Committee. I lose track of all that stuff. Anyway, people started freaking out. As soon as we started mentioning lesbian stuff, it was like – everything else we had done in the organization disappeared. That's what we were about. And, I can see in hindsight, I could understand why, because we had totally different politics. When you know that the majority of the people that you're trying to organize are not out, you have to think of other ways to organize. There's not an organization you can go to, to become part of your thing. You have to organize unorganized people. So, the downswing started when – we'd always have these fundraisers and we'd also do these educationals, and we started this lesbian rights committee, and the first thing we did was an educational, and all these different women joined. As soon as we started a lesbian rights committee, all these people who are now still friends of mine – like, June Chan and Mo [Maureen] Angelos – all these people, joined the committee – maybe Mo didn't, but

a lot of people. And so, the first thing we did was an educational – that immediately got interpreted that we were trying to make everybody a lesbian. It was classic stuff.

And then, we had a big fundraiser. And they would always have these fundraisers, and different groups would be there, and they would all be, like, politically on the left and it would be, like – I'm trying to think who were some of the groups that performed – oh, the Wallflower Dance Order, that used to be from San Francisco. I don't know if you remember who they were, but anyway – and they had one particular set of politics. Everybody had a different set of politics. Well, Sarah invited Andrea Dworkin to speak, and basically, the part that she read was about how men on the left are no different from men on the right. All these straight women got up with their men and left. And then they started harassing Stephanie, who was the staff person, and claiming that she wasn't doing her job, even though she was working nine thousand hours a week. Who doesn't work nine thousand hours a week? When you're working for the movement, they would expect you to work nine thousand hours and not get paid for it.

They did all kinds of stuff, to make it kind of appear that she was the problem. And, they did the same thing for me and for Sarah and for anybody that was on the Lesbian Action Committee, because in the interim R2N2 had started – the Reproductive Rights National Network had started, and we wanted to do a workshop at the Reproductive Rights National Network that was about – I think that was the one about lesbian stuff – right – because they were going to have a focus on lesbian stuff. And this whole big thing went down, which I can't even describe, the entire thing – but, the end result of which was, that they actually accused us of trying to not make our proposal for a workshop be a CARASA proposal but, rather, it was going to be a Lesbian Action

Committee proposal, and that was really terrible of us. But, meanwhile, they had a committee that did sterilization abuse that presented a proposal for doing a workshop on sterilization abuse from the Sterilization Abuse Committee. So, it was all trumped up stuff that was really, clearly, the homophobia that was in the group. And, it literally became impossible for us to stay there, because they were really, really – they didn't want to – we did – Sarah organized this – when the Human Life Amendment was up in Congress, and they were having these hearings in Washington, Sarah organized a group of people to go down there, and sit in on the hearings.

Now, you have to imagine that these are lefty feminists who never did any direct action I have ever known of. They never did direct action. The most they ever did was to picket somewhere. So, they got freaked, because Sarah was creating this thing, where all of us were going to go to Washington and break up these hearings – which people did – and we got huge amounts of publicity. And they were freaked that we got huge amounts of publicity, and it wasn't them that did it. I think that was part of it.

So, then they didn't want to support the people who did it. They didn't want that action to be considered an action from the group. They wanted that action to be considered an independent action. They started claiming that Stephanie was using her work time to organize for the zaps – who were the people who did this – just a hundred and one trumped up things about this. And, also, when we wanted to present other kinds of politics – just getting crazed about them – they didn't like the idea of organizing unorganized people, and when we presented a whole proposal for the work for the year, which we used to do at the yearly conference which was, you know, about organizing unorganized women, and about going into beauty parlors and Laundromats and stuff like

that. And, into neighborhoods that we don't usually go into – they all freaked. I can't even tell you, they were just crazed. We eventually went and did tabling in Flatbush and Queens and the Kings Highway area, that they were all opposed to. They couldn't believe that we would actually put out tables in those neighborhoods, because they had never done it. They had always leafleted in Greenwich Village and, you know, we got as many signatures in those neighborhoods as anywhere else. In fact, women said to us, we are so glad you're here, the only people who ever come are the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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So, you know, we had these ideas about organizing that I think came very directly out of – not just a set of lesbian feminist politics that was sort of out there at the time, but also, out of the lesbian part of the lesbian feminist politics, because we knew that you wouldn't reach lesbians by asking for a lesbian group to join your demonstration. You know, if you were going to find lesbians to organize, you would have to go looking to where lesbians were. You'd have to go to bars – you know what I mean? You couldn't just pretend that they were going to be at some lefty conference. It wasn't going to happen. And there were people who had a whole set of different politics and a different way of organizing, and they basically pushed us out of that organization. So, we started another group called – oh, I will say, I want to go back – this relates to something that you said before. One of the things that we did when we were in CARASA was we joined CRASH. CRASH was a coalition of lesbian and gay male socialists. It was the Committee Against Racism Anti-Semitism, Sexism and Heterosexism. So, originally, I was in there was a representative of CARASA. And, everybody in the group was in there as a representative of some other group.

Joan Gibbs was in there, as a representative of Dykes Against Racism Everywhere. And, Laurie [Morton] – what was Laurie's last name? She was in there as a representative of Radical Women and somebody was in there from the new alliance party, and whatever. And Naomi [Brussel], who is now my co-owner of the house – she was in there for the Committee of Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists. So, we all started meeting, and it was like revelation to everybody, because it was the first time that we – any of us in the room – had kind of brought together a gay politics with our leftist politics. And we formed this coalition, and we were trying to figure out what kinds of things could we do. And one of the things that we did was to start doing work on the Family Protection Act, which was a bill that had been put out in 1980, by Reaganites, that was, sort of, the entire right-wing social agenda, and it had all the politics that we cared about.

It had stuff about not allowing women on welfare to use Legal Aid for divorce. It had to do with separating the sexes in sports. It had to do with negative stuff about lesbians and gay men. It was an entire right-wing social agenda. So, we actually did a conference about the Family Protection Act, and then we did some demonstrations. We did some demonstrations about the Human Life Amendment. We did demonstrations about a whole bunch of things. And so, it was really good. Everybody felt really good about it, but all of our individual organizations did not feel good about it, because it was a time where there was no mass movement and all the lefty parties – when there's no mass movement, then their whole purpose is to recruit into the party, rather than become part of a mass movement. So, they didn't want anybody to become involved in a lesbian and gay mass movement. And one of the things that we did, one of the demonstrations that

we did was that the Neighborhood Church, which was a right-wing, fundamentalist Christian group, opened up on Bleecker Street in the village, and we had this big community meeting about it, and we decided to do a demonstration.

And we did a demonstration, and believe it or not, five hundred people showed up, and we ended up blocking all the traffic. It was, like, the best thing that had happened in years. And everybody was feeling so happy, and every one of the organizations told people that they shouldn't be doing that. And the end result was that everybody left their organization. So, Laurie left Radical Women and FSP [Freedom Socialist Party] and I left CARASA. I eventually was in that coalition as a representative of the group that we formed when we left CARASA. And, I even think that Naomi – I don't think the Committee of Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists stayed together. It was really amazing. And then, CRASH didn't last much longer than that, either. The people in CARASA objected to the fact that I was spending so much time on this lesbian and gay male stuff.

JH: You didn't just leave CARASA did you?

MW: Oh yeah, we all got pushed out. It wasn't as if people said we had to go. The way that we were pushed out was through them not willing to support the zaps, through when we – having these arguments about the workshops at R2N2, where they basically kept pressuring us about, you know, that what we were doing was pushing lesbian stuff and why wasn't their name on the proposals? They made everything into an issue about us being lesbians, including this, I thought, was really funny. Naomi said to me one day, and this was before we owned this house, she saw me on the street and she said to me, so I understand that you're an unconscious lesbian separatist? And I said to her, what? And she said that – because we were both on the left, she met some of these

women who were in CARASA and they were talking about me, and they said that I was a lesbian separatist, and she said, Maxine, a lesbian separatist? She's been working with gay men forever and straight groups, lefty groups. I've never known her not to work with men.

And they said, well, she's an unconscious lesbian separatist. That's such a Marxist term, right? I was an unconscious lesbian separatist. That's literally, what they thought. And they ended up acting as if I had never worked on another thing in CARASA. I was the person who came up with the slogan, a woman's life is a human life, okay? I had been doing abortion rights work for years. I had done work on daycare. I had done work on a zillion reproductive rights issues. As soon as we coalesced and formed a lesbian group, it was as if nothing else that I had ever done in CARASA existed, or that anybody else had done, like Stephanie, who had been there, and been the staff person and done everything.

So, that experience, which followed through into the Reproductive Rights National Network, which I'll talk about in a minute, was one of the things that convinced me that I wasn't going to work in the feminist movement again. I didn't want to work with straight women. That was it. Up to that point, I had never had a thought about that.

Anyway, the Reproductive Rights National Network existed at that time, because we had gotten money to do it, and CARASA was a member. And so, when we were forced out of CARASA, we started our own group, from the Lesbian Action Committee, that was called Women for Women. It was so good. It was called Women for Women – let's see – fighting for women's liberation with warmth and a sense of humor, which people on the left thought was ridiculous. They didn't even get that we said, sense of

humor. They thought, what could you have a sense of humor about in the world? It was so bad, so we loved it. So, we stayed in Reproductive Rights National Network, but as a different group. And we organized things within the Reproductive Rights National Network. And, one of the things that we did was a really good thing – a teach-in at one of our yearly conferences on the pro-family left and the pro-family right, because that was at a point in time when – because, as a right-wing. Just like the regular Democrats were going to the right, so were the lefties going to the right.

And, all these people who wrote for *In These Times* and stuff, were writing articles about how they had to support the child-bearing family. And so, we wrote – did a whole analysis of what was wrong with the left politics as well as the right politics. And, in the end, the steering committee of the Reproductive Rights National Network was, basically, all lesbians, and it was, at least, half lesbians of color. A majority of the lesbians on the steering committee were working class, and so, we were trying to put all of those politics really in and not just verbally into what people were doing. And that's when all of this stuff just showed up – the subtle kinds of racism, all the subtle kinds of homophobia. For instance, when we came up with the slogan, a woman's life is a human life and we made up these stickers – we couldn't make up enough of those to give out across the country. As an organization – the Reproductive Rights National Network – we must have produced, easily, 100,000 of those stickers, and we could have produced a million, if we had the money. And, they were up all over the United States of America – sort of, like the Silence = Death stickers, eventually were.

When we produced a sticker that said Lesbian Liberation, we couldn't get people to take them. And, there were 80 groups across the country, that were in the

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Reproductive Rights National Network and, you know, it was exactly what I had said before about the lefty model of organizing – it was, like, there was somebody radical in every one of those groups – whatever you want to call radical. They weren't middle-of-the-road feminists. But, they didn't speak for or to any of the people in their groups. There was no way of knowing how many people were in their groups, or, if there was anybody in their groups, other than the one person you spoke to. And, a majority of those people were working on abortion. No matter whether they had a reproductive rights philosophy or not, which was supposed to encompass a whole range of other politics, including child care and economic things and whatever and we got them to include a statement about lesbian liberation. But, nobody would take those. Nobody would march in their gay pride marches in their area. It was, like, pushing people. And, they didn't want to do stuff that was about, as I said, organizing, other than through these groupings. So, in the end that was one of the reasons why R2N2 fell apart, the Reproductive Rights National Network. It was also – I mean, obviously, a right wing period, but it was also that we could not get people to really pick up on those things, other than in the old lefty way of saying what they were, but sticking to what they were doing.

JH: I don't understand. Why did you – and, from what you're saying, it's true of a lot of lesbians – why did you want to do lesbian organizing, within the context of a reproductive rights organization rather than a lesbian organization?

MW: I think part of it was because we – those of us that were there, and still to this day, have more progressive politics. We had a worldview, in which lesbians were part of it, but they weren't the only part of it. And, that was a place to do that work, because other groupings were not really incorporating those issues. In fact, you know,

there were a lot of people in the gay community that didn't even know what abortion had to do with them, you know? And, people were, like, having – it's really funny, I saw they had one at the Center, just a few months ago. I went, like, this is like, déjà vu – a panel about why the abortion rights movement and the lesbian and gay movement have something in common. And, also, because we had, like, a set of politics that was very much part of lesbian feminism, which was – and this is what the people in those organizations would not accept – that the bottom line was not abortion, it was the right to control your own body, and that meant the right to control your sexuality. And they just couldn't get it, because of their own homophobia. They could get sterilization abuse, but they couldn't get lesbian sexuality. They couldn't. It's really good question that you ask, because I had a big argument with one woman in R2N2. We were making up a pamphlet about R2N2, and this is an organization in which, at that point, I mean, men weren't mentioned at all. It was a woman's right to make a decision about whether or not she had an abortion. You didn't say, a woman and her husband. You didn't say a woman and her partner. You didn't say anything like that. In fact, there was a big criticism of the whole choice concept, as being like a liberal concept – pro-choice – because it wasn't pro-choice. That was kind of this liberal thing that pretended that you had a choice. You had no choice. So, in order to create choice, you had to be pro-abortion, but nobody wanted to say that, because things were moving to the right and people wanted to sound more central.

And so, we had a critique of it. We were going to be pro-abortion. But, the only place that men appeared was under gay stuff. Then it said, lesbian and gay rights – not lesbian liberation – lesbian and gay rights. And, it was like, people could wrap their

mind around adoption, not even adoption, like, your right to have kids. But, they couldn't wrap their mind around your right to have sex. And so, I remember sitting there, and saying to this woman, why do you have lesbian and gay rights? We have less relationship, technically, to gay men, than you have to straight men, because, in fact, we don't need to have gay men in our lives. If we do that, it's a choice whereas, you're straight, and you want to have a man in your life. But nowhere on anything that's about straight women, do you have men. But then, all of a sudden, you have lesbian and gay rights. Why don't you just say lesbian liberation? And you don't even have a rights philosophy about anything else – it's women's liberation, but it's lesbian and gay rights.

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And she looked at me like I was crazy. And I said to her, we want to be women, you want us to be queer. And she had no answer for that. But that's really what it was. And, to this day, I honestly believe that except – because I'm now working with a group of young women who have experienced the same thing, and they're 17 and they're 25 and they have had the same, exact experience in the third wave feminist movement. Where there is still, so much basic homophobia amongst women, who organize along feminist things that the people who are not like that are unusual. They're unusual, the women who are not like that. It's just true, still, to this day. Just like it's true, that that's true about lefties – you know what I mean? They've learned what to put on their leaflets, but it's not as if they've absorbed it inside, and that they actually think about how would they frame their politics, if it had been absorbed. Because, you would frame your politics differently. I had people in both CARASA and in R2N2 say, that if you gave out a leaflet at offices, you couldn't say lesbian liberation because you would offend people, and I would say, hey, statistically, there have got to be more lesbians working in these offices,

because we've got to support ourselves. You may be offending some people, but you're not going to be offending the lesbians, and they're in these buildings, too, but it would be like that kind of denial. It's got to be from deep down – that you can't even think of a world that has lesbians in it? It's, like, people who write novels and there's never a lesbian in it or a gay man. I mean, how could you place a novel in New York City and not have one character – even a minor character – who will be a person of color, who will gay, lesbian – you can't, not if you're reflecting the world around you.

And, I still think we're in that place. That's the way people were. They were just – you know – so, that's why – we wanted to work in that way, because we have that vision. We had a vision that you could actually think of people who are on welfare who were people of color. You could think that there was a lesbian who was on welfare. You did not have to say people on welfare and lesbians – as if they were two different categories. And, they did not have that vision. They just didn't get it. I don't even think they get it today.

JH: So, you mentioned direct action, in relation to CARASA. Was that the first time you were involved in direct action?

MW: Of the zap kind, yes? I had not done sit ins in people's offices, or anything like that. I had done pickets and things like that, but that kind – the idea that you would do it that way. No. Was it the first time? It might have been, but I sort of remember being CD trained before then, but I don't know what it was for. Maybe it was something at the university or the women's stuff. I can't remember, because I know that I had been CD trained before, but I don't remember what I was doing.

We had done that CRASH illegal demonstration, which was in '79 or '80 – the one that was for the neighborhood – when those people moved into Bleecker Street. That could have been around the early '80's – '80. So, I had done some stuff.

But, I think that what was forming in my mind at that time – and I think that a lot of it came out of the lesbian feminist movement – was, first of all, the whole idea of inter-related politics, which was so much a part of the lesbian, feminist movement – and people don't give anybody credit for it, but it was – including a whole host of things that people do today that hardly anybody gives credit to that movement for – like signing at events. Where did it start? It started at lesbian feminist events.

To this day, lesbians think that they can ask for anything at a lesbian event. It was the first place where people had Braille programs, large sized chairs for big women, chem-free spaces. You name it, we did it. And, it was in this ideology of trying to make a world that we could envision. Sort of a world, where people would want to live, that would really speak to everybody. It had its problems, because I was not, exactly an underground kind of person, because I believe more – not just in creating a separate world like that – I believe in changing this world to be like that. But, a lot of those politics came from there.

So, a lot of politics came from there, as well – that we had as a group, in the Lesbian Action Committee, and eventually in Women for Women. But, it's pretty amazing that the left was not involved in that, given that the whole civil rights movement had taken place. If you think back to what do workers do when they go on strike or did sit-ins at the turn of the century and all that kind of stuff, but, to this day, it's not a thing that lefties think to do – to sit in somebody's office, or take over somebody's office or

whatever, to get what you want. Because part of the difference is that, in a way, they don't want anything that's in the system or, at least, they don't perceive that there's anything in the system worth fighting for. So, they want to tear it down. They don't want to ask somebody for something. It's why so much of left politics in this country, I think, doesn't speak to people, because while they claim they're realists, they're idealists. Nothing that they're doing is asking for any material change for the most part, at the moment, that's considered liberal. It's the revolution or nothing. So, that was the zeitgeist in the lesbian feminist movement.

JH: So, when did AIDS start to come into your purview.

MW: Actually, when we were in CARASA, which was the beginning of the '80s. It was really interesting, because I looked back afterwards – we had an article in one of our newsletters, I guess it was 1981, about AIDS, about the cases that were being found and stuff. And then, I would guess, it was more around – when did GLAAD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] start? Somewhere around 1984 or something like that, when R2N2 had just kind of fallen apart and I was doing work up at the [Lesbian Herstory] Archives. It must have been '84 or '85, and there were those hearings at the City Council and that was right around that time that GLAAD formed, and a whole bunch of us at the Archives showed up at that hearing, when David Summers was not allowed in to speak – to testify about AIDS stuff, and he was a PWA and they tried to arrest him, and we had this whole big to-do there, and whatever.

So, somebody told me about GLAAD. This group had formed called GLAAD, and they were meeting, and they had a meeting in the church that's on the corner near what is now the center. And, I went to that meeting with a whole bunch of friends –

women. And we had been, all of us, looking for something to do. At that point, we had been talking about AIDS, because so much of the stuff that was in the newspaper was totally homophobic, about AIDS. But, interestingly enough, because we were lesbian feminists and because of the tenets of the lesbian feminist movement was that you can't work on something that's not about you or – unless you're working with the people who are doing it. Since none of the gay men that I knew at the time were doing anything about AIDS or were infected, I didn't see a way that I could do anything. How could I make politics about something that was not me?

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But, when GLAAD started – because they were focusing on the aspects of homophobia – that seemed like perfectly reasonable. So a whole bunch of us showed up at the first couple of meetings of GLAAD. And it was horrifying. It was pretty horrifying, because all these people sat up on this dais, and they basically told you what you could do. There was no open mike. Nobody could speak. All of us left, and then, some women wrote a really nasty letter – Joan [Nestle] just came across it the other day – to *Womannews*, which was the newspaper that was happening at the time – saying, why should we do anything about AIDS? Gay men, we have nothing to do with gay men, and who cares what they do, and it's their problem, and whatever. And, why should we waste our energy taking care of men. And, I remember that Joan and I wrote a letter back saying, how many Nicaraguans do you know? Because everybody was doing work on Nicaragua, it didn't seem to matter that they didn't know any Nicaraguans.

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MW: Then they had this big meeting, because they were going to have this demonstration at the *Post*, and I still went back, because they were going to have this meeting. And there were 400 men in this room and hardly any women. And the people

who were running GLAAD were sitting on the dais, including Jewelle Gomez and Vito [Russo] was there and I thought it was really fascinating, because one of the guys who was sitting next to us said, wow, this is amazing this is happening, because nothing has happened in this community for the past 15 years. And I thought to myself, where have you been? And then, Marty Robinson got up, and he started talking about this demonstration and he said, and I thought that they were going to really do stuff like – because, at that time, the Commissioner of Health was threatening to close gay bars and he said – this is really funny, how you hear what you want to hear. He said, they're closing the closet door, and we're not going to let them do it. And I thought, there must be a gay male bar called the Closet Door and they were going to go and stand in front of it – you know, like the way they did in thirties about tenant evictions, and they weren't going to let them close it. And then I realized, no, it was just a metaphor. And they weren't going to do that kind of demonstration at all. They weren't going to do those kinds of things at all.

My idea was, that what we should do was have a phone tree of every gay bar there was in the city, and as soon as they knew that cops were coming, that they would call up a number and a whole bunch of people would show up and block access. I mean, I thought, that's what we should do. No, that's not what they were going to do. So, they were going to do this demonstration at the *New York Post*, and Marty was organizing. They had this committee called the Swift and Terrible Retribution Committee, and he was the head of it. But, he always negotiated with the cops, which was horrifying to me. I had no idea that anybody did that. Actually, that reminds me of the CD that we did. But anyway, so, they had all these people at the *Post*, a big picket. The cops – he was

constantly talking to the cops about where we should be and how we should be and they were, like, organizing and orchestrating the whole thing. It was so frustrating. It was totally frustrating. And they weren't going to do anything that was going to get them into trouble. It was not about civil disobedience. And I have to go back to say, I think it was before – when was the gay intro, the gay rights bill passed? '85?

JH: '86.

MW: So, that may have been after GLAAD. Maybe it was around the same time, because a bunch of us had sat in at the city council hearings. Actually, we sat in the year before it was passed that's right. So, it was before GLAAD. That was one thing that I did do. Actually, that's where I met Amy Bauer. A bunch of us just couldn't believe that they were going to have this discussion yet again, and not pass this thing. And we actually arranged to sit – that was with Women for Women – in that – it must have been '84 – we arranged to sit in that hearing all day. And, actually, there was a video that was made partly about that hearing called *Just Because of Who We Are* that we had at the archives, and it shows us being carried out. Because when the hearing was over, and they didn't vote, a whole bunch of us sat in, and we had this big banner that said, "Lesbian Liberation, We Won't Go Away" and we had to be carried out. That's when we were arrested and stuff.

Tape III
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So, I just thought they were going to do something more along that line. And it wasn't what they were going to do. And I said, I can't be in this. I can't be in an organization that is not – that is, sort of, going to do this kind of stuff. It's not what's called for. So, that was in 1985.

Then, the sodomy thing happened – the sodomy ruling, and everybody I knew was going said, Battery Park – oh, I was at Sheridan Square that night, and actually it was Nancy Langer and Allison Smith, if you remember them, who were two of the women who had actually been in the Committee of Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists. Or, they had come to CRASH – one or the other. They were both in ISO. And, when everybody ended up on Sixth Avenue and Darrell Yates Rist tried to get everybody to go home, because he was in GLAAD, and he was trying to get everybody to go home, and they just sat there. And they went home that night, and they made up a leaflet, and they asked people to come to a church meeting at, I think, Washington Square Methodist Church, organize a demonstration for that next weekend, which was July 4th weekend and it was – was it the centennial of the Statue of Liberty? – where all these people were coming into town? And the people in GLAAD were horrified. You can't do that, you're going to offend people, blada blada. And everybody said, forget it, we're doing it anyway. So, everybody gave out these leaflets and thousands of people showed up at Sheridan Square for that. And they said, nobody's going to come, it's July 4th weekend. Well, I hate to tell you, seven thousand people showed up or something.

And, as I got there, I found out during the week that GLAAD had negotiated on our behalf, without asking us, with the cops. And they had gotten a permit to go down to Federal Plaza, but not to go any further than that. And everybody I knew was, like, totally upset about it. And, as soon as I got to Battery Park, everybody was saying – Sheridan Square – everybody was saying, Battery Park, Battery Park, Battery Park. And so, there were a whole bunch of us who knew that we were going to go to Battery Park, no matter what they had agreed. And they must have known, because they got some

lawyer to stand up at the rally at Sheridan Square to say, you know, this is what you should do, if you're arrested. And this is where Amy Bauer and I have always disagreed on this, because she was, actually, doing the logistics and head marshaling for GLAAD at the time.

And when we got to Battery Park, they had a whole bunch of marshals, blocking the way downtown, and everybody just walked right through them. And that was, like, so exciting. It was so great to see so many thousands of lesbians and gay men who just weren't going to follow the supposed leadership of the community that was so backward and stuff like that. And so we went down, and did that whole demonstration. And then, you know, after that – that was in '86, and I still was looking for something to do. I wasn't a reader of the *Native*. I was not in the grouping of people who even knew who Larry Kramer was. He was irrelevant to my life. I would never have shown up at the community center – you know what I mean? I wouldn't have known that he was going to be there that night, or that it mattered, because he was not the person that I – or, that whole grouping were not the people that I looked to for information about political stuff.

But, meanwhile, I had started a group at CUNY – CUNY Lesbian and Gay People, which was to keep my hand in organizing, when nothing else was happening. And, so, we were marching in the Gay Pride March that year, and my friend, Rachel, had said to me, there's this new group that started and they're meeting at the Center on Monday night, do you want to go?

I had been going to every kind of meeting there was. I went to the Democrats. I went to GLAAD. I went to anybody – just to see what was anybody doing that was worth doing. So, I said, sure. So, we had planned to go the Monday after pride to their

meeting, but it just turned out that at Gay Pride, they were in front of my contingent, and we were on the side, and they were in front of us with that incredible concentration camp float that they had that year.

And I just went up to one of the men and I said, are there women in your group? Because, I saw mostly men. And he said, yeah, sure. I said, oh great. And so, Monday, I showed up and that started ACT UP, and there something like four women in the room. So, I started doing the AIDS stuff, I would say, around the homophobia that was going on with the council hearings and stuff, and the stuff that GLAAD was doing.

JH: So, what was your initial impression of ACT UP – that first meeting?

MW: This is my first impression. As someone who had been so politically active, there was not anybody in that room I knew. Marty Robinson looked familiar to me and Mark Rubin. There wasn't a lefty in the room. There weren't any of the lefty men that I knew – weren't there. None of the lefty lesbians were there. So, that was the first thing that struck me – was that this was not a group of people who were anybody I knew. The other thing that struck me was that it was really great – that people were, like – I didn't talk in those meetings for the first month that I went. I was just listening to what people did, because I had no idea who these people were or how they operated or anything. But, I really liked the way the operated. I liked the idea that people got up and they said what they thought, and that people got up, and they had an idea. And it seemed like if you had an idea, you could do it. I liked that people really – I got the feeling then, which, is a rare feeling, I think that people felt that lives depended on them. That it wasn't like an abstract form of politics. There were people in that room who were infected. There were people in that room who had lovers who had died; people who had

died. It was not an interesting political point. It was real. And that came through in that room. I mean, people were driven to do something.

So, the other thing that was obvious to me, was that there were a lot of people there who had no institutional politics. It wasn't that they had no politics, they had no institutional politics. They didn't come from some formation. They didn't have some previously set up way that you had to think. It was kind of an anarchistic framework of, like, there were no principles of unity that you had to adhere to, other than that you wanted to end the AIDS crisis. I loved it when people brought leaflets to the floor. People didn't go over them, as if they had to be politically correct, and that the language was so understandable and it was nothing like – you didn't have to read Marx to know what the person was saying. It didn't sound rhetorical. People were really interested in putting out the facts and not embellishing them – all the stuff that I thought was – and they were interested in doing actions, wherever it was that they were going to be done. They didn't care, if it was in Queens. They didn't care if it was in the Bronx. They didn't care if it was in somebody's office. They weren't about, like, just doing stuff in Greenwich Village. They weren't just about doing stuff in the gay community.

I liked that people had a vision like that and a feeling that they could really make change. It wasn't, sort of, like – we're going to be the alternative voice. I liked that people were not afraid of the media. On the left, everybody was afraid of the media. If you got covered by the mainstream media, you must be doing something wrong. And here there were people who actually believed that it was good to be covered by the mainstream media. Not to play up to the mainstream media, but to get them there, so that they would get your message across. It wasn't so that you would perform for them.

There were just a whole lot of things like that. I liked that people – I don't know – it felt really easy to fit. I sat there. I didn't know anybody. And, as I said, the reason I didn't talk for awhile, was not because I couldn't, it was because I just didn't know, what would I say there? Where would I fit in? How would I frame myself?

JH: So, when was the first time you spoke?

MW: The first time I spoke was – because, one of the things that used to go on was that people used to be really “bitchy queens.” People would get after one another. They could not just say, I don't agree with you. They would have to do some kind of theatrical number about it. “People are dying! Why are you talking about that?!” And, so, this one meeting that I was at, it really had gotten very acrimonious and also, Michael Nesline was one of the – he was the best at being a bitchy queen. He could really do it and he would just, like, cut people off. If he didn't like them, he would cut them off. He was, actually, a good facilitator, but he was really doing it that way. And, it was a very acrimonious meeting, and the feeling at the end of it was really negative, and it was, almost like this group was not going to stay together. And I was horrified, because there were 400 people in the room – all of them with incredible energy, who were really doing great stuff. It was, like, the stuff that they were proposing to do was just brilliant, I thought. And the idea that it would fall apart because people were fighting with each other, just drove me crazy.

So, Michael had ended the meeting, and I stood up on a chair, because I was so scared, and I said, “people, people, you have to listen for a minute, okay?” And Michael said, the meeting is over, and I said, “I don't care.” And I just said, “I can't believe that people are going to leave feeling this way, because this is so bad. This is so important

that we do this work, and I would just say to people, go home and think about who the real enemy is, because we are not each other's enemies." And then, I got off my chair.

And, somebody told me that Larry had said at that point, to somebody, who is that woman? And, it was, basically, from my point of view, my own self-preservation. I had finally found a place I felt I could work politically, and it was going to fall apart, because people were doing this stuff. And then, at the beginning of the next meeting – and I'll never forget this – Eric Sawyer, then was even straighter than he is now, because he was still working and he would always come to the ACT UP meetings in his suit and stuff like that and his tie. And he came, and he was wearing a hula skirt and a lei and he stood up at the beginning of the meeting and he said – totally, not part of this thing – it was the time of – who was doing it? I guess it was Jane Fonda doing it – he told everybody, everybody had to go m-m-m-m-m, and he made everybody zone out and hum together and sort of, almost do, a yoga om – whatever it was. And, he basically said the same thing – let's just cool out, let's remember what we're here for, and stuff like that. And then, the meeting went forward. That was the first time I spoke.

The first time I said anything politically was not too long after that, was when we were doing the first major action after I joined – I joined in June of '87 – was this 24-hour picket of Sloan Kettering. That's what I mean about people being committed. If you say to people, 24-hour picket today, and they go what? Well, I don't know if I can make it. I say to somebody – well, do you have plans for that day? No. So, why not? Well, I don't know what might come up. Nobody was like that.

JH: I remember it being even longer.

MW: It was 24-hours a day for five days. It was a five-day picket. And, so people – we had been planning to do this thing and I thought it was really well thought out – which was, we were picking Sloan Kettering, not because they were the worst, in terms of their AIDS services, but because they were one of the groups that was supposed to be doing research, and all this money had been allotted to research, and they had enrolled practically nobody in these trials and by that time, there were supposed to be 10,000 people in trials and there were, like, 800 across the country. So, the idea was to say, what's going on? And, they were still just testing AZT, which had been released that March, and nothing else, and we had all these other drugs that people knew about and whatever. So, that was the point of it, and the point was not to focus so much on Sloan Kettering, as to focus on why is this system not working? Why is the research not being done, etc.?

So, one meeting – we had been planning this – a guy came, and he said – he stood up and he said that he worked for some AIDS service organization and he said, I just want to say that I really think this is the wrong thing to do. Sloan Kettering is the best place in New York City, and we're going to get them really angry with us, and they're going to close down their clinic, and it's the only place to go. And he brought with him a guy who became pretty well known in AIDS medicine after that, Bruce Lee, who was a doctor at the clinic then, who basically stood up like the savior and said, I'm not going to close my clinic, but, blah, blah, blah, I don't think it's the right thing to do. And so, then people started talking about – well, maybe the way to do it was that we should carry these signs that say, Sloan Kettering is a great place, that's not what this is about. This is about the whole system. And that really blew me away, because I knew that Sloan Kettering

gave women hysterectomies they didn't need and mastectomies they didn't need. And the idea of saying that that some mainstream medical place was great, was not my thing.

So, I stood up and I said that. I basically said – and I was very careful the way I said it – I didn't do it in a rhetorical way. I stood up and I said, you know, that I would have a hard time carrying a sign like that and here was my reason. And I said, because of mastectomies and hysterectomies and I said, instead of doing that, if people are concerned, why don't we write a leaflet that we give out to the workers who go into the building, saying that this is not – oh, because the other thing that he had said was, you know, the workers were going to start treating the AIDS patients badly and stuff like that. So, I said, why don't we just make up a leaflet and hand it out, so people going to work in the building to say, you know, this is not about you, this is about the institution, it's about this and blah, blah, blah. And so, people thought, that was a good idea, and so it was passed. And then, afterwards, a lot of people came up to me and said, they were really glad that I said that because one guy said, in fact, his doctor had told him that Sloan Kettering wasn't such a great place and blah, blah, blah. So, that was the first time I said anything political, and then it just took off from there. Then, I just felt like I could speak.

But, you know, I was somebody that nobody knew. But, I think the thing about ACT UP was, it was a mass movement. Nobody knew anybody else. There were small groups of people who did. The Silence = Death Project came in together – so, they knew each other. And, the people from the Lavender Hill Mob came in together, and they knew each other. But, I would say, other than them, nobody else who was in that room – there were some people from GMHC, some people from the PWA coalition, but it wasn't as if everybody knew everybody else. Everybody was getting to know everybody else.

So, you could stand up – it was one of the reasons why, at the beginning, every lefty group tried to infiltrate ACT UP, because you could just come in and be. You were a member automatically. There was no membership, there was no test for it. So, if you had a good idea, you stood up and you said it. Nobody thought, gee, that person's an agent for the FBI, we shouldn't listen to them. If you said – gave a good idea for something to do, people would do it, because it wasn't like people had a sophisticated leftist ideology or the experience with that kin of stuff. And they just assumed that anybody who was there and cared, was somebody who wanted to do stuff about AIDS.

JH: Did that infiltration get ACT UP in trouble at any point?

MW: No, the first way they tried to do it – I wasn't there when that happened, but I was told about it, which was that, the New Alliance Party came and they wanted ACT UP to sign up on this AIDS bill of rights that they were pushing. They did what would work in that room. They sent a black lesbian. Here's a group of white men, and they sent a black lesbian to present their thing, on a group of white men who were trying to be politically correct. So, for weeks, they kept the proposal off the agenda, apparently because they had this thing that AIDS actions went first, and then, if you never got to the other stuff, you didn't get to the other stuff. And then, finally, she stood up and said, basically, that people were being against her and all this kind of stuff. So, it came up, and you know, it sounded fine, unless you understood that you already have those rights, and that if you put this up for a vote, and people vote it down, you're giving up your rights.

So, after people voted for it, somebody, apparently, went and spoke to Mitchell Karp, who was then working with Black and White Men Together, which he had been involved with for a long time, was a lawyer, and asked him what he thought of it, and he

came and he did some presentation. So, people un-voted, which was always a good thing in ACT UP.

The New Alliance Party went around the country and tried to get people to sign on. And, the other one was when the ISO came, and they tried to form a union committee. They were going, supposedly, to form a union committee. But, they tried to get everybody. Their proposal was, that on every leaflet, it had to say the same thing at the bottom, and it was what they wanted it to say. And, it was all about health care workers. It was not about anybody with AIDS. It was sort of a set of general principals. And, they would come to the room. They would be in the room, the meetings, and in the discussions, invariably, they would stand up when they would discuss. And, they would stand up and they would say, hi, my name is so and so. I'm in the ISO. They wouldn't say they were in ACT UP. They would say, hi, my name is so and so, I'm from the ISO. So, then they tried to get this proposal and, again, my people kept trying to keep it off the agenda, and they were getting angrier and angrier and whatever and it was going to come up. And, more than that, what was happening in the room was a lot of red baiting stuff, because everybody knew who they were, and there was a lot of tension. And people started talking about, oh, those lefties, look what they're doing, blah, blah, blah. And so – actually that was one of the – if I must say so, myself – one of the better things I did in ACT UP that my previous experience helped me, and the fact that I knew people who were running the meetings.

I went up to whoever was facilitating and I said that I wanted 15 minutes on the agenda, for us to discuss, why does everybody get tense, when people from ISO stand up? And that we didn't have to vote. There was no proposal or anything, but that I just

felt that it would be really good to dissipate stuff, if we could have that discussion, and then we could have a vote on their proposal.

And so, I got it. I got it because people knew who I was at that time. And I said, I would facilitate the discussion. So, I started the discussion, and so, people stood up and it was really great, because people stood up and they said things like, you know, my whole family were people who were in unions, and I totally support unions – but these people – who are they? They get up – they're not in ACT UP. They stand up and they say their name and then they say, ISO. Well, if you're in ACT UP, you're in ACT UP, you're not in ISO, you're a member of ACT UP. Then, somebody else would get up and say, why don't they start a union committee? They could start a union committee, and we can do work about unions and outreach into unions, but instead, they want to push their own agenda and blah, blah, blah. And then, actually, that was when John Nalley was in the room, and he stood up and he said, you know, I consider myself a person on the left, and I'm sure that I agree with a lot of their politics, but it's not their politics, it's the process, it's the way they go about doing this stuff. We just had that discussion for 15 minutes.

And then I said, okay, now that we've gotten this out, I hope that things will – and then, they brought up their proposal. It was voted down in a minute. And then, when I walked outside the room, the woman who had been – who I knew from ISO – said to me, you know that you cannot separate politics from process. I said, that's right, I do. And they never came back again. So, that was the way we got rid of ISO.

And we had one other thing that the Refuse and Resist people – you know, at that time, they were that group that has all the anti-gay politics – the RCP – the Revolutionary

Communist Party. Refuse and Resist was a front group for them, and they came and they wanted us to accept their activist of the year award at their fundraiser at the Beacon Theater. And, this guy did a presentation, so I stood up and I said, you know, I don't think we should do this, because Refuse and Resist is a front group for the Revolutionary Communist Party, and they have a specific set of politics about gay people. And, I didn't want people to vote on it then, but I would bring some stuff to put on the back table, where people could read about the group, and then, we could have the discussion.

So, I went to their bookstore – Revolution Books – to see, had anything changed since 1984, when they had put out their – the first time was 1974 – when they had put out their whole manifesto about how they would put us in retraining camps. And there was their 1984 version of this, which they had finally incorporated a bit of feminism, so the whole thing was about how they understood why lesbians would – why women would be lesbians, because men were so bad. But, gay men – they were narcissistic, blah, blah. They went through the whole list of things, and while they were not going to put people in retraining camps, it wouldn't matter because comes the revolution, there wouldn't be any gay people, anyway, because gender roles would be gotten rid of and therefore, we wouldn't have to. So, I put both of them on the back table, and I said to people, read them, and then we can have this discussion. And then, I remember, Robert Garcia said something like – he told them, if he could speak when he got the award, he would go, because then he could tell everybody in the room what the politics of the organization was. Of course, they left. So, all those groups tried, but eventually, they just gave up.

The one group that had a representation in ACT UP was the Prairie Fire people, because a lot of their people were in jail. Bob Lederer, Mike Spiegel, who had been a

lawyer for a lot of the people from that organization. In Chicago, Ferd Egan was from that grouping, and Marion Banzhaf and Risa Denenberg and there are a whole bunch of people. But, because they were Maoists and not Trotskyists, they actually believed in community organizing. Maoists were community organizers. But, also, they had people who were in the black leadership, who had AIDS, and that pushed a lot of them to come and do work in the community. And, Mike was one of the few straight people in ACT UP, when he came.

JH: Okay, so when you first came into ACT UP, you said that there were only a handful of women, and yet, women became really important in ACT UP. So, I wonder if you could take us through the trajectory of the formation of the women's caucus.

MW: Well, actually, even when I came in, women were very prominent, although it appeared they were straight women, which is very classic in the gay male community, is for straight women to be working with gay men or having a connection to gay men. Rebecca Cole, at that time, was active. She was not out. Maria was there, and she was, but whatever – Maria Maggenti. So, Amy Bauer was there, but she wasn't that visible. Jean Elizabeth [Glass] was there, and two other women that I can remember were Suzanne Phillips, who was one of the few straight women who actually worked with lesbians and Emily Gordon was there at the time, who did a lot of work eventually, on pediatric AIDS and never worked with the women's caucus – neither did Suzanne – didn't work with the women's caucus, either. But, visibly, there were hardly any lesbians. They spoke a lot, but they weren't leading committees or anything like that. And I always felt, I couldn't work in an organization where I didn't know people or feel

connected to people. And, especially, in large, male organization to get to know the women.

So, I started having these dyke dinners. I invited people to do a dyke dinner. And the first dyke dinner – Jean [Carlomusto] was there, then – the first dyke dinner was me, Maria, Jean Carlomusto, Gerri Wells, Ann McGuire, Marie Honan and Illith Rosenblum. And, I knew Ann and Marie and Elite, from other places. And the other women were women who were in ACT UP. And, at that first dinner, sitting right at this table, we talked about – what were we doing in this group? Why were we here? And, what was it – how were we going to be in this group, as all of us considering ourselves feminists? And, we had different histories of doing political work. How are we going to do it? Jean, at that time, had been working at GMHC. She was doing the *Living With AIDS* show. Gerri – her brother had AIDS. He was alive at that time, he had not died yet.

JH: So you knew her brother?

MW: No, but I knew she had a brother. And, basically, that's what we talked about. I don't even know if Gerri was here at that first meeting. She might have been. But, basically, that's what we talked about, and we all basically agreed that we were not in ACT UP, either – which is interesting. We were not there necessarily to work on women's issues. That was not something that we said specifically. And we were not there to scream sexism. That we all came there, because we wanted to do work on AIDS and homophobia and stuff that was happening in the community. It was about doing direct action, around those issues. And that was a really good discussion to have, because when you sit in a group where there's all those men, and it's not you that it's happening

to, and you are trying to figure out what it is that you're doing there, it's good to verbalize that to people.

So, we formed the Women's Committee, which really didn't do very much for awhile. You know, ACT UP sped along, because we must have had our first meeting in the fall of '87, and it was in January of '88 that we did the *Cosmo* demo. It was in the fall that we met here. And, basically, we were in whatever demonstrations people were doing – we were just part of it. And then, in October of '87, was the march in Washington, and ACT UP went and there was this ACT NOW meeting. All of these lefties, who suddenly discovered ACT UP called the meeting that was for two days after the march to discuss the AIDS movement. And I went with eight of my gay male friends from ACT UP. And Maria had been on the phone with people, sort of organizing the way this thing would run. But, it was, like, Mark Kostopoulos – what was he from?

JH: LA.

MW: Besides L.A. – he was from the Revolutionary Socialists – whatever it was – his organization. I'll remember in a minute. But, I knew him from there.

JH: He was a Spartacist, wasn't he?

MW: What was that group? I'll remember. It was a socialist group, and he had another name when he was in that group. It was a whole big thing.

So, he was out in California at the time, in LA, and he was masterminding this. And Maria really didn't know about that set of politics at all. I mean, she knew about feminist politics from college. She didn't know about lefty politics. So, she was trying to work with him. Everybody in ACT UP would always try to work with people. Then, all these other lefties came, because once he called the thing – the left came out of the

woodwork, and showed up at this church. And I remember sitting there with Avram [Finkelstein] and Charlie Barber and a whole bunch of people, and everybody was really excited. You have to understand that in ACT UP at that time, people really wanted there to be a national AIDS movement. It wasn't about ACT UP in New York controlling everything. People wanted this to grow. They wanted this to be the biggest thing you could possibly imagine. So, everybody was very excited that they were going to meet people from around the country that wanted to do AIDS activism. Nobody thought they had to have the ACT UP name. Nothing. But, they had no clue what the politics of those people would be.

David Robinson was there. So, we're sitting there, and they have a whole agenda worked out already that they have gotten nobody to work on, except themselves. And, basically, the morning is to talk about their proposal, which is this nine days of action for the spring. And then, in the afternoon, people were supposed to break down into groups, to talk about how to do that. So, they put out this thing of nine days of action. And this is what it reads like – AIDS in the ghetto, AIDS in the barrio. This was in 1987, and that's the language people had? Okay, AIDS in the ghetto, AIDS in the barrio. One of them was AIDS and children. There wasn't one that was on AIDS and gay men. There was nothing on AIDS and homophobia – nothing – oh, AIDS and racism – nothing on homophobia. I'm sitting in a room – I'm sitting at a time when 20,000 people have died, the majority of them are gay men. And, here's a whole formation of leftists, who want to organize a national demonstration and not one of them is going to have anything to do with gay people.

JH: But they were all gay?

Tape III
00:40:00

MW: Yeah, they were all gay. Absolutely. And, I'll never forget – sitting in front of us, of the eight of us, were these two men from Texas, who also just came there, because they had seen the leaflets. They didn't even know what was going on. I was translating for the people from ACT UP, but they were shocked. You had to be able to speak, so they had this mike, and you could line up to speak. And I was fit to be tied. I mean, I couldn't even believe AIDS in the ghetto and the barrio. Where that came from, I just didn't even get. But, nothing on gay people was really the topper. So, I got up to the microphone, and when it was my turn, I just said, I cannot believe that 20,000 gay men have died and there's not a day here on AIDS and homophobia. There was a day for organizing college campuses, but not on AIDS and homophobia. And Mark couldn't even answer me. And I just said, you know, I think this thing is crazy. I don't know why anybody would support it. It's so homophobic. It's beyond comprehension. We didn't come here to do that kind of stuff. I'm not going to get involved in doing this kind of stuff. This is backwards. It's regressive, for people to be doing this.

And I sat down. And he came running up to me and he said to me, do you know that if we do something about gay men, that that's the only thing that gay men are going to come out for, and I said to him, and? And so, then you have people on the street, and you can give them your leaflet. I said, are you going to deny people the right to fight for their own lives? Do you think that that's selfish? What is your problem? That is crazy. So, meanwhile, other people in the room had also been having a lot of trouble, because a whole independent group of activists had come from Boston. They were independent lefties. They were people who put out a radical journal – I forget what it was – *Radical History*. Basically, at lunchtime, all the independents kind of got together and had lunch,

and when we came back in the afternoon, we basically read them the riot act and said, that if they didn't change this, and actually create workshops in the afternoon, where people across the country could come together and find out what everybody else was doing, that we would all leave, because it wasn't worth our time to do this.

Tape IV
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MW: Anyway, people basically said that, if in the afternoon, there weren't just workshops. And the workshops – it was really funny, because I was in one with Charlie Barber, who was a really good friend of mine, who's dead now. It was some – I don't even know which of the left groupings that was there, and they started talking about healthcare workers. And, it was sort of this idealized version of healthcare workers. And, he just stood up – he was such a straightforward and honest guy – and he just stood up and he said, look, you know what, I don't want people to work under bad conditions or anything like this, but you can't glorify healthcare workers. They wouldn't – my lover was in the hospital, they wouldn't serve him his food. Hello. Get a grip. They're not all wonderful people, okay? Nobody's all wonderful people. It was that kind of thing. So, it was really good that people did that. They tried once more to do that. So, they tried to form this network. That's what led to the women's stuff, but I just wanted to say that they actually tried to form a network that was based on everybody accepting a set of principles of unity, and it was all these lefty groups. And they tried once more, the next year, when we did the FDA action, by having sort of a conference – which is a lefty thing to do – you have conferences – before the action, and trying to do that. And people just got up and left. And, basically, in ACT UP, we voted that we would be happy to be participant observers of any formation like that, but that we could not do that, because we were a democratic organization, and nobody could vote for the floor. So, there was no

way that anybody could to any meeting and, basically, vote for ACT UP, unless ACT UP discussed all those issues before the person went – which was something that none of those people understood.

And so, eventually, they gave it up and, actually, the ACT UP Network was formed, which functioned the way we wanted it to function, which was as a network, and not as, kind of a top-down, national organization that told people what to do. But, going back to that meeting in Washington, what people did eventually decide to do collectively was this nine days of action, which we, in ACT UP, called Nine Days of Rain – because it rained every day, except for two days. It rained on the day we did the women's action, and it rained on the day we did the pediatric AIDS action in Harlem, so we decided that God was a black lesbian.

JH It didn't rain.

MW: It didn't rain on those days. So, anyway, just the idea that there was going to be a Woman and AIDS day made us – who had started having these dyke dinners – start thinking about what kind of stuff could we do about women. And, one of the things that we were going to work on, actually, was women in clinical trials, which is what we worked on later. And, we had actually met on a Sunday at Maria's house, to talk about the Ampligen trials that were being done, and that women were not in those trials. And, when Rebecca showed up that afternoon to talk about that – because it wasn't just going to be a dyke action, it was going to be a women's action – when Rebecca showed up, she brought with her the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, that she happened to see in a store, and picked it up, because it had this huge thing on the cover about why heterosexual women don't have to worry about AIDS.

And, as soon as she showed it to us, everybody said, oh, we've got to do something about that. So, we basically, organized our first action as the Women's Committee in ACT UP, and that was the *Cosmo* action. And, that sort of set certain standards for ACT UP which, again, I don't think that people really understand, which was, that, up until that point, Marty had been organizing the actions, and every single action had been negotiated with the police, the arrests had been negotiated with the police. We were not going to ever negotiate with the police. That was not an option. And, we did this action. The other thing that people should know is that, the thing about ACT UP, also – the sense of urgency – was that we organized this in five days. People think that you need seven months to do this kind of stuff, but in ACT UP, things happened in three days. You just did it. And, we were all working. It wasn't as if we didn't have jobs and weren't doing stuff. We just stayed up all night.

Tape IV
00:05:00

So, the first thing that we did was get in touch with Helen Gurley Brown, who was the editor of *Cosmo*, and asked to meet with her, and she refused to meet with us. And, we told her what the problem was and she refused to meet with us. She stood by this guy who had written this article, who, it turned out, was the psychiatrist who was a friend of hers, and who had been seeing some very rich women in his practice, who were afraid to have sex, because of HIV. Then, they called it AIDS. So, as soon as she said she wasn't going to meet with us, we decided we would go through with this action. But, meanwhile, we called him and he was willing to meet with us. So, we got together, like Denise Ribble – not just women from the ACT UP group – but we knew that Denise had been running a lot of groups with women for years and so, we had her come with us. And, we went to meet him, and Jean Carlomusto filmed all of this, and meanwhile, I had

tried – when we first did it, I had immediately called up *Cosmo*, and I said that I was an environmental psychologist – I wanted to bring students with me, to look at their offices, because I was teaching this course about business environments. And, I was going to go up – I was going to bring all the women up that day. But, somehow, wind of this got to somebody in the news – on Page Six of the *Post* – they actually printed a little thing that said, watch out, Helen Gurley Brown, ACT UP is coming to your offices. So, I got a phone call telling me they had to cancel it.

So, we decided we would do this huge picket, in front of the *Cosmo* offices, and we would try to get into the building. We would try to slip in. And, that we would also go from that building – after we had done some stuff there – we would march up to the Hearst Building, their parent company, which was on Seventh Avenue and 50-something street. They were between Fifth and Sixth, I think, on 57th – wherever they were – they were between Seventh and Eighth, and the parent company was on Eighth, I can't remember where.

So, we go and we interview this guy. He was terrible. We did this whole filming of it. And then we show up for this demonstration, and they've got these goons who are protecting the door. And I knew that there was a door to go into the building from the pharmacy on the corner, because a lot of the workers would come out that way. Well, they had that one locked, too. We couldn't even go through there. We kept waiting for our opening. And what really helped – well, first of all, we had several hundred people show up. It wasn't just a few of us – because we had gotten all the publicity in the *Daily News*. And, there was an overhang, because they were doing construction by the building, so the sounds of banging on things really reverberated, because it was this

sound like place. So, Amy Bauer and I kept trying to get in the building. First we tried to get in the building, and then, I would say thing harassing the cops, because they were harassing us. So, I would go up to a cop, who would do anything and I would say, excuse me, I need your badge number. And, I just kept writing down badge numbers. And the one thing that we had decided was that the only person who couldn't get arrested was Gerri Wells, because her brother was in the hospital. He needed a blood transfusion that day, and she needed to go there in the afternoon. So, she was going to be marshaling and taking photos and she wasn't going to be anywhere near to get arrested. Meanwhile, Marty Robinson kept coming over and telling me, the cops want to talk to you, the cops want to talk to you. And I kept saying to Marty, we're not talking to the cops. So, he was, like, getting really crazy about it.

So, I went up to this cop, finally, and I asked him, again, for his number, and Gerri saw that he was going for a nightstick that was in his boot. And, so, she put her arm around me, to get me away from him. They were very nervous, because we had all these people. They had a police wagon there. Basically, they wanted to control the crowds, and they wanted to arrest someone. So, she saw that he was going to go and hit me – get his stick out, to hit me – and so, she put her arm around me and she said, you don't want to stand here, Max, you want to come with me, and she started walking me down the street. Well, they grabbed her, and they put her into the police van. And when they put her into the police van, it was like all the women knew this was it.

Tape IV
00:10:00

Maria climbed up on the hood of that police van. The rest of us surrounded the police van. We got everybody in the thing to surround the police van. Maria is banging

on the window going, let that woman go! Let that woman go! They were crazed. That was, actually, the second half. We did it around the *Cosmo*.

I should go back now. When we got to the *Cosmo* building, they had no barricades up there, because they thought we were going to the Hearst Building. So, we did our thing there. Then we went and we walked to the Hearst Building, and we stopped traffic by crossing at the green, but walking slowly. And I remember Marty Robinson kept saying, hurry up, hurry up, and we kept saying, Marty, you have to be very careful when you cross the street, because we knew we had several hundred people. So, then we got to the Hearst Building. So then, they put these barricades around the Hearst Building. They barricaded us in, because that's where they had the barricades. And then, everybody wanted to walk back to the *Cosmo* building. We didn't want to – it was freezing. Jean Carlomusto – I'll never forget – she was wearing the thinnest little shoes, her feet were frost-bitten, practically. It so cold. It was January. It was five degrees.

But everybody wanted to keep it going, but we were in this pen. So, Rebecca and I walk up – and you know, it's always good to be a femme and to be older – the blonde and the older woman, and we go and we start pushing the barricade away, and the cop says, you can't leave. And I said, no, no, the demonstration is over. And he said, oh, and he opens up the barricade and we have the banner, and we start marching and chanting again. So, that's when we got back to the *Cosmo* building, and by that time, they were crazed and that's when they tried to hit me, and Gerri grabbed me and they put her into the truck and then we were all off the wall and we were just shouting and banging and screaming – let that woman go. And we were shaking the wagon. And Gerri was inside. So, she said, what one of the white shirts in there said was, we better give these people a

DAT [Desk Appearance Ticket], get them out of here, because otherwise all hell is going to break loose. And so, then they let her go. And she came out, it was like a wonderful end to a demonstration. You know how you always wonder how you're going to end a demonstration? It was totally the best – everybody just shouted and screamed.

So, that was the first demonstration that ACT UP ever did that nobody negotiated with the cops, and we never negotiated with the cops again. And that was one of the things that the women brought, because we had all done that kind of thing. We just didn't ever believe in capitulating with the system. And it also put the Women's Committee on the map and made people in ACT UP aware that we were doing that. So, then, when we were organizing the Shea Stadium thing for the nine days of action, we were already a committee of ACT UP – we were the Women's Committee.

JH: Before we get to Shea Stadium – do you think the epidemic has developed the way that people thought it was going to develop back then, specifically talking about women and heterosexual transmission?

MW: You know what – people's understanding of this epidemic is 10 years behind ACT UP – on every level. When we carried our first signs about women, we were told by everybody that it was never going to be women. That's what we were told. Everybody thought it was always going to be a really small number. There was no heterosexual transmission. All right – this guy who wrote the article, he was crazy, but nobody else really believed it. Everybody believed that it was a small number of perverse women. The first AIDS conference in Montreal, it was about prostitution. In fact, we organized a demonstration about lesbians and prostitutes because nobody would ever act as if – people would not cop to anything that had to do with the fact that this

might be heterosexually transmitted. They still don't, today. Today, it's about babies. It's not about women. It's never about women. Women can die, if their kids live. I can remember even Helen Rodriguez-Trias, who was considered a radical women's physician who did a lot of stuff on sterilization abuse, getting up at one of the first discussions at the UN about women and AIDS and talking about the 10 thousand orphans in Africa – not about 10,000 dead mothers, but about 10,000 orphans. And that still is today.

We knew where it was going, just like gay men knew where it was going, because we were talking to the women. That's why we knew that there were more women infected, because we knew that the CDC definition of AIDS was incorrect – because we were talking to women who had HIV, and we knew the symptoms they had. And everybody was in a total, and I think, complicit state of denial. I don't think it was done out of ignorance. I think it was totally, politically motivated, and it still is.

Tape IV
00:15:00

JH: So, you think the same thing is going on now – that women are not being diagnosed?

MW: Absolutely. Are you kidding? Two weeks ago in the paper, there was an article about how they just discovered – here, you had asked me about 076, and I said I wouldn't talk about it. I actually made two phone calls that day, because there was an article in the paper about Nevirapine, and Nevirapine was substituted for AZT in the prevention of transmission from the mother to the child of HIV. It's a one-dose thing that you take during labor and delivery. And the kid doesn't take it, and you don't have to take it. They are now admitting that any woman who takes that one dose becomes drug resistant to Nevirapine, which is a first line of treatment in HIV, for the woman – which is exactly what we said 10 years ago. Ten years ago – more than 10 years ago, when we

first did stuff on women and HIV, and the first trials to supposedly prevent transmission, we said, you're going to give women AZT throughout their pregnancy, throughout delivery, and AZT is the only drug that's around that people claim will do anything for HIV and you are going to make women drug resistant, and they're going to die, and their kids are going to live, and everybody said no, not true. And, I actually had a guy at the NIH say to us, you are 10 years ahead of your time. And I said to him, so what you're telling me is, you know that the way things are being done are going to mean that people are going to die. And we're going to have to wait 10 years, for that to not be true, even though you know that that's the case? And he said, yeah.

JH: Except it's 17 years later.

MW: Right, and it's still happening. It's pretty amazing.

JH: So, was Shea Stadium the next –

MW: Yeah, so then the next big thing we did was Shea Stadium, which was, I would say, one of my favorite actions from ACT UP – although I have many favorite actions, but that was one of my favorite actions. The republican women's thing was another one of my favorite actions, but that was one of my favorite actions because we wanted to something for women and AIDS day. And we all got together and we were talking about what could we do? And we were throwing out, like, funny things, like we should do a wedding thing, where we show up at the Plaza in some horse-drawn carriage. We were just making up things. And Rebecca Cole and this woman, Kathy – and I can't remember Kathy's last name – I just met her at concert where I was giving out leaflets. We actually verbalized it this way – what is a place that is considered quintessentially heterosexual male – because we decided what the focus would be. We had seen, at that

time, all of the stuff that – there were these ads in the subways and everywhere else that showed a purse, and the purse had condoms in it. And it said, before you go out, make sure you take some of these with you. This was the women and AIDS thing. And I thought to myself, I'm living back in the fifties, where people told you to take a condom with you, if you were going out with a man, because you couldn't trust him to have one. And that, here we are, again, with women taking responsibility – straight women taking responsibility.

So, we all decided that we wanted it to focus on the only group of people who had not been told that they should do anything – straight men. Everybody else was supposed to protect them – gay men, straight women – everybody was supposed to accept that. Then we sat down and we said, what is a quintessential, straight-male place in people's minds, where we could do this kind of an action? That's why we thought about a wedding ceremony or something like that. And then, Kathy and Rebecca – both big baseball fans – and Kathy said, a baseball game! And everybody, like, got electrified. Of course, a baseball game. We had some funny things. We would make a hot with frankfurters for ears and stuff like that.

Tape IV
00:20:00

Maria nearly had a fit, because she was, like, what? A baseball game? She didn't know from anything about baseball games. And everybody else is going, yeah, a baseball game, a baseball game. So, immediately, we called up and found out, believe it or not, that there was going to be a home game at Shea Stadium. We would have done any of the stadiums. We would have gone to the Yankees or the Mets, but there was going to be a home game at Shea Stadium, on the day that was Women and AIDS day – what luck. So, we immediately started planning it and we figured it out what we were

going to do and we got up on the floor of ACT UP, and I was the person who presented it, because you have to present your actions.

So, I get up there and I say, what we want to propose – we have an action for women and AIDS day, and we want to go to Shea Stadium. Dead silence in the room – absolutely dead silence – tense dead silence. And then, somebody stands and goes, you're crazy! We go to Shea Stadium, they're going kill us there! Those homophobes! And then, other people start standing up and saying the same thing and, it's like – and then, in the midst of all these people – and they're saying, those people are going to kill us, and I'm saying things like, it's the men in suits who are killing us. And they're going on and on. And then, Ron Goldberg stands up. He raises his hand and I call on him, and he stands up – bless Ron Goldberg – and he stands up and goes, okay, folks, let me just tell you that a lot of gay men go to baseball games, and I am one of them. And it was, like, he came out of the closet as a baseball nut, and as soon as he did that, another man said, I do, too. But, still, people were really scared. So, every time that we would have to come to the meeting, we would have to bring really detailed descriptions like what to wear to a baseball game; how a baseball game is played; when, exactly, you're going to do something. It was a riot.

But, meanwhile – everybody really contributed great stuff to this, because the idea first was to have banners – have cards, like you do at football games – and they would have slogans on them. And, we would get some seats in the stadium, and people would flash the slogans. And then, Chris Leone said, you know what, you're much better off with banners, because with cards, you have to have a certain number of people. With banners, you don't. You can buy up 20 seats, but only sit in two, and still have a banner.

So, we decided to make banners. And then we came up with all these great slogans, like, AIDS is Not a Ball Game; Don't Balk At Safer Sex; Strike Out AIDS. We had a whole slew of them that we put on these banners, and there would be, like, three banners in each section, that would unfold, and they would have one of these slogans, and we had two sets of them.

And so, our idea was, to buy seats in three parts of the stadium – right field, left field and center field – behind home plate, and on the two fields. And it would be like call and response. One group would open it, and then the next and the next. So, we had to buy tickets, but we didn't have a lot of money in ACT UP. So, what we decided we would do, is that we would start by buying one bunch of tickets – like 60 – three rows of 20. And then, we'd sell those, and with the money, we'd get – so, we started doing that, and we actually sold a lot. We had no idea that this was going to get to be a huge thing. And then we decided that actually what it was going to be, was that it was going to be an educational action – that we weren't going to rush the field, or anything, but that because it was going to be televised on ESPN, that we could reach hundreds of thousands of people, seeing these messages, and we would give out stuff at the gate.

So, we would directly reach the twenty thousand people who came to the game, and then we would also reach all of these other people – vis-à-vis the television. So, we weren't going to get in touch with the police at all. But, Debbie Levine, who was on the committee – she was working for Creative Time, at that time, which did all kinds of performance art stuff. And they were, actually, meeting with the security at Shea Stadium, to do something in their parking lot. And, we had been trying to get in touch with the Mets, because we wanted them to proclaim it Women and AIDS Day. And we

kept calling, and they were not calling us back. We kept calling and saying, this is ACT UP. So, she was at a meeting with the community police about how they were going to handle her event. They didn't know she was in ACT UP. And she heard one guy say to the other – do you hear? ACT UP is going to storm the stadium. And that was after the article that was in the *Village Voice*, which David France wrote – the first big article about ACT UP – and he described we were going to do this action at Shea Stadium, and I guess some cop read it.

So, they were talking about how they had to get riot cops out there and whatever, and we just didn't want this thing to escalate into that. We had been trying to reach the Mets. So, Gerri Wells called up the local precinct and said that she was from ACT UP, and that she just wanted people to know that we were coming down to the stadium, and that we were going to do an educational action. We weren't going to rush the field, in case they were concerned or whatever. And then, we got a call – and we had also been trying to find out who owned the walkway around the stadium? Was it public space, or was it the Mets space, because the parking lot was owned by Kinney, because they rented it. And the city owned the stadium. But, it was that no man's land between the two – where we wanted to hand out our leaflets, that we didn't know whether we would be risking arrest or not – nobody seemed to know.

Anyway, by the time that night came, the head of the Mets met us, took our press packets and our leaflets and gave it to everyone in the press box. They let us be at every single entry. We gave out twenty thousand leaflets. It was a great leaflet. It said, AIDS is not a ball game. It had a score card and it said Single – there hasn't been one single drug trial about women; Double – double the number of women who have AIDS than last

year. And, I forget what triple was – and then, it said, home run – most men don't use condoms. And then it said, No Glove, No Love. It was in Spanish and English.

And we gave out twenty thousand of those. It was an incredible evening, because when we started doing it – how did we get the seats? So, we got the seats, and then, after we had gotten two sections filled, I started getting phone calls. I started getting phone calls from all these old lefties that I knew, who had seen this article, in the *Village Voice* and they acted like this was a Broadway show, to which I had tickets. Can you get me tickets to the action at Shea Stadium? And I was, like – you want to buy tickets, that's fine. It's no big whoop. A lot of the people in the third section were not ACT UP people, they were from other places. But, we actually sold three sections worth of 60 seats each, which is, like, 180. And, we had these banners, and it worked out great.

So, we needed to know, how long the banners had to be and what colors would show up at night? So, for how long they would be, Debbie Levine and I went to Shea Stadium one afternoon, to get the first 60 tickets. And, when you get 60 tickets, you're allowed to put something on the lead board, so we put up something like, Welcome, National Women and AIDS Day committee.

But then, we said to this woman, that we wanted to see the seats that we were getting in the stadium. And, she said, oh, I'm sorry, you can't go in, because they're doing construction in the stadium, and they're not allowing anybody to go in. And, we pleaded with her – we're getting these for our friends, blah, blah, blah. No, no, no, you can't go in.

So, we started walking out of Shea Stadium, and I saw – there was, like, a curtain, and there was an entryway into the stadium. So, I said, Deb, let's go in there. So, we

start going in, and there's a guard who's seeing us, and he goes, girls! Girls! And then, we put on our best girls thing. He goes, girls, girls, where are you going? And we said, we're picking up these tickets, and they're for our friends, and we've never been to Shea Stadium. We've never even been to a baseball game. And they told us to get good seats, and we have no idea if these seats – and the woman told us that we couldn't go in, and we don't want to do anything – we just want to see where these seats are. We'll be really, really careful. And he goes, what I don't see, I don't know. So, we just went in. And we took our tape measure and we measured the rows. So, we had exactly the right length of banner for the seats. And then we made up these elaborate instructions for everybody about how you didn't do this, just anytime in the game – you had to do it during the seventh inning stretch. You didn't want people to think that you were against the Mets, and all this kind of stuff.

Tape IV
00:30:00

People had a blast. We started opening up the banners, and everybody – we didn't tell people to do this in our group – but, everybody started swaying with the banners, and then the people across the way opened up their banners, and then their banners started swaying. And then, the third group opened up their banners, and the banners started swaying. You could see them from anywhere. You could read them really, really clearly. You didn't need glasses or anything, because they were big white letters on a black background, in a night game, where you had these big spotlights. It was just amazing. And we gave out so many Silence = Death stickers and there were loads of young people.

That's what we had told people – a lot of young kids come, and this is where they hang out on Friday nights, and stuff like that. At nighttime, they come with their friends.

We didn't have any bad experiences there. The cops wanted us to leave, and then everybody – of course, nobody was really interested in the baseball game, except the few die-hard ball fans. And so, after we had done the action – mostly everybody was antsy to leave, and Ron Goldberg is going, it's the eighth inning, it's the eighth inning, you can't leave. And everyone is going, let's get out of here – which we did. And then, the cops escorted us to the subways, if we needed escorting to the subway.

It was such a creative thing and it was really fun to do, and it really reached a huge number of people. It was really a good action, and it did really launch the Women's Committee, because it was after that, that we started preparing to do the teach-in on women and AIDS and really picked up what we were doing.

JH: So, two big actions about heterosexual women – but, not about lesbians.

MW: We had actually done a lesbian safer sex workshop – what year was that? That spring, we did it – right after that action, we actually had it planned. And, at that gay pride, we had stuff about lesbians and AIDS. And, I had done some. Denise Ribble had done workshops, and I had done some panels. We did an action at the Montreal AIDS conference about lesbians, using the data that she had, because she had been running these groups since 1981 with women, and she had kept statistics, and she had lots of lesbians in the group. And while, there were lesbians that had gotten infected from dirty needles, from drug use, there were lesbians, who never used drugs and who had sex with – what they called “rough sex” – and had gotten infected. And, as she said, when we did the thing with the *Cosmo* doctor, women aren't liars. If you get to know a woman long enough, they're not going to tell you that they did something in that kind of a

circumstance. And I met one of the women. Actually, I had her on a panel – who, very early on in the epidemic, had a lover who died and eventually she found Denise, because she had gone to all these – they had gone to all of these doctors and instead of asking her, how are you doing, blah, blah, blah, because the parents wanted nothing to do with them – it was the very beginning of the epidemic, when people died really fast and horribly – and all the people wanted to know was, how did this happen? No one ever said her, like, how are you? No one said that. Denise was the first person who said to her, how are you doing? Because after her lover died, she found out she was infected, and she had never used drugs, but they had had rough sex, and there was blood exchanged and she was infected.

JH: But there was controversy in ACT UP about lesbian transmission.

MW: There wasn't controversy in ACT UP. There were people outside of ACT UP who didn't, who weren't – I think what there was in ACT UP was – whether it was about lesbians, or, at a certain point, about women – this kind of going along with the mainstream and that this wasn't an issue that we should focus on – that it wasn't enough of an issue. That there were other groups that were much larger, and all this kind of stuff. But, I don't remember anyone standing up and saying that that wasn't reasonable. And we did teach-ins. We had data on it. And, we also said to people, here's the thing, if somebody got infected with a needle, how should they have sex with their lover? Women menstruate. If it's transmitted by blood, what does that mean? Nobody knew. Nobody knows to this day. Nobody has done stuff on it to this day. It's sort of, like, as if it's a non-issue. It's the same way as the guy from the CDC who said, do lesbians have sex? People do not get it. They don't get how lesbians have sex.

You can have people who would do AIDS education and say things like, the passing of fluid, blah, blah, blah, blah, but somehow, lesbians don't pass fluid.

JH: What about dental dams?

MW: That was two things. First of all, I do know lesbians who are infected who use them, because nobody has told them how to prevent transmitting HIV, especially when people are menstruating and stuff like that. I think that most lesbians don't. And I also think that most lesbians don't think that they're ever going to be with a woman who has HIV. And I had two discussions like that with women, that were horrifying to me. One was a woman who absolutely did not believe that lesbians could transmit to one another. And when I said, well what about this case, where some lesbian has HIV and wants to have sex with another lesbian? What if you went out with a lesbian who had HIV? Well, I wouldn't be. What do you mean you wouldn't be? What would you do? Well, it's not a question, because it's not going to happen. Well, why do you think it's not going to happen? I'm just not going to ever be with anybody who's HIV. I have had so many lesbians tell me that – like, as if they would know. Then, I had one lesbian who was exactly like that, until she split with her lover, and then she started going out with women, and she went out with one woman, who was a lovely, white, middle class woman. They had several dinners together, and then, you know, they went home one night to have sex and the white, lovely, middle-class lesbian said to her, there's something I have to tell you before we have sex, which is, I'm HIV-positive. And the other woman was, like – you know what I mean? Those are the stereotypes that people have. The stereotype is, if you're going to have HIV and you're a woman, you're going to be a woman of color, you're going to be straight, you're going to be a drug user,

you're going to be whatever, but you're not going to be the person that I go out with.

And, you know, I have friends who've died, who have been lesbians with HIV. It's not like they don't exist.

JH: Right, but they got it through lesbian transmission.

MW: Well, the friends that I know through my work in ACT UP were women who – at least, the women who told me, were women who, I know, use drugs. But, I have met women who did not use drugs. So, I have to know that that exists. And, the women that I know who use drugs and have HIV, protect themselves when they have sex.

JH: Can we skip ahead for a second, because those women – the women of color who had HIV are, virtually, all dead.

MW: From ACT UP – yeah, all dead, except for Marina Alvarez. Did Phyllis Sharpe die? I thought she was still alive.

JH: Maybe you could say something about those women, so that they're on the public record.

MW: Well, you know, I got to know most of the women, not from those two first actions, but when we started working on women's infections. Because we got in touch with all kinds of women's groups – to start talking with them – because, also, we had people in the Women's Committee, who had been working in different clinic situations, and knew what kinds of infections women were coming with. And we didn't want – and any actions that we did about that – we didn't want that to be without the women for whom it was their life. And, just through different kinds of AIDS actions – like, I had met Iris de la Cruz, and I had met Katrina Haslip, and I had met Lydia Awadala, Phyllis Sharpe – just a whole bunch of women, that had been connected, most

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of them, to ACE OUT, which was the group that Katrina had started when she left Bedford Prison, and it was for women coming out of prison, who had HIV. Iris was very well known, because she had been doing a lot of stuff with gay men.

So, when we started doing the stuff about women's infections, we got in touch with everybody that we knew, to say, we're doing this stuff, we're going to do some demonstrations about it, do you want to get involved in doing it? And, in fact, the first demonstration that we did, which was at Health and Human Services – all those women came. And by that time, we had done more outreach. We had gone to – Tracy Morgan, at that time, had joined ACT UP, and she was working, doing some counseling for homeless women. And, there were women from her center that came. And then, Terry McGovern had been doing some stuff and women that she had been representing in Legal Aid came – so, it was a pretty broad range of women that came.

A lot of those women are dead for the same reason that a lot of the gay men who were in ACT UP at the beginning are dead, because there was nothing available for them. Almost anyone – and I can read you off a list of men who are dead, who were there at the beginning of ACT UP, and two years later, they would still be alive. There was nothing out there for them.

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MW: It's kind of amazing, when you think about it, because it was in a very short window of time. It went from everybody dying to people living – in an incredibly short period of time, and it wasn't just the cocktail. It wasn't the cocktail thing. I'm not a believer that that's what did it, because it was dissipating already. But, people who were infected earlier – I don't know if they had a more virulent strain, or if it was just that nothing, whatever, because it got slower as it went along, but it still happened. In the

early days of the epidemic, people would die in a few days. Then, it was few weeks, then it was a few months, then it was a little bit longer.

That year – in 1989 to 1990 – when, like, 10 people that I knew well in ACT UP died. And, four of them within six days of each other, in November. And then, it just slowed down. People died, but they died much – there was breath in-between, in a way – not that there weren't people dying all around the place, and still, people dying quickly, who don't have access to food or a decent way to live. But, it was a monumental shift.

JH: How do people deal with all that death?

MW: I started going away every year. That's how I dealt with it. I got out of New York for a month, every January, to just, like, be. That year really knocked me for a loop. It's funny, because a lot of people say that people didn't talk about it. I don't think that people didn't talk about it. In a way, I felt very much that people dealt with it the way Jews dealt with it, which is, you sit shiva, and then, life goes on. And, that's the only way to deal with death. It's a very Talmudic concept, but it's true. When you go to Jewish funerals, people talk about that life is for the living, and that you can remember people and they're there and stuff, but you have to go on. I think that's how people dealt with it.

And then, people pretended that that was kind of state of denial. But, it's not a state of denial. I think that one of the really great things was is that people spoke about people. To this day, it's not as if people disappeared from conversation, which is the way that most people in the world handle death – is, you never talk about that person anymore. I didn't find that amongst my friends. I found people talking about people all the time – about how so and so would really get a kick out of this, whatever. Still, when

we do a Passover Seder, Avram always reads “The Wicked Son” because Lee Schy always wanted to be the wicked son. And we say that. It’s not as if Lee is not someone that we talk about.

So, I don’t think that people deny people’s death in the way that so many people have written about it. I think people did what they needed to do to go on, and then, slowly dealt with it. I’ve had people die of things other than AIDS and when it’s someone who matters to you, when you’ve cared about them for a long time, it takes forever to cope with it. It’s never just gone. The number –

The reason I started going away was because it was sort of like the last stage of labor, when you’re having a kid. It’s not that the pain is any different than any other part of labor, it’s that they come one after the other, and you don’t have a chance to recuperate. So, it’s sort of, like, before you get a chance to recuperate, the next one hits you. And I think that’s what that period was like. It was sort of, like, as soon as you were sort of, like, you know, getting over or feeling that you could go on about somebody’s death, somebody else will die. And, because in ACT UP, people made friends, it wasn’t an abstraction. It was people that you were working with all the time, and being with all the time in a social situation, as well. So, it was hard for people. As I say, we still talk about almost everyone I can think of.

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JH: Let’s go back to the chronology. How about in Stop the Church – it brought together your two issues of abortion and AIDS.

MW: I didn’t have a lot to do with Stop the Church. The reason I didn’t have much to do with it was because my mother was dying then, so I was otherwise pre-occupied. Basically, I marshaled for it and I attended the ACT UP meetings, but it was

one of the few things in ACT UP that I didn't organize. I mean, I organized almost every other action ACT UP ever did, but that was not one of them.

I felt fine about that. The thing that I felt about that – that, I guess – I thought it was one of the best things ACT UP ever did. And there are loads of people who think it was terrible, and they blame it for a hundred things that it didn't, from my point of view, was not to be blamed for. And even the idea that it was a coalition effort was bullshit. It was, like, a pretend coalition effort. There was hardly anybody in WHAM at the time. It was just because the men wanted to look like they weren't just doing it themselves. So, it was not, WHAM was not a huge group. But, the Catholic Church has never, in New York, rebounded from that action. Never, no matter what – even though they're very strong, still. They have never had the same profile. Up until that point, they were visibly – any administration in New York had to pay attention to the Catholic church. It was almost as if everyone was a Catholic.

You had to pay heed to Cardinal O'Connor. And, the only thing that I thought that was problematic within ACT UP was that most of the people that organized that action were lapsed Catholics, and they all had a huge amount of rage against the Catholic church. I was a Jew. I didn't have that rage – not against the church as a personal thing. I had been chased through Brooklyn by a priest for sticking – putting abortion stickers on churches. I had no problem doing that stuff. And, basically, when you stopped me at a traffic light and said, you know, you're doing this thing, it's terrible. And I said, well, if your church will stop being political, I'll stop being political. And, in the ACT UP meetings, I would stand up and I would say, this is not about people's right to practice their religion individually. This is about an institution – an institution that is spending

millions of dollars a year, to make sure that we do not live. And, taking millions of dollars of taxpayers money – your money and my money – and not giving people AIDS education, because, at that time, the Catholic church was the– and still is – largest purveyor of AIDS services in New York City – through Catholic charities. But, Naomi worked at Cabrini, and they were allowed to tell anybody about safer sex – nothing like that. So, you know, she would do it on the sly. And then she tried to form a group – like a support group of social workers, and half the social workers were Catholics, and she couldn't, because they actually believed in that stuff.

That's what was going on. But, what would happen in the meetings, and what happened in the action was that everyone would act as if – they wouldn't act as if this was a political thing. Their personal animosity towards the church would come out, and that, I think, was one of the things that was a negative about that action – that it started seeming like they were bashing the church as an individual thing, as opposed to as the institution it was, and they never articulated clearly the politics of the action.

But, the other thing that was amazing about that action, which no one ever talks about – people talk about Tom Keane – the Catholic, who was an altar boy, by the way – dropping his wafer – throwing the wafer on the floor. They don't mention two things – one was, we had done an action in St. Patrick's Cathedral inside, at least a year and a half before, with less people inside, but still, we stood up and turned our backs to the altar, and we sang songs, and none of us got arrested. That's because it wasn't an election period. This was a period where Koch was running against Dinkins and was a big deal. But, nobody cared when we did it before – it wasn't about the Catholic church. The second thing was, is that the number of people inside was not what got the church scared,

what got the church scared was that there were 7,000 people outside – that was the biggest ever, picket demonstration we had. The number of people outside that church, picketing the church, was huge. And the Catholic Church in New York had never had that many people to say publicly, you are killing people. Your policies – not your religion – your policies and your money are killing people. And that is what made everybody in the government close ranks in ACT UP about that thing. And, even though there were some people in ACT UP who consider themselves progressives, who thought it was terrible, and they did that old thing about, oh, you know, you're talking about working class Catholics, and they really support this. And, you know, I would say, that's what they said in Nicaragua. But, you know what, when they said that it was all right – this was the message in the eighties – it was all right that the Sandinistas agreed with the Catholic church, not to make abortion legal, because they had these billboards about, you know, you weren't allowed to have billboards that degraded women. And, everyone came back and said, you know, it's because they're Catholic, and the women don't really believe in abortion. Meanwhile, one woman writes an article about that every day in Managua General Hospital, thirty women are coming in with the after-effects of illegal abortion. Hello? Everybody does abortion. It doesn't matter what your politics or your religion is.

That is what people started saying. And people started backtracking – that we had offended people. They started buying the line, instead of saying, no, this was the right thing to do, and here's why it was the right thing to do. And, as a result, I think, of the backtracking – I mean, I think the positive outcome of that was – I'll say it again, that the

church has never had the same high profile in New York, as it had before that period, from my point of view.

Like, [Edward Cardinal] Egan – nobody pays attention to it. No one paid attention to O'Connor after that. Yeah, they were deferent, but they didn't glorify him, which they had done all the years before then. But, the negative part of it is, is that the Catholic church is still getting so much of our tax money, and they are still allowed to do whatever kind of, you know, what they call AIDS education they want to and that is, like, a no-no, as far as I'm concerned. I think we could use another action against them.

I thought we had good discussions in ACT UP about it, actually. And, people were very divided, because people were divided along are we desecrating a religious – are we doing something terrible in a religious place or whatever and, you know, I don't have any of those feelings. If you do things that have public policy implications, I don't care where you are, I'm going to come and get you, and you can't hide behind the church. It's, like, if you had Nazis in there, would I not go in there and try to get them? No, I would go in there and try to get them. I wouldn't care that you were a Catholic church or whatever kind of a church. It doesn't mean that the people in there are protected by you. So, that was my Stop the Church thing.

JH: What about the campaign to change the CDC definition of AIDS?

MW: Actually, I think that that was probably the best kind of campaign that you could possibly organize, using every single kind of organizing tactic and things really working well together. First of all, I think that it was a monumental change. It was a definite thing that made a difference in people's lives, because there were women who

were just not getting any kind of help – women who didn't even know they were infected, until we started doing that stuff.

It started out by us doing this Women and AIDS teach-in – which I loved about ACT UP, which people don't even talk about – the teach-ins, which were just educating ourselves about issues, and then creating booklets. The handbook that we created for the women and AIDS teach-in, went all around the world. Not the book, the handbook, in its Xeroxed form, went all over the world. It went to the Australia conference. It just went everywhere. We sent it anywhere to anyone, and people found out about it immediately and started writing to us. We would just ship them out, ship them out. And, basically, because people had been doing work with women with HIV that women with HIV were getting infections. It started, actually, when we did the *Cosmo* thing, because we worked with – what's her name? This woman who had done this research, showing that in Connecticut, the number of cases of bacterial pneumonia amongst women was huge, and that they were dying. And we started talking to these people and found out that women would show up at hospitals with what seemed like pneumonia, and nobody would do a bronchoscopy. People would assume it was bacterial pneumonia, or they would assume that it was flu and they would give people aspirin and tell them to go home, and women would die. And, she had sort of traced the death rates in the tri-state area, to show how many women had been dying of bacterial pneumonia, which was ridiculous, like it was an epidemic of bacterial pneumonia. But, it wasn't. It was HIV, really.

So, we knew it then, okay? And we started doing all kinds of research about what kinds of infections women get. And we did this teach-in, and the teach-in was about the different infections and we actually wrote up sections that were on, for instance, what is it

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that occurs vaginally? Well, we did yeast infections, which, of course – all yeast was on the Center for Disease Control definition of AIDS, but not vaginal yeast – like, yeast is yeast. There were various forms of tubercular bacilli, that would form in women, in different places than men. And, so, we did stuff on that. And we did stuff on bacterial pneumonia. We did stuff on cervical cancer. And, I should say, after the Nine Days of Action, women's committees starting forming in other parts of the country, and we had a national women's committee that we did phone calls and stuff with, and this whole thing was worked on nationally, but it started in the ACT UP teach-in.

And then we started talking to women with HIV, and we found out, yeah, they were getting all this stuff, and nobody knew what to even tell them about what to do. And then, we were doing this teach-in, and Terry McGovern came to ACT UP. She came to ACT UP, not about women and AIDS. She came to ACT UP, because she was going to do an action about the New York City Housing Authority throwing out somebody who had had a partner who died of HIV. And she had gone to Lambda Legal Defense, which had done the one about the private housing – I forget what the name of that case was – the Braschi case, I think it was. And, nobody wanted to help her. They didn't know who she was. She was a Legal Aid attorney. They gave her the brush-off, and basically said that they don't deal with that kind of client.

And so, she came to ACT UP, because she thought that what was needed was some kind of an action outside the New York City Housing Authority and she asked us if we would do the action, because we had a Housing Committee then. And, she was sitting in the room, when we were talking about the women's infections. And she suddenly started putting two and two together, because she had been representing women who had

been denied disability benefits, and she realized that they were being denied benefits, because they were having infections that we were talking about. She did not know anything about what the infections were for HIV. So then, she came to us and said, this is what I think is going on. So, in fact, then, we all also went to Lambda and they couldn't figure out how to do this, because none of them were seeing women with HIV. So, they have been trying to get the CDC definition changed to include women and IV drug users, but they had no idea how to do that, because they didn't know on what premise.

But she knew that she could sue. As soon as she saw our stuff, she knew she could sue vis-à-vis the disability – not the generic definition of AIDS, but the disability definition of AIDS, because they were being denied disability. So, she ended up – we helped her write that lawsuit, put in all the research, and then Linda Meredith, actually, who was in ACT UP/DC, organized from DC, to do this action at Health and Human Services, which was the kick-off for the campaign.

And, the slogan was, Women Don't Get Aids, They Just Die From It. And we had tombstones. And that's when all the women like Iris came, and Phyllis Sharpe and we had a speak-out of women with HIV, talking about all the infections that they got, and did this big demonstration and that was the day that she was filing the lawsuit. So, that was, actually, basically, to kick off the campaign, to have this thing.

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And one of the issues that we always had, even within the group that was doing that was that terror was very focused on the disability benefits, but there were other outcomes of this, that were just not about disability, which is that, if you don't define a kind of infection that's associated, you don't do research. You don't do research, you

don't get any treatment. So, it's not just that you don't get disability benefits, because who wants to get disability benefits and die. It's that you want to make sure that if people are doing research or developing treatments, they're also developing treatments for the things that you get and not just what somebody else gets, and that they're not giving you drugs that haven't been tested on you that can cause cancer of the cervix, when that's something that you're going to get.

So, we did that one, and then, Linda, before that, had been living in – when did we do that? I have to remember the timing – that was to launch the lawsuit. And then, Linda had been living in Atlanta before that. And, when she had been living in Atlanta, we had done actions with people in Atlanta. We had done actions in Columbia, South Carolina – we had done a whole bunch of things.

So, I knew the guy who was, then, pretty much the most active person in ACT UP/Atlanta. He was also a lawyer. His name was Chip Rowan. And, they were also wanting to do something about the sodomy demonstration. So, we decided that our first demonstration about the CDC would be about both of those things, and it would take place on World AIDS Day, which was December 1st – it would be around that time.

In October, we did the one at HHS, and then we organized this action in Atlanta that was called, Two Days, Two Ways to Fight For Your Life. And the first day was about the sodomy law in Georgia, and the other day was about the CDC definition, and that was the first demonstration that we did. And we did teach-ins down there about the CDC definition and we did a lot of – that was the first time that we spoke to people at the CDC and that's when, whatever his name is, said, "What, lesbians get AIDS?" He was a

horror. He was one of the people at the CDC – I forget his name. I probably have totally blanked it out.

So, we did that demonstration. But, it also involved – that fall was an amazing fall, because that fall we also had the first – no, that was the next fall. So, we did that, and then we did that demonstration around January, the first one was in January of 1990. The second one was in December of 1990. We did October of '89, then we did January of '90, and then we started doing this thing where we got in touch – we did this campaign to get as many people on board as possible. We started putting out this thing about change the CDC definition. And we put out all kinds of – let me just go back for a second. I want to make sure that I'm getting the timing right, because we got a lot of women involved – the first women and HIV conference. We were already doing the CDC definition stuff, so we had done it.

So, we did that action and through the action, we met people, because we were in Atlanta, and that's where the Centers for Disease Control is. There's this really great gay man, Jim Williams, who worked for the National Education Association – their health network – arranged for me to do a talk at their – when the CDC held a conference for health educators. And I got to speak to these people from all over the country and tell them about CDC definition. We spoke anywhere in the United States that people would invite us – anybody from the women's committee from around the country. So, we got loads of people to sign onto this campaign. We got people to send postcards. We got people to sign petitions. We had the most radical listing of things. We even wanted them to change the terminology, like, what is this, the way that they put people into categories for AIDS transmission is crazy, because if you ever used drugs, they put you in that

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category first. It doesn't matter what else you are. And the only people that had two categories, eventually were, like, gay men who used drugs. But, women, if they fucked somebody and used drugs, they were in the drug category. Nobody was willing to say that they got it heterosexually. This is like, about that thing you said before, just anyway that you could to keep that out of the thing. So, we got all these people to kind of sign onto this – people who ran youth programs. We eventually had 300 people – 300 different groups across the United States of every kind that you could imagine, who signed onto the CDC definition campaign. And we would constantly be sending them information about everything that was going on. We were sort of the center of it.

And then we decided that we would do a second large action that would be in Atlanta. And that was going to be that year on World AIDS Day – the end of that year – I think it was 1990. But, also, over that year we had been pressuring the National Institutes of Health to do a conference on women and AIDS. And they didn't want to do a conference on women and AIDS, and we kept pressuring them and pressuring them, and when we did the NIH action, my affinity group sat in Dan Hoth's office and we put flyers in every file cabinet there. They've got to still be there – about, you know, you must do women and AIDS stuff. And, eventually, we convinced them. After the San Francisco conference, we sent them a threatening note, I must say. We had sat in their offices, which they didn't every expect. And Dan Hoth got scared to death. He was the head of clinical trials, I think, for the ACTG research system.

And, at the San Francisco conference, we just held up a banner, because there was this whole thing that went down at this conference. But, anyway, we held up a banner. But then, Linda Meredith handed him a note and the note said, basically, we're coming

back to your office. And he was not wanting to talk to us on the phone, but when he got that note, he spoke to us on the phone, and we forced him to hold a woman and AIDS conference – the first one – which was held in December of '90, also. Originally, they wanted us to be part of the planning, and Linda was part of the planning, but we made it clear that we would not rubber-stamp what they did. And so, at the beginning, it was really interesting because there were all these women, who were from all over the country, who had been waiting for this day, because all of this stuff had been suppressed. There had been women researchers who had been pushing for this for years and nothing was happening. And, in fact, one woman said to another woman at this planning board meeting, how did we ever get this conference? We've been pushing for this conference for years, and nobody did it. And another woman said, because 20 people sat in at Dan Hoth's office, and he got scared to death.

So, they were all willing to do the best conference there was, but the government wasn't. And, what they used to do and they still do is they run their own conferences, and they put the researchers there that they want to be there, who are going to say what they want those people to say. And at the point, what they wanted people to say was that there was no difference, whatever. And so, we, basically – Linda, eventually dropped out of the planning because she said she wouldn't have her name associated with a conference that had been – after the whole schedule had been set, the government people took it and totally decimated it, and put only their people there. And we wanted them to pay for women with HIV to come, and they wouldn't do it – this whole thing. So, that's when we wrote up our first women's treatment and research agenda, and we handed it out at that conference, and we all showed up, anyway. And, all the women got organized.

And, when the guy from the CDC spoke, we opened up a banner and everybody started screaming at him about how wrong he was. We did a lot of actions at that conference, but the main thing at that conference was that a lot of women with HIV came from all over the country, and they formed a group, and they ended up – when Tony Fauci was speaking, and he was basically saying that they didn't know anything about women and AIDS, but he was going to talk about men and AIDS, and he started doing AIDS 101 – all hell broke loose.

And everybody got up to the microphone and said, hey, you sit down, we have something to say. And they had written up a whole statement about, you know, the three things that they needed was, they needed the CDC to change the definition of AIDS. They needed women in clinical trials, and they needed to get their disability payments, and that sort of got a lot more women involved, and then they – a lot of those women – came to the CDC action, because then they got in touch with us. And so, the second CDC action – we went down to Atlanta and did a really big action in front of the Centers for Disease Control, and also took over the head of the CDC – his offices – and a lot of people got arrested. It was the most pouring rain day I've ever seen in my life. It was not to be believed. And people stayed out there. Women with HIV stayed out there. It was just really powerful.

So, after that, they thought that that was it and that we would give up. And, I think this is what was really important – we just kept going. We didn't just do direct action after that. We did a lot of small things. We monitored what they were doing, and every time they tried to change the CDC definition and not put in women's stuff, we would do something. And we did things like – because we had this mailing list now,

from all over the country – so, we would send out an alert. James Curran is trying to change the CDC definition. He's not putting in any of the women's infection. Write to your senator, call your congress person, tell them you're demanding a congressional investigation of the Centers for Disease Control. Boom, he would stop.

Then he'd try again. They tried, at the CDC three or four times in the next two years, to change the definition to what they wanted it to be, which was, basically, 200 T-cells, and no specificity of women's infections or the infections that drug users got, at all. And the main reason that people supported the 200 T-cells, is because there were a lot of health care providers, who were seeing people with those T-cells, who are not considered to have HIV, because they didn't have the infections that were on the list. And so, they weren't getting reimbursed from the government. So, they wanted the 200 T-cells, and they didn't care about the rest of it. So, we just kept plugging along, plugging along. So, finally, he shows up – and I told you, we sent this stuff all over the country and all over the world. So, a lot of people in Europe, from the World Health Organization, got in touch with us, because even though there's socialized medicine in most of those countries, whatever the CDC does, the World Health Organization was doing, so, they weren't recognizing women with HIV. So, we had all of this stuff.

So, when the Amsterdam conference happened, and women from ACT UP went there, all these women from all over the world joined with ACT UP and confronted James Curran and said, you have to change the CDC definition of AIDS. And he still didn't want to do it. So, we demanded that he had to hold a public hearing, to show that he was right. And first he tried to manipulate that hearing, and to only have his kind of researchers. And we got all these people to say that he was wrong. And so, he finally

had a hearing that took place in Atlanta, that we got women with HIV to speak at, that we got the doctors to speak at, who had actually been doing the research. And they got up there, and they basically said, there's no question about it, here's what's going on. And we got the media down there. We got money to get women with HIV down there. We got the media down there, okay? This was after four years.

JH: How did you do that?

MW: You mean, the media stuff, or the women –

JH: The media. The women, the money for the women.

MW: They were so afraid of us by that time. We had done all these demonstrations. We had gotten groups that were so diverse, to support this campaign, from all over the country. We showed that we could get Congress people who would start to investigate the CDC. We used every single tactic that you could possibly use. It was really like community organizing and political organizing at its best. It went from the grass roots up, and we had this committed group of people. We would send out a letter and say, write a letter to your Congressman, and all these people would do it, because they wanted to change it. And then, when they happened to be at a public meeting in Amsterdam, and there were international people saying this – and because we had developed contacts with the media, they came. Bruce Merkin wrote really excellent stuff for us, at the very beginning, in Los Angeles. And, Ellie Burkett wrote stuff for us – articles for the big CDC definition in Atlanta. She wrote it in the *Miami Herald*, and it got picked up by other people. So, over time, we just developed all of these contacts with an incredible range of people, who realized that what we were saying was true. It wasn't like we were asking for something that was crazy. And, that there were women who

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were dying, because they were being denied food on their table, because people wouldn't admit that they had HIV, when they had HIV.

So, after that hearing, at the very end, he came out to do his speech in front of the media and basically what he said is, they're right, we're going to have change the CDC definition of AIDS. And then, that fall – in January of '94 – it was after Katrina died. She died in December of '93, '94 – it was '92. We had been working on it from 1988. It was 1992 that they changed the CDC definition of AIDS, to include all that stuff. And you know what? When you look at the listings of what diseases women have – they have bacterial pneumonia, they have cervical cancer. That's what they're getting. It wasn't anything unusual. We knew that stuff. So, it was pretty amazing.

JH: Did they change it to exactly what ACT UP wanted?

MW: No, they didn't change – we told them that they had to, like – well, some things have stayed, even though they didn't want it. We wanted all testing sites to be anonymous – that was part of our thing. We took everything that the CDC did, we had on our agenda. And, the fact that there are any left is because we fought for them, because originally, that was not true.

They didn't change the categories, but they did put in the infections, and they put in infections that both women and drug users get. They didn't put in all the infections, but they put in the major infections. So, a good part of what we wanted was in there. But, it was an incredible victory, because it was something that affected hundred, thousands, millions of women, probably, across the world, eventually. And yet, it was incredibly political. It had a whole set of radical politics associated with it, and it was using every kind of organizing technique. And, it also showed – you know, people

always think that ACT UP didn't have any contact with – it was sort of like the radical group to everybody else's conservative group. And the truth is, is that there were many, many service providers, across the United States and around the world, who really valued what we did. They didn't see us as being outside of them, because we got in touch with most of them. People don't know that. They think that everything about ACT UP was about, either capitulating to the government – in the case of, like, selling out – or, like, not having anything to do with the government. And I think that in its best form, the thing that was amazing about ACT UP in the best things it did, was that it did both, without giving up either. You know, you didn't capitulate to anybody, and you still got something.

JH: When you talk about capitulation, are you thinking of something specific?

MW: You can do a lot of things. There are people who just ended up working – sitting on drug company boards, and actually believing that they were doing something to help people, when they were actually being pawns of the drug companies.

I've gotten to this philosophy about that stuff, which is, because ACT UP was about something real – was about people lying – I don't know if you know this poem that Irina Klepfisz wrote, it's called "*Beschert*". She was a holocaust survivor. She's a lesbian, and she was a kid. She and her mother both survived. Her father was a resistance fighter in Poland. She's exactly my age. And she wrote this poem about the holocaust, and it's called "*Beschert*" – *beschert* means, so be it. And some people think that it means that it's pre-destined. The way that I was always taught about it was, so be it.

And, basically what she says is that people survived the holocaust for a whole range of reasons. And some of the reasons were luck, and some was because they were at the right place at the right time. They died because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time – that you can't judge what people did to survive, in a way, because it was so horrible that they had to do whatever. So be it, that's what they did – that the thing was horrendous, that you can't judge it by the same standards.

JH: But, didn't you take a public stand against meeting with the government?

MW: I didn't take a public stance against meeting with the government. No, that's a total – everybody has that attitude.

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MW: I did want to say one other thing about the CDC's definition, which I forgot to say, which I think is really important, which is, that one of the things that was amazing about that was that people came together to work on that, that everybody said would not work together. There were gay men, there were women of color, straight women of color, lesbians of color. There were straight women. It was every possible kind of person came together to work on that thing, that that's what was amazing about it

There was none of this, like, you know, this is about you, it's not about me. Even my own affinity group – which, my affinity group had 24 people in it. There were only seven of us that were women, and several of the men had HIV, several of them are dead, at this point. They spent four years working on a campaign about changing the CDC definition for women and for poor people and for drug users, and that is something that nobody ever says about ACT UP. They always talk about gay white men, gay white

men, selfish gay white men. We got tremendous support in ACT UP for that work, and from other places, too. So, I just want to say that.

Okay – the moratorium. Actually, it was Tracy Morgan's idea that there should be a moratorium. And the reason she decided to do that was, because, when we did the women and AIDS conference in Washington – and, as we were doing actions against James Curran, Mark Harrington was down there, with a woman who – I don't even know her name – was on the Treatment and Data Committee, and they were meeting with the very people who we were fighting against. And, what's more, they were claiming that this woman spoke for women, and even though she had not worked on any of the women's stuff, and actually had not done anything about women and HIV.

And Tracy got crazed. And this is where, I think, that you know – what I brought to ACT UP was a little different than what other people did which is – I had been a political person for a really long time. I don't get crazed about individual people, because if it wasn't for this person, it would be somebody else – that's my attitude. There's a category, you know what I mean?

So, she came on a national women's conference call and had this proposal that we had this moratorium on anybody meeting with any government officials, because it was undermining the work that we were doing, blah, blah, blah. I always thought that the good thing about ACT UP was that people did both, and that that had been an ethos in ACT UP for a really long time. And I thought that the one-two whammy was the best way to go. So, it was a good cop/bad cop kind of thing.

So, I was not in favor of that, at all. And I said, that I thought what worked equally as well was everybody should talk about it. The government couldn't claim that

one person spoke to them. If you let women all over the country demand to meet with the CDC, and let them say what they want to, then it would be the same thing as not anybody talking to them, because they would get so many different points of view, that who would they claim spoke for anybody? And that was also one of the things that I tried to do – which was to always, instead of wasting my time to fight against people in the organization – to try to come up with some plan that would make whatever they were doing irrelevant. So, it was sort of a positive way of moving forward.

In that discussion, Tracy backtracked and she got it to be that people should stop meeting with the government about women's stuff. And, people voted and they wanted to do it. I personally couldn't have cared more or less. I didn't think it was a great idea. I thought it wouldn't be bad to try it, about women's stuff. We had done a lot of other things, why not? But, meanwhile, there had been a lot of tension in ACT UP that Tracy had created between herself and most of the people on Treatment and Data, and especially with Mark Harrington. They were, like, daggers at each other.

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I think that part of it also was, is that there was a small grouping of men who actually believed that anything that we did about women took away from them. That was a small grouping of men. It wasn't the majority of the men in ACT UP. And, a lot of those men had gotten into the inside of the NIH – the National Institute of Health – and they thought that the progress of the AIDS movement depended on them being tight with all these people. Why they all thought that Tony Fauci was cute, I will never understand. All the women thought he was a twerp. What can I say? The men were turned on by him.

So, there was this tension that was happening, because some of the women that were on – so, then, we all said that we would bring it to ACT UP. I have never felt that bringing something to ACT UP was a big deal. People vote it up. They vote it down. That's what it's about. That's what a democratic organization is. I always felt that that was a good thing to do. But somehow, word got back to Mark, and the people that were on – a certain group of people on Treatment and Data – that we were going to call for this moratorium. It was going to prevent people from doing anything. And they had already decided, in a way – that whole grouping of men – that their interest lay in pushing the drug stuff. And, unfortunately, their view of things, which was that politics was separate from medicine, prevailed, eventually. But, at that point, that was not what ACT UP was. The beauty of ACT UP was that it was about the fact that medicine is political. And so, there's all kinds of stuff that was going on. The tension in the room was palpable. So, basically, I made – and Tracy was not presenting it, even though it was her idea.

JH: Who was presenting it?

MW: Nobody was. So, it wasn't being done. Weeks were going by. There was all of this tension. So, I figured, fuck, I'll present it. I don't care. So, I got up on the floor of ACT UP, and I put it on the back table, and I basically said, this was something that was on the women's phone call and we should discuss it and talk about it and whatever. So, that's why it gets attributed to me, because I was the public face of it – but I wasn't the public face of it because I thought it was the best thing to do. I was the public face of it because I brought it to the floor of ACT UP, because I was trying to get rid of that tension.

And, in fact, I had some very good discussions with Jim Eigo, who was – because, immediately, he called me, because he couldn't believe that I would be, like, you know – and he and I had this really good talk and I said to him, well, here's the pros, here's the cons. I said, frankly, I'm not invested in this. I don't think this is the best way to go. And I said, I'm going to vote against it, when it comes up on the floor. But, I just felt like it had to come up on the floor – otherwise, there was all this tension behind the scenes. So, we had this discussion in ACT UP. Tracy never spoke publicly about it, even though it was her idea, and it was voted down

JH: What did you say about it at the meeting?

MW: All I did was get up and I said, this is what happens on the phone call. And that's what I did. I said, this is what happened on the phone call, this is what the proposal is. It's about not talking about women's stuff. You can ask me questions about it, I'll answer it from the point of view of what this is supposed to mean. And I did. And then I said, and I think that people should vote on it, and then people voted it down and I was fine about people voting it down. I had absolutely no investment in doing that – none.

JH: In spite of the fact that it was voted down, TAG split off?

MW: They were going to split off anyway because they had become convinced that the way to proceed was to separate politics from medicine. That is what their point was. They actually believed that their biggest impact was to design trials with the people at NIH. That's what they ended up doing. That's what TAG became – treatment advocacy. They would sit on all these committees. They would sit on committees with drug companies, and I think that, partly, it was whatever they wanted to get out of it for

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themselves, and partly it was what they saw as their way of doing politics. They tried to do this reorganization of the NIH that would literally give them control of it. It didn't work. And they put out this thing that there were social issues and there were medical issues, and that they were about the medical issues.

JH: You said that that view prevailed – yet, they went off. Do you mean it prevailed within ACT UP?

MW: Oh, absolutely. I think that one of things that happened – that even happens now in ACT UP, is – what happened subsequently is that the people in ACT UP keep their hands off medical stuff. They do not argue about the virtues of clinical trials. Nothing. They do what lefties have done historically – give them AIDS in Africa. They'll do that stuff, but it's not about are they researching the right drugs? Is this drug going to kill your liver? Is it being tested in the right population? Is this about Glaxo making money? No. They don't want to touch that. They don't touch anything that has to do with fighting with TAG about the medical part of this.

They have allowed themselves to be relegated to the social issues. So, it's, like, drugs for Africa – not because the drugs are good, or because they might not kill the people in Africa, it's because the Third World should get the same thing that we have. So, that's the detachment of it from the ethics of the research there. Research is being done in Africa and Asia that could not pass an institutional review board here, and that started with the pregnancy trials, because they know here, that if they have anything that could save somebody's life, they've got to figure out how to give it to everybody. They go to Africa, they don't have to.

JH: Right, but 076 took place here.

MW: The major trials went on over after the beginning. They couldn't recruit people here. I mean, I think that was one of our best things – that we prevented them from recruiting people, but they had that problem there, because they got – and scientists like themselves in Africa and Thailand and stuff, who had only to gain by being connected to American research – who gave them the go-ahead to do anything they wanted. And they have. They've done what I consider to be highly unethical trials, outside the United States, because they can't do them here.

They tried to do a vaccine trial here. I remember when they reported on this trial. I can't remember when it was – maybe it was the HERS trial – or, they tried to do this thing to find out. They took a, quote – this is their terminology – an inner-city group of women in an area which had high risk for HIV. And, they were going to see whether women got infected or not. But, because of the ethics, they had to do AIDS education. So, they did AIDS education, and not one woman sero-converted. Did they package the education? No. They considered the research a failure, because it wasn't about the AIDS education, it was about, how do women sero-convert?

You just figured out how to prevent HIV without a drug, without anything else, and you're not going to do it, because that's not the point. You need people to sero-convert for your research – that's the story. And, I do think that a lot of the – even though, I think that ACT UP did great stuff about getting people to focus on AIDS in Africa, and making it an issue in Gore's campaign and all this kind of stuff – it's not about the nitty-gritty of what that means. It's not about the research that's being done. It's not about the drugs that are out there. The drugs that are out there still are not cures. There's never been – everything that's being done in AIDS research is being orchestrated

by the drug companies. They're still making a fortune. The whole AIDS Cure Project that we developed – every premise of that is still true, because you can't separate medicine and politics in this country.

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That's how TAG succeeded because they succeeded in making ACT UP irrelevant to a majority of the gay community, because the people – the Treatment Advocacy Group was going to get you the drugs. ACT UP was just going to shout about people in Africa. Well, you know, the whole premise of ACT UP in the gay community was that it was a mass movement of people who understood that this was about them. Well, when it's no longer about you, you're not in it. I also think that groups have their timeframe and they don't last forever and all this kind of stuff. And, the level of mass movement involvement that ACT UP had, I don't know how long that could go on. There's never been anything that's gone on for that long. It went on for pretty long, at a pretty high level. But, I'm just saying – it's not necessarily whether it made ACT UP irrelevant, it's whether it made that kind of thinking irrelevant. And it has. Now, people have been coming together about the crystal meth stuff. There are things that people talk about – new infections or prevention – they don't talk about – I can remember when the New York City Department of Health gave out condoms. They don't do it anymore.

I can remember when GMHC thought that their job was to put condoms at every bar. They don't do that anymore. The idea that HIV education takes place at GMHC, because you go to a group is exactly the same kind of lefty thinking. It's internal. Yeah, if someone finds their way to GMHC, and they find their way to your group, okay, maybe you'll get an idea to them, but it's not the same thing as having condoms at every bar. It's not the same thing as the New York City Department of Health giving them out.

It's definitely that kind of thinking – that the treatment is separate from the politics – is definitely the outcome of that.

JH: You mentioned your affinity group – which affinity group were you a member of?

MW: I was in the Costas – which was named after a guy by the name of Costa [Pappas], who was, actually, a filmmaker – a pretty wonderful, nutsy kid, person. We actually formed around the first CDC definition. We gave it that name, and it was Avram Finkelstein, Joe Montana, myself, Randy Snyder, who's dead, Walter Armstrong, Lee Schy, who's dead, Adam Smith; sometimes Maria would do stuff with us, but not later one, me, Illith Rosenblum, Heidi Dorow, Joey Ferrari, Ronnie Viggiani, Robert Getso, Jeff Engel, who is now a doctor in the community.

Ronnie got his degree as a doctor, too, although he's working outside the United States. Robert is also outside the states. Who else? Marion worked with us, for awhile. Linda Meredith eventually became part of it – worked with us a lot, because she had been – because I worked with her in Atlanta and DC. Emily Nahmanson – who else? I know I'm leaving somebody out somewhere, but anyway.

JH: Where did the idea of for affinity groups come from? And, how did they function within ACT UP?

MW: Actually, the idea of affinity groups – that I know where they came from – was from the civil rights movement, but also, more present than that in its description, from the Clamshell stuff – the stuff that was done about nuclear power and the environment – the Clamshell Alliance and all those people who did big government sit-ins, and the women's movement – Greenham Common and all that kind of stuff. And the

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whole idea was that when you get trained to do civil disobedience, that you break down the group into smaller groups, so that you sort of know everybody, and everybody knows you, and you can support each other, in a very specific kind of way, and you make sure that you're all together when you get arrested, so that you sort of know who the other person is, and you know their life and that kind of stuff. And in the original way that it was done, those affinity groups, in fact, were formed, just for an action, and then, they would dissipate, because people came from all over the country, or whatever, and they didn't necessarily stay together. And, in ACT UP, I worked in a couple of different – actually, Costas grew out of the Delta Queens, and the Delta Queens was a group of people, that we had been together and doing all these actions in the south, like the Democratic and Republican conventions in Atlanta and New Orleans. And then, this action in South Carolina, about this prostitute who had been quarantined by the government, and then, what else? We did something else in the south – so, we called ourselves the Delta Queens. Rollerena was in there, and Jean Elizabeth Glass. And then, that sort of came out of – some of the people from there came out of the original group that I was in, when we did the women's stuff at the Wall Street II action.

We had a women's affinity group, and then we worked with the Metropolitan Health Association, which was, like, Gregg Bordowitz, and Robert Garcia and all those people. But, the Costas was the one that I stayed in the longest, and those were the people – oh, Sean Slutsky – we worked together on all the CDC definition stuff, the NIH stuff, women in clinical trails – we worked together – all the way through the Kennebunkport. And, David Gipps was in it, also.

JH: Did your social life revolve the affinity group?

MW: Yeah, they were all people that I hung out – most of them – not all of them. I didn't hang out that much, personally, with Heidi. I mean, I would see her, if she was at something that Avram did or when Marie and she were lovers, I did see her there. I didn't see Adam that much, but, you know Avram is still a friend of mine, Phil is still a friend of mine, Charlie Barber, who was in that first group, Linda.

JH: Were you involved in the care of the guys who died?

MW: Oh yeah. We all were. Lee actually died so fast. I wasn't in New York, and nobody told me about it. That was my most horrible one. I came back from being away in January. I was in Brazil. I had actually gone to Brazil on a trip. It was the first time I had allowed myself to go on a trip in years, because I was always afraid that I'd go away and somebody would die. So, I went away, and somebody died – nobody was even supposed to die. Lee wasn't sick at all, when I left. I left in January, he was fine. I always send these New Year's cards out. So, then he and Joey sent me a card. And when I got back, which was the beginning of February, because I was gone a month – and, nobody wanted to call me, because what could I do, if I was in Brazil.

So, I came home, I had this pile of mail up to here. And one of the first things I opened up was a card from Lee and Joe saying, you know, hope you're having a great trip, blah, blah, blah – give us a call when you get back. Then, there's a letter from Avram, and it starts out by saying, I'm writing this on the night that Lee died. I had an anxiety attack. I was just pacing the house, and called up and finally got Avram on the phone. I tried calling everybody. I finally got – so, anyway, he wasn't supposed to die that fast, but he did. He ended up with pancreatitis and just died like that.

Yes, there are people who are still very much part of life who are from there. And then, there are people who I never see. And, I run into a lot of people. And, it's kind of funny because, you know – because there weren't a lot of women in ACT UP, but we were all really visible. There are all these gay men who know who I am, but I don't necessarily know who they are. I know a lot of people from ACT UP. It's not as if there aren't three or four hundred men that I know and I could name for you – and when I see them, I know who they are and all this kind of stuff. But, you know, over the years, the numbers of people who came in and out of that room is huge. So, every now and then, somebody will come up to me on the street and go, are you Maxine Wolfe? I was in ACT UP, and I go, really, what was your name? And then, I always joke – at the beginning, we would sit in committee meetings, and we'd go around and people would say their names, and this is what it would be – Michael, David, Michael, David – except for Gregg – he would say Gregg. Oh my God, there's somebody who's not a Michael or a David, because they were of a certain age cohort, I guess. But, that was really funny.

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JH: But you weren't of that age cohort.

MW: No.

JH: What was it like to be an older woman and be in ACT UP?

MW: It's really funny, people really didn't treat anybody differently because of their age – at least not for a lot of years. I mean, people deferred to Larry. I mean, I think one of the reasons that Larry got to like me was because – since I didn't know who he was, the first time I spoke against him, everybody gasped – as if I had done something. I was looking around – what did I do? I didn't even say anything nasty. I just said I disagreed with him. But, you know, he was somebody that a whole bunch of people just

sort of revered. But, you know, in ACT UP, the youngest person who was there at the beginning was Jean Elizabeth, who was 17, and I knew her from a workshop I had done at CUNY. She was a student and out at Queens, and she was the person who organized most of the actions at the beginning. She was in the Lavender Hill Mob. She must have been 16, when she was in the Lavender Hill Mob.

And then, there were people who were about my age, in the beginning – a couple of older people. I would say that Clark Taylor was my age. He died – a couple of older people. And then there was this vast middle that kind of – most of the people were in their 20s. Some were in their 30s. Avram is 10 years younger than me. When I was in ACT UP, I was in my forties; he was in his thirties.

It never seemed to be a big issue for anybody. No one ever said anything about age, and I think that was why it was an amazing thing for younger people, because there was none of that, you can't do this, and I have to teach you how.

Jean Elizabeth was running all these demonstrations, and she was 17. And she would get up and talk, and everybody would listen to her. And she would say – and I remember, because she always had this very commanding way, Jean, and she would say, a cop says this to you, this is what you do. She was 17, you know? And that was before we had a youth committee. I had nothing to do with it. So, I never felt, you know – and I found people to be really interesting. I learned a lot of stuff. And I am working with a really young group of dykes now, and there was something about the AIDS epidemic that people were incredibly mature.

It's hard for me to believe how young some of the people were that I worked with – from the point of view of the way that the world looks at them. David Robinson, when

I met him, was 21. And he was totally sharp, focused. In some ways, you know, you could say that a lot of those people never had a twenties, in the way that most people have a twenties. Their twenties was filled with responsibility – totally filled with responsibility. And they took it. You could never say that somebody didn't do it because they were too young, or they didn't have an idea because they were too young. It just never crossed anybody's mind, and I don't think it ever crossed anybody's mind that you were right because you were older. Plenty of people argued with you. It didn't matter, one way or the other. So, I always felt fine about that.

JH: When did you leave ACT UP?

MW: 1997, I guess – after the 10 year anniversary.

JH: Was there a particular reason?

MW: I kept trying to go to ACT UP, and what I found was that what had happened, the impact of the TAG people leaving, was very obvious. And the way it was obvious was two-fold, you know? People didn't do their research. People didn't have that ethos, anymore. There was ideology. It was the same kind of thing that made me not want to be on the left – is that people had a political point of view, and they had no information. I wouldn't they not – they didn't present it that way. And, I stayed around for awhile, also, because I was doing the CDC stuff. And then, trying to get people to do certain kinds of things became really, really difficult because people didn't – in ACT UP, when I say that we did teach-ins – people, felt that they could learn anything. But, one of the offshoots of the ethos that the Treatment and Data people created eventually, was that they were the experts about treatment. If any question came up about it, they had to have the answer. You couldn't have an answer – even for Linda, who was a researcher. They

made her out like she was – they skewered her at one point, because she could prove that what they were doing was wrong, and they didn't want anybody to know that.

JH: Could you be more specific about that?

MW: It was too complicated – it was about a research trial. She did that kind of research. I mean, she knew that that was wrong. It didn't matter, they were the experts. And so, what happened in ACT UP was whatever you were doing, you became the expert.

The people on the Insurance Committee, they were the experts on insurance. The people on Treatment and Data – they were the experts about treatment and data. So, everybody else got into this thing about, if you weren't on that committee, you had to accept their point of view, because they were the experts. And that's deadly, for an organization that was based on self-motivation, because what happened in ACT UP – when I went into ACT UP, did I know anything about immunology? Zero, okay? And I ended up knowing a huge amount about immunology and pharmacology and stuff like that. And it wasn't because I sat down and I read a book, it was because people were teaching each other. And, because when you worked on an action, people made out fact sheets, and you learned that stuff, and the actions were not about ideology. You could take the concrete material fact, and then you could say what the politics of that fact was, okay? But, it wasn't like you started out with a set of politics, and you tried to make something match it, or you didn't have a fact to go with it – do you see what I mean?

JH: And that's what happened after –

MW: Yes, and when I would go to meetings, I couldn't get people to want to investigate stuff – to want to get information, to want to use information. They just

wanted to know, what should they do? And, a lot of the stuff that people wanted to do, had nothing to do with treatment. And I think treatment is political. I still think treatment is political. I will always think treatment is political. People were still saying things like the reason that women don't participate in clinical trials is because they're poor, and they have kids, etc., etc. Hey, everybody wants to live, do you know what I mean? Women want to live just like you want to live. Poor women want to live. If they're not in clinical trials, there's something else going on. You've got to find out what that is. You can't have knee-jerk politics about it – that's about daycare and economics and that's all. It's just not that. Those things may work, but you can still do that stuff, and they still may not come, because you don't fit into their life, you don't understand what their illness is about. You don't know anything about women's bodies – whatever, you know? People didn't want to engage with the information anymore.

And I can't work with groups that just do kind of knee-jerk politics. I can't do rhetorical, ideological politics. And, I don't think that people respond to it, so it got smaller and smaller. And, I'm glad there are people who feel good about doing that, and as I say, there are some things that have gotten done that I think are good, but I just couldn't do it anymore. It was not where I wanted to be.

JH: But you hung on for several years, while this happening.

MW: Well, partly I hung on, because I was doing other kinds of stuff. I didn't end up doing stuff – not doing anything, after the CDC stuff. We did this whole thing on women and clinical trials, and we did a whole analysis of the – and work about the National Institutes of Health regs about research, and what had to be done with research, and all that kind of stuff. So, I did work on that for awhile. And then, in the last couple

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of years, I didn't come to meetings very much. I came once in awhile. But then, in 1997, after the 10th anniversary action, I just decided it was time.

JH: Is there anything that you regret ACT UP not achieving?

MW: I regret that we couldn't stop 076. To this day, I think it was a big mistake. I will always think it was a big mistake. The transmission from women to kids was miniscule. In order to save the next one percent of children, we've probably killed many, many women. I think that's a bad trade-off. So, I feel badly that we couldn't stop that. But, you know what? It's all about saving babies. You know, Linda and I tried to do stuff. We tried to write an article about that and tried to get it published in the *Times*, as an op-ed piece. We tried to get it published all over the country, and we could not. And we called it "Saving Babies". Who makes drug policies, the government or Burroughs Wellcome, and it was about saving babies, and that's what it's about, to this day. You say something's going to effect kids – and it doesn't matter if it affects a zillion adults. I regret that, and I regret the people who died.

JH: And what about the other side? What are you most proud of?

MW: In terms of accomplishments, I think that the CDC definition is the thing that I'm most proud of. But, I also was proud of the gay community, because I think that in the work that we did – and that's what I said before – that we set the standard for the way that people could work together, to make change in this country – for that time period.

There was this guy – at one point, there was some stuff that was going down in Albany, and this guy who was in the black caucus said something like, well, we've just got to do what ACT UP does. And, I think for certain people, of a certain age – and even

now, when people talk – you’d be amazed at how often ACT UP gets mentioned in the news, but it does, because I read all the stuff, because I put stuff out for the [Lesbian Herstory] Archives. So, I think that that’s – the idea that we could come together and do that stuff – I think that was amazing. I think we saved lives. I do think that we saved lives. I wish we had saved more lives, but I think we showed the way that you could do activism, if you really are committed to changing stuff. And I think that puts us alongside a lot of other movements, that made big change. That isn’t perfect – the Civil Rights Movement? What can we say? Are black people home free? No, they’re not. But, for the time and for what we did, I thought it was an amazing experience. It was my best organizing experience.

JH: Is there anything we didn’t talk about?

MW: Please, there are a hundred things.

JH: It’s amazing how much stuff ACT UP did.

MW: If I went into all the actions that we did, and the funny things that happened. I think that was the other thing that got lost – I should say that, too – with, sort of, the focus on the drug stuff, was that, there was a combination of serious politics and joyful living that was so great in ACT UP, and that was so different from the left, which basically believed that you couldn’t smile until the revolution was over – that people would party really hard. We would go and do actions where we really put our bodies on the line, and then we’d go out and party all night. Do you know what I mean? Or, David [Robinson] would facilitate in a skirt. And then, it got to the point where people would say, oh, well you don’t have time for that kind of stuff. And, when you don’t have time for that kind of stuff, you basically de-humanize a movement. A movement is about

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people. Everything takes a really long time to accomplish in the world. If you don't have a community, if you don't have a way of being, of people that you can be with, who make you feel good about who you are about what you're doing, as you're doing that stuff, you're not going to stay in it. You can't. It just becomes a drudge.

And, I think that was an amazing – why one of the things that was amazing about ACT UP – was that people formed little groups of friends. They did things together. They felt good about what they were doing. We could have big parties at big venues, and people would come and dance their heads off, and then the next day, go out and get arrested. That combination is what you need, in order to continue. You need some life. So that's my thing.

JH: That's a good place to end. Thank you, Maxine.

[END OF INTERVIEW]