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Interviewee: **Marion Banzhaf**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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**ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Marion Banzhaf
April 18, 2007**

SARAH SCHULMAN: If you could start by saying your name, your age, where we are, and today's date.

MARION BANZHAF: Okay, I'm Marion Banzhaf. I am 53 years old, and we're at my house, in Chelsea, in New York. And today is April 18th, 2007.

SS: Okay. Marion, I don't even know where you were born.

MB: I was born in Winter Park, Florida, before Disney World existed, when Disney World was all orange groves. And I lived in Florida until 1979, when I moved to Washington, D.C. And then I moved to New York in 1983.

SS: Were your parents Florida natives?

MB: No. My parents were both transplants. My father actually was a New Yorker. And my mother was from Ohio. But they were living in Winter Park, Florida, because, well, I don't know if I can condense the story, but I'll try.

My, it's a sort of interesting story. My father's father, my paternal grandfather, was a lawyer. And he was actually even in the New York State Assembly for a period of time. But he also probably was bipolar. And he wound up losing a lot of money in the '29 crash. And wound up shooting himself, in 1933. And he shot himself at home. And it took him four days to die.

SS: Oh my god.

MB: And you could still die at home then. And so my paternal grandmother, who I never met, got a job at Rollins College, in Winter Park, Florida, as a dorm mother. And she – my father was in the Navy. And she had met my mother, who went to Rollins College, and she said, I know a very nice girl for you. And so they met. And my mother's best friend told me later that my mother had sex with my father before they

were married, because she wanted to make sure the sex was good before she married him. And I love that. I love that.

My mother died when I was only 20 months old. So, and I was raised by my maternal grandmother, who stayed in, who was in, in Winter Park also. And my mother and father had gotten divorced, like three months before her death. And this was 1955. So it was a big *scandale*, you know, to be divorced in 1955.

But my maternal grandmother had also gotten divorced. And she had gotten divorced in, like, 19—, let's see; my mother was born in 1922, and she was 13. So that would have been like '36?

SS: Wow.

MB: And she got divorced because her husband, who was a surgeon, was having an affair with his niece; I mean with his nurse. And she, like, said, forget it, I'm not going to do it; even though she was the daughter of this Methodist bishop. And so that was another *scandale*.

I sort of think that maybe my maternal grandmother was a lesbian. Because her method of birth control was to lock the bedroom door. So no wonder her husband had an affair with his nurse. And she never sought out the attention or affections of another man throughout her whole life. But she did have these relat-, friendships with women. So, who knows?

SS: And that's the household you grew up in.

MB: That's the household I grew up in. I grew up with her and my three older sisters.

SS: And so your grandmother was your primary parent.

Tape I
00:05:00

MB: Yeah. And then my older sister, who's nine years older than I am; and then my aunt — my mother's twin, my uncle; his wife — was sort of my third mother.

Because they lived in the same town.

SS: And were they all involved in the Methodist Church?

MB: Yes. Yes.

SS: So was that like your first community, the Methodist Church, would you say?

MB: Actually, I guess my first community was more my cousins and my siblings. We, by that time, we were supposed to go to church. But my grandmother wasn't really going to church anymore. And we didn't have a car. And so she'd send us off in a taxi, to Sunday school. And my sister and I would go — my next-oldest sister — would go to Sunday school. And then we'd get the program from the sermon service. And we'd see the title. And then we'd take our offering money, and we'd go get ice-cream floats at the drugstore, and we'd make up what the sermon would be, based on the title. So that when we got asked about what the sermon was, we would have the same story.

And so we skipped out of church all the time. But then, we would meet with one of my mother's best, or one of my grandmother's best friends lived across the street from the church. And we would go over to her house afterwards. And then my grandmother would come in her own taxi. And then we'd all go to Morrison's Cafeteria for lunch. And that was the big outing.

SS: And you never got caught.

MB: No, I never got caught. Never got caught.

SS: Happy ending.

MB: Yeah.

SS: Can you trace any of your values today to how you were raised by your grandmother, in terms of giving to the community?

MB: I think, really, what I got more from my grandmother was an appreciation of the arts. She was really into music. And I think I also got from her that, well, it's a little hard, nobody's ever asked me that question before. She took us when she was 66, which is pretty old to be, to like, have four kids, aging from nine to 20 months, to deal with. And luckily, my aunt and uncle were in the same town. She really sort of never got over the death of my mother, and there were portraits hanging around our house, of my mother. And she was really mad at my father. And she'd say all these awful things about him, and he'd say all these awful things about her when we'd go to visit him. So there was all of that kind of stuff.

So I think one of the things I learned was that it was important to be independent. She was certainly an independent person. She had graduated from college. She had gone to Goucher. And she had graduated with an economics degree. But then, of course, couldn't do anything with it. She just had to get married. Because she — I think she graduated in 1912 — and she, we were living off of basically, her Social Security payments, because she worked the rest of her life when she got divorced. She was a recruiter for MacMurray College.

But I distinctly remember her calling up her stockbroker every morning, and telling him what to buy and what to sell. And she invested in some blue-chip stocks. Which I still have. I mean, we didn't have a car. And we wore hand-me-down shoes. But she was investing in blue-chip stocks. So it was this sort of, almost, well, it was

class-contradictory. It was like, she had totally upper-class values, but lower-class finances.

SS: But you come from this long line of people who have college educations, who –

MB: Yes.

SS: -- have their ups and downs in their professions, but were in their professions. Did you, what were your plans for yourself when you were a kid, when you were in Winter Park?

MB: Well, she died when I was 12. And my father and stepmother had kidnapped me 12 weeks before she died. I had gone to visit them for a spring break, for Easter, and at the end of the week, I packed up, and said, when are we going home? And my father said, oh, Marion, don't you want to stay here?

And I said, no, I want to go back home.

And he said, well, we've decided it's best for you to stay here.

And so my grandmother sued him for custody.

He took, it was both me and my next-oldest sister, who is four years older than I am. But she didn't sue for her. Because my third-oldest sister had been rebellious, and she was 16 or 17 at the time — yeah, 17 at the time — and she was getting to be too much of a handful, and Mary Kay, who was only one year younger than she was — 16 — she thought, well, let her father have them. But she wanted me back.

And so, for six weeks, we waited, and then we went to court, and everybody was there: my aunt and uncle, and my oldest sister had come down from college; and my father and my stepmother. And they all were inside the courtroom. And then finally, the

judge called me in. And said, well, Marion, you're a very popular girl. Who do you want to live with?

And right there, in front of everybody — and I'm 12.

So I looked around, and I said, my grandmother.

And he banged, so ordered, and so I went back home.

Well, six weeks later, she dropped dead of a stroke.

And so I would have rather have stayed with my aunt and uncle. But that was not an option.

And so my father and stepmother came and got me. And then, when my aunt and uncle came to visit me, about a month later, they didn't tell me. And so I felt completely abandoned.

SS: Oh my god.

MB: And so I was, I was pretty depressed all through my teenage years. But I couldn't wait to go to college. Because this was going to get me out of there. But that had, that's sort of like they don't care. So it was like, under normal circumstances, I might have run away to them. But it's like, who can I run to? There's nobody to run to.

SS: Well, in a way, it does explain your lifelong commitment to fighting for people who don't have rights or representation.

MB: Yeah. Yeah, in a way it does. And it also, I think, all that early loss also made me somewhat better prepared to deal with all the losses in AIDS. I at least was familiar with, with loss, somewhat. And it also made me pretty independent. Because, since I was the youngest, and I was by myself with my father and my stepmother — who

I only lived with from eighth to twelfth grade — and then I went off to the University of Florida. And when my mother –

SS: In Tallahassee, right?

MB: No, that's in Gainesville.

SS: Oh, Gainesville, okay.

MB: First I went there. And when my mother had died, a bunch of her friends set up trust funds for all of us, for college. And because I was so little, mine was the biggest. And my oldest sister got a full scholarship to MacMurray, the college my grandmother had recruited for. And Erice, the next one, wound up not going. She left to go to summer school, but then she got pregnant, and became a hippie, and it took her about 15 years to go back to college. And then Mary Kay went also. But she also met a man early and got married to him; put him through his school; and then, when it came time for him to put her through school, it was like, eh, I don't really want to do that. So she left him, so she put herself through school.

But my trust fund paid for University of Florida, tuition and room and board for two years. And I always, I worked. I mean, my father and my stepmother – I don't even know what their financial situation was, when I went to go live with them. I guess in, when I was in the eighth grade, my, the school sent home a form, and it said, family income. And I went home, and said, I didn't know what to put down. And he said, that's right, it's none of their business, and it's none of your business, either.

Tape I
00:15:00

But meanwhile, her kids were doing junior year abroad, in France, and Italy. And so, anyway. But I had gone the typing route instead of the waitress route. And so I was

being secretary, and transcribing anthropology tapes of graduate students' research work, and stuff, and –

SS: But you were in Gainesville; this is 1970, right?

MB: Right. I graduated high school –

SS: I mean, that's a very interesting time –

MB: – in 1971, and –

SS: – to go to, to end up in Gainesville.

MB: It was. And sort of, I was, I mean, even in high school, I had started to be an activist. We had formed a biracial council. When my father was on the school board, and when busing started to happen, I said, well, I'll get bussed to the black school.

And he said, no, you won't.

And I said, well, why not? It's like, so, and when the teachers went out on strike, I was the student assistant for one of the chief organizers of the strike. And my father had me removed from being his student assistant.

That was just about the only time I ever saw my father cry; was when I came home, furious at him, that he had removed me.

SS: But let me ask you some questions here, because, okay, so Florida was segregated when you were born, right?

MB: Yeah. Yeah.

SS: And integration in Florida was in '64? Is that right?

MB: Um, I think it was a little later than that, because the first time I remember having black kids in my class would have been about, well, maybe it was '64 or '65. And even then, there were only a couple. And '66. Oh no no no, wait, wait wait wait.

I'm all wrong. Yeah, no, I'm right. I get confused because I said my grandmother died, she died in 1966. But she took us when she was 66 years old. So that's –

SS: Okay. That's how you got confused.

MB: – what the confusion was in my head.

SS: I'm just asking you because, I mean –

MB: Right. I was born in 1953, so –

SS: I mean, I've known you peripherally for probably 25 to 30 years.

MB: Right.

SS: And I know that you've had a lifelong commitment to racial justice, and it's just, I'm always interested to know where that comes from in a person's life.

MB: Yeah.

SS: So you grew up in a segregated environment, and integration's taking place in your formative years, but you're old enough to be aware.

MB: Yeah. Definitely.

SS: So what was your family conversation about integration? Do you remember?

MB: It was sort of, it was not happy. I mean, they were, it was sort of like, why do these people have to go to school with us? And then, because all that other emotional stuff happened, in junior high school; and I'm trying to remember; see, I don't remember any black kids in my junior high school. And that would have been 1966, in Winter Park. And so I first remember it when I got to Sarasota, where my father and stepmother lived. And I think it was in ninth grade, which would have been 1967. And that's when I said, I'll go. And when they said, no, you won't.

SS: But how did you make that leap?

MB: Well, it was like I remember when Martin Luther King died, and I saw the news on TV, and it was a big deal. And also, I just thought it was the right thing to do. And also, a teacher, in class, in ninth grade, gave us Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet" to read.

SS: Oh, wow.

MB: And that had a big impact on me. And he sort of snuck it in. I mean, it wasn't part of the standard curriculum, or anything.

SS: What was it about that piece that hit you?

MB: It was just, I think it was the – I didn't go back and read Malcolm X again for a number of years. But it was just that there, it was like the first time I had really thought about such a different orientation to the United States; and that people could have an entirely different experience than I had.

And then there was also, there was political music then, right? There was Stevie Wonder, "Livin' for the City," and there was all that other political music. My older sisters were listening to folk music.

So I think I really was a product of the times, and what else was happening around me. And so that's why we formed a biracial council, because one of the teachers clonked one of the black kids in study hall. And a bunch of us thought it wasn't right. And so we formed a biracial council to chastise the teacher and improve race relations at the school, because it was sort of this place where all the black kids sat on one side of the cafeteria, and all the white kids sat on the other side. And I was in honors classes. And there weren't any black kids in honors classes. And the Biracial was formed by the white

kids in the honors classes, because we knew we weren't integrating. And yet, we wanted to.

So I think it was, it was sort of organic, as part of, it was what was happening at the time. And so I was part of that.

SS: So then you got to Gainesville, and you're typing.

MB: So then I got to Gainesville. And I had...

SS: This is at the moment when Rita Mae Brown is getting thrown out of University of Florida for being a lesbian, right?

MB: Right, right.

SS: Same school, right?

MB: Yeah, same school.

SS: Okay, okay.

MB: And I didn't know anything about it.

SS: Okay.

MB: And I still didn't know the word "lesbian." And what I did know is that I hadn't wanted to go to college as a virgin. And yet, I also knew that I wasn't very into boys. But I knew I was supposed to be. And so I had, I had jobs at the saving grace from my father and my stepmother is that after I lived with them the first summer, the next summer they sent me off to camp. And that was the best thing they ever did for me. And so I was camp counselor, and all of that kind of stuff. And I started out in girls' camp, but then I went to a coed camp. And so I had an affair with one of the counselors at camp, that summer, before college.

And then, when I got to college — of course, I didn't know anything about female anatomy; I learned anything I knew about female anatomy from the Tampax insert, you know {LAUGHS} that was the only picture of a vagina I had ever seen. And I didn't know anything about birth control. But I was starting to have, I got a boyfriend. And I was starting to have sex with him. And so I did wind up going to the clinic on campus to find out about birth control. But I was a little too late.

And so I found out I was pregnant by the fact that I was vomiting every morning, and going, I'd have to go, stop five times on the way to class to vomit. And simultaneously, and I was totally frantic, because I did not want to, he, Kevin, wanted to get married. We'd move to Lakeland, in with his parents. He'd get a job at the Owens Corning glass factory, where his father worked. And I said, no, I really don't want to do that.

Well, simultaneously, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union was pressuring the editor of the *Alligator*, which was the school newspaper, to break the law and print abortion referral information. Because abortion was legal in New York and California then, even though I didn't know anything about abortion.

Well so, he did. He broke the law, and printed Clergy Consultation Referral Services stuff. And so I was so relieved. Here was my answer; except for, I didn't have any money to get up to New York. So I organized my girlfriends to, I made up a petition about legalizing abortion. And we got cans, coffee cans. And four of us went out to the college quad. And I'd say, I'd approach people, and say, I'm pregnant, and I don't want to be. I've got to get to New York to get an abortion. It should be legal. Will you sign this petition, and will you give me money to, so I can get up there?

And they'd approach people, and say, see that girl over there? And do the same rap.

And we raised the hundred and fifty dollars it cost for the abortion, and the hundred and fifty dollars it cost to fly up there, in three days. And so I flew up to New York, by myself. And got, and Clergy Consultation hooked me up with the clinic, and –

SS: And they were at Judson Church at the time?

MB: They were at Judson Church, but they were all over the place. I mean, they had a branch in Florida. So they had ministers in Florida who I went to go talk to. And they said, go to this clinic. It was the Center for Reproductive Health. And I got to this clinic. And I took the bus. They told me how to get from the airport to the clinic. Take this bus, then take a cab. And when I got to the clinic, there were probably about 400 women in this clinic. It's like, everybody east of the Mississippi came to this clinic. And –

SS: Where was it?

MB: It was in the West Thirties someplace. And the doctor was a jerk. He, I got up on the table, and he said, where are you from? I said, Florida. He said, oh, where's your bikini tan line? You know, it's like –

SS: God.

MB: – the sexism. And so I said, I don't have one because I've been working too hard to get the money together to come up here to get this abortion. And by that time, I was, he said, well, you're at the borderline, so you're just exactly on time.

The big problem was that I turned out to be, have A-negative blood, so I needed a RhoGAM shot, which, of course, was going to be an extra \$50, which I didn't have. So

they took my home address off of my driver's license. And I was supposed to — was it \$50, or was it; no, it was a \$100, the shot was. I mean, it was almost as much as the abortion. And so I was supposed to send in the money, but I forgot; I missed a payment. And then my parents found out about my abortion because they got the bill.

Well, they said, why didn't you tell us? They were actually pretty relieved that I'd had an abortion, because, since another one of my sisters was already, had a baby, and they weren't very happy about that. So that was fine. But even though I knew that it was the Chicago Women's Liberation Union that had done that, I didn't seek out the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. I just went on ahead, and kept doing' my thing. Which was having sex with a lot of men, and doing a lot of drugs.

And I'd also go to the antiwar demonstrations that were on campus, because we did have a little SDS chapter. And then, one of my jobs in college was also sewing Greek letters onto jerseys. And so, I was working in that store. And some women came in, and we got to talking, and they became my smoking buddies. And then pretty soon, I found out that they were in Pi Beta Phi, which happened to be my stepmother's sorority. And they didn't have a house on campus. They lived in apartments. And so, would I join?

And I thought that this would be a good way to get in grace, back in good graces with my stepmother. And also a way to get out of the dorm. And so I said, sure.

And everything was fine. There were four of us living in one apartment. And then J. B. Sapp came out as a lesbian.

SS: Who's J. B. Sapp?

MB: She was one of my sorority sisters.

SS: Oh.

Tape I
00:30:00

MB: And she got kicked out of the sorority, for being a lesbian. And so then the rest of us left, because she didn't live in our apartment, she lived in the next-door apartment. And so the four of us left, too. And so that was when I first knew what a lesbian was. And by then, I was a junior in college.

And I had started to be a journalism major. But University of Florida, you didn't take any classes in your major until you were a junior. So I took my first journalism class. I hated it. It was so cutthroat; you had to scoop out everybody else, and be really secretive about your information, and write on a sixth-grade level. So I said, I don't want to be a journalism major anymore. So I was just basically taking 101 classes in everything and running out of money. And also, it was the 1975 recession. So I dropped out in 1975, and decided I would move to Tallahassee, where some of my siblings lived. My stepbrother lived there, and my sister the hippie lived there. And then I would get a job, and then I'd eventually go back to school at the University of Florida. I mean, at FSU; Florida State University, in Tallahassee.

Well, the week after I got to Tallahassee, I saw an ad in the paper: full-time job; great benefits; Feminist Women's Health Center; come to orientation.

And so my sister also saw the same thing, and she said, they're a great place. I've already had an abortion there. They're fabulous; go check it out.

So we got to the orientation, and they were in this beautiful building, at like an old Southern plantation that had been converted into a clinic.

SS: Now they had CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] money at the time, right?

MB: They did have some –

SS: They had federal money.

MB: CETA money, but mainly they had abortion-clinic money. Because they had, they were providing abortion services for \$150 a pop. And the local doctors were charging \$300. So that was real revenue. And because they were the only clinic in north Florida, women came from all over the South to get abortions there. So a hundred and fifty people came to this job orientation. And it was the Feminist Women's Health Center slide show, which is a critique of the Western medical establishment, and a feminist consciousness-raising session about health. And when the woman doing the slide show got to the cervix slides, and the vaginal self-examination slide, she said, doing vaginal self-examination is part of the job. We show people, and at the end of this, I'll show you how to do it. About 75 women left immediately.

And then as she kept going on about what more the job would entail, about how everybody does everything in the clinic — except for the abortion, which the doctor does — but you'd learn how to do pelvic exams, you'd learn how to draw blood; you'd have to go through the tissue at the end of the abortion to make sure everything was gotten; more and more women filed out of the room.

Some women stayed just to see how to do vaginal self-examination; get their speculum, and then they left. And so at the end of the evening, six women were left in the room, and we were all hired.

SS: Oh, wow.

MB: And so —

SS: Who was the director at the time?

MB: Linda Curtis and Lynn Heidelberg had founded the clinic. And Lynn had already gone to L.A., to the L.A. Feminist Women's Health Center. And they had both gone, the L.A. Feminist Women's Health Center, which was the first feminist women's health center, had done sort of a, what do you call it, an intensive seminar on how to set up a feminist clinic. And they advertised it in the feminist press. And so women came from all over the country to learn how to set up a feminist clinic, and then went back home, and set up various clinics. And so Linda and Lynn set one up in Tallahassee. And Risa Denenberg was working there at the time. And Susan Griffin – not the famous poet.

Tape I
00:35:00

And I just was, I was like, so relieved to learn this information. Because also they had a critique of The Pill, in the context of the slide show. And before I learned the word “lesbian” — I still hadn't come out, and I still hadn't had any sex with anybody — any women — but I had, I'd had this relationship with The Pill, where I would take The Pill. I'd be in a relationship, I'd take The Pill. I'd get depressed; I'd break up, and I'd go off The Pill, because why be on The Pill if you're not having sex. And then I'd get undepressed. And so I'd get amorous again, and then there the cycle would repeat itself. And so that happened from when I was 17, in college, to when I was 21, or 20.

And so I started working full-time at the health center. And it was a very peak time, because the doctors in town were pretty upset that the health center was taking away all their business.

And so they actually, we actually got them on tape, conspiring to deprive us of local backup at the local hospital. And so we sued them. We brought a federal antitrust suit against them. It was the first federal antitrust suit to be brought in the area of health care. And we started doing national outreach about it.

And that might have been around when I first met you.

SS: Right, because I was working at Feminist Health Works in New York City.

MB: Right.

SS: And at that time, the reason I brought up the CETA issue — and I had forgotten that you guys had abortion money — but people assumed that there would be federal funding for feminist organizations.

MB: Right.

SS: It was part of the social contract.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

SS: And it was only in 1980, when suddenly it was all taken away, and everyone was shocked, and all these —

MB: Right.

SS: -- organizations closed.

MB: Right.

SS: But it was a completely different attitude.

MB: Yes.

SS: Yeah.

MB: Right. Yes, because we had our own money, our own revenue stream, we did try to get federal money from, we did take federal money from Medicaid. And we did get Title X money for birth control, from the government. But that was it. And it was, it was sort of little.

We also did have some CETA money for training, for job training. And we did use it for job training. And so it was in that context that I came to New York, and went to other places, and I rotated out to the Feminist Women's Health Center in Los Angeles and San Diego and Chico; and Risa went to Detroit. I helped start the Atlanta Feminist Women's Health Center, with Lynne Randall and Lynn Thogersen. I went there for two months, and helped them set it up.

And we were definitely on the left of the women's health movement. We'd go to Planned Parenthood conferences and confront them for population-control policies, and we'd say, women should be able to have as many or as few kids as they want. Which was the same thing I'd say later, years later, with HIV. And because, also, because the Feminist Women's Health Centers were set up by lay people, and because it was in that window before the anti-abortionists really clamped down on freestanding clinics, we were doing everything. So it did give me this sense of empowerment, that people could do anything they wanted.

We were drawing blood; we were, you know, we weren't, we didn't, we weren't licensed phlebotomists; we were just drawing blood; we were doing pelvic exams; we were doing all the counseling. We had a nurse practitioner who came in for birth control clinic nights. And then the doctor, who did the abortions. But that, those were the only professionals in the clinic. We did the books ourselves; we did the accounting ourselves — of course, that got us into a little bit of trouble because people didn't exactly know what they were doing, so we did wind up hiring accountants — but yeah, it was pretty phenomenal.

SS: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: We better change tapes.

SS: Yes, and can we close the window, because that construction –

MB: Yes.

Tape II
00:00:00

SS: It's interesting, people live in every kind of home. We have been in some very dire home – Okay. So how many years were you at the health clinic?

MB: So I was at the Feminist Women's Health Center from 1975 to 1979. I was part of the team that went to Washington, D.C. to form the abortion rights movement of women's liberation. Because we were concerned that the pro-choice movement — well, it really wasn't even called pro-choice then — was becoming too apologetic about abortion. They were starting to say, no, we don't want to be pro-abortion. And we said, we're pro-abortion. And we're pro-woman. And so, abortion is a woman's right. And so, there's nothing to be ashamed of. And so we wanted to put it back in the context of reproductive control, rather than this stupid choice language that was being developed. So that's what the abortion rights movement of women's liberation was trying to do.

SS: So did you move to Washington, D.C.?

MB: I did move to Washington, D.C. We called it rotating. So I was only there for a while. Somebody from another health center came and stayed in my apartment in Tallahassee while I was gone; paid the rent there. And –

SS: This is '79?

MB: This is part of '78. No no, yeah. No, this is the winter of 1979. And –

SS: Before [the] Hyde [Amendment].

MB: Before Hyde.

SS: Okay.

MB: Yes, before Hyde. But at the same time, the health centers were going through political turmoil, because, well, just like the rest of the feminist movement, we had done a lot of work around thinking about racism and classism and heterosexism and read *This Bridge Called My Back* as a group, and were really trying to live our politics. And also, in 1978 and 1979, there was also all these international struggles happening: the war in Zimbabwe was happening, and Zanu-PF was traveling around the country, and there was revolution happening in Iran. And the Iranian students on the Florida State campus made it their point to reach out to anybody who would talk to them, at all. They didn't care that we were lesbians. If we would listen to what our government had done to their country, they would talk to us.

And so that was really, it was the Iranian students that educated me about the history of U.S. imperialism. I had no idea that the U.S. had been overthrowing governments around the world, starting in 1950s, in 1953.

SS: So you did come out before that happened.

MB: – I came out when I started working at the health center.

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: I had my first woman sex, with Cathy Courtney, who was from the Detroit Feminist Women's Health Center. And we were at a conference. And, and we had sex. And then my second woman lover was Risa Denenberg. And then we split up. And then, for a while, I didn't have any woman lovers again, because it was sort of strange in Tallahassee. Even though we were just about all lesbians who worked at the health center, the lesbian community was sort of separatist in Tallahassee and didn't really want,

they thought we were abetting the enemy because we were helping all these heterosexual women who were getting abortions and stuff.

And also, we didn't make a lesbian health night at the health center. We sort of thought, well, we did think about having annual exams. But mainly, we had birth control nights, and we sort of, it was a way – I wished we had done it. We didn't think about ourselves, in a way. We put ourselves last. And –

Tape II
00:05:00

SS: Why was that?

MB: I think partly it was because we had to somewhat, we couldn't be that open about the fact that we were lesbians, because we were so much under the spotlight, because of their antitrust suit. And so even though we did a lot of other things that put us in the spotlight, there was still that fear, I think, that people wouldn't come to us if they knew we were lesbians, because especially when we were doing pelvic exams, and everything else, and showing women how to look at their own bodies, and doing breast self-exam; that people's homophobia and heterosexism would keep them away, even though they needed the service. And so I think that's one of the main reasons we didn't.

Then later, people did.

SS: Well, when you start getting involved –

MB: I mean, the, the FWHC did wind up establishing a lesbian health night, in like 1980. Yeah.

SS: But when you guys started getting involved in anti-imperialist politics, were you completely out to the people that you were doing politics with, or was that an issue?

MB: Well, we would certainly talk about, we wouldn't necessarily come out as individuals, but we would certainly talk about the range of women's sexuality. And we would say, you know, some of us might be lesbians; some of us are not, that kind of thing.

And the big political fallout was over material aid to the Zanu Women's Union. Because they had come through town, and we had shown them how to do menstrual extraction. And we'd shown them the whole kit, which was two jars and a little suction tube, and all that. And they were curious about it. They thought it might be helpful for the doctors in the field when they had to do heart surgery on a guerilla. But really, what the women guerillas needed was sanitary napkins. And they didn't have time to be doing menstrual extraction. And, which is so obvious, right?

Well, so Tallahassee wanted to send them some actual cash. And five to 10 cases of sanitary napkins. And Carol Downer, who was the founder of the FWHCs, really wanted them to take menstrual extraction, too. And made the sanitary napkins and the cash conditional on the sending of the ME. And so this created a huge split. Did you –

SS: Now honestly, what was her motive?

MB: Honestly, her motive was that she wanted people to be able to have menstrual extraction — I think. And she did want to force the issue. She did want to say, well, so they might not use it out in the field, but they can use it back in the villages.

SS: Because I mean, historically, the moment that you're describing is right before the total right-wing onslaught on abortion rights, right?

MB: Right.

SS: Okay.

MB: Exactly. And that was, my position; I took a third position. So there was, one position was, Tallahassee's: the material aid should be completely unconditional. Carol's was, the material aid can have conditions because it's coming from us. And then my position was, the material aid should be unconditional, but we should raise the money from the community, because we need that cash to fight for abortion rights, and not to give to Zanu-PF. So let's have a benefit at the health center and raise it from other things, because really, we're under attack here.

And I was doing this from Washington. Because the Human Life Amendment is being drafted at that time, and –

SS: Family Protection Act.

MB: The Family Protection Act. And there's all this, they're starting to come out with all these regulations for clinics, and lay people aren't going to be able to do half the things that we had done before, and you're going to have to widen your hallways, and do all that extra stuff.

So that was my position. So I wound up leaving the health centers over, over that split. And Tallahassee wound up splitting from the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers. Because the FWHCs did organize, they recognized the value of organizing, and knew that the more people you had and the more resources that you had, the more power you had.

So we had been a federation of, I guess at its heyday, it was like 15 clinics.

SS: So really, okay, looking back on it now, what was the actual issue, with hindsight, of the split?

MB: Well, I think really it was about material aid, and can the people you're doing solidarity for determine what they want, or do you get to determine what it is that you want to give.

SS: Okay, so that's a really crucial ideological point, because –

MB: Yes.

SS: – one of your priorities over the next period of time was to do basically support work for other movements, right?

MB: Yeah, solidarity work.

SS: Solidarity work.

MB: Right.

SS: So that is a huge ideological moment in your life of separating from that.

MB: Yes. Definitely true.

SS: Okay.

MB: And, because the anti-imperialist aspect of it was also sort of earth shattering. I went to Atlanta with the Iranian students. Some of them wanted to convince us that we weren't lesbians and get married to us, to get green cards and stuff. And one woman from the health center did wind up marrying one of them. But I was never interested in any of them. And when I told them I was a lesbian, that was fine, they said. Well, still, you have to come to Atlanta, and see what your government has done.

And so I went and saw the pictures of the brutality of the shah, and all that kind of stuff. And it was just, it turned me into an anti-imperialist. And –

SS: And they were Marxists, right?

MB: They were Marxists. And they all got killed, when the, because, of course, the revolution happened. The shah was overthrown. They all went back, and Khomeini's forces killed all of them.

And so, and then I stayed in Washington.

SS: Now were you still in ARM [Abortion Rights Movement of Women's Liberation]?

MB: ARM was getting dissolved. Partially because the federation had split, and also because now, there were all these attacks coming down on all the clinics. And people needed to, rather than sending money to support this Washington project, which we also had hoped would get support from other clinics, not just from the FWHC. We had hoped that abortion clinics across the country would recognize the value of having a pro-woman voice in D.C., and an actual women's liberation voice in D.C., and that they would all pay dues that could help ARM stay going.

But they didn't. And everybody sort of had to hunker down and devote more of their resources to defending their clinics.

And so I wound up moving to D.C. And I looked for a job in a clinic. But nobody would hire me, even though I'd been the director of the FWHC, because I didn't have an MSW at that time, even to be an abortion clinic counselor, that's how much the climate had changed in that short period of time – the professionalization of the services.

And we also didn't look at our work as services. We looked at it as political education? We were a community institution. We were not just a service provider. And when women came to the clinic, they had, they got feminist education, as well as support for the service that they needed.

So I was involved in the D.C. Area Feminist Alliance.

SS: That's right.

MB: And Jill Raymond was also in the D.C. Area Feminist Alliance, and she was a typesetter at Art for People, which was the progressive graphics shop. And when she learned that I could type fast, she said, oh, we're looking for a typesetter at Art for People. And so I became a typesetter at Art for People. And then my anti-imperialist education really continued.

SS: Was that an extension of the Madame Binh Collective?

MB: No. It was completely separate.

SS: Oh, okay, okay.

MB: Yeah. It was its own business. And it didn't have anything to do with Madame Binh.

SS: And did it do any of these posters up here?

MB: No. Actually not. But Art for People was primarily a graphics shop. And they would, every progressive periodical that was put out of Washington, D.C. got their stuff typeset at Art for People. So I would get the manuscripts of *CovertAction Information Bulletin*; Middle East Research and Information Project; the CISPES [Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador] newsletter; the Nicaragua Solidarity newsletter; the progressive newsletter from the progressive wing of the Episcopalian Church. And it was before desktop publishing. So everybody brought in their typewritten, or handwritten pages, and we would computer-typeset them.

And I typed about a hundred and thirty words a minute. Besides, I was really good.

And, so, but it was that year that I did meet people from the Madame Binh Graphics Collective, and they had, there was an art gallery, a women's art gallery, across the street from Art for People. And they were doing a slide show on a trip that Silvia Baraldini had recently taken to Zimbabwe. And because I was interested in Zimbabwe, we went to the slide show, me and my lover at the time, Judy Holmes.

SS: My former lawyer.

MB: Your former lawyer.

SS: That's right, okay.

MB: That's right, that's right. And because, also around that time was the Hyde Amendment hearings. That's the first time I met you, was the Hyde Amendment hearings. Because I was the local support for that action that you all did when we disrupted the congressional hearing.

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: Yeah. Stephanie Roth and you and –

SS: Right. Maureen Angelos.

MB: Right. Right. And I was your local D.C. support.

SS: Oh, okay. That's right. And what year is that?

MB: That was like 19 –

SS: '80.

MB: I think it was early '80.

SS: Okay.

MB: Yeah. Yeah.

SS: Okay. And so, and then Judy was our lawyer, and she was your girlfriend.

MB: Right.

SS: That's the connection.

MB: Right.

SS: And was she also in D.C. Feminist Alliance?

MB: She was also in D.C. Area Feminist Alliance, and she was part of the Feminist Law Collective –

SS: Right.

MB: – which was also in D.C.

SS: With that, with –

MB: With Nan Hunter and Nancy Polikoff –

SS: Nancy Polikoff, right.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

SS: But you guys were already connected to the – I don't know exactly what the formation was called at the time – but to Silvia's organization.

MB: It was called the May 19th –

SS: May 19th Communist Organization –

MB: Yeah.

SS: Because Judy brought in Susan Tipograph. So you already were –

MB: Well, yeah, we might have been. Because we met them, we met them through the slide show. It was pretty funny. Not very many people came to the slide show. And Silvia kept talking, talking, talking, talking, talking. And when we finally

left, Mary Patten, who did do that poster about the Pentagon demonstration in 1973, stopped us on the stairs. And said, this really wasn't big enough. And the childcare center in Zimbabwe needs more support. And so will you help us organize another benefit that's bigger, through your connections?

And so Judy said yes. And I guess also at the time, we also said, we had extra space in our house; if you need a space to stay, come.

Well, the next day, ha ha ha, they, these girls, they wasted no time in organizing at all. The next day, we got a call from Laura Whitehorn, who says, I'm with the, I know Mary Patten. And I'm with the Committee — what was the name of it exactly? — the Committee for the Suit Against Government Misconduct. And we have a court hearing down in Washington. And thank you for your offer of a place to stay. Can we take you up on it tonight?

And so we said, sure. And so Laura Whitehorn and Eve Rosahn come —

SS: Your wife.

MB: My current partner, yes, my current wife.

SS: Of how long? Fifteen years, or —

MB: Well, let's see. We got, we became lovers in 1993.

SS: Okay, so almost 15 years.

MB: Almost 15 years. But we, I had the hots for her when I first met her. We just weren't single at the same time, until then. And it's a good thing, too.

But so they started drawing us in to their circle. And I was ready for it, too, because I had been, in my year in D.C., pretty much, before 1980; I had gone around to all the left groups, looking for, you know, a revolutionary strategy. And they were all

anti-gay. I might have joined the RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party], except for they were so anti-gay.

SS: Right, right.

MB: So, and we, in the D.C. Area Feminist Alliance, we formed a little communist study group — small “c” — because I had sort of decided that feminism and women’s liberation by itself was not going to bring about revolution. And so, and —

SS: Now they were doing, this was the COINTELPRO suit, right?

MB: Yes, this was the suit against COINTELPRO. And it was the suit that happened because the FBI had burned down Judy Clark’s apartment. And they had spied on people, and stuff. And the suit was progressing, but then, as things went downhill with that, it got —

SS: Well, because those guys had an infiltrator, Virginia Somebody, right?

And that was the COINTELPRO thing.

MB: Yes. That too. I don’t know about that. But things changed pretty quickly after 1981, and the Brinks robbery debacle. And so —

SS: But before that —

MB: Yes, so, before that.

SS: One of the things that always really struck me about that formation — I know there were a lot of subgroups and stuff like that, but it’s basically the May 19th Communist Organization, right?

MB: That was the —

SS: And then there was the Springboks [Anti-Springbok 5] people, and the —

MB: Right. All the, the Women's Committee Against Genocide, which you wrote about in *The Sophie Horowitz Story*.

SS: That's right.

MB: And they had a library, the Moncada Library.

SS: The Moncada Library.

MB: They had the Madame Binh Graphics Collective. They had the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee. They had the Southern African Solidarity Committee. There was a Puerto Rican solidarity committee.

SS: But there also was the seven states thing.

MB: Well, they were in, they had gotten involved with folks from the New Afrikan Independence Movement.

SS: That's right.

MB: Which was a breakoff from the Black Panther Party. And those folks were black nationalists, who believed that since 40 acres and a mule had never been delivered, and since no country ever had power without land, that black people needed some land. And so that really the five states in the South — Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida — should become the black nation — New Afrika.

SS: New Afrika.

MB: And that the United States was made up of a bunch of internal colonies. That Mexico, the half of Mexico that we took in the Mexican War, should go back to Mexico. And that Puerto Rico should be independent. And that Hawaii should reclaim its independence, and Native Americans should get back a bunch of land — real land —

instead of just the reservations they had been stuck onto. And that would bring down U.S. imperialism.

SS: Okay, now I have three questions. The first question is, why did this organization attract so many lesbians? Because there were a lot of gay women in that.

MB: Yes. Well, it's because they were lesbians. The primary organizers were lesbians. And I think it's also because les-, I think it was a reaction to sort of lesbian separatism, and being so, like, oh, if we just go back to our own land, and leave men out of our lives, then everything will be fine, and we can just wear our Birkenstocks, and have our women-only spaces, and live our own lives. And it wasn't, it wasn't global. It had no global, that had no global vision. It had no strategy for revolution. These were lesbians who said, we're lesbians and we're revolutionaries. And so I think that attracted a lot of lesbians.

SS: But also, it was a lesbian organization. I mean, it had relationships with other organizations.

MB: Well, it wasn't a lesbian organization. It had men in it. And –

SS: Maybe that's the only people I saw.

MB: Right, right. Yeah. But –

SS: But I guess you guys sent people into women's things, so maybe that's why I only ever saw lesbians from the –

MB: Maybe. Although John Brown had lesbians and men in it. And some gay men were in John Brown Anti-Klan Committee –

SS: Right, well, Bob –

MB: – some straight men.

SS: Yeah.

MB: Right, Bob. Although Bob was actually in the Puerto Rican Solidarity –

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: – Committee. He wasn't in the, in John Brown.

SS: Bob Lederer. Yeah.

MB: But, so, yeah. So I think, so that's your first question.

SS: So you don't think there's a real big answer to that. You just think it's because –

MB: No, I think that's the, the reason is what I –

SS: – that there were leaders who were lesbians, and it attracted other lesbians who wanted a broader political –

MB: Exactly.

SS: – movement. Okay.

MB: So it was a broader political movement that actually was connected to fighting racism; big-time, fighting racism. And oh yeah, and then there was a Palestinian solidarity committee, too. And you know, their impact was big enough that you wrote *The Sophie Horowitz Story*.

SS: That's true.

MB: So, heh heh heh.

SS: In my little world, there was a big impact.

MB: Yeah.

SS: My second question is your own personal transformation to identifying as a communist. Was that a hard leap for you, having been so involved in the feminist movement before?

MB: No, because as I developed my political consciousness through studying feminism, and through thinking about women's liberation, and what would it really take to get women's liberation, then it was just a short leap over to thinking about the economic system, too. And it was communism with a small "c," as opposed to, I didn't go join the Communist Party USA. And I wasn't very happy with how communism as a theory was being practiced around the world. But I liked the concept of to each according to his need or her need.

SS: But the international groups that you supported tended to be Marxist and Marxist-Leninist, in some scenarios.

MB: Yes. That's true.

SS: So you sort of were a Marxist, quasi-Marxist-Leninist organization.

MB: Yes. And I was Marxist-Leninist because also, I did feel like — and I was also pretty enamored with Mao, and with the Cultural Revolution, as we thought it was being carried out. It winds up being not such a great thing after all. But I really loved the concept of people totally changing their own culture, and the concept of the Chinese revolution getting rid of women's foot binding. And when there was an instance of wife battering, that the women in the village would all get together and go discipline the man themselves, as a justice, as a community justice effort.

So in the thought that, really, since U.S. imperialism was the primary problem, in a way, we were premature anti-imperialists, right?

SS: Right.

MB: – there are lots of anti-imperialists today. But those days, it was like a foreign concept, practically.

SS: Well, that's my final question about it. Which is that you went from being in a mass movement to being in a vanguard organization. And emotionally, that's a very different kind of experience, because it's more tense in relationship to other people.

MB: Well, I was never in May 19th.

SS: Okay.

MB: I was only in John Brown. And I'd be peripherally involved in the other things, the Human Rights Crafts Sale, and stuff. So I didn't exactly consider myself part of the vanguard organization. I considered myself part of the mass movement to organize against the Klan.

And, in the summer of 1986, I guess it was, the Klan decided that they were going to target six cities in Connecticut, for building Klan chapters. And so we organized, and we set up tables. We did, we set up tables all over the city. And we'd be in Park Slope, and we'd be in, not just in little enclaves, but in front of supermarkets, organizing people to come with us to Connecticut, to do anti-Klan rallies.

So I still considered myself to be part of a mass movement.

SS: Okay, but it's very different.

MB: Well, even the –

SS: Because you guys were in coalition with other groups.

MB: That's true.

SS: But it's not like being in the women's health movement.

MB: Well, but even the part of the women's health movement that I was in — remember, the Feminist Women's Health Centers were looked upon by a lot of the rest of the feminist health movement as a little wacky.

SS: Okay.

MB: You know. {LAUGHS} And why did we have to go take our pants off in front of everybody? And why were we so insistent about talking about menstrual extraction, and why couldn't we be in coalition with Planned Parenthood? And why did we have to bring up population control? Why did we have to think about weightlifting? At one of the political educations the FWHCs did, we even had rifle training.

SS: Right.

MB: So it's like, and we were, we were broader, we looked at ourselves as broader than the, because we were on the left.

So in a way, it's not such a big movement. I was still on the left of the women's health movement.

SS: Okay, well then here's my first ACT UP question, and we're not really there yet, but it's an emotional question.

MB: Okay.

SS: ACT UP was a huge mass movement.

MB: Yes.

SS: Involving an enormous counterculture.

MB: Yes.

SS: And it's a very different kind of political activity. And I'm just asking you, emotionally, what was the difference for you, of having been in these relatively small and somewhat stigmatized formations, and then into this huge –

MB: Emotionally. Well, I th-, it was very exciting. It was, I think except for the early days of the FWHC, when we were doing everything ourselves, and it was the most exciting political work I've done in my life, without a doubt. And it was also the most immediate. Lives were definitely on the line. And it was – international solidarity work is great and important, and I'm not saying that there weren't lives on the line in international solidarity work, because there certainly are. But they weren't right next to me, sick in one meeting, dying in the next, and dead the next.

So I think that had a really big impact. And I think the fact that I had come out of the, well also, because I had been in the FWHCs, and because Carol Danner had had the sort of titular position in the FWHCs that she had had. I was a lot more standoffish, actually, in some of the May 19th periphery work than a lot of other people, because I had seen it, in a way, before.

So when people would say, you know, you have to go sell brownies at 8 a.m. at the tollbooth to raise money, I'd say, no, sorry, can't do it. Whereas other people would say, oh, I have to go do that, because otherwise I'm not a good revolutionary, or something.

So I think that experience had sort of put me in the, I think I had a sort of slightly different relationship. Also, I came into that whole movement a little later than a lot of other people. And it reached its denouement a lot earlier for me. I moved to D.C., I

mean, I moved to New York in '83. So basically, all of those formations were gone by then.

SS: Right. And everybody, all the legal problems and everything was happening by then.

MB: Right. Right.

SS: Whereas some of your colleagues had gone to Barnard, right, were SDS, and that's where they came from.

MB: Right.

SS: So they had 20 years on you.

MB: Yes.

SS: Yeah, okay.

MB: Right, exactly. So that was somewhat different.

SS: Okay. So I think we can skip all the Brinks blah blah.

MB: Great.

SS: Don't need to do that.

MB: Great.

SS: Okay. So I'm assuming that there was a period when you didn't know what to do politically, because of all the chaos of these other organizations, and –

MB: Yes. I was, well, I was still being a computer typesetter. And so I was doing a lot of political typesetting for all the various efforts, the political defense efforts. And I'd do some of the typesetting for the Puerto Ricans, and I'd do some of the typesetting for various black organizations. And I also started getting more involved in the lesbian and gay movement as a movement. And I started organizing the lesbian health fairs.

And started to get more involved in thinking about what anti-racist work could happen in the lesbian movement itself.

And also, John Brown didn't die quite then, because it was the summer of '86 that the Klan did that. So I was still doing the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee 'til about, I guess it ended in about '87.

And so then, it wasn't very long before I guess the first person I knew, well, the first person I knew to die from AIDS was Kuwasi Balagoon, who was, had been a member of the Black Panthers. And had also been a member of the Black Liberation Army. And he died in prison. And he had gone from this, Judy Holmes was his lawyer. He had gone from being this strapping hulk of a guy to completely wasted from PCP, in a matter of four months. And that was, did I say '85?

And he was a very interesting guy, because even though he was part of the Black Liberation Army, he was also an anarchist. And he was also in love with a black drag queen. And so that's probably how he got infected. And I made a, I made a quilt panel for him, that had a big black panther on it, and was in red, black and green.

So he was the first person I actually knew. And then I found out, not very long after that, that a guy I had gone to high school with, who had actually come out at age 16. So I knew that boys could come out; but I didn't know girls could come out. It's so, why didn't I make that leap? If he can do it, why can't I?

He had come out at age 16, and he, his parents had him committed and had given him electric shock. And as soon as he graduated from high school, he came to New York, and he was a bartender at Uncle Charlie's. And I found out that he had died back in '83. And I found that out in like '85 or '86.

But I wasn't involved with, I mean the only gay men I knew were leftists. And so, and I wasn't reading the gay male press. But I was going to meetings at the Center, and watching this phenomenon happen.

SS: You were going to other meetings?

MB: I was going to other meetings at the Center. And either meetings for the Lesbian Health Fair, or meetings, we were doing some organizing around, the police raided that club, Blues?

SS: Oh yeah.

MB: And so were trying to do some organizing around that. And also, the police were doing recruitment at the Center. And so we were doing anti-recruitment at the Center. Why would you want to be a cop? They don't love us. They are occupying forces, and neighborhoods of oppressed people all around the city. Don't become a cop.

So – so I would see all these people gathering at ACT UP meetings. And I decided I would join when there were at least 10 women in the room. And so I did.

SS: That's pretty fast. When did you –

MB: Yeah, it was pretty fast.

SS: When did you come into ACT UP?

MB: Well, it was pretty early. I mean, ACT UP started, what, March of '87. And so I think it was around July. Sometime in the summer. It, it was pretty fast. And I had already, I had previously done a safer-sex workshop for GMHC, because of my work in the women's health movement, and because I had worked with the Community Health Project a little bit, knew Denise Ribble, who was doing AIDS organizing there. So we did a whole community thing around that first gay pride. And then the next year, at gay

pride, we had our first lesbian safer sex. We did a leaflet that was like, let's have sex, and, and let's talk about sex.

SS: Okay, we need to change tapes. Okay.

MB: Okay –

Tape III
00:00:00

MB: Okay, so Judy Clark was friends with Eve Rosahn who's my current partner. And she had been part of SDS. And she had been part of the Weather Underground. And she was peripherally involved in the, this Brinks robbery in 1981, which landed her in prison at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, which is the state women's prison, for a term of 75 years to life, for murder, robbery.

SS: Okay. And so when you were first coming into ACT UP, she was in prison, and a number of your friends were in prison.

MB: Yes.

SS: Right? Like four or five or more.

MB: Right.

SS: Okay. So did you feel like you had to, did that — it's hard, I don't even know how to ask the question. Did you feel like you had to do work that they couldn't do, or that you, did you feel guilty? I don't how to ask it, really. What was the consequence on your life choices?

MB: Well, there were people doing defense work for them, various people in those things. For those folks who were in prison, there were organizations that were doing support work for them, like there was Queers in Support of Political Prisoners, for example, which Eve was in. And before that, there was a little newsletter, and people were doing legal defense and stuff.

I didn't feel guilty, and I didn't feel like I was doing work that they had to do. I was doing work that I wanted to do. I was corresponding with some of them, and they were starting to do AIDS work in prison, too.

SS: Okay, so Judy and Kathy Boudin at Bedford were involved with this organization, ACE, right?

MB: Right.

SS: And was Laura Whitehorn part of that?

MB: No, she was never at –

SS: She was in –

MB: – she was a federal prisoner.

SS: Okay.

MB: And so she did her work in Pleasanton, California, in that federal prison, and in Lexington, Kentucky, in that federal prison, in Alderson, those federal prisons.

SS: And where was Susan Rosenberg.

MB: And Susan was also in Lexington. And then for a while, she was in an isolation unit in Arizona, one of those sensory deprivation units. There was also one in Lexington that then got shut down. And then she did more of her AIDS work in Danbury, Connecticut.

SS: And Silvia eventually was deported to Italy.

MB: Yes.

SS: So here are these women, who had come out of the same organization, and they were in all these different institutions. But they all seemed to end up in AIDS work, as did you. How do you explain that?

MB: Well, AIDS was in prison. And so it was clear that that was one of the things that you had to do if you wanted to meet the need, and do education, and fight. People with AIDS were the most oppressed in the prison. They were the most stigmatized. They were the most hated. They were the most reviled. So it makes sense, then, that these folks, who were always on the side of the most reviled, would start doing AIDS work.

Susan herself had been an acupuncturist. So she was a doctor. David Gilbert did a lot of work with Kuwasi Balagoon.

SS: Oh, at that clinic in the Bronx.

MB: Yes. Well, no. David and Kuwasi were in prison together, when Kuwasi was wasting away. And so then David kept doing AIDS work, and is still, to this day, doing AIDS work, in men's prisons in New York State.

SS: Okay. What was the name of that clinic?

MB: The Lincoln, the Bronx, Lincoln Detox.

SS: Lincoln Detox. Okay, okay.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

SS: Okay. So, okay. So did you come to ACT UP before ACE was started?

MB: I think so. I think ACE didn't get started until — when did it get s-, maybe not. I don't remember, do you, I don't remember when it got started. We could look it up.

SS: It's a really hard history for us to get. Because most of the women who came from ACE are dead now.

MB: Uh huh.

Tape III
00:05:00

SS: And we do want to interview Judy, if it's possible, at some point. I don't really know how to do that.

MB: Yeah.

SS: But if you could give us whatever history you have –

MB: Well, we should look it up in their book.

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: Which I have. It's upstairs.

SS: Okay, we can do that.

MB: Yeah. So we'll come back to that.

SS: Okay. The history of ACE. Okay.

MB: ACE was AIDS Counseling and Education. And it was a project for women with AIDS in, and just general women — because it also did education about HIV. And a number of women from there, who got out of prison, came to ACT UP, and we worked with some of them, like Katrina [Haslip], and – who else? Was Marina, no, Marina wasn't – was she in ACE? I don't think –

SS: I think so. I don't know.

MB: Yeah?

SS: Marina Alvarez, yeah.

MB: Yeah, Marina Alvarez. Lydia, she was infected heterosexually, I remember. Because she was always very proud of the fact that she could go ahead and drink.

SS: What's Lydia's last name?

Jim Hubbard: Awadala

MB: Yeah. Awadala. Yeah. So – yeah. But you should, and you could interview Kathy, if you wanted. She's out.

SS: Okay. I'll figure out with you how to do that, later.

MB: Yeah.

SS: But just to ask you about this ACE thing, women would mysteriously appear, women of color, straight women of color, who were infected, in ACT UP, having been organized at ACE, in Bedford.

MB: Right.

SS: And can you illuminate for us what that whole, what ACE was, and how they got to ACT UP, and –

MB: Well, ACE was, it was both an education project and a support project. It provided buddy services when women got sick; it provided safer-sex information for when you came back out on the street. It was connected to various groups, not only ACT UP, but also Life Force and Health Force. And I think because Judy and Kathy had both been organizers, they did outreach to various groups who would come in contact with women on the outside, and hooked people up, so that they would have someplace to go. And I think also those women had been influenced by Kathy and Judy's political education, that they had imparted. And so also came out feeling like, oh, you can fight the system, actually. As opposed to so many other people, who feel like, I've, I can't do anything about this situation.

SS: Can you tell us a little bit about Katrina?

MB: Katrina Haslip was an amazing woman. She was a Muslim. She was one of these people who would just electrify a room when she walked into it. And she could

give the most amazing raps about women she had known in prison, who she had lost in prison, women she was in touch with back out on the street. And she was fearless. And she was willing, even though she was a Muslim, and some of her closest friends on the outside, wound up being lesbians, like Terry McGovern and, well, like Terry especially. I wouldn't count myself as one of her closest friends, although I loved her dearly.

So I think she's, she was just one of those people who you could see, every time she did a new thing, she felt like she could do 10 new things. And she just, it's, so much more would have been accomplished had she continued to live.

It's really true, because I think she was just at that point in her life where she was just encountering all these new places and people and things, and she was just conquering them, one at a time. Except for HIV.

SS: What were some of her projects at ACT UP?

MB: Well, she was involved a lot in the CDC AIDS case definition campaign, to change the campaign. She was involved in fighting for benefits, that's what that campaign was about, is fighting for benefits for people. She was a lot involved in, I think helping people in ACT UP think about people who weren't in ACT UP, but recognizing that our actions were benefiting those folks, even if they weren't there, and that we should think about that while we were doing those actions. And I think that she helped. Civil disobedience is a powerful tool. But she also helped people think about how civil disobedience isn't necessarily for everybody, and that that's still, doesn't make you any less of an activist, if you don't want to get arrested, because of the repercussions of getting arrested for you. And I think she, I wish she had been in ACT UP longer.

Tape III
00:10:00

But she was also, I know she was involved in Life Force, too. And she was doing ACE Out had this whole campaign. So she was part of organizing ACE Out also, which was a continuation of ACE for when you got out on the street.

And so they had their own little support group. And they were working on setting up housing for women coming out of prison. They were working on getting kids reconnected. They were working on permanency planning, so that women could be part of figuring out what was going to happen to their kids when they died.

SS: Okay, thank you. Thanks for that.

MB: Yeah.

SS: Okay, let's get back to you.

MB: Okay.

SS: Okay. So you came into ACT UP in the summer of '87. And where did you first decide to plug in? Because you had so many skills.

MB: Well, I started typesetting immediately.

SS: {LAUGHS} Okay.

MB: {LAUGHS} I started typesetting leaflets immediately, for actions and information and stickers and posters and everything. And I had this corporate gig, where I was part of a typesetting department of two. And my boss was the early shift, and I was the late shift. So once I finished my corporate work, I just stayed, and would churn out all this political stuff.

So I did that. And then I also, I figured, based on my work in the women's health movement, that AIDS was going to also affect women physically, even though at that time, it didn't so much. It wasn't so obvious, early, very early on, that it was going to be

as big for women as it wound up being. I knew it was still going to affect women, because even in the first five cases that were reported, there were two or three women among those first five cases.

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

MB: Yeah. And so, and I also felt like the discrimination that was happening against gay men in particular was going to also bleed over to the lesbian community, and that even though I had not really worked with very many gay men before, and sort of dismissed them as being narcissistic and just party hogs. Now William Buckley was talking about putting tattoos on their butts. And so this was serious. So we had to organize together to fight that kind of stuff.

SS: So what was it like to work with gay men? What was new for you about it?

MB: Well – there was – there was such – there was a lot of sexual energy; that was different. Lesbians have sexual energy, too. But it's different sexual energy than gay men's sexual energy. And also, I think there was – there was such an urgency about fighting for lives, that people were really alive, and living every day as though it might be their last, because in fact, it really might be. And people talk about doing that, but very few people actually live that way.

But then I also plugged into the women's committee stuff right away, the Women's Caucus. And –

SS: Can you explain what that was?

MB: The Women's Caucus was a grouping of the women who were in ACT UP. And we would focus in mostly on women's stuff, because it, the women's stuff tended to

get lost. And both the unique aspects of how HIV was presenting in women, and also – what about safer sex for women; what about sexuality education in schools; what about condoms for men, because that was going to affect women. If men didn't use condoms, then girls were going to get infected – if boys didn't use condoms. So, both on the prevention side, and then later on the treatment side, and certainly on the education side.

And one of the things I remember talking about, when, before there was a debate about testing becoming mandatory. And so I was sitting around with some people — I don't remember all exactly who; I think David Robinson was part of the team — and I said, well, we should just set up our own testing clinic. Why don't we? We could do that.

And he said we could. And it's like, so that then, if they make it mandatory, we'll just have an underground clinic that people could go to, so that they wouldn't have to – you could still find out. But you wouldn't have to go through the state. And because we won that fight about testing then not becoming mandatory, names reporting not becoming mandatory — of course, we've lost that fight now — we never had to set up the clinic, so.

And wanting to share information about the women's health movement, and how other people had actually forced the FDA to do certain things before we had. And that even that the, that the women's health movement sort of paved the way for AIDS activism, in terms of challenging the control of doctors in the first place, and starting to democratize health care, in a way.

SS: How did you feel about their lack of knowledge of what we had done?

MB: Oh, it was frustrating. And sometimes the sexism was a little bit much, like women talking, and then, women talking on the floor and men, all the side conversations would get louder. And then a man would say the same thing five minutes later, and everybody would say, oh, that's a great idea that he had!

And then there was the playfulness about oh, we're all, we're all the same. Right? We're lesbians, too. And I remember, I said, on the floor — I don't remember if it was during the teach-in, or when we were having the whole issue about the formation of the Women's Committee, versus the Women's Caucus. But I said, not 'til you cut it off. {LAUGHS} So, just reminding people that everybody wasn't the same.

SS: What was the issue about Women's Caucus versus Women's Committee?

MB: Well, the Women's Caucus was a caucus. And caucuses did not have representation on the Steering Committee.

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: And so some of us felt like if we formed an actual women's committee, then we would get a spot on the Steering Committee, and then be able to influence the direction of ACT UP a little more, in terms of where money went, and what actions were put forth, and all that kind of stuff. Even though anybody could put forth an action at any time, still, the Steering Committee did have power, even if we didn't want to acknowledge that the Steering Committee had power. And even if the Steering Committee didn't have ultimate power — really, the floor still had ultimate power — I think as it grew, it had more power.

Tape III
00:20:00

And also, the Women's Caucus was, it was sort of an in crowd, in terms of Maxine had early organized these dyke dinners that would be in her house. And they were great; they were fabulous; I loved them. And they were a really good way for those of us who were coming to get to know each other. But if you weren't already in them, you didn't necessarily know about them, and some of us were concerned about new women coming in to the group — and more women were coming in to the group all the time — and the Women's Caucus was, it didn't have regular meetings, as I recall. It would go from project to project, as things arose. Whereas a Women's Committee could have regular meeting times, that would be a place for women to come in and immediately get integrated into the women's work, as opposed to having it trickle through the social network.

SS: So it's official versus unofficial.

MB: In a way, yeah. The caucuses were still official. But they didn't have spots on the Steering Committee.

SS: Okay. And did that happen?

MB: Yeah, it did happen.

SS: And who was the rep on the –

MB: It was me and Monica Pearl.

SS: Oh, okay.

MB: And we actually, even though other committees only had one person; because the Steering Committee was all men, we organized the floor to give the Women's Committee two seats, so that it wouldn't be just one woman in the Steering Committee, by herself. {LAUGHS}

SS: So can you let us in on what those Steering Committee meetings were like? Because no one has described them to us.

MB: Um, they were small; they were — let's see — I only did it for about three or four months. Because then I went to, somebody else rotated on, because that was another thing we said we wanted to do. And they were a lot of business. They were looking at the books; they were looking at the finances; they were trying to balance the books, and saying, making sure that no big money had disappeared. And then they were also about how to channel some of the different ideas that were happening, how to moderate some of the internal divisions that were happening. If it was even on a level of stuff that had been printed in "Tell It to ACT UP"; that was sort of, that was on sort of a catty level. It was sort of like, well, how can we smooth that over? Or, should we try to smooth that over? Or, does that need to be answered somehow?

And then it was also organizing the flow of the meeting. So deciding which action proposals and which committee proposals would be talked about, in what order.

And that was powerful, right? Because if you were stuck at the end, at some of those meetings, people left. Other meetings, people stayed till the bitter end, but early on, or right in the middle, was actually the best, because then you got the latecomers and before people started to leave. So that was the prime spot.

So that's mostly what I remember. And then there were, people would come to the Steering Committee also, to argue for their position. And we would hear them, and then we would, they would leave, and then we would decide where they would go in the meeting.

And there would be fights in the Steering Committee about that stuff.

SS: Do you remember any specific political discussion, or conflict? And can you tell us who the people were involved?

MB: Nnn-, I wish I could.

SS: Can't remember?

MB: I can't remember.

SS: Or a particular division in the organization that the Steering Committee tried to handle –

MB: Well, I think, a general discussion was the whole thing about needle exchange.

SS: Oh, okay. Can you explain?

MB: And ACT UP was running needle exchange for a while. And a lot of people thought that ACT UP should not keep running needle exchange. And so that was one specific thing.

And so people would come and say, really, ACT UP doesn't have the bi-, we aren't a service organization. This is a service. Other people would say, no, it's not a service; it's action. It's actually illegal; it's sabotage; it's a useful tool. It's putting the tools back in people's hands, and it's saving lives. And what else is direct action besides saving lives? And so it's direct action.

But other people wanted ACT UP to divest itself of needle exchange. And specifically, I think, when Housing Works was just starting to get started that was a, we thought that that could be a place that needle exchange could go, and that that would solve, they would continue to do it; it would continue to be direct action; but ACT UP wouldn't do it anymore.

SS: Is that what happened?

MB: Yeah, that's what happened.

SS: Okay.

MB: Because for a while, ACT UP was making weekly trips up to Vermont, where you could buy needles over the counter. And I took a couple of those trips to Brattleboro, and we'd go to five different pharmacies, and buy 200 syringes, and bring them back in the car. And then there'd be putting together the kits at somebody's house. I remember one of them was at Zoe Leonard's house. And so that was –

SS: Was there a time when the organization made a political decision that you really disagreed with, that you can recall?

MB: I think probably, um – I don't know that it was the organization itself, but 076 was why I wound up leaving.

SS: Okay. Do you need some more water, because I really want to ask you about 076.

MB: Okay. Okay. No, I'm good.

SS: You're good? Okay.

MB: You need some.

SS: I just need to cough. Okay, I'm ready. Ready for 076?

MB: Sure.

SS: Okay. Can you, like, lay it out for us?

MB: Sure.

SS: Okay.

MB: Okay; 076 was a clinical trial — ACTG 076 was a clinical trial designed to determine whether or not AZT, given in the first – in the second and third trimesters of a woman's pregnancy, and to the newborn, for seven days to two weeks, would stop HIV transmission from mother to infant.

And it was just being proposed and designed at a time when the AIDS Clinical Trial Group had come under a lot of fire by ACT UP and all over the country for doing its work sort of outside of community input.

And so simultaneously, the AIDS Clinical Trial Group had started the Community Advisory Board of the ACTGs, and there were representatives on the Community Advisory Board from AIDS service organizations; different community-based organizations from around the country; straight people, people of color; not just ACT UP folks, at all, although there were a few ACT UP folks on the — was it CAB? No, community, Community Constituency Group. That's what it was.

And so by that time, also, I had started working at the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network. We have to back up just a bit, because the, desktop publishing had been invented. And computer typesetting became obsolete in a matter of about four months. I no longer had my high-paying job. And it was really remarkable, how fast that became completely obsolete. It was really amazing. Why I didn't learn Macs, when they first came out, I was so elitist. I thought, eh, that'll never catch on. It's so primitive. Ha ha.

But, so, I had gotten a job at, as the coordinator, it was a three-quarter-time job, as the coordinator of the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network, which had been formed in 1988, and was the first, statewide women-and-AIDS organization in the country, and was not a service organization, but was an education-and-advocacy organization.

And the designers of 076 came out of University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey — UMDNJ — and were based in Newark. Because the AIDS epidemic in New Jersey has the distinction of being just about the only state in the country where, from the very beginning of the epidemic, people who got infected from unsafe sex and people who got infected from drug use were about parallel. It was 50/50 from the beginning. And stayed 50/50. And New Jersey had the highest proportion of women with AIDS in the country. And pediatric AIDS was identified first in New Jersey, because of this phenomenon.

So the principal investigators were out of Newark. And so we were having, at the same time I was having meetings with folks in ACT UP, I was having meetings with people in Newark, and with community groups like African American Women United Against AIDS around this trial. Because at that time, still, AZT was just about the only drug available — if not the only, still — and there was a lot of discussion in the black community about how AZT was poison. And there were also HIV denialists back then, and they were some of the same people. But because of the history of experimentation on black people in this country — re the syphilis, Tuskegee experiments — African American women signing up for this clinical trial was going to be a big deal.

So the principal investigators were trying to woo the community to support it. And we, I was trying to get the design of the trial changed. I believed that — and I talked about this in ACT UP — I believed that it should not be, it should not have a placebo arm, because to have a placebo arm would be to deny those women access to the drug, and that's the only reason they'd be joining the trial in the first place. So that'd be unethical. And that you could just as easily set up a control group from women who were

in another hospital, where the trial wasn't being done. And I also wanted to organize for the newborn arm to be optional; for the mom to be able to decide whether or not she wanted to give the newborn that powerful dose of drug in its first, because we knew nothing about what impact that drug would have on that newborn.

SS: because their goal was to keep the fetus from seroconverting.

MB: Right.

SS: Now wasn't there also an issue about the woman's future medication?

MB: There was. And whether or not, if she took this drug during pregnancy, would she both be able to continue getting it after she was pregnant, which we were also fighting to make sure happened. And what impact would, I think, at that time, other drugs were starting to be tested. And so we didn't know what impact it would have if the mom had taken AZT by itself during that time of pregnancy.

So there were a lot of questions about this drug, about this trial. And meanwhile, Janet Mitchell, who's an African American doctor based up at Harlem Hospital, was really pushing for this trial to happen, as a really good thing for pregnant women. And she never liked ACT UP. She was one of the people who thought that AIDS testing shouldn't be done in separate AIDS counseling and testing centers; it should just be mainstreamed into regular healthcare all along, from the very beginning.

And so we were in these discussions; all these various people, talking to the principal investigators; community groups; all that; ACT UP doing its thing. And I went to an ACT UP meeting. And I was really surprised at the position that ACT UP was taking. They were saying that the trial should not go forward at all; and that it should be stopped altogether. And –

SS: For what reason?

MB: Because nobody knew what was going to, what the impact was going to be on the fetus and the baby; and that women deserved to be in clinical trials. This was like the first clinical trial that women were going to be allowed into in the first place. Because women had been kept out of clinical trials because of the potential of getting pregnant, to test the other drugs. So it was like, you can't use pregnant women for this trial, when your sole intention is for the baby, for the fetus; and then not let women be in clinical trials for any other drug, when they aren't pregnant.

SS: So they had some of the same criticisms you did.

MB: Yeah.

SS: But you wanted to reform the trial –

MB: I wanted to reform the trial.

SS: – and they wanted to stop it.

MB: They wanted to stop it.

SS: Now why those two different points of view? What was the factor?

MB: Well, I thought that the trial was going to go forward, in some way or another, regardless of what ACT UP did. And that better it should be not a placebo, and have the newborn arm be optional, than go forward in its current design. Because knowing the people who were the principal investigators at UMDMJ, they had some powerful connections. They had the funding all lined up. It was going to go forward, I felt like.

And also, in talking to women, women really didn't want to infect their kids. And so women were really also hoping it would work. Because women wanted to both be

able to, since a lot of women were finding out that they were HIV-positive when they were pregnant, this was a double devastation. It's like, oh god, now not only do I have this dreaded disease, but now I might pass it on to my baby, and I might wind up killing my baby.

So they were clamoring for the trial, also. Which was all the more reason why it shouldn't have had a placebo arm.

Well so then, people in ACT UP — and I didn't go —

SS: Well, I must ask you: was the opposition the majority opinion in ACT UP, or was it a minority opinion?

MB: I'm not sure. Because at this point, I'm only getting to ACT UP meetings about once every other week, or once a month, even. And so it wasn't, like it, from '87 to when I started working at NJWAN, I would go every week; and committee meetings, too, just about without fail. But when I started having more New Jersey Women and AIDS Network responsibilities, I couldn't, and I, also I moved to Jersey City. It was harder for me to get to every meeting.

So I don't, as I recall, it, I don't think it was the majority opinion in ACT UP. But I think that sometimes it didn't matter. If you were going to do an action, you didn't have to have majority consensus about your action.

And so people, some people decided that they were going to do an action at the Community Constituency Group meeting. And it was the first time that the clinical trial was, that 076 was going to be talked about at the CCG. And people from ACT UP went in, and started yelling at the principal investigators. And —

SS: Wait. You witnessed this? Or you —

MB: No no –

SS: – you weren't there.

MB: — this is what I've heard.

SS: Okay, okay.

MB: This is what I've heard. I didn't witness it. I wasn't there. But anyway, the meeting got shut down without, the principal investigators walked out. And the Community Constituency Group got really pissed off at ACT UP, that they hadn't been able to evaluate the information for themselves, and been able to engage with the principal investigators.

And so the conversation then switched from the design of the trial to that ACT UP's action wound up being racist. Because here was this group of largely people of color; and they didn't let them hear the information and make up their minds for themselves.

Tape III
00:40:00

So then this emboldened the principal investigators, one of whom was an African American woman, and the other was a white guy, who they went on to work for a pharmaceutical company. And any discussion about the design of the trial stopped; and the trial went on as originally designed.

SS: Okay.

Tape IV
00:00:00

MB: Well, I thought that, well, I have a lot of criticisms of some of my own ultra-left actions. That on the one hand, there has to be an ultra-left for the middle to be pushed further to the left, because otherwise, if there's only a middle and a right, or just a little namby-pamby left, then the middle gets set way further over to the right. So I think there has to be one. But I think it has to be careful about what it decides to do.

And I think just as having a Black Liberation Army that was going to seize five states in the South was not grounded in objective reality, and was not a winnable objective; similarly, storming that particular meeting showed a discrete lack of sensitivity to the changing ways of the AIDS movement at the time, that was beginning to see that the AIDS movement was in a different place, objectively. Federal money had come in, that had not before Ryan White, nobody cared about AIDS. But now that there was Ryan White, and that there were actual services, some of ACT UP's demands were being met. But under what circumstances could demands be met, and what would those demands be? And how could you make them be the most effective?

And I thought, particularly since ACT UP knew that there were these other community-organizing events happening. I went, and I told people about African American Women United Against AIDS. And this meeting that we had had in Newark, with the principal investigator, 40 women, with the principal investigator, trying to get her to change the trial.

So granted, that hadn't been successful. But had they used just a little sugar with the CCG; who's to say that they wouldn't have convinced the CCG that their demands were right?

Of course, I didn't exactly agree with their demands in the first place. Because they thought the trial should be stopped, and I didn't think it was going to be able to be stopped. So I was already being a little more pragmatic, some would say – collaborationist.

SS: There's a little bit of, there's a psychological construction at play in both of those scenarios. The five Southern states and the endless militancy that won't

recognize change. I think — well, let me tell you what I think, and you tell me if you think I'm off. But I think that there are delusional individuals in leadership, who are charismatic and have a distorted relationship to, as you put it, reality. And there's people who are emotionally dependent on and want to please those individuals, and are swayed by their delusions. And that's how these things happen. To me, it's not ultra-left ideology, it's very psychological and relational.

MB: Um – well, there are, there definitely are psychological things. I'm not sure that it's entirely delusional. Because the black-belt movement did also exist for, since it was a demand from the '20s, out of slavery, actually. Even before the '20s. So it's not as though it came out of nowhere, as just this delusion.

But I think, and specifically in terms of ACT UP, I think that, I'm not exactly sure what happened. But I went to a meeting, and people said, if you think this trial should go forward, you don't care about women! And just this absolutist sort of shaming kind of mentality. That is about psychological stuff. And that's, in a way, it's not so different than saying, if you don't go sell brownies at the tollbooth at eight o'clock in the morning, you don't care about black people.

SS: But those people who said that to you; two years before, had they been like that, also? Or it was just now, that was no longer appropriate? Or had they changed?

Tape IV
00:05:00

MB: I think they had changed. And I think they changed partially – because, well, I'm not exactly sure a hundred percent why. I think a lot of it has to do with relentless death. And no outlet for grieving, except for more anger. And repressed pain. And so I think that was part of it.

I think also what was part of it was that the AIDS landscape was also changing, in that just as in any kind of movement that happens, once you start winning some of your demands and actually forcing the government to do what you want, then, lo and behold, cooptation starts happening.

So there were lots of people in ACT UP who went to, I wasn't the only person who went to go work for an AIDS organization. There were lots of people who were going to work for AIDS organizations. And so I think ACT UP was trying to figure out how it was going to continue to position itself in this new AIDS landscape. And was it going to be a coalition-builder, or was it going to be the shamer? And I think in that action, it shows the shaming mode.

SS: Now were you ever able to have this conversation at that time?

MB: No.

SS: Were you able to sit down with people, and say, why are you acting like this?

MB: No.

SS: Why not?

MB: Well, I think partially, it was my own, I think I was hurt. Here I knew all these people. I told them what I thought. They didn't value my opinion. It's like, well, what's wrong with you? I know what's right here. And you know, and how could you say? I think in that meeting, I did say, how can you say that? Of course, I care about women. Don't be ridiculous.

But at the same time, it was like, also it was like, whoa, what's happening here?

And so, my tendency at that time was also, I was pissed off that this had happened. And I thought it was really a big mistake. And I think – just as I thought that some of the other, like, what was the action when people went and chained themselves to –

SS: Hoffman-La Roche, that one?

MB: No. They chained themselves to, what was her name? Catherine Lynch, from GMHC, and –

SS: Oh, the Tracy Morgan action at GMHC?

MB: Yeah.

SS: Oh yes. Oh god.

{BOTH LAUGHING}

MB: Right. Right. So it was like, and, and so –

SS: Explain what that was, and say your critique.

MB: Well, let's see. That was about – okay, so simultaneous to 076, the campaign to get the CDC to expand the AIDS case definition was still going on. It wound up being a three-year campaign. And at one point, there was a meeting that was like a secret meeting, or a private meeting, that people found out about, that was between GMHC and the CDC and, I don't know, a couple of other AIDS service organizations; the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network had not been invited, either, to that meeting.

And Tracy and somebody — a few other people — went, and chained themselves to the AIDS service organizations', handcuffed themselves to the AIDS service organizations' representatives, at the meeting. But not to the CDC officials.

So it's like, if you were going to handcuff yourself to anybody at that meeting, to demand that they listen to you and deal with you, it should be the CDC, right? Except for that people did see GMHC as this mega-cooptation instrument, sort of, that would just come and grab all the glory and all the money, and all the credit; and you'd wind up with an end result that didn't serve people with AIDS.

Tape IV
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But meanwhile, Catherine Lynch, after that, Catherine Lynch called me up on the phone, and bent my ear for, how could you have ever even been in that organization, she said. And it was like we did do sit-ins in people's offices. And those were the right things to do at the time, actually. I don't regret any of the actions that I did with ACT UP. I don't think any of them were misdirected or had the wrong target.

I just wish that at that action, that people had figured out a way to meet with the CCG first; say, here's the deal with this trial, here's what we think. So when the principal investigators come in, ask them these questions, and see what you think about it, too. And then let's strategize about how this can go forward in the best way possible. Or not. But since they thought that it shouldn't go forward at all, of course they wouldn't take that position.

SS: So looking back now, what do you make of 076, with hindsight?

MB: I still wish it had not been a placebo-controlled trial. It did wind up showing the prior maternal fetal, the maternal-infant transmission rate had been about 35 percent, 33 percent. With AZT, it reduced it to 8 percent. Now, with Nevarapine added, it's down to practically zero.

So it ultimately did wind up being a success. But not for all those women who were on it who got the placebo, not for those kids. The women who were in the trial did wind up getting directed into care and were able to continue getting medications.

I don't know if there'd been any, if there's, we had talked about doing some follow-up to see if all the people who had taken monotherapy in 076 then later, when everybody realized that monotherapy was substandard treatment, what happened to those women? But I don't know if that was ever done. I don't –

SS: So basically, 076 resulted in almost –

MB: It was a huge success.

SS: Right. It almost eliminates the possibility of pediatric AIDS.

MB: Right.

SS: And ACT UP opposed it.

MB: Uh huh.

SS: Okay.

MB: Right. Right.

JH: Did opposition to 076 break down along sexual lines?

MB: Uh – David Kirschenbaum thought that it should go forward. So yeah, I think it did. And I think also, I think David Barr was even part of the CCG at the time, and he didn't agree with the action. So I think it did break down.

SS: Why?

MB: Well, I just think that they were being reactive. And that they were, they felt like they had to hold up the woman banner against everybody else, and nobody else was

going to do it, and they had to be the standard-bearers for making sure that women didn't get shafted in this situation.

SS: But I mean, you can also look at it like what you said before, about African American opposition to AZT because of the history of Tuskegee. Women know — you better than anybody that science never does what's in women's best interest, and they saw the fetus being given priority over the mother, which is historically consistent.

MB: Right.

SS: So it's reasonable to be suspicious.

MB: Oh, it's totally reasonable to be suspicious. And that was the tragedy of the whole thing. Because if we had united for reform in this instance, then their suspicions could have been addressed better. We could have ensured that, I think if there was a, that we definitely could have won eliminating the placebo arm, with a united front – the community against the investigators and against the NIH. That could have been won. But without a united front, the principal investigators would up winning.

Tape IV
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SS: Okay, now one more little tiny question about this, and then I want to go on to something else. What changed in you, that let you become this person who could now be a negotiator who was in both sides of the system, from who you had been before?

MB: Well, I think partially, even in ACT UP, I was part of the group within ACT UP who felt we needed to acknowledge and recognize that AIDS was reflective of all things bigger, all bigger problems in society. That it wasn't just this problem of this virus, but it was a problem of poverty and housing and drug use and sexism and racism;

and also sort of this stunted view about sexuality. And so wanted ACT UP to also see that. And so, in the whole AIDS as a single issue, or in the whole drugs into bodies debate, I was always that it was way more than drugs into bodies.

But I also think part of it was some aging wisdom, some self-reflection from my previous political work, understanding that sometimes the most radical thing is not going to be the best thing. And also, I was interacting with a whole different community then. Because in New Jersey, the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network had been started by feminists who were working in prisons, who were working in Planned Parenthood, and who were working in rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters, and had started to see the effects of HIV as early as 1985, in women.

And so, whereas when we were writing *Women, AIDS and Activism*, for example, we had to really search for women with HIV to contribute to the book, now, I was surrounded by women with HIV. And I was also wanting to make sure that, and the mission of the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network was to educate AIDS groups about women, and educate women's groups about AIDS. Because AIDS groups didn't know anything about women. So I would never go anyplace just by myself, if I could. I would always take an HIV-positive woman with me. So that we'd be a team.

And so, and I guess also I had seen results. I was on the, I had been appointed to the Governor's Advisory Council on AIDS as being the head of the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network. And I was holding, I felt like I was helping to hold off mandatory names reporting in New Jersey. I was having some successes, I felt like. And I felt like I was both being a thorn in the side, but it was from being in those places.

I guess it's the same, it's the same thing that comes down to the whole debate about, remember the moratorium on meeting with the government. And so at one point in ACT UP, there was a proposal put forward that there should be a six-month moratorium on meeting with government officials. And this happened because people from Treatment and Data had a meeting with Tony Fauci, the head of the NIH, on the evening of the day that women had been protesting and demonstrating outside of his office about the lack of attention to women's issues; I think it was about women's exclusion from clinical trials.

Tape IV
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So it was particularly galling that then we find out that Mark Harrington and was it Suzanne Phillips? No, it was somebody else. It was a woman, though. I remember that — went and had dinner with Tony Fauci, when we couldn't get in to see him.

And so the moratorium was put forward.

SS: Could you just say that again? It was particularly galling? Could you say that one more time?

MB: {LAUGHS} It was particularly galling! Ha ha ha ha.

SS: No, the whole thing. It was particularly galling that Mark Harrington –

MB: Oh, oh. It was particularly galling that Mark Harrington and this other woman, whose name I can't remember right now, went to go have dinner with Tony Fauci, the head of the NIH, on the evening that we had been demonstrating during the day, about women not being able to have access to clinical trials. Particularly galling. And so this moratorium got put forward – this moratorium proposal. But I wasn't in favor of the moratorium proposal, because I thought it wasn't just about the meeting, it was about who went to the meeting. It was about how the meeting got set up. It was

about what the content of the meeting was going to be, and it was all those questions, about what was the outcome of the meeting; what was the goal of the meeting. And so that rather than just say blanket, okay, no meetings with government officials, instead deconstruct how the meetings with government officials were happening in ACT UP, and democratize that, or change that. Bust it open, and say, no, you can't just have people from Treatment and Data go, talking about their own thing, when other people in ACT UP are fighting around other issues in the same thing. Then you're, and you can't necessarily represent the other issues, just like I wouldn't have been able to talk about my liver biopsy, Mark wasn't prepared to talk about the exclusion of women from clinical trials.

So I think there was some dogmatism happening. And I think, as I got older, I got a little wiser about dogmatism. And I try not to be dogmatic these days.

SS: Okay. Well, what I want to do is just ask you about some specific actions. And I don't know if you were part of them or not.

MB: Okay.

SS: Were you at the second Wall Street demo?

MB: No.

SS: Okay. The Montreal AIDS conference?

MB: No.

SS: The Nine Days of Action?

MB: Yes.

SS: Okay. Can you tell us what that was?

MB: Okay. What I remember about the Nine Days of Action was, this was like, ACT UP chapters were forming all around the country, sort of, quickly. Not just in San Francisco anymore, and people wanted to do some national days of action, and have them be set, nine days of action, and each one would have a different theme. Like there was one day that I think was about women, and there might have been another day that was, well, I remember, there was a day about prevention, I think. Because I remember going, I was part of a team that set up condom tables outside of high schools. And I went to one particular high school, but we organized to hit 10 high schools in different parts of the city, doing condom distribution to –

SS: How was it received?

MB: – the high school. Oh, the kids loved it. {LAUGHS} Of course. And rushed over, and we did it so quickly and we were out of condoms in a half an hour, so the school administrators didn't even have a chance. We investigated what time the schools let out. We arrived just at that moment. So school administrators didn't even have the time to come out and say, it doesn't matter that you're across the street! You can't be here!

And I remember that one. There was a housing action during the Nine Days of Action, I think. And I think that day, people went with cardboard boxes representing houses, and laid down in the street in front of City Hall, as I recall. And I don't remember what the other nine days were. Was Shea Stadium part of the Nine Days of Action?

JH: Yeah.

MB: Yes, okay. So then it was Shea Stadium. So that was a fabulous action.

SS: Can you say what that was?

MB: I don't remember who came up with the idea, who was a baseball fan. It certainly wasn't me. It was the first and only time I've been to Shea Stadium. But we bought a bloc of tickets, in three different sections of the stadium. And we made these huge banners, that could be read across the stadium, that said things like, Strike Out AIDS, and Don't Balk at Safe Sex. And I learned then that balk was a baseball term. And what was the third one?

JW: No glove, no love?

MB: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. No glove, no love. That's it. Use, use condoms; no glove, no love. And we also had condoms, and we had, like we had made some amazing number of leaflets, which I had typeset. I don't know thousands of leaflets. And we did mass AIDS education at Shea Stadium, during the game. And it was, we got all these other people, both, a lot of people from ACT UP, and not from ACT UP, came.

And at various points during the game, I remember people explained it had to be when the other team was playing, or when, when they, when there was a thing happening with the other team, then we would sway with the banners, and chant, and the cameras periodically would go on us. And we were surprised, actually, that the cameras ever went on us.

And I remember, before the action, handing out the leaflets and condoms to people going in. And getting, really, some amazing responses: everything from fuck off to, gee, thanks a lot. Wow, I didn't know this! People would read the leaflet. And we were being totally campy, and very queer, and people, I think, before, had been some nervous about that. I had been. But nothing bad happened.

We, I remember, we left hastily. And – there was something about the cops. I remember, at the end, cops sort of surrounding us. But we still all, nobody got arrested. Nobody had intended to get arrested. And it was a, that was a really fun action.

SS: What did it take to pull off a nine-day complex campaign like that in New York City?

MB: Well, that was one of the great things about ACT UP, is that we had both enough people that we could form different subcommittees, so there was a committee for every day. And we had enough initiative among a broad enough number of people that people could make their plan, and execute it. And people helped with other days, and it was one of the, it was a really cool thing.

SS: Okay. I think that's everything on my list. Is there anything else that you've got, Jim, that you want to ask Marion? Or James?

JH: I don't think so.

SS: Is there anything that you feel that we have not talked about?

MB: Well, I guess the ending. I think that the CDC AIDS case definition campaign is an example of both ACT UP's brilliance and ACT UP's failure, at the end. Because –

SS: Okay. Why don't you tell us, set that up for us?

MB: Because at the beginning, ACT UP negotiated this campaign, set up this campaign, to expand the AIDS case definition to include diseases that were being seen in women and in drug users. Because the definition had been arbitrarily developed through an observational, sort of systematized collection of diseases that were being seen in gay men alone. And meanwhile, people involved with drug users and women were seeing all

these other diseases. And if you got an AIDS case definition, you were entitled to benefits, Social Security Disability benefits. And without that AIDS case definition, you didn't have that. And it could literally mean the difference between life and death, and between not having any income, and having a little bit of your disability payments, which you had paid into.

So it involved postcards. It was a big campaign at the first, there was finally a first national women and AIDS conference, which was in 1990. And it was a big, the Feds were definitely isolated in their position at that conference, and that was largely due to ACT UP's work. And –

SS: Where was the conference? In Washington –

MB: It was in D.C.

SS: Okay.

MB: And it was attended by about a thousand people. And ACT UP was there, and I was there representing NJWAN, and ACT UP; I was in both groups then, and we hounded Dan Hoth, I think, and Tony Fauci, during that conference. And they were definitely isolated. And as the campaign kept going forward, it had started out really broad, and it started to narrow and narrow, on ACT UP's part, as opposed to staying broader and broader, and as opposed to drawing in more and more people.

And so what wound up happening was again another compromise. And –

SS: Can you be specific about what you mean? Okay.

MB: Yes. ACT UP's position was that we had to add cervical cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease, bacterial pneumonia, endocarditis, and 200 T-cells or less. And that it had to be all those things. And meanwhile, the — oh, it's this very long name, I'm

not sure if I'm going to get it right — the AIDS clinical, no, the state and territorial AIDS directors, from all the health departments, from all over the country, also wanted to get the AIDS case definition changed, because health departments were recognizing these other diseases, too, and they wanted access to the more money that they would have if they had more people with AIDS identified in their own states. Then they could get more funding streams, right? Because the allocation of the Ryan White money was based on people with AIDS, not people with HIV. And so they had an interest in changing the case definition.

So the meeting that we referred to earlier, when Tracy and other people handcuffed themselves to the AIDS service organization representatives was about the CDC trying to figure out a way out of this. And what wound up happening finally was that at the second national AIDS, women and AIDS conference, which I think was in '93; Terry McGovern and me and a bunch of other people from the CDC side hammered out this compromise that would be, so we won cervical cancer. We lost pelvic inflammatory disease, but we got both endocarditis and bacterial pneumonia. And we got the 200 T-cells.

And I wound up making the announcement of it, at this conference, and called it a compromise, and said that people should still be on the lookout for pelvic inflammatory disease, because it was still a real thing for women.

But ACT UP, sort of, by that time, was not recruiting people in AIDS service organizations to be its allies anymore. Instead, AIDS service organizations had become sort of the, the monster, and just the, the AIDS industrial complex. And –

Tape IV
00:35:00

SS: But it's the same people.

MB: Some, it's the same people. Yeah.

SS: I mean, you and Terry and –

MB: Yeah, right. Some, it's the same people.

SS: So is that personal? So that they didn't like you, or they didn't like you getting more power than them?

MB: No, I don't think it's personal. I think it's, although I did stop getting invited to parties, but – but I still don't think it's personal. I think it was about the changing landscape of AIDS. And I do think there is an AIDS industrial complex. And it is problematic, in a number of ways. And ACT UP's, I mean, I think the other reason for ACT UP's decline is, of course, the advent of protease inhibitors, and the, happily, declining death rate, that stopped, basically. Well, not entirely, but – it changed.

SS: Would the CDC definition have been changed if it were not for ACT UP?

MB: I don't think so. But I think it would have – I think, I guess it's one of those situations, again, where with the power of ACT UP, if they had continued to fight, could we have, if they had continued to stay in it, as opposed to being, I don't know, obstructionist, could we have also won pelvic inflammatory disease? I'm not sure, because the science wasn't all. Well, the Feds would say, the science wasn't even there for cervical cancer. But they gave it to us, quote unquote. Well, so if they could give us cervical cancer, why couldn't they give us pelvic inflammatory disease?

SS: And how many women got benefits as a consequence of the definition changing?

MB: Oh, scads. But more, from the 200 T-cell count than from –

SS: Can you give me an approximate number?

MB: Oh, I can't give you an approximate number, but I can tell you that it probably went from 10% of people to 50% of people.

SS: So would you say, since then, hundreds of thousands of women?

MB: Oh yeah. Yeah. Certainly, overnight, people who had T-cell counts of under 200 became eligible for benefits as a result of that. And that's, that's thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people.

And ultimately, I think, it was the T-cell count that was the more important addition than the actual diseases. Yeah.

SS: And who was the person who advocated for the T-cell count?

MB: Hm. I don't recall. I don't recall. Let me go up and get the ACE book, and we can at least answer that question about what year it actually started.

Tape V
00:00:00

SS: Okay, can you show us that book?

MB: Okay, so this is *Breaking the Walls of Silence: AIDS and Women in a New York State Maximum Security Prison*, with a foreword by Whoopi Goldberg. So it's written by the members of the ACE program — AIDS Counseling and Education — at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. And it's this very nice hardcover book.

SS: Who published it, by the way?

MB: And it was published by Overlook Press. And it came out in 1998, finally. And it says in this "How ACE was Conceived" chapter that in 1985, well, it says, "Before ACE was formed, we were in the midst of a crisis. We were faced with an illness, and all we knew about it was its name, and the fact that people were getting sick and dying. No one knew how you got it. If a woman was skinny or went to the doctor too much, people said she had AIDS. Whether it was true or not, some people wouldn't

sit near her in the cafeteria, take a shower after her, even breathe the same air. Death from AIDS hadn't hit Bedford yet, but the fear of it had."

And so this was in August '85. A handful of women responding to incidents such as these brainstormed about what to do. So they wrote a letter to the superintendent, saying there was a need for education about AIDS. And 11 people signed the letter, including two women who were being whispered about. And then they started it, and it all –

SS: So ACE started –

MB: – went from there.

SS: – before ACT UP.

MB: Yeah, ACE started before ACT UP. Yep.

SS: Okay. That's good to know. Important information.

MB: Activists, yes. And Katrina wrote the foreword to this book. And she died in '91. And so, yeah, it's good book.

SS: Thank you.

MB: Here's the back of it. With the banner that they did.

SS: I want to ask you, because of all your experience with COINTELPRO and some heavy-duty government pressure: Do you feel that ACT UP was infiltrated?

MB: I think ACT UP had to have been infiltrated. And I think – I think some of the stuff that happened with Jane — what was her last name?

SS: Auerbach?

MB: Yes, Jane Auerbach, thank you – you know, where she got those, like Nazi leaflets, and her house was broken into and stuff, and then stuff that happened with Tracy Morgan; I, I think those probably were COINTELPRO things.

SS: But why, of all the people in ACT UP, would they target Tracy Morgan and Jane Auerbach?

MB: Well the government goes after who they conceive of as vulnerable targets, or as weak links. And who knows, also, who they get to recruit? Did they recruit somebody who they had busted for drugs, who then said, oh, well, you're young enough, you'd fit in. Your standard cop could not exactly get away with being at an ACT UP meeting without being suspected. And we certainly always assumed that the police were in the room.

SS: But did you ever see evidence of infiltration?

MB: Not in my work.

SS: Okay.

MB: Not in my work.

SS: And did you ever –

MB: Except for those, those instances that I just mentioned that I thought had tinges of, like, this has got to be part of it.

SS: Did you ever see people — I'm not going to ask you who they were — who you thought were police agents?

MB: I didn't, I didn't spend my time trying to figure out who it might be. Because I thought it wasn't going to be fruitful. The room was so big that you certainly could blend in very easily. And I'm still running into people who say, you look familiar.

Tape V
00:05:00

Where do I know you from? And it turns out we were both in ACT UP, and we can't remember, either of us, names. But we were both there.

So I think, I think it was not infiltrated enough so that any of the big actions were actually blocked or stopped. And I don't think that – I mean, I don't know. I don't know how we'll ever find out. We probably never will.

SS: So you never got your FOIA, or any of that.

MB: Uh, no.

SS: Okay.

MB: I never did. Yeah. I probably still should file while we still might be able to.

SS: So in closing, my standard closing question is, looking back, what would you say was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what would you say was its greatest disappointment?

MB: Well, I think the greatest achievement is in, once again, opening up the medical establishment to the people most affected by the medicine. And to having people become powerful enough that we could change how drugs were approved in this country, for example. And I think another achievement was in establishing needle exchange as a real prevention tool. I think another accomplishment, see, I just can't name one.

Another one was opening up ideas about sexuality, and being totally open and up front about having the right to love, regardless of the consequences, and not being ashamed about your HIV status. And that going over to not being ashamed about your sexuality, either. And I think another accomplishment was the writing of *Women, AIDS*

and Activism, which remains a singular, stellar book in the canon, the first book about women and AIDS that included both a political analysis and a healthcare analysis. And I also think just influencing the system in so many ways, in terms of how insurance was going to be dealt with; how benefits were going to be dealt with.

And I think also, the, the giving, like when I was in ACT UP, I was in my thirties, my young thirties. But so many people were in their young twenties. And we're going to see the benefits of all that power for years to come, with all those people. I just can't even imagine what it's going to be. But I hope it's great. I expect it to be great.

Greatest disappointments. Well, all, the deaths.

ACT UP couldn't have changed that, really. I mean, I think we, we helped to get protease inhibitors made when they were, based on fighting, fighting, fighting for drug development. And – that made a huge difference. And then I think the other big disappointment is in not being able to sustain itself as an organization that could deal with these psychological traumas and the internal in-fightings, and the, the political splits. Is it just idealist of me to think that could there have been some, heh, here I am, coming from this ultra-left background, could there have been some compromise between Treatment and Action, I mean, Treatment and Data and the Housing Works folks, so that everything didn't have to split apart? Certainly now, when we know that 85% of people with AIDS are in countries outside of the U.S., the need for AIDS activism is still totally real. And people around the world are taking some of the models of ACT UP, and using them, and discarding others. But there certainly is a whole new form of AIDS activism that is developing around the world. And it's interesting, because in a lot of places in Africa, it's paralleling a rise in lesbian and gay groups coming out and being willing to be

visible. And so I think that's really, I wish ACT UP in the U.S. were stronger, so that we could be part of what they're doing, too.

SS: Okay, thank you so much, Marion.

MB: Yes, all the tears. I'm sure you've had a lot of tears.

SS: Sometimes.

MB: Yeah? So – I think all the stuff about grief and mass grief –