

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: **Tony Arena & Ron Grunewald**

Interview Number: **148**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **September 22, 2012**

ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Tony Arena and Ron Grunewald
September 22, 2012

RON GRUNEWALD: Can I ask a question first? Should we look at the camera?

SARAH SCHULMAN: Look at me.

RG: Ok, we need to know that.

SS: So we start. Tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

TONY ARENA: I'm Tony Arena. It's September 22, 2012 and we're at James's [Wentzy] apartment.

SS: How old are you?

TA: Forty-seven.

RG: I'm Ron Grunewald, I'm sixty-two, and we are at James' apartment in Lower Manhattan.

SS: You're the first couple interview that we've had. Can you tell us why you wanted to be interviewed together?

TA: We were a couple in ACT UP and are still a couple now. I felt like there were few couples in ACT UP that were together as long as we have been.

RG: We were a couple beforehand, we were a couple during, and we're still a couple.

TA: Yes.

SS: When did you get together?

RG: We started living together in October of 1989, but we got together around September of '86. Is that correct?

TA: I think so.

RG: I'm sorry, we started living together October of '88.

TA: It was '88.

RG: Eighty-eight. What am I — I'm losing my mind. I'm nervous.

TA: No, it is '88.

SS: Let's start a little with your backgrounds. Where did you grow up?

RG: I'm from Chicago, went to all Catholic schools from kindergarten through college, DePaul University. When I went there you wouldn't have known that it was Catholic except that the head was a priest, the head of the university. I don't really remember what his label or distinction was. But I went all Catholic schools. I lived on the North Side of Chicago, predominantly German and Polish area.

TA: I came from Long Island. Nothing special.

SS: Which town?

TA: Franklin Square.

SS: When did you come out, both of you?

RG: I came out in stages, but around 1970, '70, '71, depending on what you mean by coming out because there were certain people who knew already around '70, and by '71 it was everybody, even at work.

SS: In Chicago?

RG: That was in Chicago.

SS: So were you involved in any kind of political work at the time, or were you just out in the community?

RG: I had an older brother who was gay. Back in 1966, he had a big emotional meeting with me to say, "I have something to tell you." He said, "I'm gay."

And I said, "I know." I was sixteen at the time. He was nineteen.

And he said "you know?"

And I said, "yeah."

And he said, "Do you think you are?"

I said, "I don't know. I might be, but I'm not sure. I don't know." And that was just like [gestures]. This whole thing for him was cut.

He said, "I'm going to tell Mom."

And I said, "well, I think you should."

And he did, and it was a big emotional thing there. Our dad had died in 1966 from cancer. He asked my mom, he said, "If you want me to, I'll move away. I'll go away."

She said, "No, absolutely not."

My coming out to her was a very different thing later on. It was around 1971, I guess. I probably hadn't told her yet. And I said to her, "I'm gay too."

She said, "I had a hunch."

And I added, "And there's not a fuckin' thing that anybody can do about it."

She went, "Oh, I know."

SS: So when you came out, did you understand your homosexuality in a political way?

RG: I was involved in the Antiwar Movement, never really involved in any particular group, just in all demonstrations and handing out flyers. I would go to different groups with my friends, and we would go downtown or on Lincoln and Belmont, which was our neighborhood shopping center, and pass them out. We would get things thrown at us, and we would have little old ladies give us five dollars to go get hot chocolate, “Because you’re doing the right thing for America.” So it was a very interesting thing.

SS: How did you avoid being drafted?

RG: I got super lucky. First of all, I was going to school, and I went to college. Then when they had the lottery, I got number 320, so I didn’t even know. My best friend watched the entire thing, and he got number 120-something, but he never got called either.

SS: So was there any connection between the Antiwar Movement in Chicago and the gay community?

RG: I don’t know that there actually was a gay community then. Like I said, I had an older brother. He had lots of friends; he was a church organist. So, believe me, that’s a whole group of people that are involved —

00:05:00

TA: Are these the people you always call the old queen network?

RG: The old queen network is what I labeled them. I didn’t say that to them or anything, although they called each other and people that they knew old queens. “Oh, that old queen,” and, “That old queen’s from Kentucky,” and, “That old queen moved back.” I said, okay, it’s the old queen network. “This one used to be a drag queen, and now she’s not,” and blah, blah, blah.

But at demonstrations here and there, you would see a little group that said, “Gay Rights” and I always thought “hmm.” One time — this is probably around 1970, we had a concert in Grand Park on the lakefront in Chicago. There was a big contingent of this gay group, and I don’t really remember what their name was. There was a big one. It was just lots of people and antiwar people and everything. And I just went over to say hello to them, and they all said to me, “You know, you’re one of us. We know it. You should come and join us.”

And I said, “I have nothing against you or being a group or anything. I’m just not sure.”

“Oh, you have to come over with us.”

And then I would see them at all the demonstrations from then on, Moratorium Days and demonstrations. Remember, we were in Chicago. We had Mayor Daley, which meant we had lots of demonstrations and lots of scary times running away from cops. Luckily, I was tall and thin, I could outrun any fat cop anytime, and I hate to say that as a blanket statement, but it was the case. It really was. They said horrible things to us, and we had to blow it off.

But I do remember one demonstration, and this one was for the Chicago Eight, who turned into the Chicago Seven after they took Bobby Seale out of the courtroom or whatever that we were demonstrating, outside the State of Illinois Building where the trials were going on, and that’s where I really started talking to the gay group. They were so excited about what had happened in New York the summer before and everything. So I got to know them, but I was never a member or anything. I really never knew how to join them.

SS: And Dave Dellinger was gay.

RG: I didn't know that. I got his autograph at one thing. [laughs] What's his name, who came to our ACT UP demonstration? Kunstler.

TA: Kunstler.

RG: I met him back then and got his autograph.

TA: Yes, I remember we went — was that the trial of the Safe Sex Six?

RG: Right.

TA: Kunstler came to that march, that picket outside the courtroom, and Ron said to him, "I haven't seen you since — ."

RG: What was it, 1969 or 1970 in Chicago?

TA: " — Since the Chicago Six trial."

RG: And he goes, "Oh, that was you?"

SS: What about you, Tony? Did you come out in high school or was it later?

TA: I came out to you in that laundromat. That was horrible. What was that? When was that?

RG: That was 1986. It was Labor Day.

TA: Was it Labor Day?

RG: It was Labor Day of 1986. I met Tony through his cousin, who was a friend of mine from work, after I moved to New York, and we worked together. I got to meet most of his family. I had no family here or anything, and they kind of adopted me, which I didn't expect or I didn't ask for or anything. It was just a very, very wonderful, lovely thing. And through that I met Tony, who, when I met him, he was a kid, who was

what his cousin Rick described him as, and all I said is, “Your cousin is cute, and his sister’s very pretty.”

“He’s just a kid.”

I said, “I know that. I didn’t say I was interested.”

TA: But by 1986, I was a college student by then.

RG: He was twenty-three then, too.

TA: I was no longer the kid.

RG: No, by ‘86 you were twenty-one. He was twenty-one then, sorry.

SS: Were you out by that time?

TA: No. Well, I came out to Ron. It was a funny thing. I don’t really even know why, but I guess it had been building up inside of me for so long that I finally just blurted it out in this laundromat because I knew he was gay. I said, “I’m gay.” Then I started crying. It’s embarrassing to admit that now, I guess.

00:10:00 And Ron said, “Why are you crying? This is not something to cry about. This is something we celebrate.” And that was a very interesting thing that no one would have ever said that to me in the environment I grew up in, because unlike Ron, whose mother took that in stride, my family were dead set against that kind of thing, and I knew that all going way back from when the first news reports on AIDS were on television. I remember my mother saying out loud, with me in the room, “Oh, god, thank you for taking away these horrible people.” To hear that from your own mother, and then you know you’re one of those horrible people, it really does a number on your head, if you know what I mean.

I was feeling pretty down about myself, so when I came out to Ron, I was crying. It wasn't right away that we became a couple. We'd been friends, but we weren't a couple then. We were just friends. Then it was maybe later that year that we started to see each other as a couple as dating.

RG: Yes

TA: Then when it came time for me to get out of my parents' house and start my adult life, that was a pretty traumatic experience, because I told my parents that I was gay and that I was in love with Ron and moving in with him all at the same time. That turned out to be a big catastrophe because —

RG: They tried to kill us.

TA: Yes. There was a sort of murder attempt. "Murder" is kind of — I think it would have been an accidental death. I was leaving with Ron in the car, and he was running us off the road, like he was trying to smash the car into our car.

RG: He ran us off the road.

TA: So we could have all been killed, but I don't think he wanted us to die.

RG: It was a borrowed car from our friend Beth, who we had, little by little, we had moved Tony's stuff out of his house and into my apartment in the city, and finally we were finished. So I said, "Today's the day."

And I was around the corner, because he told me, "Don't wait out in front of their house in the car. Wait around the corner." And then he came running out. He said, "Let's go! Let's go!"

So we started driving off, and Tony was very, very upset, which you could totally understand, and he was starting to tell me what had happened. Then I looked in the rearview mirror and I said, "Does your father have a brown car? Because a man's back there, and he's frantically waving at me."

He goes, "Oh, my god, that's him. We've got to get away." And through the streets of Long Island he chased us and tried to ram us from the side. And I'm not the world's best driver. I rarely drive. I do not have a car. But I was able to avoid him.

At one point, he got out and he took the door handle of the car, and was shaking the car, and yelling, "You faggot, I'm going to kill you!"

I says, "You're not going to kill anybody."

The interesting thing that was through the whole chase, all these people, everyone on the streets of Long Island seemed to understand, not exactly what was happening, but that this guy was bothering us and trying to hurt us. We would be in big lines at the red light, and everybody would move out so that we could get through. People would back out so that I could back out and go around things. People on the sidewalk would just stand back. I went through red lights. I went through stop signs. I outmaneuvered him in a parking lot that I knew by our friend's house.

TA: We were speeding. We were speeding on the road, and eventually we came to this interesting little parking lot.

[interruption to fix microphone]

SS: Tony, I want to ask you something. So you came out in '86, so AIDS and gay had always been connected in your experience, right?

TA: When I was real young, I was sort of aware that the Village People were gay, and there was no AIDS then. So, no, it wasn't that — I understood that this new thing, AIDS, was this new thing that happened, and I remember asking you about what you thought about it once, and you said that as far as you knew, only promiscuous people got it.

SS: That was the theory at the time.

RG: Yes, that's what I'd heard. And I always said from the very beginning, I don't think a virus is smart enough — a virus, a disease, whatever it was, is smart enough to know who's gay and who's not. I just thought that was absolutely ridiculous, and they were calling it the gay cancer, and I'm going, "I don't think so."

SS: So when did you first become aware of AIDS?

RG: When they made the first statements, in the news, newspapers, that so many people in San Francisco had been diagnosed, gay men had been diagnosed with this disease.

SS: And you were still in Chicago at the time?

RG: No, I was here. I moved here in 1977.

00:15:00

SS: So when did it first enter your realm, your personal experience?

RG: I used to go to the Ninth Circle, the bar on Tenth Street. I went to others, too, but with friends and all that. And somebody said, probably around 1982 or so, somebody we hadn't seen in a while, "I want you to know he's really sick with that gay cancer."

I would almost be angry and say, "There can't be anything such as a gay cancer. He got sick. He caught something or other."

“Do you know any straight people who go it?”

I’m like, “No, I didn’t know that he got it or whatever.”

Then shortly after that it was, oh, seven guys from here we know have that, who hang out here, and people that I didn’t really know, but if they described them, I said, “Oh, I remember seeing that guy all the time.” I just couldn’t make heads or tails out of how could this be.

Then a friend of our family, a straight man with children, adopted children and a wife, he got really sick in Chicago, and he died when I went home for the Christmas holidays. I asked my aunt, who was very close to him, my Aunt Julie, “What did he have?”

And everything that they said about him, “Oh, this virus or something invaded his body and he lost all this weight, and he got these blotches all over him.”

And I thought, this is very interesting, because this is supposedly a straight man and he has the gay cancer. As far as I’m concerned, and no one since then ever said so, they never acknowledged anything. It was very hush-hush. “Oh, he just got this rare virus thing.” But I thought perhaps maybe he is gay, too, and I just didn’t know it. He was a very, very nice man. I never felt comfortable around him. I always felt he tried too hard for everyone to love him and like him.

But as time went on, you kept seeing more and hearing about more people. Then I had a really close friend, Randy, remember, who he was sick a lot, but mainly it was because he binged and purged. He was one of the skinniest people you ever met. I met him in the seventies, late seventies. He got thrown out of an Overeaters class, because he was so skinny. He was skeletal. He always did this.

Ultimately, around 1985, he got really, really sick, and I started to go visit him in the hospital. It was obvious to me that whatever this thing was, AIDS — and I think they were calling it that by then — he had it. I read his chart, and not that I could understand all the medical terminology, said he has it. They made us wear masks, caps, robes, and little things on our feet when we went in there.

SS: Which hospital?

RG: It was Maimonides in Brooklyn. I thought, it's ridiculous. Whenever I was leaving, I would kiss him, I'd give him a kiss, and his family did. Yet, when we came out, everyone stayed away from us. They left his food tray outside the door. They would never even bring it in. When he started coughing and getting really, really sick, we would press the nurse's button and nobody would come. So one time, I said, "I'm going to give it one more time," and I ran out to the nurses' station.

All of them screamed and yelled at me. "Whatever's in that room, we want to keep it in that room. We don't want it out here. You can't come out here like this."

I said, "Then somebody better come in that room or I'm going to stay out here the whole time."

And finally they sent someone in, and they adjusted his things and gave him something for the cough. I thought this is outrageous. And I said to them, "Look, he's been my friend for years. I give him a kiss every time. We're not boyfriends or anything like that, but do I look sick to you at all? I can tell you other people that hang out with him. None of us are sick."

SS: How did you know you weren't infected?

RG: Well, I didn't. I didn't know. But I guessed that I wasn't. I presumed. I mean, things that I heard and saw that other people was happening to them never happened to me, was not happening to me.

SS: Now, when you guys got together in '86, did you have any concern that you might be infected and you might not be infected? Was that a discussion?

RG: I don't know that we ever did.

TA: We never practiced the kind of sex that would, as far as I know, transmit this.

SS: Anal sex.

RG: He means anal sex.

TA: We don't do that.

RG: We don't participate in anal sex.

TA: I was never interested in doing it.

00:20:00 RG: Nor was I. But supposedly people have gotten it other ways, is what we've heard, if you have a mouth sore, something like that. We've heard this all the while.

TA: But you have to have a bodily fluid exchange of some sort.

SS: And you know then in '86, you were informed enough to understand that?

TA: Was I? I don't know. I guess I was. I don't remember that specific detail.

RG: I just remember reading everything that came along about it and trying to understand everything.

Anyway, my friend, close to his death in 1986, he needed a lot of dental work, and he was refused by several dentists that worked in the hospital there and everything. One day I was there visiting him, and it was lucky for me that I worked nights at the time, so I could go every single day to visit him, and had a chance when he was out of the hospital and at home, he lived only two blocks from where I lived, and after work I would just go over to his house, make him breakfast, make sure that everything was clean, help him with his laundry and stuff like that, get him prepared for the rest of the day, and then his family would come over. So I got to see him basically every day until he died.

I was in the hospital one day with him, and this doctor came along with a bunch of interns. There was a whole group, all young guys, there weren't any women there, and the doctor had said something to them outside the door and then they all came in, and they looked a little scared at first. And then he said something like, "With the proper treatment, you wear gloves, you wear a mask, there is nothing — there is no procedure that we can do on this man that will hurt anybody." And they were taking it all in.

Oh my god, I smiled so big, and I looked at all of them like, "Yes, it's you. It's the future. Don't be afraid. Look at me. I'm sitting right here with him. I'm feeding him." That was a big milestone for me. That was very, very exciting.

SS: So Ron had all this personal experience with AIDS. When you guys got together, when did you start to have AIDS enter into your immediate life?

TA: I remember the very first — your brother died then.

RG: See, that's where I could tell you. The first time Tony, when he moved in with me, and then we had all the death threats and everything, we got more death threats from his father, not —

TA: Yes, my parents tried to — even going way back before we were even born, one time my mother tried to throw a boiling pot of corn on the cob on him just because I was talking to him.

RG: At a family picnic.

TA: So they were always hostile.

RG: They tried to get me, and I saw what was happening, and I pushed everyone out of the way. The water was so hot, it bubbled the paint on the picnic table.

TA: So we knew that they were capable of dangerous things. After I had moved in with Ron, I still was trying to reach out to them and help them to understand, help them get through this, try to have a relationship. But when my father said that he had a gun, that he was going to wait outside where Ron worked and shoot him, kill him for destroying his family, that broke our relationship permanently for me. When your own father tells you they're going to kill the person that means the most to you in your life, you don't really get over that. So what ended up happening was — well, see where am I going with this? I don't remember.

RG: We had to go to the police. I had to get an order of protection.

TA: Oh, right.

RG: I had to notify them at work. I had to leave through the loading dock and everything for a while. Then we were informed by members of Tony's family that his father had calmed down a bit, especially once he got the order of protection when he

was served with it in the pizza parlor. He went crazy at first, and the relatives calmed him down.

TA: But in my mind, I was moving away from my biological family, and Ron's family were becoming like my family. We went on my first visit to Chicago. Your brother was still alive, and —

00:25:00 RG: My brother was still alive, and he was acting funny — I totally welcomed Tony. You had met him already. And he and his partner were totally — we stayed at their house and everything was totally gracious. My extended family, relatives and all, knew my older brother and he had a partner, so here's Ron, and now he has one too. They would all say, "How old is he?"

TA: I was younger than I looked. I looked younger than I was.

RG: At that point he was twenty-three, but...

TA: I looked like nineteen, twenty.

RG: An ex-boyfriend of mine said, "How old is that kid?"

I said, "Twenty-three." It was very funny and interesting.

But, like I said, my brother — I thought he was acting odd, and he was having nosebleeds continuously. My brother had been ill almost his whole life, one way or the other, super susceptible to colds and flus, things like that. Then he was diagnosed with a heart condition. One time, I accidentally took his medicine on my way to college, and I had — what a day I had, let me tell you. But he just seemed to me to be very, very odd.

We went back at Christmastime, and he seemed a little more — and he looked like he had lost a lot of weight, and he was continuing to have these nosebleeds,

which was something that he had had all his life as well. When he was still in high school, he was subbing for the organist at our parish, and one time he had this super nosebleed that he didn't want anybody to know about, and I ran and told my father, who took him to the hospital. And I had to run over to the convent to tell the nuns to have a substitute play his Perpetual Help novenas that evening.

This was something throughout our lives. He was always ill, and he still tried to do everything. He was in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Chorus, and he sang in operas and stuff like that. But he just seemed to be getting more and more ill.

Then after Christmas, we came back to New York, and my younger brother and my brother's partner kept calling and saying, "We think you should talk to him. He needs to go to the hospital, but he keeps saying that his doctor says everything is fine." So when I would talk to him, it was almost like talking to someone from outer space. It was very weird.

Then it got to be March 1st of 1989. They called me. They said they had to rush him to the hospital, and he didn't resist. He was immediately diagnosed with AIDS, March 1st. Within a couple weeks, I told Tony. I said, "I have to go to Chicago, because they think it's so bad that he could die."

I had to tell everyone at work. That was a thing that might be of merit here, that all the people that we knew here in New York, all of our friends, we told them, and they knew my older brother. We told them, "He has been diagnosed with AIDS." I told people at work, I said, "Don't spread it around all over," because it was still a very shaky thing for people to know this about you or your family. But we told everybody.

I went to Chicago. My brother was already in ICU. He couldn't speak anymore, because he apparently had all these sores in his throat and his mouth. And he could barely, barely write, but he would write things back and forth. So because I worked night's doing my job, I took the night shift at the hospital, and my younger brother took part, my younger brother's fiancé took part of the day, and my older brother's partner. So somebody was with him in the hospital twenty-four hours a day.

I took the night shift, but there were times when he would just be sleeping, so I'd go in the waiting room. And on March 28th, 1989, I watched the news at night, and there were people in New York who were having a huge demonstration at City Hall about the treatment of people with AIDS and AIDS in general. And I lay there and said, "Goddamn it, somebody's doing something." And the very next day, my brother died.

And I said to Tony, "When we get back to New York, we're going to join them. We're going to get involved. We're going to do something."

SS: What was your first meeting?

TA: I remember even before the meeting, we went to the action.

RG: What happened was, we seemed to not be able to find out how to get involved. This was after my brother died and we were getting everything closed up and taking care, and I was going back and forth to Chicago.

TA: We had seen ACT UP marching at the Gay Pride March once, and I remember you were a little confused. I think this was before your brother died, and you were a little confused about them, because they had placards and pictures of Mario Cuomo. And you were like, "Why are they lumping in our friends with people like Reagan, who are our enemies?"

00:30:00

RG: Little did I know.

TA: Yes. We weren't that sharp on the issues yet.

RG: Because they say something nice, and you think, "Oh, they're great. They're our buddies."

TA: Right. But the first action we went to was Stop the Church, and I remember you saw the sticker for it, and you said, "We have to go to that."

RG: We kept hearing about actions after they happened. We'd see them on TV, read about them in the newspaper, see a flyer the week after it happened. And we're going — and then we saw it. It said something about meetings at the Community Center. I said, "We've got to find out about this."

Finally we found out about the Stop the Church action, and we went, and we thought it was super great and exciting and thrilling and just made us feel so good.

TA: I remember jumping up and down at that, because I also was blaming the church, in a way, for the whole thing that happened with me and my parents as well, because we're Italian, Catholic, and we never even went to church anyway, and yet the Catholic ways still permeated everything in my life, and so I was angry at them for that reason as well. But we only were on the outside demonstration. We never were in the inside demonstration.

RG: We weren't in it. We didn't go in the church.

TA: But even before that Stop the Church, you had seen the *Normal Heart*, didn't you?

RG: I saw that already in '86.

TA: So we were always aware.

RG: You would find things.

TA: Because you had given me the *Normal Heart* play to read, and I thought it was devastating.

RG: We would participate in things. We would fill out a postcard and send it to somebody or sign a —

TA: Petition.

RG: Yes, petition of some kind, but not actual physical actions.

But I wanted to comment on that he said he came from an Italian, Catholic family, but that they talked about religion but never even went to church. I was from a mostly German, Catholic family where we always went to church and participated in everything, and those novenas my brother played, we'd be there, too, and yet I had parents who often talked against the church. For instance, when they had these little pledges that you would not see a "B" or condemned movie, my mother would say, "No priest is going to tell me what movie I can see." And she always said, "The church is wrong there. They're crazy. I believe. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in the ideals of the Catholic Church, but these priests make things up as they go along." She said, "We used to not be able to eat meat on Friday. It was a big sin. Now let's have a hamburger on Friday night. Oh, my goodness — they could change that."

TA: See, with my family, we never cared what we ate on Friday. But my father would be the one who said to me, "Why are you going with Ron? Don't you know he's the type who just goes from boy to boy to boy, and as soon as you're used up, he'll discard you and throw you away?"

RG: Where are all those boys?

TA: And we had totally different backgrounds as far as that was concerned.

But getting back to the ACT UP thing, it was our friend Mark Sundre who told us about ACT UP meetings, and you were excited about going to one.

RG: He had already gone. He had already gone to some, and that was at the end of December of '89. That's when the Stop the Church thing was, right?

TA: Eighty-nine, yes.

RG: Yes. Then we said, "We're going to start going in January, after we get back from Chicago," because we would go every Christmas and all that. When I got back from Chicago, remember, I worked the night shift, but I also got on a grand jury, so I was late, and I did the entire night shift and then went on the half-day grand jury every day for the month of January. So we didn't start going to the meetings until the end of January of '89.

I remember one of the first facilitators at our first meeting, Ann Northrop was one of the facilitators, and I was so taken with her. I was like, "Oh, my god, she's so cool." I misunderstood her name. I thought she said Ann Northern, and I said, "Oh, is it a takeoff on Ann Southern?" Kind of ridiculous, but nevertheless.

SS: How did you guys enter into the organization? What committees did you get on or —

00:35:00 TA: We just walked in and were general members for a long time, and we would raise our hand, vote for this, vote for that.

RG: After three meetings, you start voting.

TA: Sometimes we would try to get — Ron tried first, to get into a committee. He tried to go on the Fundraising Committee, and they told him they didn't want him there.

SS: Why?

RG: They just stood around and looked at each other, and I thought I wasn't young enough, hot enough, or cute enough to be on this committee.

SS: Who was on the Fundraising Committee?

RG: I have to tell you, I don't remember their names. I just remember —

SS: Were they hot and cute?

RG: A couple. And after that, one of the cute young ones came up to me and said, "I really feel bad about the way you were treated, but we do have a lot of people right now."

I said, "I'm not asking to run the thing. I meant if you're, like, selling — "

TA: He just wanted to help raise money.

RG: " — selling t-shirts on the streets. Gee, I think I could do that."

SS: What was your profession at the time?

RG: I'm sorry?

SS: What was your profession at the time? What were you doing?

RG: I worked at a computer company. I was a logistician. That's a fancy name for someone who keeps track of parts, computer parts.

SS: That's terrible that they didn't welcome you to the committee.

RG: I thought it was too. And then the guy on the — what do you call it? Not fundraising, but the one who does all the banking and everything.

JW: Treasurer.

RG: Treasury. My god, why couldn't I think of that? He made a plea at a couple of the meetings that he needed help and they needed people to come and open up mail at the workspace and then deposit the checks and things. So I thought, god, that'd be the easiest thing for me to do. I work nights.

SS: Who was the treasurer?

RG: I don't know his name. I remember he was a medium-sized guy. He was, I think, bald or balding head. And I went to him, and he looked at me and smiled, and I gave him all my information. He was, like, [gestures]. So I thought, "This is incredibly weird. Some of these people are very strange to me." And next thing you knew, there was a hot young kid with him.

TA: Helping him out and not you.

RG: Helping him out with the treasury. So I thought, "I don't know. He doesn't trust me or something."

SS: Wow, that's intense —

RG: We had some very negative things happen to us, but it didn't change our determination. I do remember after maybe two or three meetings, Maxine Wolfe just came up to me and said, "Hi, how you doin'?" She was the first person who acknowledged, "Hey, I see you here." And she got me involved in helping to paint posters and things. Whereas Tony's the artist and I'm the person who drops everything he ever touches. She said, "Don't worry about it." This one day in some gallery somewhere, she and I painted a whole big black, poster or — what do you call those things?

TA: Banner.

RG: A big, big long banner. I felt so proud.

SS: Was it at the Drawing Center?

RG: Where is that? It was on the Lower East Side, upstairs. And we painted this banner. And I told him, “Man, after the first letter, I can do this.”

She said, “We can touch it up.”

“What? It’s not going into the Met.” She was a riot and just made me feel so, so great. So we did that a lot, and we did a lot of work at The Kitchen, where we made the float for the Pride March for that year.

TA: That we went on. We would often join these temporary committees rather than longstanding.

RG: Yes.

TA: If there was a committee for the Pride March to make the Pride March float, we would join that. I was more artistic, so I was able to help with things like that, but I had always heard that the artists of ACT UP, the Gran Fury, was a closed committee. So it was closed when I joined, so there was not even a chance of me getting in there, as far as I knew.

SS: Are you an artist?

TA: I went to school for that, yes.

RG: He’s Anonymous Boy.

TA: That’s my art name. I used to draw erotic drawings of punk rockers for a gay punk rock fanzine for gays called *JDs*.

RG: Juvenile Delinquents.

TA: Yes, it stood for juvenile — so I was on that. My art name was Anonymous Boy. I had sent a drawing to this fanzine, and G.B. Jones, she's the one who did this fanzine.

SS: Johnny Noxzema

RG: And Bruce LaBruce.

00:40:00 TA: And Bruce LaBruce. She published my first drawing “from an anonymous boy,” because I didn't sign my name to it. I said, “Oh, that's cool. That's like Tom of Finland. It's a name that I can use.” So I signed all my drawings Anonymous Boy from then on. But that's another story.

SS: But are you still making art now?

TA: Yes, a little bit. But what I was getting at was I remember that year the float was supposed to be a bunch of corpses laying on the lawn of the White House. So we got this flatbed truck, and we blew up the dollar — the image of the White House that's on the back of the — was it a dollar bill? I forget what's on the back. We projected that on a canvas and we painted the White House. And then we had all these people lying on the flatbed truck as it went through the march that year.

RG: We were pretty much always on the Gay Pride committees, and we were marshals during those demonstrations.

TA: We never had marshal training, though.

RG: I did.

TA: You had marshal training?

RG: Yes, I did.

TA: Oh.

SS: What was that like?

RG: It was actually kind of fun, and I provided those — you see what they now call plastic handcuffs? We used them at the computer company. They were called tie wraps, and what they do is they keep all the cables and wires, bound together that are running from the computer. At the company that I had, they started in mini computers, but there were still big rooms full of computers with false floors with all the wires underneath, but to hold them together, they used those plastic things that were called tie wraps, and you put it around and pull it through, and then it stays like that till you cut it. So I would always provide those to the things, and we used them and showed people how they really hurt. They make them too tight.

But the marshal training was very good, and a lot of times when I hadn't volunteered to be a marshal, they just pulled me out of demonstrations saying, "We really need you." I was stopping traffic and holding people back. One time there was a whole fire department had to get through, and I got all the traffic. I put them up on the sidewalk and got the truck through, and the firemen were all waving at me. I thought that was very valuable to know how to do it and not be afraid.

SS: Did either of you ever end up in an affinity group?

TA: No, not really.

RG: Just for the Day of Desperation thing. I don't even remember what our affinity group was called.

SS: Who else was in it, do you remember?

RG: Our friend Steve Santurri and Greg Leibgold, and who was that guy who we always had his name wrong, from Mary?

TA: Mary Grace Farley?

RG: Yes. But we —

TA: Tim and Vivek, one of them.

RG: Right. It was Tim who was in the group.

TA: The blond guy?

RG: Yes.

TA: Right.

RG: The Adonis. That's how we met him. And what's-her-name was in our group too. She went to Vassar? Are you talking about — with the Russian name?

TA: Yes.

SS: Natasha?

TA: Natasha Gray.

SS: The Gray's Papaya heiress.

RG: Oh, that's what was?

SS: Yes.

RG: We didn't know. But she was always super nice to us, and we were nice to her. We never felt any, class distinction with her of any kind. We know that Maxine and she didn't get along. Maxine would always say, "Well, I wasn't able to go to Vassar."

TA: "I went to City College."

RG: We didn't understand.

TA: I often was witness to these strange sorts of back-and-forth bickering between people. I remember my first real close exposure to that was when we were doing

— when the workspace was moving. The workspace had been really on 16th Street, sort of, across the street from where we live.

RG: We live on 16th across from the Port Authority Building, and the workspace was in the Port Authority Building on the Ninth Avenue side.

TA: It was on the Ninth Avenue side, but you had to enter on the Eighth Avenue side and go up and down and through.

RG: Go up and walk through the entire building.

TA: It was like a maze.

RG: And then go downstairs in elevators.

TA: It was crazy. And Tom Cunningham was one of the first people who was really friendly to me in ACT UP.

RG: With us.

TA: Yes, both of us. He was saying we were going to move the workspace, and we were going to move it to where — across the street from where we lived to across the street from where Frank Smithson lived.

JW: West 28th.

TA: Right.

RG: Twenty-eighth, right.

00:45:00 TA: And we moved there, but I remember there was always this fighting between Tom and Peter Staley. I never understood what it was about, and it made me feel bad. But that whole process was really difficult, because Tom had found some kid who was at the Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center, and this kid was

befriending him, and they were doing all this work. Him and Frank Smithson, this kid and me were doing all this work getting the workspace moved.

And I guess they trusted this young kid a little bit too much, and one time when he was alone in the workspace, he set fire to the place. It was horrible. It was a horrible, horrible situation, because not only had he set fire to the place, he had taken Tom's wallet and flushed it down the toilet. Tom had to get the plunger and get the wallet out from under there, and of course, it's covered in feces and stuff, and it was really, really horrible.

SS: Why did he do this?

TA: I never understood the reason. But Frank Smithson saw that kid once. I was still sleeping, right, and I got a phone message on our answering machine from Frank Smithson. He said, "Tony, come over quick. The kid is here. We know he's the one who did it. We're playing it cool, but we called the police." But I didn't go to the workspace. I didn't know that this was happening because I was still sleeping. We worked midnight to eights, both of us, at the time. And it was later I heard from Frank that the police came, they arrested this kid, and the kid asked Frank, "How is Tom?"

And Frank said, "He's doing terrible, thanks to you. He's very, very sick. He'll probably die because of you," right? And then I heard the kid went to jail or something. I don't know much about what happened to him. I don't even really remember his name.

But I remember the only person who was mistrustful — we all just trusted this kid. The only person who kept warning us was Emily Nahmanson. She kept saying, "I don't know about this kid."

We're like, "No, he's cool."

She's like, "I don't know." Right?

RG: Which Emily is she?

TA: She's young Emily.

RG: There was red-headed Emily, young Emily, and then there was another one, like we see you now and then not, then we see you again, three Emilys. Now-and-then Emily, I think is what we called her.

TA: After this horrendous incident, and Tom really did take a turn for the worse after that and he did sicken, and worse, much worse than before, and then eventually died. But after that, that's when Maxine had a little forum meeting that I went to because I felt so terrible. It was all about how there could be people in our group who are not our friends, who will damage us, and how are we supposed to deal with that. I was like, "I knew this guy, and it threw me completely by surprise? How do I trust people?"

And Maxine looked at me and she said, "It's always better to make a mistake on the side of trusting people, than it is to make a mistake on the side of not trusting someone and turning them away." So, that little thing that Maxine did helped me to — allowed me to remain open and remain trusting of my fellow activists, and it was really helpful.

RG: Then we helped clean up the workspace, because there seemed to be more water damage than fire damage.

TA: I remember Cliff, the archivist, was ironing documents.

RG: Yes, Cliff. We helped him iron stuff.

SS: What's Cliff's last name?

TA: Cliff's last name.

RG: Do you know?

TA: David Buckingham might know, because he ended up being a Church Lady for Choice. I'll try to find out.

RG: We would take stuff out of drawers and empty the water out. But he was ironing everything. We'd smooth them down, line them up, try to dry them out, and he would iron them so we could keep our archives and —

TA: That fire was very devastating. It did a lot of damage.

RG: I remember wiping down the walls, mopping, and —

SS: Did you visit Tom when he was in the hospital?

TA: No, I don't think I did. I don't think I remember hearing about what hospital he was in. Did that information ever come to us?

RG: I don't know.

TA: I remember he came to a few demonstrations, even in a wheelchair after, and it was always very great to see him there, but —

00:50:00

SS: Let me get back to Day of Desperation. What did your affinity group do on that day?

RG: Oh, we didn't really do much other than lay down on the floor in Grand Central and yell and scream and stuff, but we all agreed to get arrested, and Tony had back trouble then. We did the whole thing inside, but then after everything was over and nobody seemed to have gotten arrested, that's when the demonstration moved outside. And it was extremely cold for New York. It was January. And we sat down.

We sat down on the street, on 42nd Street, by the Chrysler Building. I'm from Chicago, where it gets extremely cold, and I'm used to it, and I can put up with it. It's not a problem for me. But he already had back trouble, and the second we sat down on the street, I could feel my lower back freezing up. And I said, "You can't do this," so I sent him home. I said, "In case we all need to be bailed out, you'll be at home to get the call."

He said, "I don't want to leave you guys." So then we all suggested that he go, and he did. We, all of us, got arrested, and we all got — we only got kept — supposedly all the precincts nearby were all full, and they took us to Central way, way downtown on Pearl Street. Is that where it is? And I remember that our now state senator, current state senator [Tom Duane], got arrested along with us.

My arresting officer was super nice. I couldn't believe it. I was so lucky. And he said to me, he said, "I want you to understand that we know you're not criminals, that you're people who believe very strongly in something, but you broke the law. You broke the law, but we just want you to know we understand that, that you have a strong commitment."

I said, "I appreciate that." So I was the last one out, though, but it was two or three hours. It wasn't very long. And he walked me through a parking lot. He said he had to escort me all the way to the sidewalk, which is fine, and then we shook hands. So I had a wonderful experience with that officer and that arrest.

SS: Did you guys ever end up working on a committee ultimately?

TA: Well, it's funny. Ron was saying how he often would try to get on committees and groups and be turned away. The opposite was for me. For me, I had

people always coming up to me, asking me “Are you Latin? Would you like to join the Latino Committee?

I’m like, “I’m not Latin. I’m Italian.”

Like, “Oh, okay.”

I remember YELL was being run by Ken then.

SS: Ken who?

TA: What’s Ken’s last name? He was a teacher. Ken or Keith? No, Ken, I think. I don’t remember. You remember him. He had glasses and was sort of slender, tall. Anyway, he thought I was young enough, looked young enough to be in YELL, and so I would do things with YELL for a while, and we would pass out condoms and information at schools, in front of schools and stuff.

SS: What was that like?

RG: I went to all of those too. The best was going to the Catholic schools.

TA: The Catholic school was this —

RG: Well, we went to more than one Catholic school.

TA: Yes, but I remember the one where the priest came out of the school, and he put a garbage pail in front of the door so that we would hand the information to the students, and the priest was standing by the door, and as the students were entering the school, they had to drop the information in the garbage and then enter the school.

RG: No, they were going on a bus, because they were going on a retreat.

TA: Oh, was that it? I don’t remember. I just remember there was this garbage pail in front of the door.

RG: I used my experience from having gone to Catholic schools and having gone on retreats on buses, and I went over by the bus door and slipped a whole bunch of condoms and packages to the kids getting on the bus and talked to them and told them about how I had gone to Catholic school and blah blah blah. And they were all very, very friendly, and when they drove away, they were waving out the bus. Then we cornered the priest and brothers.

TA: I did because I said to this priest, "What are you doing? If any of these kids get sick, you're going to have to think about what you did here today."

And he says, "Why don't you just tell them not to hang out with sluts and prostitutes?" Right?

00:55:00 And I said, what did I say? I said, "That's the most ignorant thing I've ever heard." I said, "This does not just happen to people who are sluts and prostitutes, whatever you think that means." And we had this argument, right? And I said, "Look, you're Catholic. You're the one who's always telling us that we're all sinners and we all fall. How are you going to live with yourself when you *know* they're sinners, you *know* they're going to fall? Why would you prevent them from getting information that could save their lives when they do fall?"

Then the priest was looking like, "How do I answer this? How do I answer this?" He's looking around for an answer. Then he just suddenly turned to me and said, "Go away and take your devil with you," and then went back into the school.

RG: You're mixing that. You're mixing up Regis and Francis Xavier on our street on 16th Street.

TA: That's why I wanted you here, because I remember impressions, and he remembers details. My impression at the time was —

RG: There were two, and he did it at both.

TA: — was very outraged that here you have kids who need this information to live, and, again, they're getting in the way of things.

And this was a problem I had that — I became very good friends with Christopher Hennelly. Now, when Christopher Hennelly had been a Catholic monk, and he had told me that when he was a monk working at Covenant House, that they told him to tell these kids not to use condoms. And then many of the kids that he had to give this counseling to ended up becoming HIV-positive. We got very, very — he became a very close friend of ours, and he was hanging with us, and he was there the night that he got beaten.

SS: Did you witness that?

JW: By the police.

RG: What?

TA: By the police.

RG: By the police.

SS: Did you witness it?

TA: We sort of did. It was like what happened was we were there with Christopher at the meeting. We went with Christopher to the demonstration in front of the precinct, but when Christopher got there, because he was a marshal, they —

RG: They needed more marshals.

TA: They took him. They needed more marshals. They took him from us and moved him to the front.

RG: To the front, and we did the perimeter in the back.

TA: So we didn't see the actual beating.

RG: I saw them —

TA: Take him.

RG: — drag him, drag him into the police station. I mean, *drag*.

TA: And you said to me, "They took Christopher into the —"

RG: I said, "That's Christopher." I said I could tell by his jacket. I mean, like a rag doll pulling him back and forth, and he couldn't even stand up. I saw his knees hit the step in front of it. I was like, "Oh, my god." So —

SS: And then what happened with him?

TA: I know that he spent the whole night in — beaten in that jail cell, and he experienced a lot of horrors being in their custody.

RG: They beat other people up. They beat up — I can't remember her name, her camera, her video camera. And after that, there were so many, such a huge series of court dates, and I went to almost every single one of them because I could.

TA: Because we worked nights, we were often at every court. We went to the whole Safe Sex Six trial, and I tell you, you've never seen a more disgusting display of a kangaroo court than that trial.

SS: Can you explain what that trial was about and who the defendants were?

TA: The defendants were the Safe Sex Six, who were Ann Northrop, Charles King, Sharon Tramutola, Michael Wiggins, Rod Sorge. Is that six?

RG: No, what's his name? You said Charles King, right? What's her name?

TA: Her name? Kathy Otter.

RG: There you go. Transgender.

TA: Kathy Otter, yes.

SS: What was the charge?

TA: The charge was different charges for each of them.

RG: Conspiracy to disrupt religious service or something like that.

TA: And they lied.

SS: What did they do? What was the incident?

RG: This was the first action that we went to where we stayed outside of St. Patrick's Cathedral. They went in. And we were never at any of the planning session for it, so what I understood is that they were going to go in, make their presence known. I believe they were going to lay down in the aisle.

SS: This is separate from Stop the Church?

TA: It was Stop the Church.

RG: It was the inside the church part of the Stop the Church. It was a massive outside demonstration.

TA: There were two components. There was the outside demonstration and the inside demonstration, and the inside demonstration was what people were arrested for in the Safe Sex Six incidence.

01:00:00

RG: But apparently things — maybe there were affinity groups and things that didn't follow what everyone else understood, and people started yelling and screaming different things. You remember what they were? Because we weren't in there, but we've seen it on video.

TA: But it was so hard to know. What I remember most about that trial was people lying on the stand, the police officers lying on the stand. They said Sharon Tramutola was simultaneously —

RG: You're jumping ahead.

TA: All right, you tell it.

RG: What Tony's trying to get at is that we couldn't believe this judge who did her nails, read the newspaper, took naps and everything, prompted the prosecution —

TA: To raise objections.

RG: Almost all the time. It wasn't like we were at one of the sessions where she did that. Every time she thought they should object, she looked at them and went like that to them. It was outrageous. It was unbelievable. And tell them who the prosecutors were. One of them was —

TA: One of them was Dan Rather's son.

RG: — Dan Rather, Jr., who looked just like him, by the way.

SS: Who were our lawyers? Who were the defense lawyers?

RG: Lori —

SS: Cohen?

TA: Cohen, right. And Charles King defended himself, and Ann Northrop defended herself.

RG: Ann Northrop defended herself.

TA: And Laurie defended Kathy and Rod and Michael and Sharon.

RG: That the major point Tony was trying to make, we were talking about the demonstration itself that lots and lots of people were arrested and were carried out of the church, but for some reason they focused on these six people.

TA: To make an example of them or something.

RG: I guess to make an example. I couldn't tell you exactly why. Maybe they looked up their records. And Ann Northrop's very busy in a lot of these organizations and demonstrations. She's been an activist for a long time. And Charles King apparently was.

TA: I think also it might have been that they didn't plead guilty, right? I think everybody else just pled guilty.

RG: I guess, maybe that was it, too, but you'd have to ask them if they know why. But the major point that Tony was trying to make, that most of the witnesses for the prosecution were police officers and —

TA: And people who were affiliated with the church.

RG: Okay. But the point I was going to make there is that because of going to all of these trials and hearings, mostly involving witnesses for the prosecution who were police officers, I can say that going to numerous ones — twenty-seven times for Christopher Hennelly alone, twenty-seven times — the Safe Sex Six, the needle

exchange thing. God, I wish I could remember her name, the girl whose camera got smashed in. I never saw a police officer tell the truth on the stand except once.

SS: When was that?

RG: One time, and it was in the needle exchange trial where they said, “Officer So-and-so, what happened?”

He said, “I heard that people were going to be giving out needles at this table on the street, I went over, I saw that they were giving out needles. I asked them to stop, they didn’t, and I arrested them.” That’s it. That is the only truthful statement I ever heard from a police officer on the stand in all those things.

They said things like they saw Sharon Tramutola in three places at once. They said that they didn’t drop Michael — what’s his name?

TA: Wiggins.

RG: And Lori even said, “If you saw a video of yourself holding Michael on a stretcher and dropping him, would you agree then that you had dropped him?” And he wouldn’t answer. And she said, “You need to answer.” She said to the judge, “I want him to answer,” and she didn’t make him answer.

Of course, then we watched the video, and he purposely dumps him off the stretcher. But, my god, it was every single one of them. Unbelievable.

TA: One policeman said that Ann Northrop was shouting and screaming throughout the whole action.

RG: She was running up and down the aisle, running and screaming. You watch the entire video of the action, at the very end, at the very end —

TA: She’s carried out [unclear]. She’s the last person.

RG: She's the last person being carried out of St. Patrick's Cathedral. She yells, "We're fighting for your lives too. We're fighting for your lives too."

TA: That was the only time that she opened her mouth in that church.

RG: And that's the only time.

TA: But the policeman said she was running and screaming throughout the whole church.

RG: And she said to the officer, "Would you say I have a distinctive voice?" In fact, do it.

TA: [imitating Ann Northrop] "Would you say I have a distinctive voice?" That's the way she said it to the policeman. And he refused to answer the question.

RG: He was like this.

01:05:00 TA: And she had to ask it three or four times. He refused to answer the question. The judge didn't make him answer the question. This judge was completely on the side of the church.

RG: Every other trial, you see this, "You need to answer this question or you'll be held in contempt."

No. "Oh, you're an officer. Who cares?"

SS: What happened to Chris Hennelly?

RG: Oh, my god, he went through so many — not trials, but hearings and delays.

TA: Because they were prosecuting him. He was the one that got beat up, and they were prosecuting him.

RG: So many medical things, it was unbelievable. At one point, when his partner would have to go out of town, we would all volunteer to stay with him for the night. He would sleep in his bedroom. We would sleep on the couch in the living room. I did that a number of times. And I went with him to all these — more kangaroo court and trials. And this idiot prosecutor who — I'm wearing — I'm antiviolent, but, boy, sometimes you just feel like you'd like to let loose, let me tell ya.

Anyway, finally, it finally culminated where we got a judge for one of these hearings where it was actually going to be the trial, and the judge apparently had done his homework and read all the transcripts of everything and about all the delays, and he laid into this prosecutor, who, again, had Christopher doing five thousand things at once.

I was sitting next to Christopher's partner, and he grabbed my hand and started squeezing it so hard. And on the other side was another really close friend who was squeezing my thigh. I thought I was going to scream from the pain, but it was just so amazing. We're finally, finally getting somewhere. And Christopher was awarded a monetary settlement. But let me tell you, I would never —

TA: It wasn't worth it. Whatever they paid him wasn't worth it because —

RG: I would never. I would never.

TA: — there's brain damage, and you would —

SS: How was it expressed, the damage?

TA: Chris would have —

RG: He would have seizures.

TA: — seizures.

RG: And they would often be brought on by a flashing light. We were in a McDonald's with him, and some people were having a get-together, a party of some kind, and they took photos of each other. And the flash of the camera just with his burger or whatever that he had, I don't remember, sitting on the table.

And he always told us, because we were with him many times during these seizures, he said, "I can hear you." He said, "It's like blanking out and then being able to hear everything but not knowing where I am or what's going on." Then slowly he would come out of it. We would hold his hand, or we'd just say, "We're here with you. Don't worry. Everything's okay. Take your time."

TA: At first it was shocking, and then it became familiar. I remember one time we were with Christopher and we were making posters at some place, remember? And then suddenly Christopher went into a seizure, and all these other ACT UP-ers were like, "What's happening with him? What's going on?"

And we were like, "Oh, he just does that."

RG: Ron Goldberg was there for that.

TA: They were like, "Shouldn't we do something?"

RG: "He'll be okay. All right. We know the routine."

TA: He'll just be in a seizure. We know the routine. He'll be like that for a while, and then he'll come back.

RG: They were horrified, and it's like, okay.

TA: But we had seen it so many times by then.

RG: The last part of it would be a shake of the head and eyes rolling and

—

TA: And I want everyone to know Christopher was one of the kindest, sweetest —

RG: Gentle person. God.

TA: — gentlest, most nonviolent, most meek. When they say the meek will inherit the earth, they'd better mean Christopher Hennelly, because the man was so meek and kind and friendly and sweet, that this was a complete tragedy what happened with him. I'll never forget that.

RG: I'd seen him at meetings, but met him in —

TA: Did we meet him on the bus on the way to the NIH, Storm the NIH?

RG: I think that's where we met him and then got to know him because he was pushing Harry Wieder all over Washington in the wheelchair thing, and that's how we got to meet Harry as well. And I even said to him, "Are you and Harry boyfriends?"

He goes, "No, I just volunteered for this action." He said, "You can volunteer."

I said, "Oh, I think I will," and I did for — and I think it was actually a Queer Nation thing, though, where I pushed Harry through these snow-covered streets of Queens. It was a bad day for a demonstration. Were you there? Do you remember that? Oh, my god, that was scary.

SS: Let's have a little stretch. Let's take a little break, have some water. If you want to go to the bathroom or stretch at all and then we'll resume in 10 minutes.

JW: A cigarette break?

SS: Sure.

01:10:00 **SS: So I want to ask you about the culture of ACT UP. Now, you entered ACT UP as a couple, and I think there's only one other couple that has survived ACT UP. I think it's Richard Elovich and Daniel Wolfe.**

TA: Ron Goldberg and Joe Chiplock are still together.

SS: Were they together before ACT UP?

RG: I think they met in —

TA: No, they met in ACT UP, right?

RG: We think that.

TA: I think so.

RG: You could ask them. We run into them every now and then. It's funny.

SS: What was the particular experience of coming into ACT UP as a couple?

TA: People trying to break us up.

RG: Oh, my god.

SS: Really break you up, or just —

RG: It's to separate us. Put it like that.

SS: And why would anyone want to do that?

RG: Because I'm a not-very-good-looking older guy, and Tony was a real young cutie.

TA: They would invite me to parties and tell me Ron isn't invited. "Well, then I'm not coming!" I was like, "Are you kidding?" Or sometimes, if we were working on something and I was moving stuff, and they think, "Oh, I have him alone now," they would suddenly pounce on me, and I pushed them off like, "What are you doing?" Stuff like that would happen.

SS: What were the values about coupleness and what were the sexual values and ideas about sexual relationships in ACT UP from your point of view?

TA: For everyone like that, there was a lot of people who really respected and loved that we were a couple.

RG: Yes.

TA: I have to say that too.

RG: I think a whole lot of people were looking for hookups as well as fighting AIDS. I can't think of anybody who I would even think of who came there just to find somebody or just to, "Oh, it would be easy to have sex with one of these people." I never felt that about anybody there. But I felt there was a lot of people who were like, "Ooh, all this and a boyfriend, too," or a night of sex or something.

TA: Plus there was also — you never knew how many people — like we were talking a little bit about infiltrators or people who were — there were times when you got the sense that maybe the FBI was trying to break us up. I know that sounds crazy, but it happened. Weird things happened.

RG: My god, yes.

TA: Weird things that have never happened since.

SS: Like what?

RG: We would get calls on our answering machine —

TA: Because I had become — after Tom Cunningham died, he had put out a list of things. He said, “In order to be the workspace manager, it’s really hard for one person. We really need to — .”

RG: Divide it up.

TA: To divide it up. So when Tom left that position, he divided the workspace manager job up into a bunch of different slots, and one of them was protest materials manager, which is basically a glorified thing of you go to the workspace and you straighten up all the posters and all the materials that we use in that storage closet for actions.

So when I was protest materials manager, I had my name on the contact sheet, and then once my name was on the contact sheet, suddenly we would get phone calls of people who wouldn’t say their names but would say, “Oh, we had a hot time last night,” or something like that.

It’s like, “This didn’t happen.”

RG: “Oh, Tony, that nice young hot dick. I want it again,” and stuff like that.

TA: And Ron would be like, “Who is this?”

RG: Either when we were there or they’d leave messages. I would go, “Fuck you. Fuck you, FBI. Chickens. Goddamn fucking chickens.”

And during that time, one of the times it was Tony’s birthday, and I sent him a birthday card through the mail, the mailbox on our corner, and it came two weeks later, and it was obviously that it had been opened somewhere along the way. I said,

“We’re being watched.” So I started sending myself letters, saying, like, “We know you’re the FBI or some form of police-type group. I just want to say, fuck you. Stop wasting your time. Go to hell. You’re full of shit, whatever” And some of those didn’t come. They didn’t even get there.

TA: They didn’t come back to us.

RG: That’s it. It was addressed to me with my return address sticker, so the envelope would have had to have been 100 percent mangled to not get to me somehow. So when we would get those calls and stuff. We heard other people who were getting things that the girls —

TA: Tracy Morgan and Heidi [Dorow]. You said you tried to help them, I remember.

SS: What did you do when you tried to help them?

RG: Remind me, because I was just talking about —.

TA: You said they came to a meeting once and they gave, like, a presentation about what was happening to them, how people were following them around and nailing things to their door and stuff.

RG: Yes.

01:15:00 TA: And you told them that you would walk them home if they needed it.

RG: I would escort them home if they needed me to come and escort them out there. And I said to them, “I’m home all day long and when I hear the phone. We have an answering machine. Just start talking. If it’s somebody that I think requires my attention, I’ll answer.” And you said you spoke to Heidi recently or emailed her, and she remembered that or something. Of course, I barely did, but —

TA: Yes.

RG: But it's the type of thing I would do, though, if someone were afraid.

We started walking that guy — what was his name? The English guy. Rupert.

TA: Rupert.

RG: He got beat up or something, and so we walked him back and forth a few times.

TA: We would always be there to try to help out. And I remember — I know it sounds paranoid, but what we did — I saw some of those documents that they got of the FBI surveillance and they put them on display at that gallery show.

RG: Right down the block.

TA: And it was, again, filled with misinformation about us.

RG: Filled with misinformation and all blocked out.

TA: But it was really happening. And I remember after that fire that I mentioned earlier, I remember Steve Rosenbush and his friend — what's his friend's name, the big guy? Eric. Eric Schweitzer, right?

RG: Right.

TA: Got this crazy intense security system.

RG: Surveillance system

TA: Where you had a card key, and if you didn't punch in the right code, this giant voice would boom out and say, "You have trespassed this area."

And we would get phone calls all the time at the workspace. When I was at the workspace, there were calls coming all the time of people threatening us. So there was that sense that there was people working. All we were doing was trying to save

people's lives, and to have that extra thing of people trying to obstruct us from doing our work, to me it just seemed like the most astonishing thing. My impression of it was they come to these meetings and they sit here and they hear all the things we're doing. How could they listen to this and want to stop us?

SS: And what's your answer?

TA: I don't understand it to this day. You hear people talking about how someone suffering from this opportunistic infection that makes you blind, and there is this medication that might be helpful. Why would you try to get in the way and obstruct people who were trying to make that available, to help speed that process along, or do any of the other number of things that we used to do? I still don't understand. Maybe you understand it better than me. I still don't understand how someone could sit in the room as a spy on us and not be moved, and still do that job of trying to obstruct us.

RG: No, I could never understand it, and I never will. I can't understand Republicans. I can't, I honestly cannot.

SS: Did ACT UP ever do anything that you profoundly disagreed with?

RG: Profoundly disagreed with.

TA: Only recently. The twenty-fifth anniversary I don't agree with. That action I didn't agree with.

SS: Why?

TA: We could get into that later.

SS: Let's get into it now.

TA: I thought it was a big waste of time, and I still think that that whole Robin Hood tax thing is a big waste of time. I don't believe it's ever going to happen. I don't think that if it did happen that it would help anybody. I think that it's a big mistake to waste all that —

SS: What's Robin Hood tax thing? Do you want to explain it?

TA: They want to tax certain kinds of transactions that take place on Wall Street and use that money and carve it up into all these different social — to help fund all these different social things. The laundry list of social things that it's supposed to help everything from education to green energy to a laundry list of things, and they think that one of those slender slices of pie is supposed to go to HIV and AIDS. My feeling, when I went to these recent meetings — because I should explain. I was going to these recent meetings, and I was there like the DIVA TV person, because I did eventually join — after working a little bit with Insurance Committee and YELL, I did actually — my real — I feel like my real place ended up being with DIVA TV, and so I did join the DIVA TV Committee, affinity group, whatever you want to call it.

01:20:00 And it was there that I met Jim Wentzy, David Buckingham, and many of the other people who were working on video, because we were documenting everything we were doing all the while we were doing it. It was because Christopher Hennelly got beat up that I ended up buying, getting a video camera, because I had been with him that whole night, and I felt like if I had just had a camera that day and was videoing it, maybe that would have been just one more camera that would have gotten —

RG: Beat up and broken and thrown away.

TA: Maybe not beat up and broken. Maybe it would have captured exactly what really happened there, which we all know what really happened there.

RG: I'm sorry, I can't remember her name, and I went to all of her hearings where she finally had to accept some sort of thing to not have to go anymore. Sorry I don't remember her name, but —

TA: Is it Esther?

RG: No.

TA: It's not Dolly?

RG: No.

SS: The person whose camera got smashed?

RG: Oh, they smashed her camera but they had the videotape, and then the videotape in police custody magically disappeared like apparently everything does in an evidence room. They were actually trying to say — and luckily, someone else had a video or a photo of her camera where you could clearly see that there was a —

TA: A tape in there.

RG: — a tape cassette in it, because they were trying to say there wasn't. The police went, "Oh, she was just aiming the camera at us in a threatening way, and that's why we hit it."

TA: She brought the camera there to use it as a weapon. That was what the police said. The camera was being used as a weapon.

RG: Dena? Was that her name?

JW: I think it was Dolly.

SS: Dolly Meieran?

TA: It could have been. Christopher would remember. Anyway, there were videotapes of that assault, and some of them were even used in the court and at press conferences afterwards, but there was not any good video of the actual attack, not real clear, distinct video. I felt like if I was just one more person with a camera, that maybe I could help prevent this, because I'd been through all this with Christopher, watching him go into convulsions and all this other stuff, and it was profoundly disturbing to me.

I remember I was talking to Aldyn McKean once, because after coming back and forth from visiting Chris at the hospital, I remember saying, "I feel like I need to do something. I have to get a video camera, too, and start taping some of this stuff, because I don't want to be visiting more people in the hospital like this."

And he looked at me like that was an offensive thing to say, and I felt bad, because I didn't mean I wasn't going to visit people in the hospital who had AIDS anymore; I just meant I didn't want to visit people in the hospital because of the —

SS: You didn't want them to be in the hospital.

TA: To be in the hospital and especially because we're already visiting enough people in the hospital because they have HIV.

RG: Because they got beaten up at a demonstration.

TA: But when you're young and you say things, it comes out wrong, and so I still feel bad about that even now.

SS: What did you cover for DIVA TV? What did you shoot?

TA: Oh, the one that I think I got the best footage from was the Ashes Action, because Ron helped me. He picked me up and —

RG: Held him against a wall so he —

TA: — held me against the fence.

RG: It's an aerial view.

TA: So I could get really, like, above that fence, and he was holding me up, and I was shooting the ashes go over the fence and onto the lawn. It was interesting

—

RG: The White House lawn.

TA: It was interesting because all those years earlier we had done that Pride float of people laying dead on the White House lawn, and now we were actually putting the ashes of people who had died, on the White House lawn. It was almost like a prediction or a premonition of something we would do, I guess.

JW: Then the horses came.

01:25:00 TA: The horses came. I was knocked down. I got knocked down quite a few times by police, actually, doing video. I shouldn't say quite a few, but at least two big ones. One was at that Ashes Action, and the other was in front of Republic Campaign Headquarters during the Campaign '92 actions. I had done some video there too. But I did a lot of video. A lot of it was at meetings or at demonstrations and stuff, but I also helped with the ACT UP Live TV program that was a live call-in show, and I would do camera there or I was sometimes host or I would be —

SS: What was the cable station?

TA: It was Manhattan Neighborhood Network, and we had a live call-in show where people would call. They would actually call and talk to — whether it was Maxine or George Carter or whoever was our guest at the time.

RG: Ann.

TA: Ann Northrop sometimes hosted. It was a very good show. I liked doing that.

SS: How did you go work? You would all go shoot and then would you get together and edit together, or was it an individual thing?

TA: I think mostly what we would do is we would shoot. Then we would bring the tapes to James Wentzy, who would incorporate them into public access TV shows like AIDS Community Television. Or sometimes once in a while I would make, actually, my own sort of show from splicing things together from my camera tape onto a VHS tape, very crude editing.

But it was our way of getting this stuff out. It was news. We were trying to inform the community about what we were doing and about what they could do to help us end this plague. So it was real loose. It wasn't like there was a leader who was ordering us to do things. We all were democratic about what we were doing.

SS: I want to ask you guys about the split in ACT UP. When did you first notice —

TA: You mean when TAG split from —

SS: Yes.

TA: I remember at that meeting, there was the meeting where Maxine and Heidi and maybe a few other women had proposed this moratorium on speaking to people, the scientists and stuff, at the NIH. Remember? And it was a very long meeting with a lot of back-and-forth fighting.

SS: Why did they propose that?

TA: The way I remember it being presented, because I wasn't there, was they said they went to — the women went to this meeting, and Fauci was there, I believe. Dr. Fauci was there. And they were explaining things about their point of view about things that had to be done for specifically pertaining to women and AIDS, and they weren't getting any positive response, or they were being dismissed, essentially.

And one of them said something like, "we had this meeting because I respect Peter Staley and the T&D people, but you people are crazy," something like that. I think from the women's point of view, they were saying, "Let's all show that we stand together, and it's not one group versus another group in our organization. If you're saying you won't speak to us, then we all won't speak to you. We're united." I think that was the impression.

From the T&D side, my feeling was that they were trying to express that it took us so long to get in to get a seat at the table, even, we're not going to just pull out now. I remember, I think it was Heidi said something like, "We're only asking for a moratorium of six months. Six months is not a lifetime."

And then the whole chorus from the T&D side of the room screamed, "Yes, it is," which was true for a lot of people.

And during this debate, I remember you and I listened very carefully to both sides, and we did feel that it didn't make sense to have a moratorium. I remember I voted no to the moratorium, and the "no" won. There was no moratorium, which made me angry when TAG decided to split off from ACT UP, because the floor voted your way. Why are you leaving?

SS: So why did they do that then?

01:30:00 TA: You'd have to ask them. I still think it was a big mistake. I don't know the reason. I don't know the reason. I do know that it was around that time that things on the floor of ACT UP started to become more and more annoying. And when I mean annoying, I mean people showing up specifically for certain votes and then disappearing as soon as that vote was over. It was, like, this is not a democracy. This is tipping the scales to go wherever you want it to go. "We want this vote to go this way, so we want all our friends to come vote this way," and then they all leave.

Meanwhile, Ron and I, I want you to know, were people who would come at the beginning of those long meetings and stay to the bitter end of those long meetings, and those meetings went long. We were very serious about it.

RG: And then have to go to work.

SS: So why did that happen?

TA: Why did that happen?

SS: Why did this kind of breakdown happen?

TA: Do you know?

RG: I don't know why. I just think that certain people were getting a seat at the table, and they didn't want anything to jeopardize that. I think there's always been in a group like that, or any group, almost a class system where, "We know more than you do, and you guys can go out and yell, but we're the ones who know these particulars. So we're in a station above yours."

TA: "We're the elite and you're our soldiers, and where we tell you to yell, you go yell, and then it looks like we're strong," or something. I don't know. It

sounds very harsh to say that, and I don't think that that's entirely true, but sometimes that was the impression you got. You know what I mean, or am I crazy?

RG: No, like I said, I thought ultimately there was a class system, and certain people belong here and certain people belong there, and otherwise — and I'm the one who would count how many people were at the meetings, although it was very difficult, because people were always going in and out, but you'd get a general idea.

Then all of a sudden, the meeting with fill up with 50 to 100 more people who could swing or sway any votes. I remember I said it right away, and I used to keep notes, and I would have numbers written on the side of the paper, and said, "Look, eight o'clock, this. Nine o'clock, this." Their vote comes up at nine-thirty. Oh, usually it's the other way around. The meeting gets smaller as time goes on, as the length of the meeting drags on. And all of a sudden there's more people than there were here before. They came just to do that vote, have it their way, and that's when it really —

TA: Because people put things on the agenda were told around what time their item would be on the agenda.

RG: Approximately what time it would be.

SS: So what was the consequence on the organization of TAG leaving?

TA: T&D went on. I was never in T&D, but I had friends on it. Ken Jacobson was a pretty good friend of ours, and I think that we went on and did a lot of still pretty effective things.

RG: I think it went on, but in almost separate entities. For instance, YELL. Tony was still doing a lot of the artwork for YELL, and if they were going to

have an action or something, I would show up, but I wasn't going to meetings anymore or anything.

TA: I remember when Kate Barnhart came into YELL. She had been in the foster care system, and she asked if someone could design a comic book that would explain all the ins and outs of testing for foster care kids in that system. And she and Tom Beer sort of gave me these notes, and I tried to figure out how this process worked, and I did a comic book called *The Foster Care Kids Guide to HIV Testing*, and it explained to a young audience what would happen to you if you're in the foster care system and they decide it's time to give you a test for HIV, whether you want one or not, because that was one of the places where mandatory testing happened, was to kids who had no parents. So I remember I would do stuff for that. I would do artwork for the YELL zine and things like that.

So where was I going with this? Oh, Kate Barnhart. She — what was I going to say? Oh, I forget. Doesn't matter, I guess. I was going to say something to do with Kate Barnhart. And what were we just talking about right before we talked about this?

SS: About how TAG leaving affected ACT UP, and you said that T&D still stayed and you had friends —

01:35:00

TA: Yes, T&D still stayed, and YELL still stayed, and all these organizations within ACT UP still worked pretty well, even if we felt like the main floor was starting to work not quite so well. But I remember it was around that time that you stopped going to the meetings, right? You got fed up with it.

RG: It was when they decided to move back to the Center, and they said, “That’s where we get all of our energy from.”

And I’m like, “I don’t think so.”

TA: We don’t get our energy from a building; we get it from the people in the building.

RG: And they decided to move during the summer, when it was blastingly hot. And people on the floor had said all kinds of things like, “We can have a truck pull up out in front that will cool the thing down. They run hoses into the room.”

And I was like, “This is getting so crazy to me,” really, really nuts, and there’s so few people. And I felt that for what a group like that was capable of doing, that we had gone far beyond what I ever thought we were going to do, because that was when things were really starting. People with the disease were starting to get things other than AZT, and it was actually starting to slow down the virus. I thought we pretty much made that happen through all kinds of different things and going to the NIH and the CDC and people who became TAG being on all those committees and really meeting with the real people in charge. I thought it all had something to do in making people aware on the street and in schools and all. And I thought we had accomplished a lot of our goals. Had we gotten a cure? No. But I thought yelling at buildings now wasn’t going to do anything anymore.

TA: Although one of my favorite things we did when we were yelling at buildings is when we went to the Chicago action and was yelling at the AMA.

RG: But that was still 1990. It was early on. It was a big deal for me to go back to my city and all the insurance companies. And one of the things that Tony and I

did was they were having a demonstration against the policies of Cook County Hospital, where there was no AIDS ward or even AIDS room for women with AIDS.

TA: Can you imagine that, that women with AIDS go the hospital and they turn them away? “We don’t have room for you.”

RG: It was 1990. “There’s no place for you here.” So it was particularly women that were doing this demonstration, and a street had to be blocked, and it was in front of the old City Hall, which was across the street from the Daley Center, which was the new City Hall with the Picasso in the square.

TA: The idea was if you won’t allow women with AIDS to have an AIDS ward in your Cook County Hospital, then we’ll have an AIDS ward here in the street in front of it.

RG: Right in the street. And they had little mattresses, and Tony and I, we were there, and I said, “This is definitely for the women to do exclusively,” except they hadn’t figured how to block the street and the traffic. So Tony and I had a banner, and we just strung it between us, and we blocked all the oncoming traffic and stood there with everyone honking their horns at us and flashing their lights and their brights and everything. I said to him, “We hadn’t planned to, but I think we’re going to be arrested.”

TA: Because the police descended. They descended like an army —

RG: Oh, my god.

TA: — and were ripping women off these mattresses.

RG: They arrested the mattresses. And then I said, “I think we’re going to get arrested.”

He goes, “I think so.”

TA: "I think so."

RG: I said, "Okay." We hadn't planned to, but we have family, we have relatives. My brother's partner was there. He said, you know, "You guys get arrested, I'm coming to get you."

We're like, "Okay," but we were really — but I had a history with Chicago police, and they're very brutal and all that.

So, okay. So we're blocking the street and blocking the street, and we blocked it until they had arrested the last mattress. They'd taken all the women away, and they picked up the mattresses, and I said to Tony, "They just walked past us."

TA: It was like suddenly everyone was gone.

RG: They were gone, and the streets — [laughs]

TA: And Ron and I were just holding this banner. I'm like, "Why are we the only two people standing here?"

RG: The street was completely empty behind us, except for flyers and things. I said, "Let's just go."

TA: So we just folded up the banner and took it back to New York with us.

RG: We just timidly went up to the Daley Center, where they were having a Holocaust memorial, and one cop, Chicago cop, came over to us, and he said, "Do you think you guys could simmer it down now? Because there's another thing going on here."

TA: The Holocaust memorial, right.

01:40:00 RG: And someone else from ACT UP came over and said, “Hey, it’s the first time in one of these things where they’re actually going to mention that among the people killed in the Holocaust were gays and lesbians,” and that was thrown in by the new Mayor Daley, his son, which I went, “Well, this is certainly a change for things here.”

I said, “Oh, yes, officer, we’re finished now.” Remember that?

TA: Yes.

RG: And we’re rolling up the banner, still thinking, “Is he going to pull us in or something?”

TA: Because as horrible as police were, sometimes there were police that were cool. You could tell that Richard Deagle story with the police.

RG: Oh. At one of the demonstrations at the Cathedral, I think it was the anniversary of the Stop the Church action, we had another big demonstration the year after, 1990, and we had all these posters. People went in the church, but there was no disruption or anything, but they made their presence known and stuff. Again, we stayed outside.

Afterward, we decided, a bunch of us decided we were going to go back by the cardinal’s residence behind the church, whatever the other street is there on Fifth Avenue. Is that Madison? And we put all these posters up in the windowsills and the window frames of the building directly across the street, and we put them way up, and we would boost each other up, and we got them way up so if anyone in the residence looked out, they saw them.

It was definitely — and so this young officer came along and said, “All right, you guys. You had your say, you did your demonstration, everything’s cool, everything’s fine. But you’ve got to go now.”

And Richard Deagle ran up to him and said, “Bad cop. No doughnuts.”

So I said, “Richard, really it is over.”

And Richard said to him, “Officer, how high can you reach?”

And he’s like, “What do you mean?”

And we saw him on one of the lower windowsills. He pulled down the sign, the poster that we had left there.

He goes, “Oh, that high? Ron, help me with a boost over here.”

And I said, “We have them up there already, Richard.”

He said, “I’m telling you, officer, bad cop. No doughnut.”

And the cop said to me, “I think you should get your friend out of here. It would probably be in everyone’s best interest.”

I’m like, “Richard, let’s go.”

He goes, “I mean it. Bad cop. No doughnut for you.”

I’m like, “Richard!”

TA: Because he was saying, “We’re trying to take these signs down. They’re our signs.”

RG: He said, “They’re our signs. You must leave them there.”

And I’m going, “Oh, my god.” And the cop’s looking at me like — you know. I said, “We’ll be leaving presently, I guess.”

And “Oh, I don’t know if I’m going just now.”

I said, “Oh, let’s go to a doughnut shop or something. Let’s just get coffee or something.”

And the cop’s looking at me like, “I realize the position you’re in, and I’m trying to help ya.” We had some positive things there.

And along the way, and if I could tie in about the stuff I said earlier, about fundraising, I did ultimately work with them a lot, street fairs and Gay Pride events, and Tony and I helped —

TA: Helped Brian Griffin build a t-shirt rack.

RG: A rack so they could be seen, and we helped him disassemble it, we helped him sell them all day. We did things like that a number of times, so, I mean, we did get involved.

SS: I only have one question left. Is there anything that we haven’t covered that you think is important?

TA: What haven’t we talked about with regard to ACT UP?

JW: Can you do some Larry Kramer imitations?

TA: Larry Kramer impersonations, because —

RG: No, we’ve met with him a number of times.

TA: — I loved his speeches. I often memorized them, and I would go —

SS: Let’s hear it.

TA: I would recite them.

RG: Oh, my god. How about do the one from the — what is it? — 1993 gay rights demonstration in Washington, D.C.

TA: “Donna Do-Nothing Shalala is a lesbian, and I know it and she knows it and thousands of other lesbians know it all across this country. So why is she denying it so vehemently? We don’t need another Ed Koch ruining our lives.” I loved the way he delivered speeches, and so I would just watch them over and over again, and just by watching them over and over again, I would memorize them.

“Plague! We’re living in the middle of a fucking plague!” That stuff, I love that.

RG: That’s great.

TA: See, the thing that’s great about ACT UP is it was this outlet for this anger and this frustration, because the thing about you I remember so much about then was you were Mr. Sticker.

RG: Oh, my god.

TA: You would buy all the stickers. Every time there were stickers that came out, you would buy them all.

RG: Rolls and rolls.

TA: And you would put them all over the city.

RG: I put them *everywhere*.

01:45:00 TA: *Everywhere*. He wanted to — it was his way of fighting back, because things were so bad, because politicians said such horrible things. You would just sticker and sticker and sticker. You would even have sticker wars where people would take stickers down, and you would put the sticker in the exact same place that you had put it before.

RG: And there was a group of people who putting anti-gay stickers. Somebody ultimately said it was a little old man or something. But, I went around, I spent Saturdays just going all around the whole neighborhood of Manhattan just pulling them down. I would have something with me to scrape them off, and then I would always replace them with something.

SS: What did they say?

TA: With ACT UP stickers.

RG: Oh, “Fags are going to hell.” “Gay = Death.” All those. He had a lot of them, and they were all on this thick white paper, and they were outlined in black.

TA: I saved a bunch of them.

RG: Oh, you have some?

TA: Because you took them home, and I put them in an envelope and I put them in a box. They were awful. They were horrendously evil.

RG: One day when I was on my way home from work — this is when we were on Park Avenue. That’s where our office was, and I was coming home early on a Saturday morning. and I was putting up ACT UP and WHAM! posters. Women’s Health —

TA: Health Action and Mobilization.

RG: I was putting them up on Fifth Avenue on light posts and thinking, “There’s nobody around.” And one of them I couldn’t get to stick, and I was really pushing it on and I heard a car pull up behind me, and I went, “Oh, I’ll bet it’s the police.”

So I turned around, and it was a limousine, and the window rolled down. And it was Yoko Ono and Sean, and she saying something, “See,” and she was telling him. I turned around and she smiled at me real big, and I was, like, “Oh, cool,” and the window went back up. And I said, “Oh, I feel really good today.”

And on the way home I would stop by the Women’s Health Clinic, where those antiabortion protestors were. I did that almost every Saturday.

SS: On Park Avenue South, yes.

RG: Yes, just a couple blocks down from where our office was, and I would —

TA: I remember another person you saw through the window of a limousine was George H.W. Bush.

RG: Oh, yes. I yelled at him.

TA: You were with Wayne Fisher that day, right?

RG: Him and his wife. No, I wasn’t with Wayne that day.

TA: Oh, okay.

RG: I was with a bunch of YELL kids, and I was just screaming, “Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!” And his wife, who I called “Cotton Top,” was [mimicking] looking like they could plainly hear me. I followed them all day that day, met them at the heliport way downtown near the Staten Island Ferry and at a hotel in Midtown.

TA: Getting back to — I remember you saying Randy Rose, Randy Rose, your friend who died. I remember when we protested George H.W. Bush at Kennebunkport, you handed out pictures of Randy and told people about —

RG: Of Randy, my brother —

TA: — who he was.

RG: — a guy in a band we really liked.

TA: Sea Monster.

RG: Sea Monster.

TA: A heterosexual man who died of AIDS.

RG: Who died of AIDS. Handed them out to people on the street, who no one ever wanted to take one. I said, “Please take it. It’s my brother.” “Please take it. It was my best friend.” “Please take it. It was a member of a band that I really like.” And they would all take it, and they would read them right in front of you, and, “Oh, thank you for sharing that with us.” That was nice.

I remember going into hamburger places wearing ACT UP buttons and having black kids behind the counter saying, “Oh, you’re one of those people? We love watching you. You got to do some more cool stuff.”

I’d say, “You want buttons?”

They’re like, “Hell, yes!” And I’d be passing out buttons.

TA: Ron wore ACT UP badges all the time and everywhere he went. I remember once when we went to Kentucky, there was a girl in the airport who was — remember that girl, young girl in the airport? She was totally — she says, “I’m glad you’re wearing those badges.”

RG: “Thank you for doing that.” She goes, “Thank you for doing that.”

I said, “Do you want one?”

She went, “Oh, no, I’d get in trouble.”

I said, “You want one just to have it?”

TA: She says, “But I know there are people here who don’t think that HIV can happen here.”

RG: She said, “We have lots of people,” and it was in Paducah, Kentucky, not the biggest town. She said, “There’s people with AIDS here, and no one wants to talk about it. No one wants to do anything.”

TA: “We’re supposed to believe that this only happens in big cities, and that’s the line we’re supposed to tell people, that this doesn’t happen here in Paducah, Kentucky. But I know there are people here who have it.”

Remember how we were like [demonstrates]. But for every person who was supportive, you had the jerks, too, who would see your badge and be — some of them gay people. You’d see an ACT UP badge, and they’d get all snooty.

RG: “You’re giving us a bad name.”

TA: Yes.

RG: I said, “Oh, really? *You’re* giving us a bad name by not fighting back, by taking it, by rolling over and playing dead. Stop.” People would get angry with me in elevators and stuff. I had people move away from me in elevators.

01:50:00

Oh, tell them Sue’s — British Sue’s story about the young woman in the subway.

TA: Our friend British Sue —

RG: Oh, no.

TA: — Sue Mensah was never a member of ACT UP, but she’s been our friend all through the time we were in ACT UP.

RG: And totally supportive.

TA: She remembers being on a subway —

RG: Subway platform.

TA: — and seeing a woman wearing a red ribbon. And two girls next to her on the subway were whispering to each other, “See that woman over there with the red ribbon? She wears that red ribbon because she have the As.”

RG: “She has the As.”

TA: “She has the As. I blame the faggots for the As.” Right? So this is the kind of thing that you would hear, not just on television or in some media newspaper environment, but actually in conversation with people right in front of your face. That was the kind of thing that I hope ACT UP was instrumental in educating against.

RG: And we always had that group of counterdemonstrators with us. I don’t know if you remember them. The group got smaller all the time, all the time, but it was spearheaded by this one woman with a bullhorn all the time, “You going to hell,” and blah, blah, blah. And I used to yell back at her all the time.

And then one time I saw her. She was passing out all kinds of religious pamphlets and anti-gay stuff at 42nd Street and Seventh Avenue. So I went up to her and I said, “Do you remember me?” And she — ooh, she looked like she had seen the devil in hell. And I said, “How are you feeling?”

She goes, “I’m fine.”

So I shook her hand. She didn’t want to. I said, “I hope you get better.”

TA: Why did you do that?

RG: I don't know. I just thought, "This is different than yelling in her face."

SS: It's a physical assault, but of a different kind.

RG: A different kind, right? And I said, "I'll see you."

She goes, "Oh, yes." She went, "Oh, yes." She's like, "Whoa, what the hell was that?"

Even I was going, "What the hell was that?"

SS: This is the last question. Looking back with hindsight, what would you say — I'm sure each of you have different answers. What would you say was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you feel was its biggest disappointment?

TA: My biggest disappointment is that we didn't finish the job. I wanted to see — I wanted to see the end of AIDS. I wanted to see not just — my problem with what happened, I remember one of the last things I said on the floor of ACT UP in a general meeting, before this reunion meeting, back in the nineties was when these new drugs have started coming in and people starting living longer. I said, "We have to remember not to take our eyes off the prize. The prize has to be a cure. And we're just accepting a consolation prize and not keeping our eyes *on* the prize."

And people applauded and listened. But it was like the steam had gone out of it somehow. And as someone who was not HIV-positive, myself, I feel like the spearhead of that movement had to be people who were HIV-positive, who were fighting for their lives, and we were just helpers, helping assist, but that the spearhead has to be people fighting for their own lives and standing up for themselves and fighting. And

after fighting so many years, how can you begrudge someone who just wants to take a break and says, “Okay, I’ve got this. I want to get on with my life now. I want to have some relaxation and have a real life and not just have your life be only ACT UP.” Because for years it felt like, for you and me, that our life was ACT UP, only ACT UP. That’s all we ever really did was ACT UP this, ACT UP that, ACT UP everything.

RG: And Queer Nation.

TA: I never was in Queer Nation. I didn’t like Queer Nation. You went to Queer Nation. I would not go. I went to a few and said that these people are crazy.

RG: Yeah.

01:55:00

TA: I didn’t like the way they organized their stuff, and they would go on and on about these crazy little things that no one cared about, like that crazy Catholic woman who prayed to roses. What was that all about? Why do we have to protest her? No one pays any attention to her.

RG: Well it was mainly because she wanted to establish a statue of the Blessed Virgin in a public park. That’s mainly what it was about. We didn’t care if she went and prayed there. She could pray anywhere she wants. That’s part of freedom. It’s part of being American.

TA: It didn’t seem worth spending all that energy and time.

RG: I agreed, and I didn’t go to those things.

SS: So what do you feel is ACT UP’s greatest achievement and biggest disappointment?

RG: I agree with what Tony said, but I think —

TA: We didn’t say what we thought the greatest achievement was.

RG: You didn't, so go ahead.

TA: I don't know what it is. That's the thing.

RG: I thought the achievement was that we accomplished all the things that we did, obviously, but how we did it. And I hate to use the word like I did before, about class systems, but it was people from all walks of life coming together, and different races.

TA: There were rich people, poor people.

RG: And heirs to big fortunes and people from the —

TA: The street, basically.

RG: — the lower middle-class, really working-class backgrounds, and black people and Latinos and Latinas —

TA: Asians.

RG: — and Asian Pacific Islanders

TA: Ron helped get one of the Asian Pacific Islander things translated into Thai, because there were no Thai people in the Asian Pacific Islander caucus. So he worked with someone who was Thai.

RG: To me, that was such an important thing that it was all these different people and occasionally movie stars.

At one protest for Kate, which was really — it was really a YELL thing, I think it was, and I said, "I'm one of the older people. I'll pass out pamphlets," and I just said something like I would go to each person I was handing out, said, "My name's Ron. What's yours?"

And this one woman goes, "Susan."

And I'm going, "Oh, Susan Sarandon." I said, "Thanks for coming, Susan." I was like, oh my god, I'm so star-struck.

And I went down the line, and said, "My name's Rosie." And it was Rosie Perez. I was like, "Holy cow, this is so, so great."

But, it was all these different people that we got together from nothing, from nothing, and they had already existed before we joined, but we saw — and got to raise funds and do direct action and start Housing Works. To me that's one of the most important things that came out of ACT UP, and there was a big fight about whether it was direct action or not. I was one of the people that stood up and said, "It's getting homeless people with AIDS off the street. That's direct action. What could be more direct than that?" And we won, and they're still around and apparently prospering and helping people. So it's just the whole thing to me, that we did —

TA: So the greatest achievement was that we —

RG: We got the government to face up to things, to some degree. We didn't get everything we wanted. We didn't. We didn't get a cure, and it's horribly disappointing and all this time later. But I think that we showed that citizens can get together and do something and really make it meaningful and really have an impact. That's what I think is the big achievement.

SS: Do either of you have anything else you want to say?

RG: We made a lot of friends.

TA: We're still friends with them.

RG: We're friends with lots of people. James, right there, and all that.

TA: David, Steve Santurri, Steve Rosenbush.

RG: Yes, and other people that we just see now and then.

TA: Betty Williams — we were real good friends with.

RG: And that's fun to see with. We got to learn a lot about how other people see things. A lot of it was very, very exciting. We traveled to places, some places that I've only been there because of ACT UP, like Maine and Kennebunkport and lay down in George Bush's driveway. And what?

TA: And Bethesda, Maryland.

RG: And Bethesda, although we've gone to Washington and stuff.

TA: That Kennebunkport action, I was videotaping for that. I got a lot of good footage that way. I liked that one.

RG: And I think we were somewhat influential in the 1992 presidential campaign.

TA: I think we were *very* influential in the 1992 campaign. We were holding up signs that said, "What about AIDS?" And they would talk about AIDS!

RG: The thing is George, the first George Bush, mentioned one of my signs, the one that I came up with during one of the debates. And he said —

02:00:00 TA: We went to the Waldorf Astoria, and Ron had made his own little sign, because George Bush had said this stupid thing. How does he not say stupid things?

RG: It runs in the family.

TA: His son said stupid things. His father used to say stupid things too. He said that the way to stop AIDS is just to change your behavior.

RG: Change your behavior.

TA: Right.

RG: So I wrote, “Bush, change *your* behavior. Fight AIDS.” And I had that sign —

TA: When we protested the Waldorf Astoria —

RG: — and it was on TV and everything.

TA: And it was reported in *The New York Times* article. I think they actually quoted your sign in *The New York Times* article. That’s where George H.W. Bush saw it.

RG: So during the debate on the day of the Ashes Action and we were in Washington, D.C. and we were watching the debate in this restaurant. I think it was called the American Food Restaurant, or something.

TA: That’s a very strange name for a restaurant.

RG: There was very few people there. It was called something like that.

TA: I don’t remember the American Food Restaurant.

RG: They brought up AIDS in the debate and we were there with all our fellow ACT UP-ers, and we were just so excited.

TA: And George Bush said, “No, you can’t talk about that subject rationally. I once said that you can stop AIDS by changing your behavior, and one of these ACT UP people says, ‘Bush ought to change his behavior.’”

RG: “No, they tell me I should change my behavior.” I’m going, “That was me!” And the point is, you see, by me with Magic Markers in our kitchen, I got to the President of the United States.

TA: You didn’t change his mind.

RG: Of course I didn’t. But he noticed. It was like, “Hey.”

SS: He had to address it.

RG: Yes that was cool.

SS: Let's end on that. You guys are very cool.

TA: Oh thanks.

SS: Thank you.

TA: We did a good job.

RG: Thanks for having us.

SS: Thank you so much.