

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

A PROGRAM OF
**MIX – THE NEW YORK LESBIAN &
GAY EXPERIMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Interviewee: **SPREE**

Interview Number: **060**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **October 16, 2004**

**ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of SPREE
October 16, 2004**

SARAH SCHULMAN: Are we rolling?

SPREE: I'm looking at you. There's two cameras going? Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: We are rolling.

SS: Okay. So the way we start is you could say your name, today's date, how old you are, and where we are.

SPREE: Okay. My name is SPREE. Today's date, I think, is Saturday, October 16th, 2004. Which means I've got a little bit less than a month now to be 46 years old.

SS: Great. And where are we?

SPREE: Oh. We're at IDA. Idyll Dandy Acres, Tennessee. Well, in Dowelltown, outside of Dowelltown, Tennessee. Out in the woods. In the holler.

SS: In the holler. Now, can you tell —

JIM HUBBARD: Okay, wait. I have to stop.

SS: Why?

JH: I forgot to do the releases.

SS: Oh.

JH: You have to sign —

JW: So we're still ahead of the game. We have the introduction, the picture —

SPREE: But you can't use that now. I didn't sign anything, so if you use that.

SS: Oh.

SPREE: New York Public Library?

SS: And San Francisco.

SPREE: Oh.

JH: Now on the Web site, do you want us just to use the name

SPREE?

SPREE: Um hm.

JIM HUBBARD: Okay. And that's all?

SPREE: Um hm. And I've printed it just the way I like it, so you can copy that.

JW: Okay.

SPREE: Yes, I've thought – are we done?

SS: No, we're not done yet.

SPREE: Oh.

SS: Because are we shooting? Are we rolling?

JH: We're rolling.

SS: Tell us about this picture.

SPREE: Okay. This picture was from when ACT UP took over City Hall. And there were some people who had made these signs that say, and I'm Marlene Dietrich, or I'm So-and-So. And of course, I was, as you can see, dressed up in my faerie drag. And somebody handed me this sign that said, "And I'm Cary Grant." And I just started holding it up. And reporters started going crazy, just taking my picture, I guess because it was so funny that I was dressed the way I was, holding this sign saying, "And I'm Cary Grant." And it ended up on page 3 of *New York Newsday*.

SS: Okay, we have a little coffee coming around.

SPREE: We're having coffee service now. Oh, maybe I could have my coffee on my picture. No, that's a little — oh, are the flowers in here?

JH: Yeah.

SPREE: Oh, how lovely.

SS: So I just have to say that people have referred to you as "Timmy."

SPREE: Right.

SS: So just for, for purposes, historical purposes —

SPREE: For archival —

SS: That SPREE and Timmy are one and the same person.

SPREE: Right. Or Timmy became SPREE.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: That's —

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

SPREE: Houston, Texas.

SS: And what was your, what kind of community did you grow up in?

Tape I
00:05:00

SPREE: Well, I lived in Houston till I was 10 years old. And then, as I say, went from a bad situation to a worse situation and moved to southern Georgia. And it's literally about as far south as you can go in Georgia and not be in Florida. So from the age of 10 to 17, I was in a very backwards, redneck, horrible place. Brunswick, Georgia. Which, they just recently went to, you know, for the G-8 Summit; I thought ironically, but.

SS: So when you were growing up, how did people talk about gay people?

SPREE: Oh! Well since, I'm pretty sure, junior high — I don't know about elementary school — but they definitely always referred to me as a faggot. And I remember trying my darnedest to figure it out, because I was like, okay, wait, now, they're saying that I'm this person who's supposed to be attracted to other men, when most of the male, quote unquote, people that I was around were not appealing, at all. And, although I would look at the pictures in *Playboy* where there were men and women together, that sort of thing. So, I pretty much always knew that they were right, and I guess because I've always just been so out there, they just {finger snap} picked up on it, and started calling me that. And but there was not any kind of talk about gay this or gay that.

I've since heard that there are a couple of people that I know from high school who came out. We had a very flaming biology teacher, in the 10th grade. That was pretty funny. But it was never talked about. Other than, like, oh, he's a big fag, or in derogatory terms, I guess is what —

SS: So how did that affect your high school life?

SPREE: Well, I was kind of part of a clique of my best friend, who was from England. And her family had moved to Georgia — don't ask me why — and so it was me and her and kind of her circle of girlfriends. And we were pretty much an outside clique. When I say that we stuck together, but we were kind of like always off to the side at pep rallies, or whatever. We weren't very actively involved with the —

I was, in the 10th grade, the play that we did was *The Miracle Worker*. No, sorry. The play that we did was *The Importance of Being Earnest*. And I was the only person in the 10th grade; all the rest of them were juniors and seniors. And then the next year, we did *The Miracle Worker*. And I had a small part in it, and I was also the student producer. And then the third year, my senior year, which is supposed to be your big year to do your play, the drama teacher said, “We just ain’t-a going to do a play this year, ’cause we ain’t got the time, and we ain’t got the money, so we just ain’t-a going to do a play.”

And I was brokenhearted. And also, I had taken speech from her in the 10th grade. And then in the 12th grade, took her drama class. And she came in and said, the first day of class: “This ain’t-a going to be a drama class; this is going to be a speech class. ’Cause I don’t wanna teach drama; I wanna teach speech.” So, it was pretty sad.

SS: So did you, in your clique, or you and your special friends, did you ever talk about things like justice or have any awareness of political movements, or other people’s struggles, besides what you were going through?

SPREE: Oh, yeah. I mean, definitely, about things like race, and that political scene. And it was kind of interesting, because what happened was, in the 7th grade — okay, in elementary school, there were three black girls in the class that went with us, all the way through. And then, in the 7th grade — well, after the 7th grade — what they did was they took one, the black junior high, and they made it all 7th grade. And integrated the junior high, so that all the black kids came to 8th and 9th grade in my junior high, and then the black school was only 7th grade, because in Georgia, a lot of people don’t go any further than the 7th grade, so it was all 7th grade.

Tape I
00:10:00

And that was years before they had all of the Boston race riots and stuff like that. And there was tense moments, and kind of like little riots; stuff like that. But nothing like what happened in Boston. And then, you always think about — and I do agree — that the South is backward, and that sort of thing. But somehow, we just dealt with it, and it was happening, so we had to.

And then definitely my friends were very feminist, and so I remember things like reading about and watching things having to do with the ERA and trying to get that happening and stuff.

And so I definitely had a political consciousness. Now, as far as it having to do with a gay thing, that wasn't until after high school.

SS: How did your family react to you being victimized by the other kids? Were they aware that it was happening?

SPREE: Yes. I'm sure I talked about it. And I think I was told, you just have to be tougher. Which, heh heh, that's kind of a joke, but that was their attitude, was just tell those people, look and just be back in their face, and stuff like that.

SS: So they wanted you to stand up for yourself?

SPREE: Yeah.

SS: Now, at that time, okay, when you were just ending high school, what was your idea of what your life was going to be like? What kind of life did you want for yourself?

SPREE: Well, what happened was, I finished high school early. So I left before I even was done with my senior year and went to the University of Georgia. And

there, I just kind of blossomed. I loved it. I studied radio journalism and film. And after going there, I had to go back to the town where I went to high school, to graduate.

And then immediately left, and went to California, to go to acting school. I went to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, outside of Los Angeles. And the plan was that I was supposed to go back to the University of Georgia. But once I made it to California, there is no way I am going back.

So I went to a town a little bit north of Los Angeles, Ventura, California. And got enrolled in a community college there and was very active in the theater arts department, and my dream was to eventually move to Hollywood and become a movie star. So.

SS: Right. So were you starting to come out into the L.A. scene?

SPREE: When I got to L.A. is when I started to come out. And that's when I started doing things like going to rap groups at the Gay Community Services Center, which became the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center.

SS: In West Hollywood?

SPREE: Yes. It was towards West Hollywood. It was on, I think, La Brea or La Cienega at the time. And I actually – my first boyfriend worked at the gay center. And we actually got up there, on the roof, and stuck in another sign that said, “Lesbian,” so it would say “Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center.” And I didn't realize that those two things — coming out and trying to be a movie star — did not go hand in hand at that time, because it was the pre-Rock Hudson era of, before he came out. And so I tried. I mean, I did the whole Hollywood, game-playing thing. And was in a couple of movies, and four episodes of *General Hospital*, and –

SS: What movies were you in? We have to know.

SPREE: Okay. I was in Steven Spielberg's colossal flop of a film, called *1941*, which now, a lot of times, isn't even in his list of credits, because once he made it, they said he'd never work in Hollywood again. His career was over.

SS: Okay, what, under what name was your character? Because we have to look it up now.

SPREE: Oh. I was in, a soldier in the USO and we had three weeks' worth of scenes with Penny Marshall and Patti LuPone. And that is all cut down to where Penny Marshall has one line, and Patti LuPone has no lines. But they both get a credit at the end. So, you can definitely see me. I didn't even recognize myself the first time I saw it, because I had my hair cut three or four times. The first day, they kept saying, you, go to the barber. And so, at one point, there's this fight scene between Treat Williams and this other guy — Bobby Di Cicco — and they're fighting on a table, and I'm kind of standing right beside the table, going — like that.

SS: So, so you continued with your acting. And you were going to rap groups at the Gay Community Center.

SPREE: Right. And I was meeting some guys, and having, trying to have, what I would call a relationship. But we weren't really on the same wavelength, because they're mostly disco bunnies and stuff like that. And I mean, I would go to discos and have a good time, and dance, and stuff like that. But, in 1983 is when I went to my first Radical Faerie gathering. And once I met the Faeries, it became pretty clear to me that it was a lot more important to be who I am as a person than to try to play this Hollywood game of hiding myself so that I could be a movie star.

SS: Where was the gathering?

SPREE: It was outside of San Diego, at a place called Madre Grande. And it happened in July of 1983. And by that point, I had started to get a little bit politicized toward the gay movement, because I have an older gay brother, who lives in San Francisco. And he would buy me books like *Gay American History* and always talked to me about Harry Hay and John Burnside, and then I went to my first faerie gathering, and lo and behold, there's Harry Hay, and I'm meeting him and talking to him, and after that, well, they lived in L.A., and I lived in L.A., so we became really good friends.

And then I went on a trip with them to another gathering, in Oregon – Breitenbush, Oregon. And we stopped at my brother's, and they spent the night. So it was kind of fun. My brother had been telling me all about Harry Hay and John Burnside, and then I bring them to his house, and oh, they're going to spend the night, and we're going to go to a gathering together.

SS: Who were some of those other people? Was James Broughton part of that community?

SPREE: He was a part of it. But he had actually gone to the gathering before. If you see footage of him at a gathering, it's the year before. That same group, which was called Stonewater Circle, put that one on, at the, I don't think, no, no, no. It wasn't the same place. But it was still outside of San Diego. And James Broughton was there. But he was not at the gathering that I went to.

SS: So what did it mean to have this revelation? How did you have to change your life?

SPREE: Well, there's another person I wanted to tell you about that, if you've seen this postcard, he's wearing a T-shirt that says "Faggots are Fantastic." (see www.humorhour.com/pictures/print.asp?picture=124 or forum.ebaumsworld.com/showthread.php?t=83384) And he's on a porch of an old Victorian in San Francisco. And his name is Crit, well, his real name was Newbold Crittenden Goin III. And when I got to my first faerie gathering — that one I'm telling you about — we arrived at about lunchtime. And I walked up, on my own, away from the group that I had arrived with and started walking toward this community building. And he looks at me, and he goes, "Well, I'm glad you're here. We've been waitin' for ya." And I was looking over my shoulder going, who is he talking to? And then I was just, like, whoa.

So you might see his postcard, especially around Short Mountain, if you...

SS: And what's his faerie name?

SPREE: His name, Crit.

SS: Crit.

SPREE: And so then I go into this place, and lo and behold, there's this, whole huge buffet table spread out. And it's all vegetarian. Meaning, I can eat it all.

Because, that was the other thing that I was always very political about, even growing up back in those Georgia days, and whatever. I told my mother, when I was nine years old, that I didn't want to eat meat. But she was from Iowa and had been brainwashed by the dairy industry that you have to eat meat; you cannot live on the planet and not eat it. And then this friend from England had a little brother, who told his mother

that he didn't want to eat it, and she was like, fine. She'd make him his own plate of potatoes and peas and beans, or whatever. And I was so frustrated by that.

So I've often said that I, in a lot of ways, I feel I've been more discriminated against being a vegetarian than being queer.

SS: Quite a statement.

SPREE: {laughs}

SS: So, now, it's interesting, because '83, which is this big turning point for you, is also really when AIDS starts to become known and recognized. Do you remember how you initially became aware of AIDS?

Tape I
00:20:00

SPREE: I remember the very first article, that was that article by Larry Kramer that was however many number the cases were and counting ["1,112 and Counting"], was how the article would be printed, over and over. And it was printed in the *LA Weekly*, or something like that, and it was like, I can't remember how many cases it was at that point, but that number, dot dot dot, and counting, and then it was about, this mysterious gay cancer, and that sort of thing. And just kind of becoming aware of it, and figuring out what it meant.

And originally, in the Faeries, it was so ridiculous. It was like, oh, well, it doesn't happen to Faeries. And they're spiritually enlightened, and stuff like that. So, they can be aware whether or not somebody's infected and stuff. Which was just such stupid bullshit. But it took awhile to get to the point where we really got into the whole thing of practicing safer sex, and stuff like that. That was not necessarily going on at the first gathering that I went to.

SS: How hard was it to adjust to safe sex?

SPREE: Well, it took, it took some real determination. I volunteered at the Gay Community Center, Gay and Lesbian Community Center, in L.A. And I did this thing where they developed, there, attached to the Center was the Gay Men's Clinic, which was the big clinic in L.A. And at that point, they were trying to develop the hepatitis B vaccine? So I was going and getting my blood drawn. And they were studying me. And one of the reasons, I think, they were so interested in me was because one summer, I had stayed with my brother in San Francisco, while he and his boyfriend at the time had hepatitis. But I didn't get it. And so they were kind of interested in that. And then, I went through the whole phase of the study.

And I remember this one time, I had just gotten a job working at the telephone company. Because to pay for my acting career, I did telephone jobs. And I got this call from my answering service. This man named Aaron Todd. And I thought, oh, Aaron Todd, sounds like a producer, or something. And it turned out, it was this guy from the Gay Men's Clinic that wanted me to volunteer for this hepatitis B study. So I did that. And we went all the way through.

And through that, they really stressed a lot of – it was like pre-safe sex. But things like don't share a razor, don't share a toothbrush. Just kind of common-sense sort of things. And so I definitely had a bit of awareness about communicable diseases, and things like that.

SS: But when they first started to say that HIV was sexually transmitted, were you suspicious of that? Did you feel like they were trying to take away your sexuality, or control it in some way?

SPREE: Well, it didn't really have an effect, I don't think, in the beginning, on me. Because in L.A., they still had things like bathhouses and gay clubs, and things like that. So at least until after I had left L.A., they hadn't done that thing where they were starting to close down those places, and stuff like that. So I think, just as a recreational thing, it wasn't like we were being told, oh no, you can't do this anymore sort of thing.

SS: So do you remember the first person close to you, that you were aware of, who had AIDS or HIV?

SPREE: I would say that, yes, I do. Very well. I'm trying to figure out how to explain this story. Yeah, I heard you want stories, so if I start getting too long-winded, you can steer me in another direction.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: I went to a Faerie gathering in Ithaca, New York. It was outside this guy's house, who's one of the founders of this place. His name's Tom Seidner. And he had a gathering. And all during the gathering, there was this guy that was going around in army camouflage shorts and army boots, and that was it. And I was keeping my distance from him, because he was real butch, or whatever. And the last day, the closing day, I went to the circle, and did one of my typical, oh, boo hoo; just starting crying, and emoting, and carrying on, when I had gotten the talisman, or whatever. And then passed it on, and didn't think about it.

And then, I was sitting in the house, at the dining room table. And he walks in, grabs this chair that's sitting between us, flings it out of the way, and comes right up to me, and goes, "Stand up! I want to give you a hug." And I was just, like, ahh.

Tape I
00:25:00

And then, that was it. I was gone. The rest of the afternoon, we laid out on this deck, just like talking, and stuff. And he lived in DC. And he was in the military. And his name was Henry Chervathen. But his nickname was Straw.

And so it was great, because whenever we'd go to like, you know, the March on Washington, or things like that, we would stay with him.

And I mean, when I first met him, he was this big, huge, scrawny, I mean, big, huge, bulky guy. And then, to just watch him literally fade away, to like skin and bones, was so heartbreaking. He told me — and I remember, this is another, you learn from anecdotal things, and I'm not sure how graphic you want to be — but he once told me that one time he and this guy were doing a whole bunch of cocaine. And they really got into rimming. And he was sure that as a result of that, he got a really nasty case of cryptosporidium. And he told me, don't do it. I don't care how much you might think it's exciting, or you want to do it. Don't do it. It's not worth it.

And he would come — then I was living in Manhattan, on the fashionable Upper West Side, on 73rd and Amsterdam — and he would come, and stay with us, and go to Doctor's Hospital, I believe it was. And they would give him the milk from a mother who had just had a calf. Because they thought it would have the antibodies to be able to deal with his thing. And nothing, I mean, nothing worked. He went through so many different trials and tests. And like I said, eventually just shriveled away. And it was very, very sad.

SS: So he was the first really close person to you. What made you move to New York? Did you come from L.A.?

SPREE: Yes. What happened was, okay, so I met the Faeries. And I got all involved in being a faerie. And in 1985, I decided to give up my life that I had there — I had a very nice, cushy situation – a big one-bedroom apartment. I had a job at the phone company that I could walk to in 20 minutes, which is unheard of in L.A. And I gave all that up.

And I was going, supposed to go traveling around Europe, with these two faeries. Actually, three faeries. And ended up, lo and behold, in the spring of '85, at Short Mountain Sanctuary, for their Spring Gathering. And then, the two other faeries didn't show up. They were supposed to meet us there, and they never showed up. And so then me and the other guy went to New York. And were trying to figure out the logistics of getting over there, and stuff.

And we went to Boston. And when we were in Boston, he ditched me. He got up one morning and took off and went to Miami. And I was just, oh my god, what am I going to do? And I was like, well, girl, you'd better go ahead, because you've given up everything to go do this trip.

So I went, and I traveled around Europe for four months. And I thought I would be coming back and be going to live in San Francisco, with this faerie who I had met in my first faerie gathering, and who I was very much in love with and thought I would end up — see, I couldn't rationalize just giving up my life to go move to be with him in San Francisco. He was in L.A. to go to chiropractic college. And then he was going to San Francisco. So I thought, okay, well, I'll go travel around Europe. And then, I'll come back. And then, I'll go live in San Francisco with him.

Tape I
00:30:00

Well, I traveled around Europe for four months. And I'm crying in the streets of Paris, because I miss him so much, and stuff. And then finally, at the end of the four months, I got a letter from him, because an old boyfriend of his was going to go to school in Paris. So there was an address that he could write to me at. And he's like, when are you coming back? I miss you. It seems like forever that you've been gone. I can't wait to see you again. When are you coming home? Things like that.

And so, I get back. I fly back into New York. It took me about a week. I was in Paris, and I flew out of Paris. I end up in New York. Spent my first, I don't know how many hours, in the Port Authority bus terminal. Talk about a welcome home.

So then, I called him up. I called him, or my brother. I can't remember who I called first. But when I got him on the phone, he's like, whoa. What made you decide to come back already? It just seems like yesterday that you left. And I was just like, oh, no! How could I be so stupid? And I was like, okay, well, you know what? I always wanted to try it in New York. And now is my perfect opportunity, because here I am. And you know, what else am I going to do? So, you know, I said, okay, I'll give New York a try. And I managed to last five years.

SS: What job did you get when you were in New York?

SPREE: Well, in the beginning, I did a temp agency routine. And then, eventually, I had a neighbor, across the street from me, when I lived in Queens, who worked in the travel department at NBC. And I used to tell them my telephone stories. In fact, I had this little routine that was sort of an Ernestine-on-acid thing, where I would tell funny stories about the telephone company. And he said, I'm going to get you a job

working on the telephones at NBC. And I was like, oh, okay, great. Why don't you just do that? And he did.

And so I worked at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. And eventually, I was on the midnight shift. So I would answer phones through the night.

SS: And now, where was your gay life being lived, in terms of New York?

SPREE: Well, there was a faerie circle in New York. And I'm wracking my brain, trying to answer your question. But it's jumping ahead, because I think I know where this is going, and you're going to ask me about how I heard about ACT UP. And they're kind of connected, because in my mind, it was when I went to the first March on Washington — well, it wasn't the first one, it was the second one — because the first one, I was in L.A. And that was '79. And then, the January after that one, we had a march on Sacramento, in California, where we went to the capitol, and had a march on Sacramento. And then, the next March on Washington was when I went with a bunch of faeries from New York. And met up with a bunch of faeries from the West Coast, including this person who I was referring to, that I was going to go to live with. And ended up getting talked into — I was not going to do that whole dancing on the steps of the Supreme Court demonstration — and this guy talked me into it. And I was just like, okay, sure, why not? So —

SS: You mean about Hardwick? Was it that —

SPREE: Yes, it was — the Bowers versus Hardwick. And so, we get up there, and are dancing around, on the plaza of the Supreme Court. I mean, I even remember being butted up against the sawhorses, and the guy, this policeman, going, you

want to come in? Come on in. And he opened up the thing, and we just went in, and made a circle, and started dancing around. And lo and behold, get processed, and put onto a bus with Ortez [Alderson], who was saying – the name he was going by was Bayard Rustin — and he said, I believe there's quite a few people with that name on this bus. And so anyway, I ended up going to jail with him, and Gregg Bordowitz, and all these people from ACT UP. And because out of the group that I was being processed with, I was one of two people who did not want to say, not guilty. And so it was me and this other faerie — he was a faerie — do you want names?

SS: Yeah.

SPREE: Yeah, okay. His name's David Berman. And he's written a book, and some plays, and stuff like that. And so he and I were the last two in our jail cell and everything. And we got in front of the judge shortly before midnight, I think, of that day. And when he said, how do you plead? We said, we plead for a reversal of the Supreme Court's decision of Bowers versus Hardwick. And then he would turn to the clerk and say, I'm entering a plea of not guilty for this person. And so, then that meant we had to come back to go to a trial. And he, David Berman, was also a paralegal. So he was really excited about that, because he said if we went to trial and won, or whatever, then we would actually be in the law books with the whatever it is, the District of Columbia versus our names, and stuff like that. So he was really excited about that.

And so anyway, that's how I got hooked into the ACT UP thing. And then, as a result of that, going back, when I went back to DC, Gregg Bordowitz and Ortez and all these people came. And we went. And my friend Straw was still alive, and we stayed there. And then we went, and it was really ridiculous. Because what happened

Tape I
00:35:00

was — and it was the same judge, because he even remembered. He said, oh, I remember processing him that night, when they called me back up. I was always in drag, by the way. So, he calls me back up. And he goes, oh yeah, I remember processing him. And then the reason that the, none of the cops were there, because Gorbachev had come to town. And so they had to go provide security. And he was like, I can't believe that the District of Columbia doesn't have enough policemen that they can't provide security with Mr. Gorbachev and still be able to be here for this trial. So he just dismissed everything.

And it was really fun because I had kept my bracelet on the whole time. And then went out into the halls and all these people came up, and ripped it off of me, and stuff. So, that was sort of my first taste of —

SS: ACT UP.

SPREE: Yeah.

SS: Can we take a minute to just think about Ortez, and remember him? If you could tell us about him, that would be really great. We've been trying to make a record for people who have passed away.

SPREE: Oh, my god. This is probably my best story.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: Okay. Ortez Alderson. Oh, I'm looking at the camera, I'm not looking at you.

SS: That's okay.

SPREE: He would probably do that, too. He was from Chicago. He was active in the Black Panthers. He moved to New York.

SS: Can we go, I want to just talk about that for a second, because all we know is Ortez was a Black Panther. But do you know any details?

SPREE: Yes. I know that he was involved with them. And he used to talk to me about the difference between a black gay man and a gay black man. And he was, in his definition, a gay black man. And so, he would talk about how there was even discrimination within his own community, because he identified first as a gay black man, and not as a black gay man.

SS: Now was he – ? I understand.

SPREE: Okay.

SS: Now, he was in the Panthers in Chicago?

SPREE: Well, I know he lived and grew up in Chicago. I'm not exactly sure where his involvement with the Black Panthers was, but I would think it would be —

SS: Do you know any of the programs or actions that he was involved with, in terms of the Panthers?

SPREE: Not specifics, no.

SS: Did he ever say anything about being gay in the Panthers?

SPREE: Oh yes. That's what I mean where what, he, by what he was talking about, the difference between a black gay man and a gay black man. And I mean, even once I got to know him, and he would do those things in the subway, where he would get arrested, with the racial riots or whatever and end up in jail. Invariably Al Sharpton would end up calling him a faggot, or a queer, or whatever. So he was always discriminated against within the black community.

SS: But do you know if he was particularly — I'm sorry to press this; it's just because you're the only person who has this detail that we've been chasing for a long time —

JW: Yeah, maybe you should hold that thought.

SS: Oh, okay. We're going to change tapes? Okay.

SPREE: Yeah, no, I'm sorry. I could —

Tape II
00:00:00

SPREE: Okay. We were talking about Ortez Alderson. And so I met him in jail, in DC, after that action at the Supreme Court. And started getting involved in ACT UP then. And became involved in an affinity group with Ortez and Bill Monahan and Gregg Bordowitz, and Steven Cordova, and well, we'll get into that a little bit later.

SS: What was it called? Do you remember?

SPREE: Well, yes.

SS: Oh.

SPREE: Okay. We made an appointment to go have a meeting with Stephen Joseph. And in order to get the appointment, someone in the affinity group said that we were the Metropolitan Health Association. Right? So he took the meeting. So we go. And we proceed to have this meeting with him. And don't leave. And then he catches on, and he's like, oh, I get it; this is a sit-in. I've played those political games before, and blah blah blah.

So anyway, our affinity group became known as just MHA. And then, from action to action, it would change what it stood for. Originally, it was Metropolitan Health Association. But sometimes it would be Many Housewives Annoyed or whatever the thing was that we were going to be involved in, the MHA would change. Kind of like

RFD. And eventually, that segued into Surrender Dorothy. So. But I'll, I'll ease into that?

Okay, so anyway, by being in an affinity group with Ortez, and eventually it became pretty clear that we were about as closely politically aligned as you could possibly be, all the way down the line, when it came to every issue. And in an affinity group you process a lot of different stuff with a lot of different people. And to find somebody that you're that in sync with is pretty amazing.

And so Ortez had a boyfriend. And MaxZine [Weinstein] said he couldn't remember his last name, but his name was Arthur Gursch. And I remember a lot of people in ACT UP would say, what on earth is Ortez doing with that guy? They just couldn't figure it out. And it took a while, actually, for Ortez to even introduce me to him. But he did. And I met him. And you know, he was a little bit quirky. But hey, I was cool with that. And so I got to like him; he got to like me; and I think, because of that, because I was one of Ortez's few friends who could deal with Arthur, we became really, really close.

And later, it was only years later that, when Ortez was telling me about why a lot of people didn't like him and couldn't deal with him and stuff like that, and one of the things that he would do was just occasionally, just "spaz" out, and kind of go, "blblblbl." You know, and jerk, and jiggle, and just go off, or say strange things, or whatever. Well, Ortez told me that when his family found out that he was gay, they had him institutionalized. And he had electroshock therapy.

SS: Arthur, or —

SPREE: Arthur. So that's why he would, from time to time, just short-circuit, or spaz out. But he was a great, I mean he was wonderful. And they would s-

SS: He passed away, Arthur?

Tape II
00:05:00

SPREE: No, no. He's still alive. And in fact, now we're really going ahead. So then, Ortez moved back to Chicago. We had gone through — oh, maybe I should go in order. Because I feel like I need to. Okay.

So through that meeting with Stephen Joseph, we decided not to give it a rest. And it was around the time when he just, with the stroke of his pencil, cut in half the number of people in New York City infected with HIV. Like, literally, just “whiiik.” It's half the number that we believe. So it was completely a budgetary move, and stuff.

Well, we proceeded to just pop into his office all the time. Sometimes we'd get in, sometimes. There's a really funny picture where we're all locked in the Xerox room, because we couldn't even get in to the office.

And then, but the real shining moment was when we broke in when he was having a meeting with all these different health officials from around the city, and stuff. And we break into the office and just start screaming and carrying on and stuff. And there's a video of it. And it's very funny.

And I, he's saying something about, oh, these people are going to do theater. And I'm like, theater? You can spend 60 dollars a night and go see theater on Broadway. This isn't theater. People are dying! And so, he dismisses the people that are there, and says, we can't continue with our meeting, because these people are just going to disrupt. And he gets up.

And so I go, and I sit down in the seat that he was sitting in, at the desk. And even later on in the trial, it came up that I was banging my hands on the table, and they were saying, the defendant became very violent, banging his hands on the table, and stuff like that. I actually broke one of my rings by doing it. But never mind.

And anyway, so he got really annoyed that I was sitting in his spot. So he pulled a chair up, right next to me. And there's this guy. And I am not going to remember his name, but maybe you'll know who he is. He, he was a professional photographer. And he was friends with Susan Sarandon; I know that. And he took a picture of me and Stephen Joseph, sitting side by side, at his spot, at this conference table. And I've got on this very lovely black-and-white polka dot sun dress and these pink sunglasses, and I'm sitting next to Stephen Joseph, and he's just looking as, oh, as scowling and grimming as ever.

Meanwhile, another person in our group is at his desk, behind us. And Stephen Joseph isn't seeing what's going on there. Well, he lifted a copy of his agenda for the entire month. So anytime Stephen Joseph would be having lunch in a small, out-of-the-way restaurant in Chinatown, we would just pop in in the middle of his lunch, surround the table, and just start. I mean, we literally made that man's life a living hell. He came so close to snapping so many times. We demonstrated outside his town house. And that was the one time where I saw him literally go to punch somebody, but he caught himself, and didn't do it and stuff.

And anyway, because of that, we then had what, we didn't want it dismissed. Because up until that point, all the cases had been getting dismissed. And we wanted to have a trial. And so we were the first group to go to trial. And so —

SS: Who was your lawyer, by the way, at the trial?

SPREE: Okay. The lawyer who helped us pretty much all the way through all our legal actions and stuff was Joan Gibbs. Now, but for this particular case, she was the legal adviser. She wasn't representing us as an attorney. There was a very young, handsome, upstart attorney, who, by that point, they had started going to ACT UP and stuff. And he was with a law firm. And he represented 2 out of the 12 or 13 of us that, and he, I think, I want to say his first name was Martin, or Marvin? I'm not sure. I don't really remember. But anyway, he represented two people. And all the rest of us represented ourselves. And in so doing, Joan was who we could go and talk to, and she was there every day. But she just was not acting as our attorney.

And anyway, at that point, I had gotten a job. I had stopped, after the March on Washington; I stopped working at NBC, and sort of became a full-time AIDS activist. And well, I'm sure I don't need to tell you; the pay is not so great.

Tape II
00:10:00

So eventually, I got a job working at the National AIDS Hotline. And that was through Rebecca and, oh —

SS: Cole.

SPREE: Yes. Thank you! Rebecca Cole got me a job, working at the National AIDS Hotline. And I thought, finally, a job where I'm going to be able to marry my AIDS activism and get paid, it was so ridiculous. We got paid, I think, minimum wage. And we were on, I worked on the midnight shift. Most of my jobs have been on the midnight shift. And at one point, what it was was the CDC gave a contract to this organization called the American Social Health Association, ASHA, ah-shah it was called for short. And they got the contract from the CDC to run the hotline. Well, at one

point, they switched us. When I first started working there, I was operator 310? Well, at one point, they switched us from operators to information specialist. And we got a nickel-an-hour raise. Whooo! And then we were no longer operators, we were information specialists. And what happened, eventually, was, there were two offices. There was our office, and there was an office in North Carolina. But the office in North Carolina would close at night. So all the calls would get routed to New York. And so, you could hear, in someone's voice, when they would ask you where you are, and you would say, New York, they'd be like, you must really know what's going on, because it's really happening there, and stuff.

And so eventually I got promoted to be the supervisor on the midnight shift. And when that happened, then I hired Bill Monahan and Ortez to come in and be information specialists on my shift. And of course, we were talking about whatever drug there was in the pipeline, or on the black market, or whatever. And that was not what they wanted. They wanted you strictly to tell the government's AZT party line. And it ended up being this – oh, okay.

So. We – me; Bill; Ortez – we're working all night, through the night; midnight to 8 a.m. We get off at 8 in the morning; get on the subway; maybe grab a bite to eat. Go downtown to 100 Centre Street. And then, go into the courthouse. And then, I always had my bag of drag that I would then change into, outside, in the corridors, so that every day of the trial — it ended up being a three-week trial — and every day of the trial, I had a different outfit on. And we showed this videotape in the courtroom, where we're disrupting Stephen Joseph, and sitting in his office, and all this kind of stuff.

And they're bringing in the security people, and there was this one security guard who really liked us. And she didn't want us to get punished. We're being tried for criminal trespass in the third degree, was what we were being charged with. And so I said to her when I got to question, I said, and what was the thing that I said to you every time you told me that I was trespassing? And she said, well, you told me that Stephen Joseph was a public official, and you were a member of the public, so you had a right to meet with him.

And the big thing was the ADA, through the whole thing, kept going, did you have an appointment? Did you have an appointment? You didn't have an appointment. No, you didn't have an appointment. And it was so ridiculous. Because he wouldn't-a given us appointment, even if we had tried to get an appointment.

So, it was very, parts of it were very comical. Another very funny thing was, all the people who — like the security guards and whatever — would enter from the back of the courtroom; walk up to the witness stand; get sworn in, whatever. When it was time for Stephen Joseph — yes, himselfness — to come in, to the courtroom, he came in a side door, with special security detail.

Well, Bill Monahan, he was such a hothead. He jumped up out of his seat, and he was like, I object! I object! And the judge is like, what? What do you object to?

And he's like, all the other people who have witnessed or testified came through that door! Why is he getting special treatment, coming through that door?

And she's like, Mr. Monahan, sit down! If the Stephen Joseph security detail feels that he needs to come through that door, then so be it! And you cannot object! Sit down! It was so funny.

And then the whole trial was like that. And eventually, by the end of it, because Stephen Joseph was Koch-appointed, Laura Drager, bless her heart, as liberal as she tried to be, was also appointed by —

SS: Who is she?

SPREE: The, she was the judge.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: Laura Drager. She was appointed by Koch. So in the end, when it was all said and done, we were found guilty of criminal trespass in the third degree. And she said, there's no doubt that you did it. You showed me a videotape of you doing it, so I have to find you guilty, because you did it. And then she even went on to say, but what you did was wrong. It was against the law. And you need to be punished. So. Because we had asked if, when, if we were found guilty, that we could work in a AIDS ward of a hospital, or something like that. And she said, no. Because that's the kind of thing you would do anyway. And you need to be punished. So I am sentencing you to 10 days with the Department of Sanitation.

Now. Okay. We're dealing with people with HIV, AIDS, compromised immune systems, the works. So we're like, excuse me? We'd like to make sentencing statement, which is your right when you're found guilty, that you get to make a sentencing statement. Okay. Go away for 10 days. And come back. And I'm thinking, there is no way that we are going to get through to this woman. It's just not possible. And I mean, we're talking about people like Mark Harrington, Jim Eigo. They're all in this trial. So you get 12 or 13 of the most eloquent, beautifully written speeches. Because they knew more than some of the doctors knew about how HIV was transmitted,

and how the drugs acted, and stuff like that. And just going on, for 10 or 15 minutes, each one of us, saying these things to her.

And I even said something like, because she had said, at some point, something to the degree that it did not affect her. And I said, okay, you may sit there, in your lofty position, and say that it does not affect you. But it does. It affects all of us.

And she even went back, and addressed what I said, and said, oh, what I meant when I said that was, I have not known anyone personally, that it has not affected me in that way. But yes, I know, it does affect all of us, and da da da da.

And oh, I have to do one side story. So in addition to writing this speech, that I was very nervous about, I went out and bought a new sentencing outfit. Now, this was around the time of *Dynasty*, and Alexis. And I wanted to do that scene where Alexis walks in, with the big hat, at the end of season one, on *Dynasty*, when it wasn't even Joan Collins, it was just some woman in the big hat, because they hadn't cast her yet. So I got this big hat.

And I go in, and I sit down in the, well, we're in the jury box, because there are so many of us that we're in the jury box. And this kind of closet-case bailiff comes up to me, and he goes, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to remove your hat. And I said, well, let me just ask you this: if I was a woman, would you ask me to remove my hat? And he thought about it for a second, and he goes, yes, actually, I would. And then I said, all right. Well then I'll take it off. Because I wasn't going to let him get away with this drag-phobic sort of thing. So I took off my hat.

And anyway, so, by the time we had made all these speeches, she said, all right, you've convinced me. I've changed my mind. Instead, I will sentence you to 10 days of community service with God's Love We Deliver.

So we did manage to get through to her and change her mind on that point. And then, I've heard since — and maybe you've been told — that she actually was also the judge for the people that went to trial for the needle exchange? And she actually sided with them. But see, what happened with our case was, it immediately went on to appeal. So we didn't even do the 10 days because it went to appeal. But then what happened was, Koch was out, and Dinkins was in. So they just scooted our thing to the bottom of the pile, because it wouldn't behoove them to do this, you know, prosecute this whole case that was under the Koch administration, when they had a whole new administration, with Dinkins and his health commissioner, whatever.

SS: Woody Myers.

SPREE: Okay. So anyway, back to Ortez. All right. So, well, before I tell that story — so what happened was, after the trial is when he moved back to Chicago. And he had bought a ticket, because he thought he was going to have to come back to go for something else, for part of this appeal thing. But then it never happened, because it just got scooted to the bottom of the pile, or whatever. So he sent me the ticket. And it was back in the old days, when you could exchange tickets and stuff like that. So I used it to go to Chicago to visit him and Arthur and then fly back to New York. So that was really fun and exciting.

And, but one of the most fun actions ever, that I remember being a part of was when George Bush the First was running for president. And they called it a

Republican Ladies Tea Party. Now, I'm not quite sure why, because it actually was more like a cocktail party. But anyway, because of all the graphic artists or whatever that were involved in ACT UP, somebody got hold of one of the real invitations, and then made a whole stack of them. So we decided we were going to go to the Republican Ladies Tea Party.

SS: Okay. Who's we?

SPREE: Oh, ACT UP.

SS: No, but who were the people that went with you?

SPREE: Okay. Well, oh, gosh, you know those people that I mentioned, in my affinity group; all of those people, like Bill Monahan; Steven Cordova, and it was announced at the general meeting. So it was anybody who wanted to could go to it.

But my point was that what I decided to do, for I think the only time ever, in my life, was to do what I call passing drag? So I completely shaved, including my chest hair. Because I had this very lovely Jackie O black A-frame dress. And it went down to about here. So I had to shave my chest hair. I probably hit your microphone; I'm sorry.

And so, and then I wore these long, black elbow-length gloves. And took a taxi to meet, outside this, wherever it was — a bookstore, or a plaza, or something — and then we went to where this was. And it was just in some random office building. On the second floor, or whatever. But because we had these invitations, we got in, or whatever.

And so, now, for those of, the people that don't know, Ortez is quite a bit shorter than me. And as we pointed out, extremely black. And he decided that we were

going to be a couple. So he drags me by the arm, over to these black Republicans, at this thing, and starts chatting them up. And Ortez was also an actor. And I mean, it was so hysterical. I —

SS: Now, he's in a suit?

SPREE: Yes.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: And me with my long black gloves. And he introduces himself, and then he says, and this is SPREE. And I hold out my hand like this. And you could tell, the man didn't want to take my hand, but he barely shakes it. And then, so, and then he's like, well, actually, we live in Connecticut, but we have an apartment on the Upper West Side. And well, you do vote in Manhattan, don't you? Oh, yes, we always vote in Manhattan. And I mean, I am biting the sides of my cheeks to just not burst out laughing, because it's so hilarious. And he's really debating with them about why they are Republicans. And it was just so funny.

And then at one point, somebody had made these buttons that said, Lesbians for Bush. So I took mine out of my pocketbook and whipped it on. And Ortez put one on his suit. And there was this Young American Republican guy there, who had gotten wind of the situation. And he walks up. And he looks at the button on Ortez. And he goes, oh; you're for Bush, right? And Ortez is like, yes, absolutely. And he's like, well, listen, we heard there might be some trouble here. Will you help us out? And Ortez was like, anything. Just tell me what you want me to do, and I'm there.

Tape II
00:25:00

And so, I can't remember what it was. They started singing "The Star Spangled Banner," or "My Country 'Tis of Thee," or some real gacky thing. And as very

typical ACT UP fashion, we could not even wait for them to finish, and we just start bursting out, chanting, ACT UP, Fight AIDS, and that boy, when he saw Ortez was one of us, was just so slack-jawed, and just couldn't believe that here he had thought this guy was, I don't know what he thought a lesbian was, but anyway, that was one of the most fun things that I ever did with Ortez.

SS: I just want to ask you about this Black Panther thing.

SPREE: Yes.

SS: Because I'm particularly interested in this.

SPREE: Okay.

SS: So do you know any specifics at all about his time in the Black Panthers?

SPREE: Other than that he would talk about it, and you know —

SS: Do you know, was he out in the Panthers?

SPREE: Yes. I'm sure of that. I'm quite sure of that. Because of that thing that I said earlier about the gay black man versus a black gay man. And that was a cause of tension for him. Because they wanted him to be a black gay man, not a gay black man.

SS: Was he around the whole Fred Hampton–Mark Clark murders in Chicago? Did he ever mention that?

SPREE: No. When I conferred with MaxZine, now both of our memories are shady on this. So I think that he didn't ever specifically talk about it in those terms. Like what you're talking about. He didn't refer to specifics. He just would say, he was in the Panthers. And he did stuff with them. And I —

SS: You know why I'm asking this —

SPREE: I assume it was in Chicago.

SS: Huey Newton once wrote this very pro-gay statement. It's quite famous. And I've always wondered who the gay people were that he was talking to. But you don't have any knowledge about that.

SPREE: No.

SS: Okay. Onward.

SPREE: Okay.

SS: We tried.

SPREE: So now Ortez is living in Chicago.

SPREE: Right.

SPREE: And I met MaxZine at a Faerie gathering in upstate New York.

And shortly thereafter — oh, I do want to talk about this. So what happened was, the American Social Health Association decided that they were going to close down the hotline in New York City, where it had started, with volunteers and move the entire operation to Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, which just happens to be the world headquarters, at that time, for Burroughs Wellcome, the manufacturers of AZT. Coincidence? I don't think so.

So we waged the good fight. I mean, we did everything we could to keep that hotline open. We told them, look, within a 10-block radius of this office, there are probably 600 cases of AIDS. And there was, at that time, 600 in the entire state of North Carolina.

But they figured that they could get people in there, they could give them the government party line, and they would not question it. They would do what they were told, and they would say what they wanted them to say.

And it was so obviously political. They told us that by closing our office, they would save the government a million dollars. And we were like, oh, maybe the government's spent too much money on AIDS? And they were like, oh, we would have to redo the carpeting. We were like, rip up the carpeting! We don't care. We'll work on the bare concrete. We just want to keep this office open. It was so disgusting.

SPREE: This was a government agency that then got transplanted to Burroughs Wellcome?

SPREE: No. What it is is, it's the, okay. The American Social Health Association has its offices, whatever, in the same place as Burroughs Wellcome.

SS: But this was a public association? It was federally funded?

SPREE: Yes. The CDC gave them money to run the, when you would see on TV, if you have a question about AIDS, call 1-800-342-AIDS. Okay. That was this hotline. So it was, our checks would say, American Social Health Association, right? So they would get money from the CDC, and then pay us a pittance to answer these questions all night long. I got kind of famous in ACT UP for doing routines about the ridiculous calls that we would get, about how you can and cannot get AIDS, at some of the anniversary parties.

SS: Do you remember any of your routines?

SPREE: Oh, sure.

SS: Can we see a little?

SPREE: Do you want to do, do some of them now? Okay. And we would pass stories back and forth to each other, too. And I kept a little notebook that I would write them down in. And for instance, this woman called up because she — I'm trying' to think of how it went. Okay. Oh, god, help me, MaxZine.

MaxZine: Which one?

SPREE: The one with the diaper, in the baby's diaper? Oh, god, all right. We'll yeah, the daughter spit into the baby's diaper? It doesn't make any sense. The baby spit into the baby's diaper. And then the mother wanted to know if they baby could get AIDS.

SS: Right.

SPREE: Right. Okay. What it, okay. Here's a typical one. Someone from the city, the big city, visits the country. They give it to a cow. The, well, the person from the city, from the country goes back to the big city. But they give it to a cow. Can you get it from eating a hamburger from this cow?

SS: {laughs}

SPREE: Um, okay.

SS: Right.

SPREE: This one, I can do. Okay. This woman was doing her laundry. She dropped some of her laundry onto the floor. She then rationalized that what if someone threw a used condom onto the sidewalk. Someone steps in it. Then goes into the laundromat, and walks where she had dropped her laundry. Is she in any danger of getting it?

SS: So in other words, ignorance, complete paranoia, and anxiety.

SPREE: Yes. All, all night long.

SS: Right.

SPREE: What? Oh. {WITH THICK SOUTHERN ACCENT} The other night, I was out with the boys. And we went to one of these go-go clubs. I don't know why. I was sitting next to the stage. And one of the dancers knocked my glasses off. She picked them up and licked them. I wiped them off with my handkerchief. Forty minutes after that, I masturbated into the handkerchief. Am I at risk?

There was, the topless-bar calls were one of the number-one ones. Okay. So. I went to a topless bar. And you know how sometimes, when you put your money in the G-string, sometimes your finger touches their vagina? Well, I think, when I stuck my money in, my finger may have touched her vagina. Sometime later that evening, I was picking my nose. And I had given myself a bloody nose, using the finger that I believe I may have touched her vagina with. Have I given myself AIDS?

SS: Wow.

SPREE: Yeah, I had a whole routine about this that, yeah, it's really sad, but this was literally night after night after night; this is what we were dealing with.

SS: Now, before we get into you meeting MaxZine, where was your romance with Gregg Bordowitz?

SPREE: Ahhh! Ah. Okay.

SS: The Romeo of ACT UP.

SPREE: So what happened was, after I had met them all in jail and started going to ACT UP meetings, I was having my 30th birthday. I was living in Brooklyn. And I invited all those people that I had met in jail, and had become friends with, in ACT

UP, like Gregg Bordowitz, Steven Cordova, Bill Monahan, Ortez, da da da da, all those people. Okay. So. Gregg comes to my birthday party. Oh! At one point, there was this dizzy queen — and I can't remember her name — but she told me that Gregg Bordowitz had said, at one point, he wished he had gotten my phone number from me. And I was like, well, girl, that is not a problem. Here it is; you give it to him. And, well, he never did call. But he did come to my birthday party. And then, I remember, at one point, he, well, I was just kind of standing there dancing by myself. And he walks up, and he asks if he can dance with me. And I'm like, uh, yeah.

And so then, oh, I remember the other guy's name. But maybe I shouldn't implicate him, because he got extremely drunk. And was not going to be able to negotiate the subway home. So then it kind of became clear that people were going to be spending the night. And since Gregg was tending to this guy, he was going to be staying the night at this party.

Well, one of my roommates, bless her heart — Agnes, who is one of the founders of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence — decided we were going to play this game. And what you did was you wrote down your astrological sign and put it into a hat. And then you would draw out names and then the idea was that you would get matched up with the person whose astrological sign had drawn you, and you had drawn them, if you follow what I'm saying. So. And I don't know how I had found this out. But somehow, I had found out, earlier in the evening, that Gregg Bordowitz was a Leo. I swear to you, I drew out of the hat, Leo. So I'm like, okay. Then, a couple, a friend of mine had come all the way from Denmark. This was a big birthday party, by the way. I thought it was going to be my last big one, but never mind. And he had brought another

guy, who was a Scorpio. And he came up to me. And I had kind of liked him during his stay, or whatever. And he, but he was too tired; he was going to bed. And he said, do you want my Scorpio piece o' paper? And I'm like, yes, I do. And so then, at one point, Agnes was like, if you're not happy with what you have, you can try to exchange it.

So I say to Gregg, well, I have one here that I very much want to keep. But I do have this one here, that you could trade for, if you want to. And he's like, yeah, well, I have Aries or Aquarius or something, and I just really can't relate to it. So I think I will trade for the, what you've got. So of course, I give him the Scorpio. And then I'm like, I've got Leo. And you've got Scorpio. And he says, oh, it's Kismet. And so we ended up sleeping together the first night, that first night, on my birthday. I considered it sort of like a birthday present. And then we took him to his first Faerie gathering, also outside of Ithaca, but not at this guy's house; it was more at a center, or something like that. And what I was going to tell you is, he was living with Maria Maggenti at the time. And I didn't figure it out until quite a ways into it. But he would never let us have sex or spend the night at their place. And it was because, it was kind of like a railroad apartment. And he did have sort of his own space, with his own bed. But he didn't want to be doing it, in case Maria Maggenti would walk in, or something. I don't know. Anyway, we always had to have sex at my place. Which was kind of funny. And also, lo and behold, little did I know that after the fact, was told, that he was probably one of the most slept-with people in ACT UP, over anybody else. But I was completely clueless to that fact. At the time.

SS: Why did you think it was going be your last big birthday party?

SPREE: Oh. What I meant by that was it was going to be the last time I had a really big celebration for my birthday. Because it was a landmark birthday. I was turning 30, and I thought, okay, let's have a big party. Well, then we're getting way ahead of ourselves now.

But you know, I moved to the country. And lo and behold, I develop KS. I have AIDS. I get close to dying, all that kind of stuff. But, I manage to make it to the protease cocktail era. And here I am. And 46. So when I had my 40th birthday, we did have another big party, over at Short Mountain. To —

SS: And you'll have another one on your 50th.

SPREE: Probably.

JAMES WENTZY: At this point —

SS: We need to change tapes?

JW: It's a perfect time.

SS: Okay.

MaxZine: Does anyone need a drink?

SS: We resume. Now, my question to you is, when did you realize that you were positive?

SPREE: Okay. After I had met MaxZine, at this Faerie gathering in upstate New York, and they had shut down the hotline, I was getting unemployment. Well, I went to surprise him for his birthday. And we ended up buying a van together.

And then I sort of — choppy left New York. I didn't move out. Some people didn't move in; we were just talking about. I didn't move out of the place I was

living; I still had stuff there. And was still paying rent there. And I was actually living in San Francisco.

But in the summer, before that, we had been traveling all around, going to Rainbow Gatherings, Faerie Gatherings. And we had this person that we would perform with. And we were talking about starting our own Faerie theater company. And I remember being at the land in Oregon called Wolf Creek. And literally, all I would do would be just go in the van, and in the back was a platform bed. And I would just lay there. And I had no energy. And it's, I know it sounds really strange, but I swear, it was like I could feel something coursing through my veins?

And I finally said to MaxZine — because I was a real opponent of — an anti-testing person. And I said to MaxZine, I think I want to take the test. And he was like, okay.

And he went with me. We went to this clinic in the Castro, in San Francisco. And watched a video about it and got our blood drawn and had to wait 10 days to come back and get the results. And we go back together.

And I go in my room, and he goes in his room. And the guy tells him, okay, you're negative. Do you have any questions about safe sex? MaxZine's like, no. And he's like, okay, you can go. And so he goes out.

And meanwhile, I'm in my room, with my guy, who tells me I'm positive. And I'm like, oh-oh. And we had, they had done a study. Now, I don't know where they, how they do these kind of studies. But they said that when a person goes to get their test results, after the counselor says the word "positive," that you are positive, that the person will only hear 10 percent of what the counselor says after that. So that's why,

on the midnight shift, we would get these people who had had time to digest it, and had a whole bunch o' questions about what it meant, calling us up. These were the legitimate calls, I'm talking about. And then, we would talk to them. But let me tell you: there is no way — and I mean, I was a good information specialist. I got glowing reviews. I knew everything there was to tell them. I could talk people through it. I'd say, it doesn't mean you're going to get sick. It doesn't mean you're going to get AIDS. When it happened to me, all of that advice just flew out the window. And I could not take any of my own advice. It was — until it happens to you, you really cannot understand it. You can try. And you can empathize and sympathize and all that kind of stuff.

Anyway, my point was, 25 minutes later, I say to the guy: oh, would it be all right if I ask my boyfriend to come in here? So all that time, MaxZine's been sitting out there, knowing that I'm in my room, with a positive result, because he is in and out of his room. And if I had it to do over again, I'd ask him to come in a lot sooner, because I feel bad that he sat out there all that time.

Tape III
00:05:00

SS: So once you know you were positive, did you go back to ACT UP New York after that?

SPREE: No. Then I lived in San Francisco. I was involved in the ACT UP/San Francisco before it split into ACT UP/Golden Gate. And I was around for that. But I was part of ACT UP/San Francisco.

And I would go to HIV-positive support groups. Which I just couldn't relate to. I mean, they are talking about whether or not to come out as positive at work, because they're worried that they might lose their health-insurance benefits. And I'm just

like — you know. I want to talk about what you're feeling, your emotional, what's going on with you, da da da da.

Even in Nashville, I went to this HIV support group, KS lesions all over my body. I'm completely in tears, falling apart. And after I'm done, they're like, well, let's talk about whether or not we're going to have a meeting in two weeks, because there's going to be a holiday that week, and we have to decide. And I'm just like — anyway. I know that was a tangent. I got off the mark there.

So anyway, I'm living in San Francisco. I'm a nanny to MaxZine's nephew. He was six months old, and I would baby-sit him, and so I couldn't relate to this whole thing about health insurance, and coming out at a job, and stuff like that.

But meanwhile, I also was not telling anybody. It was really strange. I didn't even tell this person who I referred to before, the first 23-year-old Jewish person, not from Long Island. I didn't even tell him.

And I don't know what I thought was going to happen. They were not going to talk to me anymore, or have anything to do with me?

And to the person, when I finally — I said, it's a lot like coming out. Because every book I read, before I came out, was, you have to be comfortable enough with how *you* feel about it to be able to deal with how other people feel about it. And I really think that's true about coming out positive, too. Because I had to get my whole mindset around it before I could start dealing with other people's reactions.

But to a person, not one person had a bad reaction. They're just like, oh, I'm so sorry, and what can I do to help you? And none of that fear that you have that they're going to turn their back on you, and not have anything to do with you. Which, by

the way, is the case with my biological family. Other than my gay brother, who lives in San Francisco.

SS: They dumped you after you became positive?

SPREE: No.

SS: Or when you came out?

SPREE: When I came out.

SS: Right.

SPREE: Yes.

SS: Now, so did you ever return to ACT UP/New York?

SPREE: I would visit from time to time and go to a meeting, and stuff.

But I think by that point they had started meeting at a different location. They weren't meeting at the Gay Center anymore. It was more over in the East Village, I think?

Somewhere in a church or something?

SS: Cooper Union.

SPREE: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. It was only just as a visit thing. And maybe go to a demo, or something like that.

SS: So you didn't go back there for treatment information. As a positive person.

SPREE: To ACT UP/New York?

SS: Yeah.

SPREE: No. Then I ended up getting involved in this affinity group in ACT UP/San Francisco – which it wasn't called that then, it was just the ACT UP – called the PISD caucus? Which is People with Immune System Disorders. And I was in

their affinity group. But even then, it started to, I started to get this kind of like not-so-sure feeling about it all. Because I remember, and that was around the time of the big international AIDS conference, when it happened in San Francisco. And this whole thing, it was all about are you getting arrested? How many times have you been arrested? Are you going to get arrested? And I'd start shaking my head, and go, what? It doesn't count if you don't get arrested? If I just show up and wear a PISD shirt, that's not enough? I have to get arrested for it to mean something? It kind of started to; I started questioning it, because it was like, something's wrong with this picture. But that's, literally, that was one of the first questions you would always be asked, is, are you getting arrested?

SS: In ACT UP.

SPREE: What are you going to do — yeah.

SS: San Francisco.

SPREE: Yeah.

Tape III
00:10:00

SS: Now, one of the things that we've been doing is, everyone that we talk to who has AIDS, we've asked them if they would tell us what treatments they're taking.

SPREE: Oh. Yes. All of them, or just taking now?

SS: Everything you're taking now.

SPREE: Okay. So you don't want to hear the story —

SS: Unless you want to tell us, sure.

SPREE: Oh yeah, yeah.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: Okay. So what happened was, I moved to this place, in Tennessee. And I knew I had HIV. And I knew that I would probably eventually need to get plugged into a healthcare system. And at that time, and still now, in Tennessee, there's this thing called TennCare. Which is the state pays for your health care. And so I got plugged into that. And I started developing KS lesions. And at that time, it was actually that when they first came out with protease inhibitors, it was even a monotherapy. And that's what I opted for.

And the way that happened was, MaxZine's mother told him, on the phone, the next time SPREE goes to the doctor, make him ask about this thing called the protease inhibitor. And then my brother, who, by the way, also has KS, but he is HIV-negative, which, at the time that he got diagnosed, he was one of nine gay men in the country. So, Marcus Conant, at UCSF, wanted to study him. And he got into a program where he was his doctor. And he said, tell your brother — to my brother — he said, tell your brother to ask his doctor about this protease inhibitor called Norvir/ritonavir. So there's two messages right there.

Then I turn around and in my mail slot, in my mailbox at IDA, is this thing from Project Inform, which is a fact sheet about Norvir/Ritonavir. Didn't come through the mail. Nobody claims that they put it there. I don't know how it got there. But it's like, okay, I'm obviously supposed to ask my doctor about this. So I did.

I started with taking it just by itself, first. And it made me sick as a dog. I mean, three weeks solid, I threw up everything that I ate, literally. You have to take it with food. And three meals a day I took it and threw up. And eventually ended up in the hospital. And got taken off of that.

And then started — and I'm pretty sure it was just a monotherapy then — started on Crixivan, Zerit/d4T and Epivir/3TC. That was my first cocktail. And then I was on that very successfully, with my lesions cleared up. My viral load went undetectable.

And I stayed on that for a number of years, until my doctor thought I started to show signs of getting resistant to it. So she pulled me off of that. And I actually had what they call a protease holiday. And they did a genotype and found out that actually, I'm not resistant to any of the protease inhibitors. So now, they have me on a four-drug cocktail, which is Viramune, Viread, Epivir/3TC and Ziagen, or abacavir. And those, none of those are a protease inhibitor. Because what she said was, well, we'll hold those off until we need them, in the future, should that time come. Because if you're not resistant to any of them, then you'll be able to use them.

So that's my cocktail now. And I just got, after taking it for over a year? I just got my first undetectable with that.

SS: Great. Wonderful. So let's go back to the ACT UP/New York time. I just want to give my colleagues a chance to have a little something to eat, if they need something.

SPREE: Okay. Oh, and I wanted to tell you anothe-, a little bit more, Or-, Ortez —

SS: Great.

SPREE: — if that's okay.

SS: Definitely.

Tape III
00:15:00

SPREE: So, okay. So what happened was, Ortez had moved back to Chicago. And we would, of course, talk on the phone all the time. And then, suddenly, I had all this trouble getting him on the phone. And then finally, when I got him on the phone, he didn't want to talk. He'd just get off the phone really quickly, or whatever.

And then, I talked to Arthur. And Arthur kept telling me he was away. But he wouldn't tell me what that meant. And then finally, one night, after I had hung up the phone with Arthur, he called me back. And he told me that Ortez was in the hospital, with pneumocystis pneumonia.

And so we would go to Chicago a lot, because we had started that Faerie theater company that I referred to. And we'd go to Chicago a lot, and always stay with Ortez and Arthur. And we became friends with Ortez's sister, whose name is Germaine.

And again, watched, without a doubt, the most strong-willed person I have ever known in my life. I clearly remember that there was a point where he said, okay, this is enough. Now I've suffered enough. It's time for this to end.

It took him six months to die, from that point, I think because he was so strong-willed. But I clearly remember that.

And then what happened was MaxZine and I had gone to Europe and were performing in a International Lesbian and Gay Association conference in Copenhagen. And on the first night that we were supposed to perform, we got a telegram from Arthur, saying that Ortez had died. And MaxZine took it. And at the end of our skits and shows and stuff, he said, I just got, for the first time ever in my life, a telegram. And I want to read it to you. And by the time he finished reading it, everybody was crying, and in tears. And it was just so beautiful.

And then, what happened was they had services and everything for Ortez. But he was cremated. So Arthur saved his ashes till when we got back to the States, and went to Chicago. And me and MaxZine and Arthur and Germaine all had these little baggies with Ortez in them. And his wish was to be scattered around the Bahá'í temple, which is in a suburb of Chicago. And so we went to the Bahá'í temple. And we'd go up and smell the roses and reach our hand in and throw a bunch of him in the rose bushes. Because you can't just go scattering somebody's ashes in their gardens. They frown upon that. So, we had to be a little circuitous about it. And so that was really fun. And we saved a little bit, because he always said he wanted to travel with us, doing theater. So I had a little box that I kept him in, that he went riding around with us in our van and stuff.

SS: In ACT UP/New York, what was the culture around being positive? Was there any difference between positives and negatives?

SPREE: Oh, definitely. I always talked about, in my experience, in ACT UP/New York that there were people who would lay their butts down in the middle of Wall Street, get dragged off by the police, handcuffed, thrown in jail, treated like shit for the cause. But, when it came time for people to put their hand in the air, to actually give care to a person who was sick or needed something, whatever, they just couldn't do it. It was emotionally too great.

SS: Can you think of a specific example?

SPREE: Well, I can remember, at meetings, them standing up there, saying, so-and-so needs someone to help them get food, get groceries, do this, do that, whatever. And they would want people to raise their hands and volunteer. And —

SS: Do you remember the name of anybody who needed, who asked for help and couldn't get it? I'm just asking you this because we've had a lot of stories of people who were in care groups. So I'm just wondering about who didn't get served.

SPREE: Oh. Um — {long pause} — I can't.

SS: Because at that time, you were negative, or you thought you were negative.

SPREE: I always said that I assumed I was negative. But once I figured out that I really was positive, I didn't. I assumed that I behaved as though I were positive, as far as having safe sex, and all of that kind of stuff. But didn't want to admit it, or something? So I'd always say I assumed I was negative. But that wasn't true.

SS: Okay.

SPREE: But there was one other story I was going to tell, about somebody who did get care, but it wasn't necessarily specifically around HIV. I went to this demonstration. I remember, we went to the Center and got on a bus and went to a hospital in New Jersey. I want to say Paramus; I'm not sure.

But anyway, there was this guy there; I met this guy. And we really kind of hit it off during this demonstration. And his name was Bill. I think his last name was Kaiser; I'm not sure about that. But he did live in New Jersey. And he would come to meetings, and be involved in ACT UP and stuff.

He got hit by a postal truck, in New York. And he ended up in the hospital, in a coma, for months and months and months. And me and Bill Monahan and Steven Cordova would go and sit at his bedside and tell him about what happened at

meetings, what happened at demonstrations, and all this kind of stuff, even though he was in a coma. Because they say they might actually really hear you. So we just talked to him like he was.

And then, lo and behold, after I left New York and came back and went to some Faerie function, this guy was housesitting in an apartment downtown. And I go to this apartment. And there he is, sitting on a couch. And I'm like, oh my god. I visited you when you were in a coma, in the hospital. It was amazing.

SS: Well, how was it handled if somebody died? How, did they announce it from the floor? Or —

SPREE: Oh yeah. There I'm sure that that was, then people would, they would go to memorials and services and things like that. I don't think that was an issue. What I meant was more of an issue was when it actually came to providing the care for somebody, that it was, it was so much more loaded than doing all those things I said. Like sitting in Wall Street and getting hauled off to jail. People would do that. But they couldn't necessarily bring themselves to care for somebody who actually —

SS: I want to ask you about gender inside ACT UP. So you were doing actions in dresses, and coming to court in dresses. And there were always these tough butch dykes, like Amy Bauer, and people like that. Was there anything, any kind of value against that inside ACT UP?

SPREE: No. In fact, what I say, and what I really appreciated about ACT UP was that they completely and fully embraced me, and actually honored the fact that I was showing up in drag, in outfits, whatever. Because I think, at that point, it was like, whatever we can do to bring attention to this issue is good, and important, and we need to

do it. And so I think, yeah; even the butch dykes appreciated it. And I really, I really, really liked that about ACT UP, that I was able to be this flaming faerie and still respected and not looked down on, in any way. I never felt looked down on for that reason.

SS: Did you ever work closely with women inside ACT UP?

SPREE: I remember that we did a thing that was somehow to do with something that was going on at Sloan Kettering. And in that little group, it was both men and women. But in the other groups that I had talked about, like MHA and Surrender Dorothy, those tended to be all men. Or male.

SS: Why did you switch your name to Surrender Dorothy?

SPREE: You see, I think that that somehow got done to us. And it had to do with the whole trailing Stephen Joseph, and making his life hell, and following him all around New York, wherever you went. And then having this trial, and the fact that we were the first group that said, we want to have a trial. We don't want our charges dismissed, and follow this through.

And see, what we had thought was, we would use what they called the necessity defense. That it was, we absolutely had to do this. And well, that obviously didn't work. But that's what we thought. And I'm pretty sure that it was around in that time that somebody took a thing — and made a banner or a sign or something, that said "Surrender Dorothy."

And then, I think somehow, because maybe some of the people from there came in to the action that had started by MHA, and they got in there. And then people

would start talking about the trial, and whatever. And then they'd say, oh, Surrender Dorothy. And so, yeah. It, it —

SS: It just happened.

SPREE: Yeah, it was, exactly.

SS: It wasn't a particular, a conscious homage to Judy Garland.

SPREE: Well, I think the person that originally took the sign and had the idea at a demo to say that, yeah, it was. But then it just got put onto us. Like, it wasn't like we said, oh yeah, we're going to change our name to Surrender Dorothy.

SS: I only have a few questions left. Is there something that you want to cover that we haven't gone over?

{Extremely long pause}

SPREE: Well, let's see. I mean I think I've talked about most of the things that I wanted to talk about, as far as like the hotline, and that was so discouraging, as far as trying to get anybody to help us out. I mean, we wrote letters and sent out press packets and stuff. And they did do an article in *Newsday*. And one person on the board of directors said that she would vote to keep our office open. And that guy, I think his name was Bill, for some reason — the photographer — he said that Susan Sarandon wanted to take us on as a cause, or whatever. But she was way too busy at the time, or something like that. But. Yeah.

I had specifically wanted to talk about that whole fight, because it was such a political stupid thing that they did. To move it, you know, to North Carolina.

And then, after that, when you would call up, they would not tell you where they were. They would just say, we're on the East Coast somewhere. And I

remember one time, visiting Ortez, we would call them up, and make up these wacky, wacky stories.

Oh, Ortez was great. Because like I told you, he was an actor. And he did this one, on the phone, with this woman. And he just kept her on there for so long, about, well, my roommate has one of those shower things that you can stick up your butt. And he was just going on and on. It was so funny.

And another Ortez story was, we went to Chicago to protest insurance companies. Because at that point, they wouldn't give policies to gay people, or people with HIV, whatever. And Ortez was quite ill at the time. And he came to the demonstration. And even got arrested. They threw some mattresses down in front of this place and got arrested, because there were no beds for women in the Cook County Hospital at that time. Maybe MaxZine told you this story. But he got arrested. And then came home that night.

And as tired as he was —he was even losing his voice — they had him do a call-in show on the radio. And we were there, at his apartment, with him on the phone, barely able to talk. And these people calling up, just saying these horrible things. And he never once lost his cool. He just said it like it was. And he, it was amazing. Here was this man that was sick and had spent the day demonstrating, having people call him all kinds of names and stuff. And just, he was amazing.

Tape III
00:30:00

SS: So here's my last question.

SPREE: Yes.

SS: So this time we've been discussing is about 15 years ago, or more.

In this subsequent period, for you, what is the legacy of ACT UP in your own personal life?

SPREE: Oh. Definitely that I have a voice. And I have a right to demand to be treated with respect. I mean, even all the way down the line, in my own story of having HIV, developing AIDS, and going through the healthcare system and the mental health system, and all of that kind of stuff, well I even did a play about it.

There was this faerie who lived in Toronto, who wrote a play called *Person Livid With AIDS*. Because at that point, people were trying to get away from being called Paws to PLWAs; People Living with AIDS.

And so I had wanted, and he actually was in the hospital for the umpteenth time. And decided he had had enough. And took a handful of pills and ended his life. And what I had wanted was to get a copy of this play that he did. He did perform with us at one point, in Minneapolis, when we were doing our Faerie theater. And I wanted to do it. I wanted to get that tape and do that show. His story. And it was about living and taking pills and going and meeting with prime ministers. Whatever those people are, yeah; prime ministers? In Canada.

And then finally, MaxZine said, well, why don't you just tell your own story? And so, that, to me, is what ACT UP taught me. And even down to the way that I am treated by a call center, on the telephone. I mean, partly it has to do with my telephone jobs, that I always had.

But also, before ACT UP, I would let them get away with some things that they do not get away with now. It's like, no, you are going to deal with me, and you are

going to make me satisfied, or you're going to put your supervisor on the line. Or I definitely, and in person, too. A lot of people, at times, they can't deal with it. If I'm not being treated the way that I feel I deserve to be treated, in a restaurant, or in a department store, or wherever, I'm just like, look, I'm a person, I'm here, you got to deal with me.

I think part of it, too, was when we first moved here I got the feeling that when we would go into the bank, in Dowelltown, for instance, that somehow, they acted as if, if we just kind of don't really acknowledge them, or whatever, they're going to go away. And we didn't. We're still here. And by the time — that bank's long gone now. But by the time it closed, I would walk in, and Wanda, the manager, would be oh hey, SPREE!

So I think, because of ACT UP, and fighting for the right for people to be able to take whatever kind of medicine they want to take, if they think it will help them, then they have that right. And I think that I carry over such a political consciousness now, that I did not have before. That you'd better treat me with respect. And let's deal with my health situation, whatever it is. There's been times when I've been confined to a wheelchair. And that whole thing.

I mean, I remember — heh heh heh, heh — Miss Thing over there once got me in trouble at this AIDS benefit in downtown Nashville. This thing called Art Decadence, which is a big benefit for the Nashville Cares. Which was a joke, because any time we asked Nashville Cares for anything, they'd say, well, you don't live in our region, so we can't help you. And we went to this big, screaming benefit, and it involved some marijuana spanikopita first. But anyway, I pitched a scene about them. They had to get me a wheelchair. I was not budging. And they couldn't find one. And I

Tape III
00:35:00

was just having a diva fit and finally had to be taken home, because — I wasn't having' it! {laughs}

So, did that, did that answer your question?

SS: Yes, you answered it.

SPREE: Okay.

SS: Thank you so much.

SPREE: Anything else? I feel like there's something else, but —

SS: Do you want to think for a minute?

SPREE: Well, is Max-, where is MaxZine? I thought he was going to be around. He is? Okay. Well. Oh. I could tell you sort of the progression of how I got hooked up with the doctor that both Sandy and I have.

SS: Sure.

SPREE: Okay. So what happened was I moved to IDA. And so some of the other people at IDA decided that they wanted to, with MaxZine and myself, make a play, and take it on tour. And so we did. And when we were in Ann Arbor, Michigan — no, we were in Detroit, Michigan, performing at this theater — I remember, I was making up, in the mirror. And I had this mark on my bottom eyelid. And it was kind of like a purplish mark. And I remember thinking, hmm, I wonder what that is. And then we had gone to Florida. And we were staying at MaxZine's parents'. And I found one in-between my toes. And I don't know if you saw that play, *As, As If*—

SS: *As Is*.

SPREE: *As Is*. Where that's where he gets his first lesion, is between his toes. And then, it was like, hello?

And so we were in a Chinese restaurant in Macon, Georgia. And I said, I told MaxZine, this is what I thought it was. And he just started crying, and I was like, oh, god.

And so then, we would go around, and ask people that we knew that knew somebody who was a doctor or got their friend to come and look at it. And I mean, was getting these ridiculous – this one doctor, who worked for the CDC in Atlanta, said that I had a hematoma on my eyelid — which is a bruise — and I'm like, okay, I bruised my eyelid? And it was some kind of fungus or something, growing between my toes.

And so, but through all of this, somebody told me, you need to get plugged into Vanderbilt. And so I called up Vanderbilt. And what Vanderbilt told me was, they have like these AIDS clinical trials. And they said, but in order to get in one, you have to be referred from this place called the Comprehensive Care Center.

So I called them up. And this woman who answered the phone at the time was named Quintella. And I told her what they said. And she said, they told you what? She said, let me call you back. And I had to wait by the phone the entire day. But she did call me back.

And then she put me through to this social worker there, named John Senter, who, I told him about my situation. And he said, well, I'm really worried about the one on your eyelid. So I'm going to talk to the director of the center, and try to get you in here. Because at that point, I wasn't yet on TennCare?

And so I go in. And there is this doctor there, who is a fellow — this is what they call them — he's from Vanderbilt. So this place is an amalgamation of

different things. One place donated the space; another hospital donated the equipment; Vanderbilt donates the staff that works there.

And so this doctor looked at all my lesions. At that point, I had them other places, too. And he kept saying, I don't understand why you don't have them on your hands. And he kept saying that.

And finally, I was like, okay; why do you keep saying that?

And he goes, well, because I think you have secondary syphilis.

And I was just like, oh, my god. It was worse than if he told me I had KS lesions. Because I was like, oh no, I'm going to lose my mind now.

So he sends me to get my blood drawn. I have to wait 10 days to two weeks before I call back, to get him on the phone, because he's this important fellow person. And I get him on the phone. And he goes, oh, you do not have secondary syphilis. So I'm going to start you right away on AZT.

And I'm like, wait a minute. This is my body here. And he's like, I'm going to switch you back to the front desk. And tell them that you can only come on a Thursday, because I'm only here on Thursday.

So I had enough snap, by the time he transferred me, to say to her, there is no way, absolutely no way I can come on a Thursday. I'm sorry. And she said, well, then what I'm going to have to do is just plug you into the computer, and it's going to match you up with whatever provider is available at that time. And I'm like, do it.

And so, and then I wait to go. And I have the appointment. And I go in. And I remember, I'm sitting in the room, and I'm all nervous. What's going to happen,

what's going to happen? And the door opens. And this beautiful woman walks in and she says, "Hi, my name is Bev. Time's up? Well, we don't need the whole –

JW: I just ran out of tape.

SPREE: Do you want it? I can just tell you. She says, Hi, my name is Bev. She looks me dead in the –