

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

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Interviewee: **Deborah Gavito**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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**Interview of Deborah Gavito  
ACT UP Oral History Project  
July 24, 2008**

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

DEBORAH GAVITO: My name is Deborah Gavito. I'm 51 years old. I'm in New York City, in my restaurant. It's July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

**SS: You should say, your fabulous restaurant, Counter, on First Avenue.**

DG: Yeah, my fabulous restaurant, Counter, on First Avenue. Thank you.

**SS: Sure. Where were you born?**

DG: Denver, Colorado.

**SS: Oh, I didn't know that.**

DG: Yeah.

**SS: In Denver itself?**

DG: In Denver, right smack dab in the middle of Denver.

**SS: Was your family long-term Coloradans?**

DG: My mother was Mexican and Native American. And she was born in New Mexico, in Las Vegas, New Mexico. And then her family moved to La Junta, Colorado, which is by Pueblo. And then they moved to –

**SS: And your father was Italian?**

DG: Italian and Polish, yeah. And his parents were coal miners, in Sheridan, Wyoming.

**SS: Oh, so you're a native whatever that is; far Midwesterner.**

DG: Yeah. Oh, yes.

**SS: For many generations.**

DG: You know, my great-grand-...yes, and my mother's parents were pioneers. I think we have, Kit Carson was one of our relatives. So –

**SS: You're a real American. When you were growing up, were your parents ever involved in any kind of political or community –**

DG: No. Absolutely not. There was no – ah, they were – my father's side of the family, Italian, Italian, Italian. And my grandfather owned a, sort of a sleazy bar in the meatpacking district of Denver. No, they were pretty con-..., My father is conservative, but he was a union man. So I remember – the only political thing I remember is going to a Safeway store with him. And there was a picket line, and he didn't cross it. But other than that, he is so conservative that –

**SS: And that was for the farm workers?**

DG: No, that was just the workers, Safeway is a grocery store in Denver. And then my mother's side of the family; {SIGH} oh, god, I don't even know how to describe them. I don't – they're just crazy. But they were – yeah, they were very – okay, heh. My mother's two sisters; one is a lesbian; and the other was most likely a lesbian. My Aunt Nadine, who is most likely a lesbian, married a gay man, who then moved to San Francisco. My other sister, Aunt

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Martha, still lives in Denver. She has a gay son. And oh, god, she's, like, really short; butch dyke; and – it's hard to talk about it, because – let's say on Christmas – I mean, she was a butch dyke, but in a very conservative, Catholic family. So my mother and grandmother would go to the, what was Target then, and get her a polyester pants suit, and a wig, to be appropriate for the holiday occasions. And that was sad. It was sad, and it was – I didn't come out till I was 26, and I think that it was a very oppressive environment, and I didn't have any support.

And my aunt was actually put in a mental institution, for about five years. And she was – my dad is much more crazy than she is, and they didn't put him in a mental institution. So – that's a little bit – yeah, that's a –

**SS: Were they religious?**

DG: Well, my aunt who's a lesbian is actually a lesbian lay nun in Colorado, so on my mother's side of the family, yes, my grandmother was very religious. My mother, when I was in sixth grade, had an emotional breakdown, and – destroyed every religious artifact in our house. And up until that point, we went to church, and, I had my communion. But after that, we didn't go to church.

**SS: So what did they tell you, or what was their stated value about helping other people?**

DG: I think my mother's side of the family was so emotionally needy that helping anyone was not even in their vocabulary, heh. So – and in both sides of the family – there's sort of this immigrant – climbing up the ladder

mentality, where – taking care of other people, other than your immediate family, wasn't done.

And the interesting thing about my mother's family; my grandmother, they were Mexican, and I wasn't allowed to say I was Mexican when I was little. And luckily, I was a little blonde girl, so I could sort of get under the radar screen, but I had cousins who just looked Mexican. They couldn't, heh, So that's sad. It was a pretty oppressive environment.

**SS: When did you start plotting your escape?**

DG: I – when I graduated high school. And when I graduated high school – it was a – I come from a very poor, working-class family. And when I graduated high school, I could barely read. And I couldn't write a complete sentence. And so I went to – a community college, and took a lot of remedial classes; and sort of self-educated. I did graduate from college, but I sort of jumped, or I think I hit about six colleges by the time I finally got my degree, in liberal arts.

**SS: So when did you leave Colorado?**

DG: When I was 17, when I graduated high school.

**SS: So you got away from that whole environment.**

DG: Yeah, and I think I've been back twice. When I – that's my landlord.

Hi, Mr. [Ice].

MISTER [ICE]: [Sorry to bother ya].

DG: Oh, okay. Where was I?

**SS: When you left Colorado.**

DG: Yeah.

**SS: Leaving that environment. Well, let me ask you this.**

**Which came first? Getting politically aware, or coming out?**

DG: Coming out. But ACT UP was so important.

**SS: You came out before you were in ACT UP.**

DG: Yes, I did, because I was 32 when I joined ACT UP.

**SS: So let's not skip ahead. Let's start with when you were 26.**

**Where were you living?**

DG: New York City.

**SS: So when did you come here?**

DG: I came here in 1981. And I waited on tables. I was an assistant stage manager at Playwrights Horizons. And – it took – I couldn't deal with my sexuality for probably two or three years after that. And then I fell in love with a woman who was a – the sound designer of a show, and, heh, So that is – yeah, that's it.

**SS: And so were you involved in the gay community, or were you just privately in your relationship?**

DG: Oh, I wasn't invol-, no, I think ACT UP was my first – the first time I was ever political. Yeah.

**SS: So what was your prior experience with AIDS, before you came to ACT UP? Did anyone you know have AIDS?**

DG: No. I didn't have – I had several gay male friends, gay friends; but none of them had AIDS. A friend of mine came to an ACT UP meeting, and I went with him. And then I just – joined. It was great.

**SS: So what made you just decide to join?**

DG: There was such a – there is so much excitement. And – for someone like me, who was a little bit tentative about my sexuality, it really helped me, because everyone was out and proud and – I was able to get comfortable in my own skin. So – yeah, it was a little bit scary, because everyone in ACT UP is so intelligent. And so I was intimidated by everyone. Denver, Colorado, I – I – I didn't know anyone who even graduated from college. So it was pretty amazing. I mean, everyone was so articulate. There were writers; graphic artists; musicians, architects; every occupation you can imagine. And they were all – super in the their field. And it was really good for me to be around that, because it just sorta propped me up a little bit, and sort of got me going.

**SS: So how did you first plug into the organization?**

DG: I think I just, I went to a meeting with my friend Michael. And then I – it was maybe a couple months later that the second Wall Street demonstration, I participated in.

And then, it was just so exciting, because you could really do anything. You could Xerox fliers; you could – you could just fit in, because there were so many – everyone was just so happy to – the sense of community was so great that you could just fit in however. I didn't quite know where I fit in, but I sort of fit in, because you know, everyone's a little bit odd and peculiar, and has their own – and they're not straight-laced and conservative, and so my little quirks fit right in. Yeah.

**SS: So what were some of the groups that you were part of?**

DG: My affinity group was Wave 3.

**SS: Can you explain where they got that name?**

DG: I don't remember. I think we were the third wave at the FDA. That's what I'm assuming. But I'm just, that's a big guess. That was, gosh, there were so – Jim Eigo, Mark Harrington; Russell Pritchard, Pam [Earring], Margaret McCarthy; Jill Harris; Marvin [Schulman]; there –

**SS: How did you get into Wave 3?**

DG: I think I went to a seminar that Mark Harrington was giving. And then after the seminar, he asked me to join.

**SS: Was it an invitation-only affinity group?**

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00:15:00

DG: Yeah, that was, they were a little bit, um – they were – I'm not gonna say this, I don't want to say that – sort of and sort of not. Yeah, I know – sort of and sort of not. I can't remember. I know they just asked me, and then other people joined, or –

**SS: What did you guys do at the FDA?**

DG: Oh, we – god – I think we ended up in some sort of office room. And David Kirschenbaum — he's another Wave 3 person —

**SS: You broke into the building; the FDA?**

DG: You know we – we ended up in some sort of office building, in the FDA. I don't remember which office it was. But I actually didn't end up there, because David Kirschenbaum and I went scouting. And then they found a door that was opened, and ended up in this office. So – yeah, we had our little white lab coats on. Wave 3 was the, sort of intellectual treatment – group of people. I mean, Jim Eigo is just as smart as a whip, and the sweetest man on the planet. Yeah, I have such a fondness for – Russell Pritchard. Just like, your first question was about – what was it – participating in group activity, or – and Russell is, god, the epitome of that. How he took care of Brian Damage, and how he took care of Mark Fisher – I just get – choked up a little bit. Because he was just the most selfless, he's selfless.

**SS: So where did you meet, how often did you meet?**

DG: There is a period, I think, right around the FDA and after the FDA where we probably met once a month. I don't remember. Quite often. And then we would sit together at ACT UP meetings, and – sort of plot what we were doing, what we would do next.

**SS: Can you tell me about some of the actions –**

DG: God, you know what? There was the FDA. There were – you know, the other – sort of – there was the AIDS Treatment Registry. And – what's his name; Michael Callen — I think that's his name — and then Iris. And so Wave 3, a lot of people in Wave 3 were connected with the AIDS Treatment Registry. And they were sort of –

**SS: Explain what that was?**

DG: They were – there weren't any clinical trials on people with AIDS. And they were actually documenting this before the medical community did anything. And Mark Harrington and Jim Eigo were – were – really at the forefront of getting drugs – made available. They did all the research, they did all the legwork. They were just – intellectual wizards. And –

**SS: Did you work on the AIDS Treatment Registry?**

DG: I helped them, I helped them with – a couple fund-raisers. There was a big fund-raiser, and I sort of organized the whole thing, whole fund-raiser for them.

**SS: Do you know where it was, or –**

DG: Oh, gosh. I – it was a space that was donated to us. And I think we gave Iris an award, or the ATR gave Iris an award for the work she did. It was really wonderful, because all of these people were just giving – giving their heart and soul to ACT UP, and it was sort of a nice occasion to celebrate, and acknowledge –

**SS: So when you did a fund-raiser in those days, because I remember, they were happening all the time.**

DG: This was a different kind of, this was a fund-raiser where someone donated a hall. And I got all of the food donated, from, god, I – Florent donated. And it was really good food. And then Russell Pritchard, who was a food sty-, stylist at that time, styled it. So it was a really big, elaborate banquet setting. We had all the wine. And, white tablecloths and pretty – pretty formal, for an ACT UP fund-raiser.

**SS: And what kind of people came to it? Was it ACT UP people?**

DG: Yeah, all ACT UP people. And mostly people who were active at Treatment, on the treatment end. So – yeah.

**SS: Now one of the things about Wave 3 — I was looking at my notes for a second — is that it went on for so long, even though so many of the members were involved in so many other things. What was the commitment, the emotional bond, that kept you all together for so long?**

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DG: First – one of our members, in the very beginning, Brian Damage – got very ill. And I – and we took care of him. We had a schedule of – we had a set schedule, and we'd sign up for times that we would be with him. So for a period of time, the group was Brian's caretaker, particularly Russell Pritchard.

**SS: What was that like for you?**

DG: It was great. Because I had never done anything like that. And I come from a very – just – a very conservative – uptight family, and just to see how people could give selflessly was wonderful. I mean, it really – you know, I grew up a lot in ACT UP.

**SS: So what was it like to be taking care of someone at a time when there was so little available medically? How did you make decisions? Do you remember what kind – did Brian have any treatment?**

DG: God, you know, I don't remember that part. I don't really remember it. Sally Cooper was also a member of the group. I really don't remember that –

**SS: And how come it was you guys taking care of him, and not his family?**

DG: Oh, he, his family, I think, had disowned him. I don't think he had anyone else in the city. He had a few friends.

**SS: Where was he living?**

DG: I think he was living with Russell Pritchard. I think on Fourth or Sixth Street. Yeah, right in the neighborhood.

**SS: Now was that a typical thing in ACT UP, for people to be caring for dying people while they were doing activism?**

DG: Yes, I think it was a common – people had friends, and lovers, and – and a lot of people who were sick didn't have families. It's pretty amazing how, just on top of all the activism that was going on – just how sincere and dedicated every-, people in ACT UP were to just being good, good people.

**SS: I want to get this thing about not having families. Would you say that a lot of the gay people in ACT UP were alienated from their families? Did you see family members with sick people coming to ACT UP?**

DG: Yes. the only, the, Pam [Earring], who was in our group; her brother died of AIDS, and that's why she joined ACT UP. But she was young. I mean, she was probably in her late thirties, maybe early forties; living on the Upper West Side, very educated, very smart, hip. So she joined ACT UP because she loved her brother, and wanted to help out. And she was great; just this sweet, kind, smart –

**SS: So can you just explain and demystify, for people who weren't there, how an affinity group would come up with an idea? Like, what would happen? Would you go to somebody's house?**

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DG: Oh yeah. We would meet at different people's homes. The person would sometime cook a light meal, or just potato chips, or whatever. There would be beer, wine, or – and we would sit around, we had an agenda. And then we would just throw out ideas.

It was very comfortable. Everyone was comfortable, kind; unpretentious. So many people in the group. Margaret McCarthy; just smart as a whip. And – and just as kind as kind could be. So –

**SS: Do you remember any specific actions –**

DG: You know what? I wanted to go online this morning, and I didn't have a chance. Because I really – god, I just, I'm not remembering specifics.

**SS: Let me ask you this: did you ever get arrested?**

DG: Yeah, Wall Street –

**SS: What was that like for you? When you went to Wall Street, had you already had civil disobedience training? Or did you just get arrested?**

DG: No, I had civil disobedience training in ACT UP. I had never done anything like that.

**SS: So you had decided before Wall Street that you were gonna get arrested.**

DG: Yes.

**SS: What made you make that decision?**

DG: I – I don't know. I think that – why not? Here was a group of people, committed to a cause, and a good cause. And – everyone was so protective of each other. There was nothing – there was nothing scary about it, because it was so well planned. And we have your lawyers, and then you have all your support group. It's –

**SS: Can you explain to people what the civil disobedience training was like?**

DG: Oh, you – you go to a group, maybe there would be 10 to 20 people. I think [Amy Bauer], [Jerry Wells], might have conducted the session. And – we knew exactly what to do at every step of the way. And even – even when we were in jail, someone was there, advocating for us. So – yeah. I think I, yeah.

**SS: So when you got arrested, what were you doing?**

DG: I just, I think we blocked a – I think we blocked a street.

**SS: Did they put you in handcuffs?**

DG: I think they might have been the plastic handcuffs. And then I was also part of the group that was strip-searched.

**SS: Was that from Wall Street?**

DG: No, I think that was another demonstration. And –

**SS: What happened?**

DG: They took you into custody, and then – I think there were little cubicles, and a woman went into the cubicle, and asked you take down your pants, asked you to take down your underwear, asked you to take off your bra. And – it wasn't – it was inappropriate, but I just did it, and it took about two seconds. And I think the same day, we were released.

**SS: So if it only took two seconds and it was nothing more than inappropriate, why was there such a brouhaha about it?**

DG: Because it was inappropriate. You're not supposed to be strip-searched; it's illegal.

**SS: So what did you guys decide to do?**

DG: The lawyers took up the case, and it went, I think we settled out of court. And we each got about – I think seven to eight thousand dollars.

**SS: Each.**

DG: Each.

**SS: What did you do with your –**

DG: Oh, boy, I went to Barcelona.

**SS: There you go. Now you were in ACT UP for a long time. I mean, I remember you there for years. Right? So were you at all the Monday-night meetings?**

DG: Yeah – I very rarely missed a meeting. It was – it was like going to church. I don't go to church. If I did go to church, that would be the best

church I would go to. I'm absolutely not religious; I've never been. But going to a Monday-night ACT UP meeting regularly – I loved the ritual, I loved the people, I loved all the actions. Everyone was act-, Richard Deagle, he was another one in Wave 3, he was a graphic artist, and I helped him a lot, silkscreening a lot of the posters.

**SS: Which posters did you work on?**

DG: Oh, god, Silence is De-. We would – god, there were a variety. God, I remember going to his house in New Jersey. And – I'm sorry, I'm just drawing a blank.

**SS: Oh, okay. Were there any big actions that you worked on, outside of your affinity group?**

DG: I always participated in some way. You know what? There's a way I stayed on the periphery, but I was still active. And I think that was because I was a little intimidated by all these really educated, smart – there's nothing that these people couldn't do. And that was good for me to see, and good for me to be a part of. But there is a way that I was still a little bit careful. But I learned a lot, and I –

**SS: Let me ask you about the Women's Committee. Can you explain – because you were in on that from the beginning, right, pretty much?**

DG: Yes. Yes, I remember going to a meeting at Maxine Wolfe's apartment. And I think the first action we did was a demonstration at Shea Stadium.

**SS: Now what was that about?**

DG: Oh, gosh, you're getting me. I think we were – I think we were just educating – I think we were educating the public about women and AIDS, and the fact that women were, a lot of women had AIDS, but they were completely overlooked.

**SS: But why Shea Stadium? It seems like –**

DG: Because it was a very male, you're talking about a very male place to go, that – I mean, baseball, football, basketball.

**SS: So what was the strategy about educating about women with AIDS at a very male place?**

DG: I – in retrospect – it seems so appropriate, but I don't remember the conversation, getting there.

**SS: Had you ever been to Shea Stadium before?**

DG: No. No! I've never been to, I never – that was the first and only time I've ever been to Shea Stadium.

**SS: Because it's not like a great place for a bunch of queers to go normally–**

DG: No. No, I think that was part of it. Educating the mainstream public that AIDS existed. And that's what ACT UP did.

**SS: So what did you guys do at Shea Stadium?**

DG: I handed out flyers. And then we had posters, and I think one of the – one of the security guards tucked them away, and –

**SS: Did you feel afraid at all, to be there?**

DG: No. There was always – the great thing about ACT UP is that there was always so much support. And you were always with a group. I can't remember an action or an activity where there wasn't a group of people. If I were alone in Shea Stadium, holding up – a Silence Is Death poster, back then – I might have been a little bit intimidated. But with a group of women, who were very comfortable with their sexuality, and – very outspoken, it was not –

**SS: So what was the Women's Committee like? What was it like to –**

DG: That was actually the first group of lesbians that I ever – I haven't thought about this, but it actually was the first group of lesbian, a large group of lesbians that I was ever involved in.

**SS: Was it all lesbian?**

DG: No. I think there were some straight women. I can't remember who.

**SS: Were the dynamics of the Women's Committee different than the dynamics of ACT UP at large?**

DG: Yeah, I think women are – I'm trying to think of her name. I would say no. I would say no. Because I think the women in ACT UP were just as ballsy as the men in ACT UP. So I'm just gonna say no. I think it was – it was similar to Wave 3, where I went to Maxine's house, and there was a group of women, and maybe she made some food, or had some potato chips, or whatever. And we all sat around and tried to figure out what action we should do.

So, no. The women were just as ballsy as men, and just as outspoken and courageous, and –

**SS: Do you remember any kind of actions or proposals for actions that you were uncomfortable with, or decided not to do, or weren't sure you agreed with?**

DG: No, absolutely not. I think that – every action that anyone did in ACT UP was appropriate.

**SS: What about Stop the Church? Were you involved with that?**

DG: Oh yeah. I wasn't involved with that, but – that was great. I mean, that was great. I was born in a very – Catholic family. My grandmother had prayers everywhere, my little Mexican grandmother. You'd open a cabinet, and there was a prayer; you sat down on the toilet, there is a prayer. You reached

for the toilet paper, there is a prayer. So – I thought that was great. I just, go for it.

I was never – I was uncomfortable, because – in ACT UP a little bit, because I was just intimidated because of my lack of education, more than anything else. And I was just trying to catch up with all these people that seemed so smart. You had written books by that point.

Like I said, when I graduated college, I could barely read. I think the only book I remember reading in high school, god, was *Johnny Got His Gun*. I think that's, that's it. One book. Which is – pretty pathetic. But – so I was intimidated a little bit by how educated people were, and how articulate they were, and how savvy they were, and how ballsy they were. But I was never uncomfortable with any of the actions.

**SS: Can you characterize some of the conflicts that you witnessed in ACT UP, in terms of points of view or things that people disagreed about?**

DG: Um – god – I know there were a lot of disagreements. There might have been a little bit of conflict between the activist protesters, sort of ACT UP member, and the treatment people. And that's just because the treatment people were interested in getting – they were both interested in the same thing. But I think some people in ACT UP were uncomfortable with working in the system. When Mark Harrington and Jim Eigo and Iris Long actually started

getting to know the head of the FDA, and became actually experts in their field, I think that some members were a little uncomfortable with that.

**SS: Why?**

DG: I guess – I guess some people didn't really see or understand the benefit of sort of getting to know these people in power. I think it had to do with getting to know people in power, and having access to people in power. And that is a little bit in conflict with working outside the system to make changes. So I think that was –

**SS: Did people try – oh, we have to change tapes? Okay.**

Tape II  
00:01:10

**SS: I want to ask you about Mark Fisher.**

DG: Oh, god. That's a –

**SS: Were you involved with his care?**

DG: No. I think Wave 3 had split off at that time. And –

**SS: You had split apart, or –**

DG: It actually disbanded.

**SS: Oh. Why was that?**

DG: I think that – I think a lot of people, like – the really hardcore treatment people – I think they were just so involved in that, that people started to wander off a little bit, and go into different groups. I became active with needle exchange then.

**SS: So you weren't around for Mark's – did you go to his political funeral?**

DG: Yes, oh gosh. I was, gosh, I loved Mark. Gosh, he was an architect, I remember – going to his office one day, and he showed me all – oh, gosh. He was the sweet-, he was another just sweet guy; just kind – and I think there were – Russell Pritchard, Pam [Earring], Mark Fisher, and myself, for a good period of time, just hung out together. We sat together at all the meetings. If there was an action or an activity, we did it together. I remember going to Pam's apartment on the Upper West Side so many times. Just – yeah.

**SS: So what did you do in needle exchange?**

DG: Oh. Gosh, back then – the East Village has been so gentrified. But there were so many shantytowns. And we would hand out, I was with Alan Clear. And that's when I went and met Donna Binder. And we would go around to all the different shantytowns around the East Village, in Alphabet City, and get old needles, and exchange them for new ones. It was very, very controversial.

**SS: Inside ACT UP?**

DG: Not inside ACT UP, but – even the liberal political powers were uncomfortable with needle exchange. They didn't know what to do with it. And – a lot of mainstream politicians didn't support it.

**SS: So what made you decide to get involved with it?**

DG: I always like doing something. It was a great activity, because there was a schedule, and – and I could feel like I accomplished something. And that's why I loved needle exchange. There was – I could just give of myself, and I got so much back. And I made so many good friends. Alan Clear is another just sweet, sweet guy. Garance; oh, god, I forgot Garance, with Wave 3.

**SS: What was it like for you dealing with addicts who were living in a shantytown? I mean, homeless addicts –**

DG: Oh, I'd never been around people who were so marginalized. And again, we did it in a group. And there would usually be three or four people. We just had our little route. There were tent cities, in our neighborhood. It just –

**SS: Where were they?**

DG: Oh, in Alphabet City. And in – probably four or five different spots. There were a lot of – squatting back then. That was a long time before the Tompkins Square Park riots.

**SS: I have a couple questions from Debbie Levine.**

DG: Oh, okay.

**SS: Okay. Cayton [Carolwyski] – do you know him? C-A-Y-T-O-N?**

DG: Oh yes, yes, yes, Cayton.

**SS: Cayton. What was his last name?**

DG: I don't remember – he was an older gentleman. Oh yeah, he was great. He was great. He was just, he was a sweet – he was older.

**SS: Do you have any idea of where he is?**

DG: I do not. I have not kept in touch with him. Not at all.

**SS: The other question she asked me to ask you is, were you involved in a play that played at La Mama for one night, written by Bob Huff, called “Rockville is Burning”?**

DG: No.

**SS: Okay.**

DG: No.

**SS: So that's that. Okay. So now I want to ask you a big question, about social life inside ACT UP. What was it like for you to socialize, meet women, have sex with women, fall in love – was that an organic part of being in ACT UP, or –**

DG: Yeah. I was still – you know, I was 32, but I was still uncomfortable with my sexuality. So, you know, I hung around the guys. I did have affairs, and, and – I met Donna Binder, and we had a relationship for, god, 10 years, and we have a daughter.

**SS: And you started this restaurant.**

DG: And we started this restaurant together. So – I mean, that's pretty amazing, that came out of ACT UP. I have this beautiful seven-year-old daughter, that is cooler than cool. I'll tell you a story. This –

**SS: Okay.**

DG: – is cool. And it just will show you how different today is.

So anyway, I was walking down the street with [Raphaella]. And she said, Mommy, I have five people that want to marry me.

And I said, well, that's nice. Last month, you had one person, and [Kiel] had four people. So that must make you feel good.

And she said, no, Mommy, I don't know what to do. [Kiel] keeps – wanting to sit next to me. She's always, you know, wanting to be with me. But I really want to marry [Million]; I want to marry a boy.

So I was like, oh, that's interesting.

So the next week, she's like, Mommy; I'm, can [Million] marry two girls?

And I was like, well, who does [Million] want to marry?

Me and [Kiel].

So I said, well, that's a little, that's polygamy, and that's illegal. But you can have as many boyfriends and girlfriends as you like.

So then the next week, she's – Mommy, can two girls get married?

And I said, that's – in New York State, you can have a commitment ceremony, but you can't get married. But it's different in different states. That was [me].

And a couple weeks later, she was in her class, and her teacher was – this is kindergarten. And her teacher was talking about marriage, and how marriage is between a man and a woman; two men; or two women. And [Raphaela] raises her hand, and says: Actually, Marilyn, it's not legal, I mean – it's not legal for two women to get married, but they can have a commitment ceremony.

And then – I mean, just the cool thing about this story is that, and every link in the chain was perfect.

So I was sitting in the park. And two of her classmates' mothers were next to me, and I told them this story. And the woman next to me said, oh yeah, Xavier, he loves [Tile]. Like, okay. And then the woman next to him said, yeah, [Ilco], the other day, said, Mommy, I love [Tile]. And said, okay. Said, no, Mommy, I love [Tile] like John and George – their two gay friends.

So it's remarkable that the teachers, the students, the parents; the school; just cool.

**SS: There you go.**

DG: Yeah.

**SS: It's a far cry from –**

DG: It is. I mean, it –

**SS: So why did you leave ACT UP, Debbie?**

DG: It was really – I mean – it was really starting to – the other action that I participated in was with Peter Staley. And I was support when he, he broke in to Burroughs Wellcome. And the cool thing about that action is they lowered the drug price, like, I think the next week, or soon after. So that's another action was, you got immediate results. And that was – that was cooler than cool.

**SS: You had to go down to the corporate headquarters?**

DG: Yeah, I think it was in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. So that was a great action.

**SS: So people would just like go to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. I mean –**

DG: Yeah, no, that was a serious action. And you had serious lawyers. There were serious legal ramifications with Peter breaking in to Burroughs Wellcome. And he could have gone to jail. He could have – he could have had serious consequences from that.

I remember driving down in a van. And there might have been eight people. I can't remember who they were. But yeah, that was just cooler than cool, and just to see results immediately was so satisfying.

**SS: So why did you leave the organization?**

DG: I – just, it started just – everyone started just – leaving a little bit. And it was just – I think towards the end of ACT UP, it was really, people were tired. And they had lost so many friends and lovers, and it had been such an intense period of activity. And I think people just needed to move on with their life.

{BREAK IN AUDIO & VIDEO}

DG: How a person natur- {BROKEN PICTURE/SOUND} over a longer period of time.

**SS: Okay, so I only have one more question; and thanks for your time. So looking back, what would you say is ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you feel is its biggest disappointment?**

DG: God, there were so many. There are so many things. Today, I can go to Housing – take my clothes to Housing Works Thrift Store. And that started out of ACT UP. And Alan Clear – I don't know whether he's still the executive director of the Harm Reduction Center, or whatever it's called. But that was a direct result of ACT UP. And then the lowering of drug prices. Just the fact that the medical community, that our government started focusing on AIDS.

So there were so many – absolutely incredible things that happened.

I think that – compared to men, there were such a small number of women. And I think that – I guess there's a way that a man is entitled. And I think that's why ACT UP could accomplish so much. And I can't imagine a

group of women doing what ACT UP did. And that's – sad, discouraging; disheartening. But I think women have to take care of so many – they might have families, they have kids; work; they have work, and then take care of their families. And it's just – men and women are different, and I think women are a lot more tentative, and they feel less entitled. So I think that would be – I'm not disappointed in it, but just to know that that's a reality – is, I guess right here.

**SS: Okay. Well, thank you. We made it in time.**

DG: Oh, thank you so much.

**SS: Thank you so much, Debbie. Appreciate it.**

DG: Yeah. Oh, you're welcome.

**SS: You're plugged in, so you need to unplug.**