

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

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

Interviewee: **Heidi Dorow**

Interview Number: **069**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **April 17, 2007**

ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Heidi Dorow
April 17, 2007

SARAH SCHULMAN: Okay. Go ahead.

HEIDI DOROW: I can go ahead? Okay. I'm Heidi Dorow. It is April 17th, 2007. We are in my apartment, in Brooklyn; Park Slope, Brooklyn.

SS: And how old are you?

HD: Oh, right. It's interesting I left that out, isn't it? I'll be 42 in a couple weeks.

SS: Okay. And I remember when you were but a girl.

HD: Yeah, heh. Those days are long gone.

SS: Because you were one of the younger people in ACT UP, actually.

HD: Yeah. I was 23, I think.

SS: Okay.

HD: Maybe I was 24, 25. It was, I came to New York in 1988, the summer of '88. So I was born in '65; that makes me 23? That made me 23 then?

SS: Um hm.

HD: There were people younger than me.

SS: Yeah –

HD: There were some teens. What was her name, [Jean Elizabeth Glass]?

SS: [Glass].

HD: She was younger than me. Garance was younger than me.

SS: Well, Garance was younger than everyone, I think.

HD: But yes, I was fairly young and incredibly impressionable.

SS: Okay. Well, let's get back to that. But I don't even know where you were born, actually.

HD: I was born in Lansing, Michigan. And I grew up in Michigan and other places in the Midwest; Illinois, Minnesota. I went to school in St. Louis for a while. And I only moved to the East Coast – well, to go to school.

SS: What is the ethnicity of Dorow?

HD: My family likes, my grandparents came from Germany, and they spoke German and all that stuff. But they were German Poles, or led me to believe that somewhere there was some hiding what their real ethnicity was, they always said they were good stock German people; which I never think of as good stock. {LAUGHS} Yeah, so they were German. And the other side of my family, I don't know. Just a mix.

SS: And when did they come here?

HD: My grandparents came here in the early part of the century.

SS: Okay. And so did you grow up near them?

HD: Yeah. I lived with my grandparents. My father died when I was very, very young. And so I lived with my grandparents when I was a little kid, in Michigan. Or in, that was in, near Chicago, but very near Michigan.

So I lived with them, and then my mom moved out from them. But I was very close to my grandparents.

SS: So did they sort of raise you in an old style? Was it in contrast to the other kids that you grew up with?

HD: No, I had two sets of grandparents. And the ones I lived with were my maternal grandparents, and they were not, they worked in restaurants and stayed up

all night and played cards and drank with the neighbors. My other grandparents, my father's grandparents, who I used to go to their house after school, when I was a little older, they spoke German in the house. They had limited English skills; they had 12 children; they were very old school, and they were very old. From the time I was young, they were old. And they, they sat in a chair and spoke German and talked about the old country and stuff.

SS: Were they Catholic? Is that--?

HD: No, they were Lutheran.

SS: Lutheran, okay.

HD: But they lived in this house that was right down the street from the church that I went to. And even when I was a kid, they had church services in German.

SS: Oh, wow.

HD: So –

SS: And did you go to church with your maternal grandparents?

HD: Uh, yes, I did. But not with my maternal grandparents; my paternal grandparents. I went, yeah, I went to church, went to Lutheran church.

SS: So would you say that that was the first community that you were part of, in some sense?

HD: No.

SS: No. What would you say?

HD: Absolutely not. {LAUGHS}

SS: Oh, okay.

Tape I
00:05:00

HD: We went because we were supposed to go to church. My mom, when we were there, when we were living in Michigan, my mom was a single parent. And she would go out on Saturday night, and sometimes get home late, and didn't always want to drag us to church. It was not a – we went because we – I think my mom felt like that's what she should do. It wasn't, we weren't big churchgoers; we weren't deeply involved in the church community. No.

{SIGH} First sense of community; uh –

SS: Were you raised with any kind of ethic about accountability to other people, or doing things with other people, or –

HD: No.

SS: Not at all.

HD: No.

SS: So, but you're one of the most community-minded people there is. Where did that come from?

HD: I needed it. I needed that, and I didn't have it, growing up. And I think – I think that the first time that I felt that I was part of a community was probably when I got involved in theater, when I was in high school and stuff. And I think that that draws people who – don't feel like they fit in somewhere.

And so I think I did feel part of a community in some sense. But I really, no; we were not raised to think about other people's needs; we weren't, I didn't grow up worrying about what was happening to the neighbors. It wasn't, I don't think I was taught to be mean, or to be thoughtless. But I think it was very much a sense, is the only way I'm going to get ahead is if I do, if I look out for myself.

And I think in some ways, those are valuable, hard-work kind of skills, and, and beliefs to have. I've always been able to, more or less, financially take care of myself. I haven't had anyone to depend on for those kinds of things. And so taking care of yourself and doing what you needed to do to get by; those have been useful skills.

SS: Right.

HD: But they're not enough.

SS: But also, theater club in high school is such a gay code. That's where all the gay kids end up –

HD: It's totally gay code!

SS: – in the Theater Department.

HD: Uh huh, and they were all gay.

SS: And did anyone know that? Or was it all – were the teachers, were any of the teachers –

HD: The teachers, the teachers that were influential to me were actually not gay. But my peer group, they all ended up to be gay. Or dabblers, for a while.

SS: Well was that on the table, at all, in high school?

HD: No. It wasn't for me. And if it was on the table for them, it was in some other context than the relationship they were having with me. I didn't know my friends were gay. If they were having same-sex sexual experiences; I didn't know about it.

But also, I grew up in the Midwest, pretty uptight, small town. We didn't talk about those things.

SS: What town was your high school in?

HD: I went to a place, I went to high school in a place called Clinton, Illinois, which is right in the middle of the state. There's a nuclear power plant there; there's – a woman who killed her children a few years ago, and put them in a car and shoved them in a lake. Those are the things that you would know about it. There's nothing – it has no significance.

SS: So at what point did you start making plans to leave?

HD: Immediately! I was constantly planning an escape, and all I wanted to do was get away from there. But I think that I spent a lot of my childhood wanting to grow up; so, be a grownup. Immediately, I wanted to get out of there, I wanted to be somewhere else; I wanted to be away from small town-ness. I wanted to be away from my family. I wanted to be away from small-mindedness. And I just needed to get out of there. I didn't really – I had lots of plans. But they weren't – they were really very simple, immediate plans, how do I physically get out of here? If I have a car, I can leave. If I know how to drive, I can leave. How do I make money to leave?

So they were those kinds of plans. But in terms of what my future would look like, I don't think that I had that many ideas. I don't think I had that much information to formulate ideas. I just wanted out.

Tape I
00:10:00

SS: So how'd you get out?

HD: Well, my grand plan, in terms of the one route I thought was the way out, initially did not work. Which was, I was going to go to college, and I wanted to go to a theater school; and I wanted to go to a, I wanted to go to a conservatory theater school. I wanted to go to a training program. I didn't want to go to college.

SS: To be an actor?

HD: Yeah.

SS: Okay.

HD: So all the schools I tried to get into rejected me. Heh. And so that was, that was very devastating. So I got into kind of a rinky-dink school –

SS: Can I just ask you; what was your audition piece?

HD: Oh, that's a really good question. That's a good question. I'm not sure I can remember, to be honest with you. That's a good question.

The only thing I can remember that it might have been was – in the musical *Working* –

SS: Um hm.

HD: – Right? – There's, the prostitute has a monologue. That's the only non-singing part, I think, in the whole show. And – I did that in high school for different things. I performed it and stuff like that. So I thought, the only thing I can think is maybe I used that, because I remembered it. But I could be wrong about that.

SS: Okay.

HD: Uh –

SS: So that flopped.

HD: Yeah, it flopped. But, so what I did was I auditioned for a kind of a rinky-dink junior varsity school — Webster University — that had a theater program. And, I had auditioned to, five schools, and I didn't get into any of them. So I got into that school. And that was St. Louis, Missouri. It –

SS: Big city.

HD: Yeah – sort of. But I – I got in there. But it was a conservatory, so you had to audition every year to get back in. After the first two years, you had to audition to get back in. And I got kicked out of the school. So –

SS: Why? Honestly, why did you get kicked out?

HD: Well – I actually don't think I was good enough.

SS: Okay.

HD: That's what they said. But I was also sleeping with a teacher, in the dance program. So, and I can't imagine that people didn't know about that.

SS: Hm.

HD: So – I don't think that that probably helped. I don't think that was the reason I got kicked out of school. And it never occurred to me at the time that that would be a problem. {LAUGHS} I was sleeping with this woman in the dance program. And – whatever – foolhardy. So I moved –

SS: Wait, was that your first girlfriend, though?

HD: Um – yes.

SS: Wow.

HD: Yeah, she was 10 years older than me.

SS: And what became of her? Do you know?

HD: I don't know where she is now.

SS: You've never Googled her, or anything like that?

HD: I have Googled her; of course I have. I try not to do that too much. But I have Googled her. I don't know where she is now.

Anyway, I moved to Chicago — because I had friends there — who were in a theater company. And they asked me to join their theater company. And so I lived there for a couple years, three years, something like that; four years. And — then — I felt — I felt stupid. I felt like I wasn't very smart. And I loved doing the theater stuff. But I felt dumb. And I had never been anywhere; I had taken very few academic courses when I had been in school before. And I just felt stupid. And I felt I needed to learn things. But I was very — I didn't think I could make it in a regular university. So I went to the library. And I looked at one of those books. I think they have different ones now. But it was called a Barron Guide?

SS: Um hm.

HD: Is that what they are? Right? So they list all the colleges around the country and stuff. And I noticed in the front of the book, there was a special notation for schools that were, I don't know if they called them "alternative," or "no grades," or something like that. I was like, I had never heard of that. So I was like, oh I could go to a school where they don't have grades, and maybe I could graduate. I didn't even know what that meant.

So I looked in the book for every school that had one of these special notations. And I applied to three or four of them. And I got into Hampshire College. And — I barely even knew where it was. And so I got in. But I didn't, they, they did all my financial aid and all that. And they said, well, we just need you to give us three thousand dollars. And I really, I worked in a store. I lived in a studio apartment, and I worked in a cute little shop. And I didn't have three thousand dollars. And I didn't know anyone who had three thousand dollars.

And so I said, I can't come.

And my – I was really, I was devastated. And so then they said, well, reapply again. And I applied again. And they recalculated my financial aid, and so I went, I don't know, six months or 12 months later, or something. And then I ended up on the East Coast, and went to Hampshire, and –

SS: I just want to ask you about your time in Chicago.

HD: Yeah.

SS: So by the time you came to Chicago, you were already out.

HD: No, I wasn't.

SS: Oh. So what happened after your dance teacher?

HD: I wasn't out. She moved to Chicago with me. But we weren't out. We weren't, – we lived together. But I never made a declaration that I'm a lesbian.

SS: So did you ever check out anything in the lesbian world in Chicago?

HD: Very little. I think I went to a – I never did anything when I was with my lover. She ended up leaving me, after a year in Chicago. And – I would go to bars – I went to bars, but I would go by myself, because I didn't have anyone, I had a lot of gay male friends, but I didn't have any lesbian friends, at least that I knew of. And so I would go to the bar, and sit there, and read the gay paper – in the corner. And I wasn't really a big drinker. So I probably had Coke. It's so pathetic. And I would read the gay paper. But I never met anyone; I never did anything that – The only thing I did when I was in Chicago was – I was very devastated after my girlfriend left me. And so I went to the mental health services, the gay mental health services.

SS: What were they called?

HD: I'm trying to remember! I want to say Horizons, but that's not it.

SS: That sounds possible, yeah.

HD: Does it sound possible? It's called something else now. They have a big center, with all these mental health services there. They didn't have that, at the time.

But I went to the mental health services. And they hooked me up with this therapist, who was a dyke. And I said, I'm here because I broke up with my girlfriend, and I'm really depressed, and crying, crying, crying. And she said, well do you want to talk about being gay?

I was like, no, that has nothing to do with anything! Why do you want me to talk about that? I was very adamant.

And then, of course, being in that therapy, I ended up coming out to my mom, and stuff, and –

But I think I had to leave Chicago to explore this gayness. I had to go someplace where nobody knew me. And so I went to Hampshire.

So it was partly getting smart, but it was also, I think, going to college, and trying to learn things. But it was also about, I had to start over.

SS: Right.

HD: I had to start from scratch. If I was going to be, if I was going to be gay, I didn't, I had to do that without the scrutiny of people that I knew.

SS: So you went to a school where you were older than everybody else – and –

HD: Older than a lot of people; not everybody.

SS: – and a lot of rich kids.

HD: Tons of rich kids.

SS: Okay.

HD: Tons of rich kids.

SS: So what was that like?

HD: It was crazy! I had no idea what was going on. I was stunned. I was stunned for a couple of reasons. One is that I got there, and this school was pretty small. So I would go into a classroom, and there would be eight or nine people. Sometimes there would be more, but I remember my first semester there, I went to a class, there were eight people. And so the teachers would ask you questions, and look right at you; and say, what do you think?

I had never had that experience in my whole life. And I found it astounding. It was great, it was exhilarating and terrifying, and – but people were paying attention to me. And I don't think I ever had that experience, in that way.

And then, there's a huge class thing.

And – two things happened in the first year I was at school, I think, that were really kind of pivotal experiences for me. I had been at school a couple months.

Tape I
00:20:00

And there were signs around the campus about people were going to drive to Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington, the gays are marching on Washington.

And I was like, here's an opportunity to be a gay person, heh. And – and so I think there a bunch of students, they, the school gave them vans to drive people down there. Which –

SS: So Hampshire.

HD: Is that Hampshire? Now, they give the students vans to drive, however many — eight hours — it is to D.C. from Massachusetts. The liability issues alone are unbelievable.

So we drove down there, a bunch of us. And — people were saying, are you going to stay for the civil disobedience action at the Supreme Court?

And I was like, well, well, what's that? What's that all about?

And two of the people from Hampshire said, yeah, we're going to do that.

And I said, well what is it?

And they sort of explained to me kind of what it was. People were going to get arrested at the Supreme Court — regarding the sodomy decision by the court that happened before. And I didn't really totally get it. But it was about gay people couldn't have sex, or something like that. And — mostly I was like, I don't know what this is, but yeah; I'm in. And —

SS: Had you ever been at a demonstration before?

HD: No.

SS: Okay.

HD: Never. So — I did, we did the march and everything, and that was fun, and really overwhelming. But I got really focused on the civil disobedience.

So went to this training. And it was a civil disobedience training; it was all random people, right? And they said, well, what affinity groups are you with? And I was like, I don't know what that is, so I'm probably not in one.

So they put us in one; everybody who was at the training. And I ended up in this group of women, all women. And they were women who had been involved, many of them, with the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment.

So they'd been arrested dozens of times. And they were really hardcore. And – so – we decided, in this group, that we weren't going to give our names when we got arrested. And I have no ide-, I had no idea what was going on.

So anyway, all this stuff leading up to – we get to the Supreme Court; they arrest us; I remember being – and I resisted arrest, because that's what they were doing. They were all from Seneca; they'd been arrested a million times.

SS: Do you remember any names, or –

HD: I have no idea what their names were.

SS: Okay.

HD: I probably couldn't pick them out in a lineup at all.

They were older than me. Most of, I think all of them were older than me. And significantly, many of them. So – we're going to resist arrest.

I was like, okay, well then that's what I'll do.

I didn't know any better.

And so, they dragged me around the corner, the police did. And they have us all lined up against this wall, around the corner from the court. And there's no cameras or anything at that point. And they say, what are your names? And they're going to write down our names.

And the women who I'm with, they say their names are, – the only one I can remember is Winnie Mandela. But they gave all of these, not their names, right, obviously.

And so I did that, too. And –

SS: What name did you give?

HD: I think I said I was Winnie Mandela because the person next to me said that. And we were all white women. Um, this is crazy. So we, they take us, and they put us on a bus, and anyway – we end up in D.C. jail. And these women, they had put these identification bracelets on us, that had numbers – which were corresponding to a Polaroid that they took of us.

These women immediately said, let's change clothes. People put up their hair, or took down their hair, or took off their glasses, and they switched shirts, or changed their, or got rid of shirts or jackets or something. This way our pictures won't match what we look like when they bring us to court.

And they came around again, and asked our names. And these women would not give their names. So I was like, I'm not going to give my name.

I didn't know any better.

So we ended up in jail for two days. And – I was in a bunk in the D.C. jail. It was unpleasant. And the woman that I ended up in a c-, and they also split us up, into, two women to a cell. The woman I ended up in a cell with was Deaf. So I couldn't communicate with her very well, and it was very dark, so she couldn't read my lips. So we couldn't communicate hardly at all.

And I – I was terrified.

Tape I
00:25:00

Once we got separated from the bravado, or the, the sort of macho, hey, we can do anything, sort of thing I started to get scared. But at that point, I had no idea what to do; I didn't know if I was going to see a lawyer; I knew nothing.

Anyway, after about two days, they bring us to court. I saw some of the women ahead of me, going before the judge. Eventually what happens is, they say, we can't identify these women. So we never gave our names. And we walked out of the courtroom into, onto the streets of D.C. free. Nothing, no, I didn't know where to go. I was just standing there. And I didn't know these women. They were off to find their cars and go back to Seneca or wherever the hell they were going. And I somehow figured it out to go, someone had given me information about there was a Hampshire alum who was inviting people to — I think it was a woman — to her house. And so I went there to try and find a ride back to school. And found a ride. And — but that was the first time I ever got arrested; that was the first time I went to a demonstration; that was the first time, anything.

And then I was completely sold.

SS: Well, what appealed to you about it?

HD: It was really exciting. It was really, really exciting. And not the part about being in jail; I hated that part. The, probably, somewhere between five and 10 minutes, that we experienced, and were at the Supreme Court, at that demonstration, at that civil disobedience, what they were doing is they were kind of letting affinity groups — were you there?

SS: I don't know.

HD: They were —

SS: I've been to so many things, I can't remember.

HD: They were letting — this was 1987, October 1987 — they were letting affinity groups onto that sort of plaza at the stairs in front of the Supreme Court. So it was completely staged; it was complete bullshit. But they let us up there. And you could see people down in the street chanting, and there were signs, and there were cops everywhere. And we sat down there, and did some sort of chant, or something. And I never felt so high in my whole life. And what I learned, over time, is that that's what it's about; it's those 10 minutes.

The leading up to it is nerve-wracking and anxiety-producing, and lots of work. And then afterwards, it's anxiety-producing, and boring, and a pain in your ass, and going back to court, and blah blah blah blah blah. Those 10 minutes. Those 10 minutes are what it's about. And nothing, nothing in the world outside of those 10 minutes makes you feel like you feel in those 10 minutes.

SS: Which is, how?

HD: Exhilarated and part of something bigger than yourself; and happy, and belonging, and – thrilling. And powerful, maybe, somehow, in spite of the fact that you're more powerless than powerful; that the world of possibilities stands before you. And I've always thought that it, imagined that's – people I know who have taken more drugs than me describe crack. It's like this 10 minutes, right? You're really, really high. And the rest of it sucks. But all you want to do is get those 10 minutes back. So, I don't know. That was, that was great; that was really thrilling.

SS: Okay, so then you go back to Hampshire. And –

HD: I go back to Hampshire, and I – they want us to talk about the experience over and over. So I get a lot of validation; a lot of validation. So that's nice, too.

But then I start doing this thing on campus, where I'm a work-study student, as are many people on the campus. And – I don't remember the origins of it. But anyway, we decided to form a — what did we call this, student worker? — a SWC. We formed a student-worker coalition, which was sort of our version of a union. And the idea was, is that we wanted to either get the wage that the school was paying student workers to be higher; or, more ideally, is that someone in the group is a numbers-cruncher. And their whole thing was, they figured out how many work-study students there were; how many hours of work-study were worked every day or every semester; and then how many students there were on the whole campus. So they thought, if every person on the campus worked X number of hours, we could turn work-study wages into grants.

Tape I
00:30:00

And so we formed this committee, and we met with the administration, and – I became an activist, I guess. We got in a car — there were four or five of us — we knew that there was going to be a board of trustees meeting, of the school. And so someone had a car. And they said, we're going to go and we're going to crash the board meeting, and demand higher wages for the students, or this new plan of everybody works.

And so we got in a car and we went to this board meeting, and we had – we staged, we got most of the students to agree to a one-day walkout of their work-study jobs. We got involved. I think it ended up, in the end of that year, that academic year, that

the work-study students got a quarter raise an hour. Which we thought was – we thought we had lost. And we did. But some people were happy with that.

Anyway, so I got, I got doing that stuff.

SS: What did your mother think of all of this?

HD: She didn't, I wasn't really talking to her, probably. I didn't talk to her much for about seven or eight years. And that was during that time.

SS: Okay.

HD: So, she didn't really, she probably, to this day, doesn't know I did that stuff.

SS: And were there any particular teachers who were important during that time, at Hampshire?

HD: Yeah. Marlene Fried, who was a very influential person. And Laurie Nisonoff and Susan Tracy. And the three of them were my committee to, had to do a final paper, or whatever, to get out of there. Yeah; they were very, there are a lot of really great teachers there. Margaret Cirillo was really great. But Marlene Fried is the person that really got me going. It wasn't even so much about the activism stuff. It's, she was the first person I felt engaged me as – a thinking person. She asked me questions; asked about ideas. She was great. I think that she does that, to this day, for students. She's a good egg.

SS: So what happened when you got out of there? Did you graduate?

HD: I didn't graduate. I was only, all that happened in a year's time. And while I was there, I met – someone who was part of the student-worker coalition, Karen Wolfe, Maxine's daughter. And I met Karen, and then she told me about her mom, who

was part of this group, ACT UP. And I read about ACT UP in the paper. I remember that was March of eighty, was March of '88 first Wall Street action?

JIM HUBBARD: Eighty-seven; March of '87 was the first one.

HD: Okay. Right, right. So I remember reading – this was after that. There was press about that action, right? So I remember reading the *Village Voice*, or something like that, at school. Anyway, so I'd heard about ACT UP, but I didn't really know much about it. But Karen's like, you should really talk to my mom. And I think I called Maxine. But I didn't know anything, really. I knew very little about AIDS. I didn't know anyone who had AIDS. I didn't know from New York. I had been to New York once — is that right? — once, yeah, once. But it sure did sound exciting. I was like, huh, okay.

So I think what happened is, is there were four or five of us, in school, in Hampshire. And people wanted to go to New York for the summer, and do internships. But nobody had any money. And these were all people who were part of the student-workers coalition. So these were not the super-rich kids. And so what we did was, there was some kind of fellowship thing on campus, for summer internships. And they'd give you a certain amount of money. And so like I say, I think there were four or five of us. So we'll all apply, and whoever gets the money pays the rent for, we'll find a place that we all live, and that person pays the rent for three months, and at least we have a roof over our heads. So we all applied. And one of us got it.

And we all had to pitch something. And I pitched, I pitched this ACT UP thing. I was like, I'll go work with ACT UP. I didn't know what the hell ACT UP was exactly, but –

So everyone's like, okay. So we came to New York that spring, of '88, with the whatever money – I think it was eighteen hundred dollars. And – maybe it wasn't that much. And we came here for one day. And I think Maxine introduced us to somebody, a real estate person or something. Anyway, we had, we have one day to find an apartment; and that's it. And we found an apartment. And interestingly enough, it was on Seventh Street, here in Brooklyn, between Fourth and Fifth Avenue. And it was two floors. And so we gave them the money. And we moved up here. I don't even remember moving up here. What I did with my stuff – anyway – we all got here, and we slept in one room upstairs, with mattresses on the floor.

And I went to my first ACT UP meeting. And I didn't know anyone. I think I had, I had called, I'd talked to Maxine, and she said there was a meeting before the meeting, about something. And I was to look for her. And – I just went. And I – that was the end of the story; or the beginning of the story. But, you know what I mean? I just went, and started doing it.

SS: Okay, a few questions. Now, I have to say, I remember –

HD: Uh huh.

SS: – you; I think you came for Thanksgiving, with Karen, at Maxine's –

HD: Oh, did I?

SS: – from Hampshire. Because I actually remember you.

HD: I came to another Thanksgiving.

SS: Oh.

HD: Later.

SS: Oh, okay. It wasn't that one? –

HD: I don't think it was that Thanksgiving.

SS: – oh, okay, okay, okay.

HD: I came to a Thanksgiving later, where I got really sick.

SS: Oh, okay, okay.

HD: Ooh, I think I – no, sorry.

SS: Okay. Now before we get into the whole ACT UP thing: what if Maxine had been into Central America? Do you think your whole life would have become about Central America?

HD: {LAUGHS} Oh, that's funny. Is Maxine the pivotal point? Um –

SS: Or whatever. If the person who had gotten you into ACT UP had gotten you into something else?

HD: Sure. Possibly. But I think the key was the gay thing.

SS: Oh, okay.

HD: So that it was – Maxine was, Karen was saying that her mom was a lesbian, and that there were all these gay people in the group. And I don't remember being that conscious of all of this. But I'm sure that was going on. How do I get into this gay thing? How do I become a gay person? And whatever that meant. So I think that was a huge part of it, whether that was completely known to me or not. I also think that it was, as it was being described to me, and as I was reading about it, it was about direct action; it was about, people were mad about something. And they were getting, they were, their anger was, they were actually doing something with it; and they seemed really cool. People seemed to, people were writing stories about them in the newspaper. And

they weren't saying they were ugly, horrible people. And so – I thought, I'm really mad, all the time, about everything. This seems to be my people.

Again, I'm not really sure that I was very conscious of it. I think that when I went to Hampshire, it was like suddenly there were all these opportunities to do things that I didn't really know anything about, and that had never been presented to me. And – I don't know if I thought at the time that, as I look at it now, a window was open; and I either was going to jump through it, or it might be closed forever. I wasn't, there was nowhere else for me to go. I didn't feel like I had to go back home. There was no home for me to go to. And I felt like Chicago was my home, because my friends were there, but I wasn't really out there. So me wasn't there.

Tape I
00:40:00

So it's not like I had, there wasn't that much tying me somewhere else, except my own fear of doing something different and going somewhere different.

So there was nowhere to go behind; there was only someplace to go forward. So I just went. And I was terrified.

SS: Okay, but before we get in-

JW: Change tape.

SS: Okay.

Tape II
00:00:00

HD: I've made it quite challenging, with all the cords over there, haven't I? Between your technology and my limited technology. I just got a DVD player six months ago.

SS: Oh, there you go.

HD: I'm scaling up.

SS: Yeah.

JW: Okay. We're ready.

SS: Ready. Okay. So you walked into ACT UP. And you never walked out. Because it's 19 years later, and you're still in the AIDS world.

HD: Um, yeah. Yeah. – I walked in. And I had no idea what was going on. But it – the energy and the excitement in the room was palpable. And I think, I'm sure everyone you've talked to has said that. I can't imagine anyone couldn't – they'd have to be dead – not to feel that. And there were a lot of things going on, right? There was laughter, there was intensity, there was a sex vibe going on, there was a righteousness going on, there was a seriousness going on. There were people in the room who looked physically ill – and were. But there was also a vibrancy that was just really, really clear and exciting.

It was, it was scary; and I think that – I don't know why that didn't drive me out of the room. But, I guess because I didn't know anybody. What did I have to lose? I wasn't, there wasn't – I was a stranger there. And that, I think, was the main reason that fear didn't keep me from coming back.

SS: That's what you said about Hampshire; that if you didn't know anybody, you could go forward.

HD: Yeah, yeah.

SS: So what about, had you ever been around a dying person before? You said your father died when you were very young.

HD: My father died when I was really young. But I was 18 months old, so I didn't know. I had some grandparents die. There was a kid in grade school who died. But no, I had not been around dying people, really.

SS: Do you remember what you first felt about it?

HD: In terms of –

SS: When you first realized you were interacting with people who could die, or who did die, or – what was the evolution of your feelings about that?

HD: Uh – it, it really was – I remember, I’m sort of jumping ahead, and with, I tell you the things that come to me most easily, the memories that come to me most easily. But they’re sort of jumping ahead in the story, if that’s okay.

SS: That’s fine. Sure.

HD: Several things that I will never forget. And one of them was; I went to visit Ray Navarro in the hospital. And I didn’t know Ray that well. But, in ACT UP, I think one of the things you did was to go visit people in the hospital, and he was a cool guy, and I – people had said he was really sick, and that he wanted visitors, and blah blah blah. So I think he was at St. Vincent’s, but I could have that wrong.

Anyway, he was really sick at this point. And he couldn’t really see. And I think he was either deaf or couldn’t hear out of one ear at that point. So the only way to talk to him was to get in bed with him, and talk in his good ear. And that’s what I was encouraged to do. His mom was there; Catherine [Gund] might have been there; I don’t remember.

Anyway, so I laid in bed and talked in his ear. And he was really sick, he looked like a sick, dying person. And – I was scared to touch him, because he seemed so frail. But he clearly, he was affectionate, and he, people were affectionate with him, and so I wanted to be affectionate. But I also was so out of my league.

At that point, I had been around other sick people from ACT UP, but I felt so overwhelmed, and I didn't know how to behave, and I didn't know how to act, and I didn't feel comfortable. And I wanted to show him care and love, and I was moved by him, and felt great love for him, and was also terrified.

ape II
0:05:00

I, I was – I remember going into the bathroom at one point, to pee, or to wash my hands. And standing in front of the mirror, shaking. And not wanting to go back out. Because I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to be helpful. I didn't know how – I was scared of his fragility.

And – I remember leaving there, thinking, oh my god, I am in way over my head. I am in way over my head. I don't know how to handle this. And I didn't know how to, I didn't even know how to talk about that, let alone I wasn't sure who I would talk to about that.

And then I remember another time, going to a meeting; and getting there early and being in the back. And Vito Russo came in. And he was really sick at this point. And he was very frail, and kind of walking slowly and feebly. And – and I was putting flyers on a table or something, in the back. And he came, and he said, come out, come out in the garden with me. This is when the Center still had a garden. And we went out in the back, and we sat on a bench. And he was holding my hand. And I didn't know him that well either, really. And he was holding my hand. And I don't remember exactly what he said. But he was essentially saying, you got to keep doing what you're doing; we all got to keep doing what we're doing. You're doing the right thing, and – he was so frail. And he was going to die. And I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do in these situations. I didn't have anything profound to say. I was scared for

him. I was scared for me. I didn't want him to die. I didn't know how to respond to his dying.

And I think there were a lot of people in ACT UP who got really good at being with sick people. And I don't think that I ever did. Because I didn't know what to do, and I felt in-, like I was responding inadequately.

But he was just so kind and loving to me. And, not because I did anything particularly nice to him. But he was so sick; he was so sick. And I don't know how he got to the fucking meeting. And there he was, sitting there, holding my hand. And – again, I remember thinking, when I went back in, it's like, I don't, I don't, I can't; I don't know how to do this.

Of course, now I feel so – perfectly fine with sickness and death and physical crisis. I'm always shocked when people get all bent out of shape; so-and-so has cancer, and, well, people die. Let's hope they have a decent life while they're still here, and stop being such a baby, and let's go to the hospital. But then, I felt really scared and overwhelmed.

SS: What were the dynamics between the women in the organization?

Would you say that there were different kinds of groups of women inside ACT UP?

HD: Yeah. Heh, definitely.

SS: How would you describe that?

HD: I think that there were women who came to ACT UP with a political life, and political beliefs. And sometimes they were older. They were formed before they got there. And then there were people like me, who were not formed before they got

there; and whose political understandings and political beliefs were shaped by my experience in ACT UP. And I think there were tensions there.

SS: I really want to know about that. What was the relationship between those two groups of people?

HD: I don't think, for me — and I'm not even sure who I would group with me in this grouping, so I'll just talk about myself — but for me, I didn't go to ACT UP because I wanted to — fight for women, or to, I was concerned about women with AIDS. And so, it just didn't occur to me. Later I sort of got more educated about that, and that seemed like a very important thing to do. But in the beginning, I didn't get that. So when people would talk about — and race issues, I could actually understand a lot better. That made more sense to me. I understood that historically. I knew more about that, in terms of what I read and what I had grown, to gain in knowledge. But in terms of women's stuff, it didn't mean that much to me.

So I think there were tensions from people who came to issues from a women's perspective from the get-go. And those might be somebody like Maxine or somebody like Marion or people who had some political experience. Risa Denenberg, whatever. People who thought about women's issues first. And so I think some of the tension, for me, was my ignorance.

And also, looking back on it, that didn't seem as much fun — eh! — As hanging out with the guys — and going wheat-pasting late at night, or doing whatever. That seemed kind of — dour, or not as much fun. So I wasn't drawn to that. And —

SS: So how did that play itself out? Did you get in arguments?

HD: I didn't get into that many arguments. Just because I didn't really feel, it was only later, I think, with stuff around, the CDC definition, where I actually, I had learned more about, I felt like I was coming from a place of more knowledge. But I didn't get into that many arguments. Also, I was not an arguer, with that crowd. That was my family; ACT UP was. I didn't want to argue with my family, that much. I wanted to be good there, because that was my home.

That doesn't mean that people didn't annoy the shit out of me, or, I wouldn't groan and roll my eyes when –I love Bob Rafsky, but Bob would get up there and rally, and here comes this rant about something. In a good-natured way.

But I didn't want to argue. I think that later, as ACT UP grew more contentious, I also, – I was connected to, most often by being lovers with people who had, who were not afraid of being contentious, or not afraid of arguing. Maria Maggenti, Tracy Morgan. Those are people who I think had a more sense, had more of a sense of themselves. And so they'll take on anybody that they didn't disagree with. I didn't have that much of a sense of myself, but I was attached to people who did.

So the tensions that are obviously most memorable are things around Stop the Church; and that was, I think, in part because that action was the first time that ACT UP was so connected to reproductive rights issues, as well as HIV and AIDS issues. And so you're going to bring different players. And people have competing concerns.

SS: Can you be specific?

HD: Well, the Church has been opposing abortion, and being a thorn in the side of reproductive rights activists, long before the AIDS activist movement existed. So people who had been, women in particular — reproductive rights activists — in

saying the Church, is the enemy, had been around the block; whereas ACT UP people talking about the Church's opposition to condom distribution – that had been a recent phenomenon, in terms of HIV and AIDS.

So I think there was sort of, oh, so *now* you're going to go to a rally that includes reproductive rights issues, because your gay issues are at stake here, and I –

SS: But who's saying that? Whose critique was that?

HD: I'm not trying to be evasive. I couldn't – in my mind; I can't put that in someone's specific mouth.

SS: Okay, but you just vaguely remember that there were people –

HD: Vaguely remember that, yeah.

SS: Okay.

HD: For me, it all worked pretty smoothly, in terms of, I missed Stop the Church. I wasn't at Stop the Church. Let it be said. History will tell. I was not at Stop the Church.

SS: But you're talking about WHAM, right?

HD: Yeah. Yeah.

SS: Okay, so –

HD: And I wasn't really involved with WHAM that much.

SS: Okay, but if you could just lay it out for us –

HD: Sure.

SS: – because we don't have the background.

HD: Okay. So –

SS: So, well, what was WHAM?

HD: – you should talk to someone who was more involved in WHAM than me. But WHAM, WHAM started in New York –

SS: What did it stand for?

HD: Women's Health Action Mobilization. And it grew out of a meeting of the Reproductive Rights Coalition, I think. There were women, many of them younger, involved in the Reproductive Rights Coalition, who, I think, were antsy, were impatient, that there wasn't a lot of direct action going on. And this was, WHAM happened after ACT UP. So there was this model of direct action, on the streets, with ACT UP. And some of the women who were involved in the Reproductive Rights Coalition had also gone to WHAM meetings; or had gone to ACT UP meetings. And, well, why can't we do this here?

And so WHAM was formed. And WHAM used similar tactics to ACT UP. And did demonstrations in the streets; got arrested. And we're talking about a time period in which there were several Supreme Court decisions that, direct action response was appropriate.

In some ways, there's an opportunity for using, there was, ACT UP model that was out there, and reproductive rights activists could sort of capitalize on sort of new, this idea of new street protests. And obviously, you see it now; a lot of those issues were overlapping. Whether it's – access to reproductive health services; safer sex information; control of your body; blah blah blah. They have common cause.

Okay, the tension – here, I'm trying to give you, not be so vague, but to be specific. The one action that I was part of that I have a fairly clear recollection of, that was a WHAM ACT UP thing.

SS: Let me guess; the Holland Tunnel.

HD: No.

SS: Oh, okay.

HD: No no no no no no no no.

SS: Oh, okay.

HD: It was – Justice Souter had been nominated to the Supreme Court.

And the hearing for his nomination was happening in Washington. And people from WHAM — I think this is what happened — people from WHAM came to ACT UP and said, we want to go to D.C. to go to the hearings. And who wants to come with us, and we need some of your money to pay for a bus; I think is how it went.

I think people from WHAM said something to a couple of us. Anyway, got up at the meeting and said – I think I got up; others did, too – and said, this is an important issue! Because people got up and said, what does this have to do with AIDS? We're here to fight AIDS, blah blah blah.

And people spoke from the floor — I think myself included — saying, this is absolutely an ACT UP issue. And that we should support this action, and we should go.

So I felt like I really had to go. And I really didn't want to. It was one of those deals where you'd meet the bus at 3:30 in the morning, and then go to D.C. Just horrible.

And people didn't want to support it. And then later, what happened was, is that we were at the hearing, and we got arrested. And we needed a lawyer; we needed to pay the bus to wait for us, to take us home. It was more money from ACT UP. And I

think there was enough sentiment in the room, both from some women — although I think there were a fair number of women who were like, you guys did a stupid action, heh, heh, and it's your own damned fault that you got arrested! But there were people, enough people in the room who had a sense of importance about a Supreme Court nominee, reproductive rights, AIDS issues, that there was enough of a connection to sort of override the guard in ACT UP that said, this is not an AIDS issue.

And they paid for the stuff, and we got out of jail, and all that stuff. But people weren't overwhelmingly enthusiastic. I think the group, this was, I think, at a time when the group was very large; there was a lot of money in the coffers; and if you were doing direct action, and you were getting arrested; and there were enough people to say, yeah, do it, even if it was a few vocal people; you could do it.

SS: Now was WHAM mostly straight?

Tape II
00:20:00

HD: I guess. I wasn't that involved in WHAM. I think that there were more straight women in WHAM. But I think that there was, I'm guessing, from who I knew, that there was probably more people — sleeping with whoever; there was more bisexuality in WHAM than there probably was other places. I think everybody was dabbling with everybody.

SS: Because — now correct me if I'm wrong; or let's discuss this —

HD: Yeah.

SS: Because what I remember —

HD: Yeah?

SS: — is that there was — a feeling at the time that men had access to a lot more money than women could have ever gotten.

HD: Oh, that's what you want to talk about. Okay.

SS: And that, I mean, reproductive rights movement before ACT UP had done direct action, before –

HD: Um hm.

SS: – most people in ACT UP had ever heard of direct action.

HD: That's right.

SS: And that there was a kind of finger-wagging, guilt-trippy, kind of you-owe-us thing coming from WHAM. Because you boys have all the money and you should put up some for us. So it was kind of a weird relationship. And there was a feeling of resentment that – because at that time, that's when the argument surfaced that if it was about women, these men would have never been there. And because the disease was about men, and all these women who came out for AIDS; but they wouldn't have reciprocated. And this was kind of like them putting that on the table. Does that all sound familiar to you?

HD: Absolutely sounds familiar, I would respond in two ways.

SS: Okay.

HD: One is that, what I said before. It's that I'm the one who remembers what ACT UP gave me. And that's how usually I'm going to respond when people ask me historical questions about ACT UP.

SS: Sure.

HD: It gave me a lot. And I'm not one to speak ill of it. And it's not because I'm censoring anything. What I remember is it was good to me, in many ways. And the kind of finger wagging that you're talking about, I have no doubt happened. I

wasn't really a participant in it, at least that I recall. And I wasn't, I didn't really travel in that circle. So I absolutely think that ACT UP was the place to go if you needed money for something.

SS: Right.

HD: And take out the politics. Let's be strategic. It's the same; it was the same dynamic that happened later, when WAC was around.

SS: You want to say what that was?

HD: Yeah, WAC: Women's Action Core? Coalition?

SS: Coalition.

HD: Coalition. So WAC started — that was post-WHAM — and WAC, the first WAC meeting was in some gallery.

SS: The Drawing Center.

HD: The Drawing Center. Were you at that meeting?

SS: No.

HD: So that meeting was rich ladies. There were other people there, too. But doctors, artists, lawyers. They had money; and they wanted to do direct action, and they wanted to do cool artistic things. And they had politics; I'm not saying they didn't. But they had money. And it was later, when some of us, sort of post-ACT UP, did the Holland Tunnel action; we went to a WAC meeting and made a pitch, because we knew, if they passed the hat, we would get money. Which we needed. And they did; and we got it.

SS: Mmmm.

HD: So, that's strategic, in my mind. And I think it was the same thing for ACT UP, if you wanted money and if you wanted bodies. Where if you went to a room on a Monday night when things were good, there were 700 people in the room. So if I had what I thought was a good idea, and I wanted to get more bodies to come to it, I would go to ACT UP, I would get more bang for my buck.

And I think for me, that's how I thought of a lot of ACT UP things. I wasn't the smartest person about treatment issues; I wasn't the most hardcore political person about women's issues, or any other, sort of specific issues; but I could talk and think about strategy. And so that's how I saw a lot of things.

How am I going to get the most people in the street? How am I going to navigate around the cops? How am I going to make this interesting enough that someone who's never been arrested before will take that leap? And that's how I looked at things, which I think is fairly naive?

SS: Why? Why is that naive?

HD: Because there are a lot of politics going on. The thing that you said about, if women had been getting AIDS, would these men have been involved in the crisis? Probably not.

Tape II
00:25:00

I didn't think that way; and I didn't think about those things. I just knew that this was exciting; and after I had been there a while, is that not only was it exciting to go into the street or whatever; but my new friends were sick, and I didn't want them to die. So then it became very personal.

And my understanding of the political layers of what was going on took a long time to develop. Mostly, I just, this was personal, this was my home, and my contribution was, how do you strategize about doing successful actions.

SS: So what was one big project that you were really deeply involved with?

HD: The couple that come to mind the most often are the Grand Central action, which we called the, we had called the Affinity 500, which is that we wanted 500 people to be arrested en masse. And then later, all the stuff around the CDC campaign.

SS: So when you say Grand Central, you mean Day of Desperation?

HD: Yeah.

SS: All right, let's talk about that. Can you explain, from the top, what that was?

HD: Sure. This was – was it January or February?

JW: January 23rd.

HD: Okay, January 23rd. Okay. It was going to be, Day of Desperation: it was going to be a day of action. So that there would be stuff going on all day. And Desert Storm had just started, right? Thank god someone knows their history in this room.

SS: January 16th was the first Gulf War.

HD: Yes. So I think there was this thought that this was drawing attention from the AIDS crisis, blah blah blah. And that people, they wanted to encourage, sort of, the city being kind of taken over around this issue. So there were actions planned morning, noon and night. And marches, education things, different affinity groups were

doing different things. But it would end; the day would end, with this massive action at Grand Central. And the thought was that we would get 500 people arrested, in Grand Central, and that we would shut down Grand Central. That was what we first talked about.

I think, I actually think it was me, and maybe others; I thought, oh, we can't shut down Grand Central. We won't have enough people. Because what I did was we did the measurements. We went there, and, how many square feet is it?

Some guy — I don't remember who — he worked for the city, or something. He came, he shows up a meeting. He goes, I got something for us to look at. And he has floor plans of Grand Central. And now, he would be in Guantánamo for having that. And I still have them. {LAUGHS}

And he brought them to the meeting in this, a tube that you put posters in. And he had, in a black magic marker, put a skull and crossbones on it. It was like, do not open, top secret. And it was really funny. But then he opened it, and there it was.

{WHISPERS} Which I thought was amazing.

Anyway, first we were talking about; we can shut down Grand Central. And then after awhile, it was like, no, I don't think we can do that. But let's get 500 people arrested.

And that was really exciting, because it was all about strategy. How do we strategically try and do our best to fuck up rush hour, in Grand Central Station, and shut it down? At least that's what we talked about in the beginning. And it was terrifying; we were going to get killed; how do we recruit enough people to do this? It's going to be so scary; we're going to be beaten and bloodied; and we want everyone

who's never done this before to sign up. And we had pledge sheets, right? And we asked you to, we gave you a packet and said, sign up 10 people.

And then we were trying to figure out how we were not going to be killed, and then how to do this, and not have the cops stop us before we had even gotten a chance to do it.

And I think about these things now, we really would be in Guantánamo. It just – of course I'm being dramatic. But it's – you can never get away with this shit.

So that was great. In the end, I don't think it turned out as well as it could have. Because for whatever reason, people thought we had to leave Grand Central. Which I think was a huge error. And I might have even been the person who said we had to leave — I don't remember — but we left. And I think we actually could have shut it down.

SS: Well how many people did we have?

HD: I think the arrest numbers were 390-something. Anyone who has a better se-, it was high. It wasn't 500.

SS: But the arrests were outside on the street.

HD: Yes.

SS: But inside Grand Central –

HD: No arrests inside, as far as I know.

SS: But how many people do you think actually –

HD: Oh, there were over 500 inside.

SS: Oh yeah.

HD: Yeah. Because it was freezing out.

SS: Mm.

JW: Thousands.

HD: Yeah. It was –

SS: There were thousands of people there.

JW: Yeah.

SS: Yeah.

HD: It was freezing outside. And so I think fewer people wanted to, because you had to wait to get arrested, once you sat down. I remember running to the front, because I was cold.

SS: What was the demand?

HD: Good question! I think – I don't remember what the fact sheet said. And I actually was going to look that up, but I didn't have time. I remember it was – the action started when some of us came into the middle of Grand Central, and let up a banner that said, Money for AIDS, Not for War. And so I think there was a general, a very general focus, about resources not going to waging a war in the Middle East, but focusing at home.

In terms of the very specific demands, which I knew there were some; at this moment, I couldn't tell you.

SS: Fight AIDS, not Arabs.

HD: Right. And was it two nights before that they broke into CBS?

JW: One night before.

HD: One night before. So – you were with that crowd, weren't you?

JW: Uh – no, but I had good friends –

HD: Anyway. So yeah, that was a general, less resources, no resources for the war, more resources for AIDS, but I'm sure there were specific demands; I don't know what they were.

SS: Okay. I have a political question.

HD: Yeah.

SS: ACT UP sees the connection between abortion and AIDS. ACT UP sees the connection between war and AIDS. Does the abortion rights movement and does the antiwar movement see the connection with AIDS?

HD: Then? I doubt the antiwar movement did. Although generally, I think there's, anytime there's a war, I think progressive people make one of the better arguments – has always been, resources directed at killing are resources better used on fighting poverty, creating jobs, giving people housing, health care. I think that's a time-honored kind of demand, right? So I think generally, there might have been connection. But I don't think the antiwar movement at the time probably had too much connection to ACT UP or the AIDS movement. I think reproductive rights activists probably had a better sense of the ties that bind there, particularly as it related to things like comprehensive sexuality education and access to contraception. So I think there was that, those folks probably got it, more than antiwar folks, at the time.

SS: Okay. So, your romances, with key figures in ACT UP.

HD: Key figures, yeah.

SS: How did that influence your political development?

HD: Immensely. I was very naive when I went into ACT UP, politically. And I think that being, with more politically astute and more politically vocal, people

than myself — well first of all, I think, going back; I think what that did is it opened the door for me socially and personally. I'm not sure that I would have made as many connections and friends, at least as quickly, in ACT UP, if I hadn't been romantically involved with popular people. And I met people that way. I got to know people, I got to talk to people, I would go to meetings that I wouldn't necessarily have gone to. And so I learned, I learned a lot. I soaked in a lot of information that way, because I made connections with people who knew things. And so there was a political education process.

I think that those relationships definitely influenced my political thinking. I don't think I would have been; I wouldn't probably have gone to a WHAM meeting if I hadn't gotten involved with Tracy. Probably wouldn't have planned actions like the Holland Tunnel around reproductive rights issues if I hadn't been involved with Tracy. Maybe I would have, but probably not.

And so, I learned a lot. And it was exciting to have a partner in crime.

SS: But isn't there a down side to being associated with a controversial figure?

HD: Sure.

SS: What is it?

HD: I think; Tracy is a person who I think – she's not afraid of controversy. I don't think that means that she's undamaged by it. But she just did what she thought was right. And was kind of fearless in that way. And probably had confrontations that I might not have had if I hadn't been connected to her. I don't like

confrontation. I don't mind it so much anymore. But again, like I said, it's, I didn't want to disrupt the family environment in ACT UP. I wanted to be good there.

But I also, I feel like I got – the most obvious controversial thing with Tracy and others — myself included — was the sort of, the moratorium that was proposed by folks regarding – people – this history is interpreted differently by different people. But as I remember it, there was a proposal about having a moratorium – ACT UP not talking to the government, any kind of government people, any government entities, for six months.

SS: Whose proposal was that?

HD: Well, it came out of the Women's Caucus, I think, if I remember right. And I – I think Maxine presented it on the floor, publicly, to ACT UP. But there were a lot of people involved. I think Maxine was chosen specifically to present it, as someone who was known and liked; had been around in ACT UP. So people had a lot of problems with that.

SS: What was the reason for the proposal?

HD: The proposal — in my mind; again, this is getting to, my take on it was, is that there were so many interactions with government entities, right? People from Treatment and Data, and from other committees, meeting with them, sort of talking about, what's the next plan for drug development, or about this drug trial, or that drug, or whatever; that the government — again, strategically, from my point — the government was no longer afraid of us. And the way that things happened, the way things moved, the way things changed, is that they were afraid of us, and the scrutiny and the controversy we could bring to them.

SS: How did you know they were no longer afraid of us? What showed that?

HD: Well, all the meetings that were happening with them.

SS: Oh, I see.

HD: Dinners were being had with them, and sitting down in a meeting.

Not a protest meeting, where if you don't give me this, I'm going to walk out and overturn these tables; but let's talk about what we're going to do next. And –

SS: Why was that a problem, though? Isn't that what people wanted?

HD: I think, I, I guess some people wanted it. I continued to believe that our greatest successes were gotten by us being a protest movement; one in which we shamed or feared our enemies into action. And I continued to see them as enemies. So –

SS: Let me just ask you; was there a specific issue where you felt that ACT UP was not as effective as it could have been because the relationship with the government was too cozy?

HD: That's a good question. Well, I think there was some – I think it started around the CDC definition, a little bit, in that, I remember there were people from Treatment and Data. We were trying to debate what our demand was around changing the CDC definition.

SS: Could you just explain why we needed to change it?

HD: The CDC definition was fairly narrow, and it was created early in the epidemic. So it didn't necessarily reflect the changing demographic of the epidemic. So it didn't, for example, include persistent gynecological infection — right? — As a marker that got you from HIV to AIDS. Or pelvic inflammatory disease; that's the one I

remember. But there were other infections that were more common, for example, to IV drug users than to non-IV drug users. And so the definition wasn't reflecting how HIV was manifesting in different populations; many of them women or IV drug users; women and men.

SS: So what was the consequence of that?

HD: The co-

SS: Change tapes?

JW: Quickly, hold that thought.

SS: Okay.

HD: I'm going to - can I pee?

SS: Why was it important that the CDC definition of AIDS include symptoms that affected drug users and women?

HD: The definition was tied to how the Social Security Administration was approving access to disability benefits. So the Social Security Administration was using the CDC's definition of AIDS as the only way that you were going to qualify for disability. So women were getting sick, and in many cases dying, without an AIDS diagnosis.

So you got a couple things going on: you've got an inaccurate portrait of the epidemic, because some of these women are dying without having an AIDS diagnosis, and they're not counted in numbers; and then they're not getting benefits. So they're sort of getting screwed from a couple different angles.

So a bunch of us — and I think it originated out of the Women's Committee — These interviews make me nervous primarily for one reason: my memory,

I don't always think is accurate, and it's also, it's not only colored with time, but then also my opinion. But I'll just say what I remember.

SS: But everyone else has the same problem.

HD: What I remember is that ACT UP had gone to Atlanta, to the Center for Disease Control, and done several actions. And the CDC had not, still had not changed the definition. And so, as I recall, Tracy and I — who were lovers at the time — said, let's come up with a year-long campaign to win; to get them to change the definition. How do we get from here to here; and we are going to make their lives miserable. They will have to change the definition, because we are going to be at them at every turn.

So we came up with this plan. And I think — I think we went to the Women's Committee, but I don't really remember. That kind of makes sense; but who knows. Anyway.

So this plan that we had was, it had several different layers. It was a campaign. And these are the components that I remember. I think the first one was a postcard campaign. And the front of the postcard was a picture of James Curran, who was the head of the HIV-AIDS division at the CDC. Had a big target on his face. And then the text on the back, it was addressed to him: Dr. Curran, or, I, and I remember the beginning of the postcard. It said something like, Hey, Curran. It was really, like eeeeh. And basically said, change the definition; we're coming after you, or something. And so we, I think, got 10,000 of those postcards printed up. We sent them all over the country; we got people in, obviously, ACT UP, but then we tried to get doctors, social workers,

AIDS organizations; we tried to flood Curran with these postcards. That was one thing we did.

Another thing that we did is that somehow — and you could never find this out now — somehow, we got a hold of Curran's travel schedule. And we found out that he was coming to a New York airport, and that he was going to be passing through the airport. So we found out how, and when it was, and whatever. We met him at the gate, with these huge signs that were the cover of the postcard. His face, with a big target on it. And we just yelled at him, from the second he got off the plane, went to baggage claim, and I think he got a cab or something; and just followed him around, screaming at him. Said, you kill women, or something like that!

SS: What was his reason for not changing the definition?

HD: I don't even remember. I'm guessing it had to do with, that you couldn't necessarily link these infections or medical manifesta-; they couldn't necessarily be linked to HIV. I think he believed it was science, and/or he was getting pressure that, why would we want to, we don't, the government doesn't want to spend any more money on AIDS; we don't want anymore constituencies yelling at us to be involved in AIDS; why would we want the numbers to go up? Why would we want to increase benefits to poor women? We don't want to do that.

So, who knows? But I'm sure it was both political, and he probably believed his own science.

Anyway. So we did the postcard campaign; we met him at the airport. I believe that within that campaign period, there was also another trip to Atlanta, to the CDC. There was coordinated actions – we found out that there are local CDC offices.

There's a CDC office in New York, there's a CDC office in Atlanta; California, whatever. So we worked with ACT UPs around the country, and there was a day of simultaneous action at CDC offices.

The action that we did in New York, if I remember, is that the CDC office was in 26 Federal Plaza — I guess it's still there — on Broadway. And we had a picket line in front of it. But what we would do is we had, we got this, that orange construction fencing, rubbery kind of fencing? We sort of lined the demo with that. And the demo was, we would walk on one side of the street on the sidewalk, and then when the light would change, we would take the action into the street, and cross. And we had those orange — bless you — fencing things. And the demonstration wouldn't get across the street in time for the light to finish changing. So it just went in this big circle; fucking up traffic.

And then, at the same time — this was the big, dramatic, theatrical part — is that we, at the time, there was 346 Broadway was there — it's still there. But — what was it? — A Day Without Art, the offices, the Clock Tower Galleries were up on the top floor. And I think it was Day Without Art had offices up there. Anyway, we had access. And we went to the roof. And we had made this huge, long banner that was — I want to say it was three to five stories high. It was ginormous. And it said, CDC Kills. And it was vertical. So we went up there, risking life and limb, I might add. I and others crawled out on a ledge that had no guardrail that was probably about this big. And there was ropes involved and tossing it over. And I'm not sure that I would do that again, I was terrified, but also I didn't think twice about it. And there were other people who did the same thing.

Anyway, so in the middle of this action, this big action in front of Federal Plaza, the banner comes down! Whooh! CDC Kills! It's five stories high. It was beautiful!

So that was happening. And then we had this sign-on campaign. Which, we had this sort of pledgey kind of thing, that was directed at the CDC, saying, change the definition. Here's what we want you to do. And we had people sign on, and we had everybody sign on who wanted to sign on. But we targeted AIDS service organizations, physicians, nurses, social workers, clinics, whatever. I think we had a heavy focus on the health care establishment.

So we got people to sign this pledge, and we kept track of who was signing, and we had them send their demands to James Curran at the CDC. But then we also kept track of who was in the network, who had signed on. And then, I believe we ran a full-page ad in the *New York Times*. I think ACT UP agreed to pay for that. And it was just this constant campaign.

Now simultaneous to that, Terry McGovern at the HIV Law Center was pursuing litigation with the Social Security Administration to get them to change how they were, what definition they were using to determine disability.

So all this stuff was going on at the same time. And that's exactly what Tracy and I talked about in the beginning, was relentless, don't let up on them. Let them be hit from the health care establishment; litigation, activists, scientists, beat them until they yield. So, campaign-style organizing, which again, that's what I liked; that was what I felt I could contribute. There were obviously lots of politics going on in ACT UP

at the time; I don't mean to ignore them. But what I remember, what I have the most visceral response to and what my memory is clearest about, is the campaign.

SS: Were there women with AIDS inside ACT UP who were part of this campaign?

HD: Yes.

SS: Who were they?

HD: Well there were women that were part of ACT UP, but they were also women from Health Force; women from – god, I can't – the women from Health Force; some of them were women who had come out of AIDS education stuff at Bedford Hills, ACE [AIDS Counseling and Education]. Yeah. There were a few women in ACT UP with AIDS. But I would argue that those women were primarily connected with other AIDS organizations, and ACT UP was not their primary affiliation. They might disagree, but that was my observation.

SS: Do you remember their names?

HD: Well there was Jane Auerbach; and there was Katrina, for a while.

SS: Katrina Haslip.

HD: Yep. Those were the women that I had the most contact with.

SS: Okay.

HD: There were others, certainly. But I don't, at this moment, remember their names.

SS: Okay. So all of this stuff was going on, and I'm assuming that ACT UP is putting a lot of money and effort into the CDC change.

HD: Um hm.

SS: Would you say that that's where you started to feel that certain sectors of ACT UP were getting too cozy with the government?

HD: Well, if I recall, the first time we went to the CDC for an action — and this is before the campaign started — there was debate about what do we want to demand in changing the definition? And I remember that there were people, I think from Treatment and Data — I think it was David [Z.] Kirschenbaum — I remember having a debate with him — I wasn't leading the debate; there were other people, more knowledgeable, were — he was saying it's got to be based on T-cell counts. And I think I remember him referring to discussions he had had either with the CDC or people in the NIH, or something, in a meeting he was in with them — which I don't believe was a meeting in which tables were overturned — and that there was a debate about what should our demand actually be. And I remember David — but I'm sure there were others — sort of saying, we've got to link it to a T-cell count. And there were other people, and the other people I remember being folks from the Women's Caucus; folks from the Latino Caucus; saying, no.

SS: Who? Who from the Latino Caucus?

HD: I think it was Juan Mendez. I think it was Juan. I just, I'm picturing the meeting. We were in Atlanta. It was like a pre-action meeting. And they were having an argument about that, I think in part based on what their signs were going to say. {LAUGHS} They were, we were ch-, people were making signs, they were talking about sort of the theme of their affinity group. And I believe David's affinity group wanted to talk about T-cell counts. And so an argument ensued.

And I think David got shot down. Or, he might not have changed his mind, but he might not have put the same thing that he was going to put on his sign. So.

And so I remember that being, me thinking at least, in a passing way, that these people have access or information that I don't have. And the Treatment and Data stuff was never my forte anyway, so, it's a different set of skills and knowledge. But I just remember thinking, wow, I don't know about this stuff.

SS: Did you feel abandoned?

HD: No. No, not at that time. No. The folks I was most familiar with, most friendly with, most intimate with, were from the Women's Caucus or from the Latino Caucus. So I was like, I deferred to them. They said it didn't include, the demands were not inclusive of illness and infections of women and IV drug users, and I was like, okay; then we got to go with that.

SS: Right. So what was the thing that made it so dire that you had to propose a moratorium?

HD: Um – I think first of all, was that the campaign that had been ongoing – the campaign was happening before the moratorium was proposed. In my mind, the campaign was about fight until we win; don't negotiate until we win. Strategically, we're playing hardball, and that's how we're going to win. And to me, the six-month moratorium was an extension of the campaign.

SS: Of the CDC campaign.

HD: That's my recollection of why it was important; why I support it. Because we're playing hardball; we're going to win with hardball. We're not going to

win going to their meetings. We win by, because we're going to be tough and we're going to, that confrontation, direct action wins this ball game.

SS: And when did you finally win?

HD: It was actually, in terms of, I think that maybe the – the Social Security case – or there was a settlement, I think, in Social Security before the CDC actually changed their definition. It was long after. The campaign had, I'm not even sure that I was in ACT UP when things actually changed.

SS: Okay, so it was years later.

HD: Um hm. I think so.

SS: So the moratorium ended, did not end up having an impact.

Okay.

HD: Well, we didn't have the moratorium.

SS: Right. But not having it didn't speed it up.

HD: Yeah.

SS: Okay. So Maxine came on the floor, and proposed – she was the face for a group of people –

HD: Um hm.

SS: – who proposed that ACT UP have no meetings with the government for six months.

HD: Um hm.

SS: And who were the people that this was most directly threatening?

HD: The people in Treatment and Data and people who were indeed meeting with people like Tony Fauci and whoever else. And those folks had, over time –

Mark Harrington is the person that comes to mind, because I think it was Mark who actually – this whole thing was started – or I think – not the whole thing was started – the feelings of ill will were in part connected also not only to the CDC, but also the 076 trial. Which was a drug trial for pregnant women, and administering AZT to pregnant women.

SS: For what purpose?

HD: To prevent transmission to their children – unborn children. And there was some debate about how this was being used; and that the women that were primarily going to be the subjects in this trial were going to be women of color; that, the thing that I remember is, at the time, there was data, scientific data from Europe, that was showing that women who had access to good prenatal care were less likely to transmit HIV to their kids. That's the study that I remember. And I'm not a science head. But I remember reading that, and going, why aren't we exploring that? Why are we giving them AZT? That there are larger, broader sort of medical issues here, beyond getting these drugs, pumping these women full of drugs. And was this the only access the women in this trial would have to health care, prenatal care, etcetera?

While, there were some of us in the Women's Caucus who went to a meeting, a public discussion about the 076 trial. We disrupted it. My memory of this is not so good. But we disrupted it.

SS: In Washington?

HD: Yes, in Washington. There were people running the meeting; there were people of color running the meeting, and some of the doctors involved — I'm trying to think of that woman from Harlem Hospital, the physician, African-American physician. You know who I'm talking about, right?

SS: Exactly, yeah.

HD: She was running one of the legs of, one of the arms of the trial, I think. And she was obviously for this. And – most, if not all, of the women; most, not all. Most of the women who were leading this protest were white. So there was backlash, that this, what were these white women doing – disrupting this discussion, or talk about this trial, or trying to disrupt this trial, when it was giving access to women of color? It was being led by women of color. That it was racist.

Tape III
00:20:00

Anyway, and we were denounced, that action was denounced by some members of Treatment and Data. And if I recall, there was something about Mark Harrington having dinner, the night before, or a few nights before, or something — I may be conflating several events here — prior to the action, and, and so that – this is all getting to your question about the moratorium – is that there seemed to be this feeling that we no longer had the ability to pressure the government to do something different, or what we thought was the right thing to do, if members of the government were having dinner, socially, with other members of ACT UP. And it wasn't just the dinner thing, although that, I think that was a particular dig. Oh, that woman also was at the dinner. What was her name? God! Rebecca? She was in T&D. Anyway.

So there was a feeling that protest no longer held the same ability to have impact if other members of the group were interacting with the government in a different, more friendly way.

SS: Okay, that's the strategic argument. But isn't there also an emotional argument? That all these years, you guys have all been in it together? Can you articulate that?

HD: Yeah, I think that there was this feeling that — also, things were changing. The drug approval process was changing. And it had changed because of ACT UP. And the Mark Harrington's and the Jim Eigo's and etcetera of the world were probably responsible for those changes happening. As well as all the other stuff. But they were talking to these people, saying, you're doing it the wrong way. This is what you should be doing. And the changes that were happening were what they wanted to happen, what they said should happen.

So — if some people were having this direct impact through negotiation or dialog with the government, personally then, what was somebody like me, what was my role? Because I wasn't making a suggestion about what a drug trial would look at. Or I wasn't making a suggestion about what a promising new treatment would be, because I didn't know — I had a general sense of those things, but that was not — that wasn't what I was bringing to the effort. So if we are moving away from protest — and I know we're making a leap by saying that — but if we're moving away from protest, then I didn't really have anything to do. And there were, I think, probably other people who might feel that way.

And then to add the layer on top of that, there were people who had AIDS. And particularly if you had AIDS, and you were saying that we should meet with the government or negotiate or, what I'm concerned about is that the drug trial process be different so I personally can get a drug; and I'm over here, and I don't have AIDS; and I'm saying, no no no, let's not do it like that; there's, I think, a conflict of interest, or people feel that they're being betrayed.

But that was beginning to be the first times that it was, there was this real, saying, I have AIDS, and I know what's best.

I think that always drove the organization, in many ways. But what was happening is that somehow, the way it was being said, or what it was being directed at, made others, like myself, feel excluded. That if we weren't a protest movement, if we weren't a direct action movement, then I'm not really sure what my role was. And of course, that made me feel bad. That my allies, my comrades, my fellow soldiers in the trenches, were somehow then different than me. That we were going to say, we're not in the same trench, and I'm not really sure what my job is anymore.

SS: And also, I guess, of all the emotional issues that you laid out before, if there's a big group of people in ACT UP who have respect and currency and leadership because of all the direct action work that they've done, and it's an environment where they're really recognized in a way that in the outside world they don't have that kind of recognition and now the paradigm's going to shift. It really challenges people's self-image and their relationship to the world, on some level.

Tape III
00:25:00

HD: Absolutely. I had more – people knew who I was in ACT UP. I'm saying they knew lots of other people. But I'm saying people would say hello to me. They would know what I was doing; and I had the ability to provide some leadership on different things in a way that I probably, I certainly hadn't probably really found it outside of ACT UP, or before ACT UP. So this was a place where I got to grow into myself and contribute something, provide leadership.

SS: But at the time, were people who were going through that — like you and Tracy and Maxine — were you having that discussion, honestly, about that

it was a paradigm shift that changed your status and changed your role? Or was it only discussed ideologically?

HD: I think it was mostly probably discussed ideologically. I think, I remember saying, at a meeting — where this whole, I-have-AIDS, I-don't-have-AIDS thing became really important; it was when we were at Cooper Union — and I remember saying at a meeting, I don't know what my place is here anymore. And so there was that kind of thing. But I don't, I think mostly it was an ideological discussion.

And I actually also don't think that there — time gives a better understanding of what was happening personally. But I know that I felt, I was personally crushed by that. I was destroyed by that, all that division in ACT UP. It, it, I was — so devastated by that, and wounded by it. And if this isn't the place for me, then where do I go? And if people that I care about are leaving, then what's happening here? It was a huge, terrible loss.

SS: But, on the other hand — okay, so that's the emotional side. But let's look at the actual politics of it.

HD: Right.

SS: The movement away from being a fully participatory direct-action movement, that had a street component; to being basically what it is now, which is people who sit on committees with government and pharmaceutical companies.

HD: Um hm.

SS: Who lost? Who is not getting services through the current structure?

HD: Well, I think that – well, in terms of services, I think it's a very different story. I'll give you an example, right? I remember, when I was in ACT UP, we would often, sort of rail against GMHC, right? They don't meet the needs of people of color; they don't meet the needs of women. It's gay white man, blah blah blah blah.

Recently, in my job, last year, I had to go to GMHC for a meeting. Around the table were – a black woman; a black man; two Latino men; an Indian man; a woman with a disability. It's, it was – the organization's face had completely changed. And most of the people that, a group like — and I'm just using them as an example which is recent and familiar — they're providing services to people of color and women and IV drug users and they're doing that.

SS: So do you believe that the negotiation system has actually served a broad community?

HD: Um, no, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that. But what I will say is, I take a slightly different take on it.

SS: Okay.

HD: And that is, is that direct action, and direct-action organizations, have a limited lifespan. That doesn't mean they can't come around again. But their inception, their heyday, is brief. And the best example is the black civil rights movement, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And half of those books up on that shelf are about the civil rights movement and SNCC, and if you read, direct action and changing a world with an enthusiasm and a belief that you are right, and you will win doesn't last that long.

So I think that the way things sort of played themselves out — in terms of the negotiation and people being involved with pharmaceutical companies and the NIH and blah blah blah — That was inevitable. That's a product of the group's success.

Tape III
00:30:00

Now did that make me happy, or did I think that was the only way it could have gone? I don't know, maybe. No, not everyone has access to services. There's still huge stigma around HIV and AIDS, in this country, particularly among people of color, right? And do I wish things had turned out differently on some of these issues? Absolutely. But I don't think ACT UP could have done what it did forever.

SS: Okay. Well, I want to ask you one more personal question, and then I want to talk about police infiltration. Okay, so you're going to be 42.

HD: Yes.

SS: You've been in AIDS for 19 years, half your life.

HD: Yeah, but I haven't been in AIDS that whole time. That's false.

SS: Oh, okay.

HD: So, I —

SS: So how did you get back into it?

HD: I wouldn't even say that I'm back in it. I work in philanthropy; I'm trying to get the organization I work for, that does a lot of gay philanthropy, to be interested in HIV and AIDS. And I don't think that they are.

SS: Really.

HD: Yeah. So I'm trying to make the case that particularly domestically. Funding and interest in HIV and AIDS has, over time, shifted from the domestic to the international. And I think a lot of people are still interested in AIDS, if it's about AIDS

somewhere else. So I'm trying to focus the work that I do, as one small piece of it, to say, if you're interested in gay issues, you need to be interested in HIV. If you're a black gay man in this country, it's your number-one issue. Infection rates are near 50 percent. So how can we say it's not a gay issue? Right?

But I left AIDS stuff for a long time. So don't give me more credit than is due me.

SS: Okay. But why are gay funders, how come they don't get it now?

Why are they resistant to –?

HD: Well, I think partly because we spent so many years saying AIDS is not a gay issue.

SS: No!

HD: We, we were successful. And so now, that's part of it. I think part of it is that, all these other things that are – people die less frequently; they don't, there's a less dramatic kind of atmosphere. Generationally, a lot of people who were going to die in droves died, and then sort of next generation didn't experience the amount of loss that those of us in ACT UP did. So it's not as urgent. Urgency leads to direct action. So people live longer, there's less urgency.

I also think that there has been progress, success, on acceptance of gay people and gay issues in this country. Certainly not total acceptance. So if there's acceptance, and we have access to halls of power, we have legislation that protects us; we win in court; we have fraternal organizations; we're on TV. We don't want to talk about people dying. That would indicate that we're not succeeding.

SS: I see.

HD: So – I don't think people want to talk about it so much.

SS: I just want to jump back to the issue of police infiltration in ACT UP, because I have very vivid memories of you and Tracy talking at meetings at the Cooper Union about feeling that you were being harassed. Can you just tell us what happened to you, and how you felt about it then; versus how you think about it now?

HD: Yeah, what started happening – the experience that Tracy and I were having together — we were girlfriends, so we spent a lot of time together — is that weird things would happen, right?

So we would – at her house or at my house, we would get these weird phone calls, right? I would listen to my messages, and I would be getting the answering machine of somebody else in ACT UP; Jane Auerbach, I remember, as one person. Sort of these three-way, weird calls or messages, that seemed very unexplainable to me, and still do.

That's nice ambient sound, isn't it?

SS: It's okay; we're in the city. Screaming kids.

HD: There were notes, flyers, left on the back table at ACT UP. I don't remember what they said, to be honest with you — I have a file of them somewhere — saying not-nice things, if I recall, ab-, oh, I remember now. There was something about Tracy and her robot girlfriend. Which was me –

SS: Right.

HD: I'm not sure what I was being a robot about, but – people would come up onto, come up to us — several times this happened — onto the street, knowing

who we were — and I don't know who they were — knowing our names, and asking about demonstrations, and stuff like that.

So weird things like that.

SS: But why did you think it was the police? There are plenty of weird people in ACT UP.

HD: I guess I didn't think, well, I think that – harassment or discomfort of people involved in activism is not, and it being generated by the police would certainly not be a new phenomenon.

SS: Right. But looking back, what do you think it was?

HD: I don't know.

SS: Was there a reason why you and Tracy would be singled out by the police? Because I don't remember anyone else experiencing it, at the time.

HD: Um – whoever did it, I think probably – we were also, or Tracy, and me, were connected to things like the moratorium; tension, which caused tension in the organization. If you were going to disrupt the organization, you would focus on the point where there's conflict. And I also think that Tracy really focused on it. She, it really upset her. It scared her; it physically scared her. And it didn't, she was not calmed by ignoring it.

SS: Right.

HD: So, the only thing I think, looking back, is that I, my response was not to pay as much attention to it. I didn't want to. Some of that might have been naive; some of it, I didn't want it to be happening. But I do think, if we had paid less attention to it, would have gone away. Whatever it was; whoever was instigating it.

SS: Did you ever get your FOIA file?

HD: No, I didn't do it. I don't want to know.

SS: Okay.

HD: And what if it came back that there was nothing on me? Would that make me feel better, or worse? Do you know what I mean? I already felt a little crazy about it. So, I didn't see the benefit. And I actually, later, of course, I had a couple jobs working for other organizations where I did FOIA requests for them. But I never did my own.

So, I don't know. I just also thought, isn't this just, I just didn't, it seemed like it was all adding fuel to the fire, and I wanted the fire to go out.

SS: Right. I understand that.

HD: So –

SS: So when did you finally leave ACT UP?

HD: I don't, I was trying to remember that. I remember sort of leaving in fits and starts. And the meeting I described at Cooper Union was, I think I left shortly thereafter. I don't remember what year it was.

SS: Was it before the TAG split, or after the TAG split?

HD: I think it was before. I think it, I think – no. It might have been after. It might have been after. When was that? What year? Historians?

JW: Ninety-two.

HD: Well I think it was – it was – I was going to say, because I was going to say that I left in '91 or '92. So.

SS: Okay. I only have one question left, unless there's something you think we haven't covered. So looking back, what would you say was ACT UP's really greatest achievement, and what would you say was the arena in which ACT UP really failed?

HD: {SIGH} Um –

JW: Maybe we should change the tape.

SS: Oh, let's change the tape. That'll give you a minute to –

SS: – ACT UP's greatest achievement and biggest disappointment?

HD: Oh right. I think that there are some sort of standard achievements, which I, are not minor. They changed the drug-approval process, they created a sort of a, for lack of a better word, a patient empowerment movement that I think has huge ramifications today. Somebody like Lance Armstrong, I think, can do what he has done; or breast-cancer awareness, or any of that stuff — because of ACT UP.

So I think those things are important.

But for me, I think I'm always tied to the direct-action piece of it. And that direct action came back to life during the period of ACT UP, and that it became a way to make change in the world. Just as historically had happened before, and hopefully will happen again although we've never lived in an age, post-9/11.

Can there be an ACT UP-like movement post-9/11? I don't know. I'm not sure there can be. Is there such thing as a liberation struggle, an armed liberation struggle, in other parts of the world, post-9/11? I'm not sure.

So the idea that direct, the biggest achievement, in my mind, and I feel that personally, was that direct action, confrontation, not only with the government, but confrontation with norms about what is acceptable, were challenged. And they were challenged on a regular basis, and it became a good thing to do, a righteous thing to do; and therefore, change happened.

What they could have done better, or what I wish they could have done? God, that's a good question. I don't have, nothing comes to mind. Not saying there aren't things. I think we could have gotten a few more years out of direct action, as a really strong tool, weapon. Militancy could have gone on for longer, I think. Maybe not much longer, but a little longer. And we could have gotten a little more, using militancy, I think.

And I think the effect that participating in ACT UP had on many people, in terms of lesbian and gay struggles, liberation, acceptance; the ability, empowering people to see that they could make change. And whatever any of those people went on to do — good things — was because of their participation in ACT UP.

And for me, it's like it created a sense of community that I have not experienced since. But because I experienced it, I want to seek it out and find it and build it, if it's possible. And that community struggle made those things change; not individual struggle.

SS: Okay. Thank you for a fantastic interview, Heidi.

HD: Really?

SS: It was really great.

HD: I felt really boring. You say that to everybody.

SS: No no no no no!

HD: You have to! Ha ha ha!

SS: It was really great. Really. Thank you so much. It's really helpful.

HD: Okay. I hope so.

SS: Not too bad, right?

HD: No, it's fine. I'm, I'm happy to talk –