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Interviewee: **Blane Charles**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Blane Charles
January 7, 2014

SARAH SCHULMAN: Okay, so you look at me.

BLANE CHARLES: Real good!

SS: So the way we usually start is you say your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

BC: My name is Blane Charles. I'm 51 years old. Today is January 7, 2014. And we're here at the ACT UP –

SS: Oral History –

BC: – Oral History –

SS: – office.

BC: – office!

SS: Welcome. So where did you grow up?

BC: I was born in Brooklyn, East New York, Brooklyn. And when I was 10, my mom, for her, for their wedding anniversary, wanted us to move to Charleston, South Carolina. So my father had a house built in a newly developed suburb called Woodside Manor, where we actually were able to go with the developers and pick out the area of the suburb where we wanted our house built from the ground up. So it was a pretty exciting experience. At the time, it wasn't exciting, because as young kids from New York, the last thing we wanted to do was move down South.

SS: Right.

BC: But as I grew up, later in life, I was able to appreciate why my mother made that move; so that we could be better persons and have a better quality of life.

SS: But didn't you miss the freedom?

BC: Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, down South, they spank you in school.

SS: Oh, really.

BC: Yeah.

SS: Oh, okay.

BC: And I was always in trouble.

SS: Why were you in trouble?

BC: Beause I was rebelling. I didn't want to be down there. I thought if I was bad enough and I caused enough trouble, we'd move back to New York!

SS: But no.

BC: No! You know what my mother did? She would come down to the school, in her housecoat and rollers in her hair, looking like, really bad, and embarrass the hell out of me. So, it worked. because I got tired of her embarrassing me, so I stopped –

SS: Oh you started in behaving-

BC: Yeah. I graduated class historian. She was really proud.

SS: Okay. And what were historicizing?

BC: Oh no, I'm saying, I graduate, you know, we had victorian and valedictorian, and I –

SS: Oh.

BC: – and I graduated class historian, because there was like levels of achievement. And I also was heavily involved with the Drama Club, and I was on the track team. So I'm just saying, she whipped me into shape, basically. But –

SS: Right.

BC: – it took a little bit of time.

SS: So was your family community-oriented? Were you raised with some kind of sense of responsibility?

BC: Well – I was raised in a Jehovah's Witness community. So – it was a very closed-circuited sense of community. It was nothing – everything else was bad. Whatever Jehovah's Witnesses did was good, and everything else was bad. So it's kind of a warped sense of community. And then, when I dis-fellowshipped—when I'd say it was 16 or 15 — because I told my father; I was like, you know, I can't be preaching that this is wrong when this is who I am, you know. So – for my honesty I got – what is the word? – abandoned, or like – thrown out, you know. And that was devastating, because everybody I knew, and my whole world, was Jehovah's Witnesses. So, it was from that place that I encountered ACT UP and – because I left, and came back to New York, and was looking for a source of empowerment, and ACT UP was one of those sources of empowerment.

SS: Okay, let's go back to South Carolina for a second. So you're in school, and you're in Jehovah's Witness; and you're going to church a lot, right?

BC: Kingdom Hall.

SS: Kingdom Hall. And you have an apocalyptic orientation towards Rapture. And when did you start to realize that you were gay?

BC: I always knew I was gay. I was just going along with the game, because I wanted to please my parents. I grew up wanting to please – my thing about my childhood was that my validation was always through pleasing other people. So I always compromised whatever I wanted for the sake of pleasing other people, and getting their approval. Yeah.

SS: So you didn't believe anything that was going on in the Witness?

BC: No, I didn't – the only thing now that I can say, as a mature adult and Buddhist, is that I was able to go back to my mom and tell her, thank you sincerely for raising me the best way you could, which was through the Jehovah's Witness religion, because it did instill in me some values and morals and principles that I felt preserved me through my recklessness when I was living in Europe for 10 years as a dancer and a model. So – I mean, I see that there was some value to it. But I just – the principles and their concepts and ideology just did not sit with me, no.

SS: But as you're going through this, it's also, it's like the end of the '60s, it's the beginning of the '70s; the whole world is in all kinds of cultural transformation.

BC: Yeah.

SS: How did you get access to what was going on in the outside world?

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BC: I didn't get much access. The only way that I was able to get access is when I was away from my parents, at school or playing with my friends and other young people that were from Jehovah's Witness families that also wanted to explore. So we'd have our secret club, where we would try things, and go out and explore, and we would keep it amongst ourselves. Yeah.

SS: So what was your perspective on the gay community? What did you know about it?

BC: The only thing I knew is what I saw through the media. So it was not very, it wasn't a very pure or honest portrayal, obviously. But I did know that that's where I belonged, and that was my family, and that somehow, I would manage to find my way to become a part of that family.

SS: And did you connect it with politics?

BC: I thought it was very political. When I was growing up, to be gay was very political. Oh yeah.

SS: Okay, so you thought of it that way.

BC: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. But I'm not really into it because as far as I'm concerned, to be black in America was political, so –

SS: So were you looking for a black gay community from the beginning? Or were you looking –

BC: I was just looking to belong to a community where I was accepted, and I was appreciated and valued, whether it was black, white, Puerto Rican, or whatever. But, you know what I mean? But gay, definitely, yeah.

SS: Okay.

BC: I didn't feel very connected to the black community, because, first of all, I wanted to be educated, I wanted to learn, I wanted to travel, I wanted to really contribute to the betterment of society. I got teased even by the way I talked, because I talked – my English is very important to me. And I was a drama major. So I was always shunned, teased, ridiculed, from my own community, for either being too white, or being gay, or being too effeminate, or too out there.

SS: So when did you realize you wanted to be an artist?

BC: My mom was a very artistic person. My two aunts that I grew up with are very artistic. They crochet, they knitted, they painted. My mother did this thing on fabric called Tri-Chem — I don't know if you remember Tri-Chem, it's paint in a tube, where you can paint on fabric.

My father worked at Sears for a moment. And so my mother would take us school-shopping for clothes; we would go to Sears to buy clothes. I mean, it doesn't get more boring than that. And so I would take my clothes, and

cut them, and paint them, and do all sorts of things to them, and make them my own style, reflect my own personality.

And of course, there was a limit to how much I could do, because my mom would be like, okay, you're not walking out the house in that, you know.

SS: Right.

BC: But I still was able to – have some kind of self-identity.

SS: So when you were excommunicated, and then you left; where did you go?

BC: Well, actually — it's interesting you ask that question, because — when I was excommunicated, I felt like the religion had turned its back on me. I was trying to do the right thing, and honestly—be honest about who I was as a person, and be authentic. And I was young. So I told my dad that he'd have to pay for me to move back to New York. And he paid for my move back to New York, and I moved back to the same street that I was born on, but in a house of the woman who babysitted us when we were kids, Juanita White. And I found out afterwards why my mother was so cool with that idea; is because she could keep tabs on me, because she would call Juanita White –

SS: Oh, okay.

BC: – at night and check up on me, and I overheard Juanita on the phone with my mother one night when I was on my way to bed, walking down the hallway. And I didn't say anything, but – and then that was my cue to find my own apartment as soon as possible. So that's what I did.

SS: And Juanita was also a Jehovah's Witness?

BC: Oh – everybody in my life –

SS: Your whole world.

BC: – my whole world, yeah, yeah. And that's why there's such a high suicide rate amongst Jehovah's Witnesses, especially among young people – which is not discussed, of course. And I'm a suicide survivor, so –

SS: Okay.

BC: Yeah.

SS: So how old were you when you got your own place?

BC: Well, let's see: it was around the same time that I got my job on Wall Street. I was working for Lehman Brothers when I was around 18 or 19 years old. Can you imagine? Yeah. My cousin was an executive secretary for Lehman Brothers. I had no idea what Lehman Brothers was, and the magnitude of that. So I got the job; I started off in the post office; I worked my way up to – I was the proofreader of narrative and statistical documents in the word processing center. I mean, if I would have stayed there, I would have definitely rose through the ranks. But I just couldn't take the homosexual-bashing, and the jokes, and the racist jokes. Because it was still, that was what – '80s? So Wall Street was still pretty, predominantly white, and even if I was just in the mail room, or – they saw me being recognized, and being promoted. So that was sort of what – who is this person, you know.

SS: Tell us a little bit about the scene in the early '80s that you were on in New York.

00:10:00

BC: It was crazy. It was crazy, it was [quick]–

SS: Where did you go –

BC: – it was out there.

SS: – what did you do, what –

BC: Well –

SS: – what was happening?

BC: – I mean – you know, Juanita had a certain amount of supervision on me. But I was a teenager, going into adulthood. So she couldn't really, like, say, you have to be home at a certain time, or whatever. She tried to, like, monitor my comings and goings, but once I was out – bathrooms in the subway, in the park; like wherever I can encounter and express my sexuality. I mean, I was this repressed child, just waiting to explode. It was crazy. But that was the time when there was a sexual freedom, and everybody was just like – you know – we didn't even know what AIDS was yet. It was just a really, really crazy time.

SS: Do you look at it as a good time?

BC: Yeah –

SS: Yeah.

BC: – absolutely. Um hm.

SS: So can you just describe to us what the scene was? Or, like, where did you go, besides –

BC: Well, it was just –

SS: – besides cruising. Did you have any kind of community?

BC: Yeah. There was this club called Paradise Garage –

SS: Right.

BC: – which was like a home to a lot of us, where we could pack our outfits and get to the club, and change into our fabulous outfits, and dance the night away, and be fabulous and appreciated, and dance with the Alvin Ailey dancers and Dance Theatre of Harlem, and I mean it was just – Prince was there, Chaka Khan was there; Donna Summer; a lot of the artists were there, just letting their hair down. It was just like it was a big family; it was not pretentious at all. It was definitely, I felt like I was part of a family. I got to meet Larry Levan, the legendary Larry Levan –

SS: Right.

BC: – and that's why eventually we were able to do one of the big benefits for ACT UP, the ACT UP for Life party, at Sound Factory, with Larry Levan – because the Paradise Garage had closed by then.

But, yeah. So through night life – just connecting with people – I just think the energy in New York was so much more different, because people were more open and free, and much more – it was much more gritty and raw, and

sex was everywhere. Just walking down the street, you could look at somebody and then like follow them. I mean, it was just – it's a bit squeaky clean now, but –

SS: Right. So you were in the nightlife, but you were not in politics before ACT UP.

BC: No, no. Remember, they were still trying to get me to go back to the Kingdom Hall to be reinstated.

SS: Oh, okay.

BC: So I was dealing with playing that game, 'cause part of the terms was, if I stayed with Juanita, when it was time to go to the Kingdom Hall, I would go with her to the Kingdom Hall. So it was sort of like this, well, you can do this if you do this. But once I left, once I moved out of Juanita's home, and moved into my own apartment, then I was able to just research and look and find some ways to be political.

I mean, I feel like I was always political, though, because I've always been true to myself and I've always dressed the way I wanted to, and acted the way I wanted to, and spoke the way I wanted to. So I feel like I was always political in that sense. I've never been one to sort of like compromise or hide who I was. Even when I was giving sermons and going door to door as a Jehovah's Witness, I still, I feel like I wasn't trying to be straight. That's why I said what I said. I felt like, I don't want to confuse people, and I don't want to be a hypocrite. Funny things, even like when my mom would wash our clothes and put our clothes up on the line: she'd make jokes like she couldn't tell which

underwear were mine or which underwear was my sister's. Yeah, I've always been out, free, and open. I mean, I've never really been –

SS: Right. And you were studying dance at that time?

BC: Well, no. When I went to Montreal –

SS: Okay, so that's later.

BC: Yeah yeah yeah.

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

BC: I guess – well, I would say, obviously, in the '80s. When they started talking about the thing called GRID. Through the media, again. But then I saw an ACT UP demonstration on one of the TV news segments. And that's where I was like, who's that? And then I asked questions in the community, which led me to the Gay and Lesbian Community Center. And then I went up to Peter [Staley], and I was like, you know, I'd like to get involved. And then he was like, oh sure, you know. And he saw how crazy I was dressed. And, oh, this is great, yeah.

And I've always felt like, you know – I've always felt like it was important to use whatever it is that you to bring attention to the issues. So for me, being a fashionista, and loving fashion and design, I thought that that would be a way to attract people to listen to what I had to say, or capture people's attention.

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SS: But so AIDS wasn't really that present in your life until you came to ACT UP.

BC: Right, right, right.

SS: Okay.

BC: Yeah.

SS: All right. So you walk into that room. Had you gone to the Center before?

BC: Yes, yes.

SS: So you'd hung out at the Center before?

BC: Yeah, not, I mean, hung out; but I mean, I just went there to, like find out information, and just find out what was going on; to kind of ground myself and put my roots in the ground, and really feel—know what my options were, and feel like I was part of a community.

SS: And when did you come to ACT UP?

BC: Uh, nineteen-eighty – was it '88? I think it was '88 or '87. because I left for Montreal in 1990.

SS: Okay.

BC: Right. So I think '87; 1987, yeah.

SS: So how did you plug in? Where did you go in ACT UP?

BC: Well, for me, I wanted to, like, find a role. I wanted to help out. At that time, everything was written on a chalkboard, because you didn't have all this technology. And Peter made a joke, and he said, oh, you would be a fabulous chalk queen. Eh-heh-heh, and that's how I got my name, Chalk Queen! And then, the rest is history. I mean, all the meetings, I did all of the – and I

always wore these fabulous outfits, and you know – it was just really fun. Yeah.
But it was like, that was my coming out.

SS: But there's also a lot of power in that job.

BC: Yes! Yes.

SS: Because you are stating, you're framing all the subjects.

BC: Yes.

SS: Yeah.

BC: It was good for me. Because you know, that was at that point where I was looking to empower myself, and build my self-esteem and self-worth and self-confidence. So that was really great for me.

SS: So while you were in the front of the room, what kinds of changes did you notice from the front, in terms of what was going on?

BC: Changes, as—

SS: Well you're in the front of the room during the meetings. So as time passed and the months passed, what kinds of things could you perceive happening?

BC: Well people were really passionate about a lot of issues. There was a lot of passion in the room, right? But I think that as time went on, I felt like we were able to find a way to respect each other more, so that we can get our voices heard in a orderly way. And that's why we went to Montreal, for the International AIDS Conference. The Reaction SIDA was so impressed with how we got the job done, how we got things decided on, that they wanted to kind of

have someone come up and teach them a model of how we worked and help them gettin' more mobilized, and that's why I was happy to be able to do that.

SS: But that came a little bit later, right?

BC: Yeah.

SS: Yeah.

BC: That was in 1990.

JW: '89.

BC: '89, right.

SS: Okay, so let's go through the time that you were in ACT UP New York. So you said that one of the things you worked on was a benefit with Larry at Sound Factory.

BC: Yeah.

SS: How did you organize that?

BC: We did a lot of amazing civil demonstrations. We did the San Francisco Burroughs Wellcome, we did –

SS: What did you do there? Tell us about it.

BC: I was just – I just wanted to help in any way that I could. So we'd have like a series of meetings to organize our plan of action. And we'd all have our role to play in that demonstration or that activity.

SS: Who were you working with on that?

BC: Let's see – a lot of people, but I can't remember all of them. But I know Peter Staley, myself; Larry Kramer; oh, like a lot of people. I can't remember all the names. It's a long time ago.

SS: So what was the action that you guys organized?

BC: We always did – the main thing we were fighting for that I remember most in my mind is the access to AZT. And that was like the biggest issue that I can remember. Getting chained around the buildings in San Francisco, and the die-ins, and going to Burroughs Wellcome North Carolina, and actually getting in the building, and locking ourselves, and chaining ourselves to the radiators and getting arrested, and being on the news right after we got out of prison. I mean, it was just amazing. Keith Haring played a big role in helping us financially pull that one off.

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

BC: Yeah. because he didn't want to make it public, but yeah. That was a very expensive operation. We had vans and suitcases and we made fake IDs, and we had suits, and – it was very like *Mission Impossible*.

SS: How did you get into Burroughs Wellcome?

BC: Well, we got a copy of one of the employee IDs. And then we made copies for ourselves, with our names on them. And we literally walked in; showed up— and went – but the thing, once we got in, that's when we had to figure out, okay, what are we going to do.

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So we made a false alarm that said there was a fire in the building, and we got everybody out of the office, and then we went in a office and we locked ourselves in the office –

SS: Oh my god.

BC: – and that’s how we were able to like – and then once they found out we were locked in, and then while we were locked in the office, we tried to crack the window to put the banner out; and the window wouldn’t crack! So we was like throwing chairs, and everything. It was crazy! So, I don’t know – I’m trying to remember how we finally got the banner – out the window. I’m pretty sure we did get the banner out the window. But one of the things I remember is that they were starting to break down the door. And Peter was like, okay, everybody lock yourself, handcuff yourself to the radiators. And we had handcuffs and keys and everything. It was amazing. I mean, it was such an incredible operation. And we pulled it off. Yeah.

SS: And your goal was to get the price of AZT lowered?

BC: Lower, mm hm.

SS: And did you succeed?

BC: Um, I felt like we did. I felt like we made a –because you know what? Basically, what we had to do is bring the public’s awareness to these issues, and then from there, there was meetings back and forth. What was the name of the – trying to remember the name of the group that Elizabeth Taylor –

SS: AmFAR?

BC: Yeah, AmFAR, yeah, yeah. So that, those demonstrations played a key role in empowering ACT UP once they were meeting with, like, when they had meetings at AmFAR, meetings on AZT; that this is real, this is like, you know, this is something that needs to change, and it's not just something that we're saying because we need a lot of attention, or we want to cause hysteria.

SS: So what was the atmosphere? You're working on something like the price of AZT, and then there's all these people in ACT UP who need AZT. And then you discover years later that AZT was not what we all thought it was.

BC: Right, heh heh.

SS: So what was your emotion around that, like looking back, and seeing that some people may have died because they took AZT.

BC: Well, I mean, at that point, at that point in time, it was, like we didn't have a lot of information. So that, for us, that was the golden pill; that was like, you know, oh, this is, you know, our answer. As time went on, of course, we educated ourselves more, and we learned more. But I feel like – I still feel that we did something great, because it was like we worked with what we had, and the knowledge that we had. And if it was another pill that would have been better, then we would have did the same thing for that. So – we have to consider the amount of knowledge that we had –

SS: Because there were debates inside ACT UP. Like there were people like Jon Greenberg –

BC: Yeah.

SS: – who only would do herbal and natural treatments. Most of those people died. But that was a big division in ACT UP.

BC: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It was medicine versus homeopathic and natural. But I mean – at the end of the day, that's the personal decision that you as an individual would have to make. I mean, I just felt like it was important for people to have access to choices, and not, oh, well I can't afford AZT, so I'll do the natural thing. You know what I mean? But to make a choice because that's what you want to do, and not because you feel that that's the only option that you have. So that was what I was big about.

SS: And how did you feel about getting arrested?

BC: I was a nervous wreck at first, because it was like I never got arrested in my life. I'm like, oh no, this is going to go on my record, I'm ruined for the rest of my life, blah blah blah! But after the first time, and when it was explained to us, the repercussions of it; I was like, oh, when am I going to get arrested again? I was ready to do something. And it was for the cause. I mean, I looked at people like Martin Luther King, and other peace activists, that got arrested for their cause. And it's like it's part of the fight.

SS: So let's go back to the Sound Factory thing. So ACT UP went to the community for money. And Sound Factory was like *the* place.

BC: Yeah.

SS: So how did you arrange that fundraiser? What was involved?

BC: Well, it was a combination of Keith Haring's connections and my connections. Because I was very involved with the club. We came up with the idea, because this is where we always partied, so why not have a benefit where we all would go and celebrate life, and have a good time. I mean, it was just like – it just made sense. And they were like really excited, because they were supportive of the work that we were doing for the community. So it was really sort of organic, you know.

SS: Because a lot of people in the community didn't like ACT UP.

BC: Well, a lot of people did.

SS: Right. Okay. So Sound Factory –

BC: I think more people did than didn't. Yeah. That would be an interesting survey, to find out –

SS: Who was who?

BC: – what the ratio was, people who were for ACT UP and who weren't for ACT UP. I really feel there were more people for ACT UP than weren't. I feel like the people who weren't down with ACT UP are probably Republicans.

SS: Okay. That's interesting. You think there were Republicans in ACT UP?

BC: Um – that’s a good question. I would say yes. Because, I mean, at the end of the day, the right to proper healthcare doesn’t have anything to do with whether you’re Republican or Democrat. I mean, that’s something that should be a right for everybody. That’s a universal right. So for sure, oh yeah, yeah.

SS: Okay. So – what was, like, the social world of ACT UP?

Like –

BC: Oh, it was great, it was fabulous.

SS: What was it like?

BC: That was one of the things I loved about it. I mean, we got serious and we got political and we got the job done. But we knew how to have a good time.

SS: So what did people like to do? Where did they go, what –

BC: Oh, all the bars in the East Village; Sound Factory, the West Village. Some of these places, I can’t remember the name of, because they’re all closed now, but – Christopher Street, of course. And then there was another place, on Greenwich. Oh, man. Greenwich between Sixth and Seventh. Uncle Charlie’s!

SS: Oh.

BC: Yes. That was one of our hangouts. We’d go have a meeting, and we’d go to Uncle Charlie’s afterwards. Or we’d have a meeting, and go to Benny’s Burrito, and have Margaritas and – yeah. It was really great, because it

was like – it was a fun group of people, and we became a really close-knit family. And so it wasn't just about meeting and dealing with issues, but it was also about getting to know each other, and really being there for each other.

SS: So who were some of your closest friends in ACT UP?

BC: Definitely Peter Staley, Gregg Bordowitz; Jean; Larry; oh, let's see. I'm bad with names, so I can't remember all the names. But a lot.

SS: Okay.

BC: I mean, it was –

SS: All right, so tell us about your star turn. How did you get to star in the famous safe-sex video that Gregg made?

BC: That's an interesting question because I don't know how that—

SS: What was it called again?

BC: *Midnight Snack*, and –

SS: Right.

BC: – something – fierce?

SS: *Something Fierce*, okay.

BC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. *Midnight Snack* and *Something Fierce*, right, yeah. Um – it's like so long ago, it's like –

SS: Had you ever had sex on film before?

BC: No that was the first—

SS: So who talked you into that?

BC: Peter!

SS: Okay!

BC: Well, it was a combination between Gregg and Peter. But we were very close, though. It was just like, so, like, uh, okay, if I'm going to do it, I'll do it with you guys, you know. But – and it was also liberating.

SS: But also, it was speaking to an issue at the time, right?

BC: Right.

SS: That porn was not – safe sex was not part of porn.

BC: Right, right, right.

SS: So people in ACT UP were trying to produce their own.

BC: Right. And you know, and say that, you know, this is necessary – right, exactly.

SS: Yeah.

BC: Yeah.

SS: And did people in ACT UP actually have safe sex?

BC: I'm sure, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SS: Was that your experience? Yeah.

BC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SS: So that really was part of the culture at the time. It's hard for people to understand that now.

BC: We felt like we had to do something, because all of our friends were dying like flies. I mean, we had to like kind of take the situation into our own hands. You know what I mean?

SS: Because now, I think it's very hard for people to even believe that. Because it's so far in the past, that such a large community, everybody would – would be onboard.

BC: Well, I mean, you know, I mean of course, there was the – you'd always have both segments of the community. There was barebackers, and you know –

SS: In ACT UP.

BC: Oh, yeah. I mean, you know. I mean, there was – ACT UP was a combination of everything. But I just felt like people are people, and you know – I mean, I felt like people were involved with ACT UP because they wanted to try to do something to make a difference. You know what I mean? Like –

SS: So were you in an affinity group?

BC: I'm trying to remember. I know I was, but I can't remember which one. You mean like – a side group that was –

SS: Yeah.

BC: Yeah. I know I was in – the group who did all of the posters and all of the publicity. I forgot the name. What was the name of that group?

SS: What was the name of that group?

JW: Media?

BC: Media.

SS: Oh.

BC: Yeah, Media, Communications, yeah, yeah, that was it, yeah.

SS: And who were you working with there?

BC: Gregg and Jean and – Lulu – was it Lulu?

SS: Who's Lulu?

BC: Lola, Lola.

SS: Oh, Lola Flash?

BC: Yeah, Lola Flash.

SS: Were you in House of Color?

BC: I was not in House of Color, but I worked with House of Color was the group that did the posters and stuff?

SS: It was an art collective –

BC: Yeah, right.

SS: – inside ACT UP.

BC: I didn't know they actually had a name – I didn't know it was an official – okay.

SS: And did you ever work with Majority Action Committee?

BC: Yes, um hm.

SS: And so what was the task or objective of Majority Action?

00:30:00

BC: I think it was to really bring more awareness to the ethnic communities within the gay community, and issues that were really custom to their needs and their situation. You know what I mean? Yeah. So making the minority majority.

SS: And was it successful? Was it fun? Or was it frustrating?

BC: Oh yeah yeah yeah. It was frustrating. But we made it fun.

Yeah.

SS: Do you remember any of the activities of the group?

BC: Well, there was a lot of educational – like we would have meetings where we would have dialogue circles, and we would like really discuss issues amongst ourselves and really have like open – people feel free to openly discuss whatever their challenges were personally, or their frustrations; and providing a safe space for that. So we had a lot of those meetings at the culture center, the Community Center in those rooms on the second floor, yeah.

SS: So before we get to Montreal, is there anything else that we're not covering about the time that you were in ACT UP New York?

Specific actions, or events that stood out for you?

BC: Well, I just feel like I like the fact that we were all-inclusive, and that we welcomed anyone who wanted to be a part. And we had the Rainbow Coalition. I mean, we had everybody from every walk of life, every color, every style. I felt that that was really important. Because I've also worked with other organizations later on that I felt like, sort of like the Jehovah's Witness kind of concept of you had to be of our mindset to work with us; otherwise, you can't be a part of this group. And I felt like ACT UP was very liberal in that sense.

SS: Did ACT UP New York ever do anything that you really disagreed with, or that troubled you?

BC: Mm, no.

SS: No.

BC: Are you thinking about the St. Paul's –

SS: Oh, St. Patrick's?

BC: The St. Patrick's thing?

SS: I wasn't thinking about it, but how did you feel about that?

BC: More power; power to the people.

SS: Okay.

BC: No, I mean, I'm, you know, after my experience with religion, I was just like, I felt like that was really important. Yeah. I thought like, you know – religion is supposed to be for the people, not people for the religion.

SS: Right. Okay, so –

BC: I had no problem with it at all.

SS: Do you want to change your costume before we get to Montreal?

BC: Yes, okay!

SS: Okay, great! Okay. Great.

JW: We have to –

BC: Oh right. Was that Okay?

SS: Yeah, It's good.

BC: A lot of it I don't remember, so I was uh, uh.

SS: Right. It's hard. It's a long time ago.

JW: You remember everything you wrote on the chalkboard?

SS: I wonder, do we have footage of Blane writing on the chalkboard?

JH: You know, I have to go back and look.

BC: That would be really cool.

JW: Of course, ACT UP gets criticized because there weren't people of color. There were good intentions in that criticism, but you didn't have that take.

BC: They were there.

SS: Let's get back to that.

JH: On tape

SS: Maybe we do.

JH: It's not too cold to walk over there?

JW: No.

BC: Do you have a tissue? I just want to blow my nose.

SS: Do you have tissues?

JW: Yeah.

SS: Okay

JW: My nose runs outside, I could barely keep up with it.

BC: No, it's crazy.

00:35:00

SS: Okay, great. Wait, wait until we put the mic on you. I'll ask you that again.

BC: This one you want to go through here?

JH: Yeah. I guess that'll do.

BC: You want to pull it through?

JW: That wasn't at the Palladium was it?

SS: No that was at Sound Factory.

BC: That's the one at Sound Factory. That's where Madonna –

SS: Wait, wait, don't say anything.

JH: Are you on?

JW: Yeah.

SS: You're running?

BC: Palladium was ACT UP for Life with Keith, with David Spada and Keith Haring.

SS: Yeah, so who was at the Sound Factory party?

BC: Everybody!

SS: Everybody.

BC: It was exciting. I think I was probably one of the last persons that Keith Haring did body paint on. So, Patrick McMullan photographed me for Interview magazine, which was then being published by Andy Warhol. It was one of the last years I think was – I think it was '89, yeah. And then we did a performance with dancers from the House of Xtravaganza, and Madonna was there, and she saw the performance, and that's where she chose them to be in her Vogue video. And then Connie Girl did a performance of "Walking on Thin Ice,"

which is a Yoko Ono song – and Yoko Ono was in the audience. It was pretty, pretty amazing. Yeah.

SS: Do you remember how much money you raised?

BC: Oh, that's a good question. I want to say – I think it was something like – 24,000, or – I can't remember exactly. I have it written down.

SS: Okay.

BC: Yeah. I have it written down. But it was –

SS: Significant. Yeah. Sound's amazing.

BC: Talk about back then, too, I mean, that was a lot of money.

SS: Yeah, absolutely.

BC: Because I have the amount that we raised on the invitation in my portfolio. Because I keep portfolios of everything, right. So I have my AIDS activist portfolio; and modeling portfolio, dancing portfolio. And so for the ACT UP Sound Factory, I have the actual invitation.

SS: Oh, wow.

BC: And I have my T-shirt, autographed by Keith and Grace, and –

SS: Oh, wow.

BC: Yeah, so, yeah. It's really amazing. He did, we did tank tops with the ACT UP invite, ACT UP for Life logo. Yeah. And so Keith autographed people's T-shirts at the party. Let's see what else.

It was just a really, really –

SS: What was he like?

BC: Keith Haring?

SS: Yeah.

BC: Oh, he was like a big kid. Yeah. I mean, he was really cool, and fun to work with. And he frequented the Paradise Garage, too. So we were always dancing at Paradise Garage. He was just like, you know, sneakers, chill, very laid-back. He liked – he really was fond of Puerto Rican and African American boys, though. You know. It was fun.

SS: Right.

BC: Yeah, yeah. But it was just nice working with him on that level – where we got serious, and we had to like make decisions, and, and take action, you know. So he was part of the planning and everything, too. So –

SS: And was he already sick at that time, or –

BC: Oh yeah.

SS: Yeah.

BC: Yeah, yeah. That was something he wanted to do because he knew – he just wanted to do something to make a difference.

SS: Right.

BC: You know. Yeah. And I was really impressed with the fact that he, it wasn't about his name on it, and so like you said, you didn't know, a lot of people didn't know that he was involved. But he played a really significant role in the success of that action.

JH: And he painted on you that night?

BC: Yeah. It was freezing cold!

JH: He did it in public?

BC: No no no no no. We had to be, everything had to be ready for when the party started. So we got there, like, in the early, early afternoon. But it was freezing cold. I mean, this is a huge warehouse, you know, and it was not open; they just opened the doors for us to get in. I remember shaking, I was, like, so cold. And all I had on was a G-string, which he painted over, too, so it looked like my whole body was painted. And then he had an assistant, whose name was Angel — I think Angel is still around, yeah — who helped finish the job. It was really, really, really amazing.

SS: Wow.

BC: And then hanging out in the DJ booth with Larry and Keith, and — it was really cool.

SS: Were you ever in a care group for anyone in ACT UP who was sick?

BC: Officially? Like —

SS: Like were you involved with anyone — were you involved in the care of anyone in ACT UP who was dying?

BC: Yeah, I mean, we c-, we cared for a lot of different people —

SS: Do you remember anyone in particular who —

BC: That's a good question. I can't remember exact names —

SS: Okay.

BC: But yeah. But that was part of –

SS: Right –

BC: – family, community.

SS: Yeah.

BC: We'd just go to bring soup to someone or medication, or like, you know, like – we all kind of took care of each other.

SS: Right. Okay. So the first time you went to Montreal. Now that was for the AIDS conference.

00:40:00

BC: Yeah, in '89? Yeah.

SS: Right?

BC: Um hm.

SS: And had you ever been there before?

BC: No.

SS: Okay, so can you just describe for us what the AIDS conference was like, and what the experience was like?

BC: It was really, really awesome. I mean, it was really exciting for me, because it was the first time I ever had experienced anything on that level. And coming from my background, where I was pretty repressed and sheltered, it was like a coming out. I had my head shaved, I got a pink triangle on my head, and outfits together, and all of our banners, and – and we got there, and it was just like – the energy in Canada, in Montreal, is just so amazing, too, so. But – it was really, really empowering, because we felt that we were making a significant

difference, just when we walked down the aisle and got onstage, and like, made our statement. And all the interviews, the press was just eating it up, so it was really, really great that we were able to get our message on international news, and out there.

SS: Whose idea was it to take over the stage?

BC: It was a group decision. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: It was also Tiananmen Square, in China, the same weekend.

BC: Right, yeah.

SS: Okay. So did you stay, or did you come back, and then go back?

BC: I stayed a little longer, and then I came back, and then I went back. I actually met someone, and moved to Montreal to help start ACT UP Montreal, but also for the relationship. The relationship obviously— it fizzled. He was in love more with coke than me, so, heh heh heh, you know. But his best friend became my best friend. And we proceeded to establish ACT UP Montreal. And the other thing that was really great about that was we were able to do an AIDS benefit, an annual AIDS benefit. We started the same year as Black and Blue. The Black and Blue party started in 1990, and the World Ball for Unity, which is what we did, which is the bringing together of all the different groups within the gay community — leather, drag queens, trannies, everybody; and

artists — and providing a platform to celebrate what made us special, and celebrating the diversity within our own community.

SS: In Montreal.

BC: Yeah.

SS: Okay.

BC: And they saw the voguing, *Paris is Burning*; they knew about the voguing concept in New York, and they loved it, so they wanted to kind of like do their own version of. So the World Ball community provided a stage for these groups to come together, form houses, to compete against each other for trophies. And we make up like really great categories. And artists in the community would create these trophies for us for free, and we got sponsored by Molson and MAC Cosmetics. I mean, it was a really, really huge –

SS: What was different between doing politics in Montreal versus New York?

BC: Well, Montreal, you have the issue of the Francophone versus the Anglophone. So you have that language-cultural thing. So we were working within the English-speaking part of the province of Québec. So my friend at the time, Luc Desaulniers, who was amazing person, who was a Québécois, coproduced the benefit with me. So he made sure that we were like politically correct, and that we were sensitive to the issues of both aspects of the community, which is great.

So everything that was spoken was spoken in English and French; cultural things that were important to Francophones were addressed – important to Anglophones – so it was a very, that was probably the biggest challenge.

The other thing was that the community – we wanted to really kind of provide a platform for the community to respect each other within the community. So by celebrating all aspects of the community, it kind of brought, it brought people together. It really did bring the community together. And later on, years later, I'm living in Paris, when I was living in London; they did this, like, a hundred most influential people in Montreal. And they chose me as one of them, which is really, really, really –

SS: Great. Amazing.

BC: – really great. Yeah. Because the gay-marriage bill was passed in Québec. And I think they were one of the first – I think it was Québec and then Boston, or was it Massachusetts? I think Québec was the first to legalize gay marriage –

SS: Now it's interesting, because –

BC: – Massachusetts.

SS: – most people in Québec are Catholic.

BC: Mm.

SS: Why is Québec so much more progressive than New York?

BC: I think it's just the Canadian mentality.

SS: What is that?

BC: – it really is. It's just so much more laid-back, and so much more liberal, and so much more humanitarian.

SS: Mm.

BC: Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah.

SS: So then what were the demands of ACT UP Montreal?

00:45:00

BC: The same thing – basically, like, the right to be partners; the right to – the medical – the social—their medical program is so great, because it's like free medical for everyone. But it was more just the sexual rights; freedom of sexuality and freedom of those different aspects in the community. Because of the Catholic religion, it was just really shunned. So you couldn't really be open about it. So I think it was more about freedom of sexuality and also respecting people with AIDS and not thinking that they're outcasts now because they have this disease. Giving them their rights, too; rights to work and –

SS: How many people were in ACT UP Montreal?

BC: Well, it's way smaller than ACT UP New York, but –

SS: Yeah.

BC: – I mean, it was still – the ACT UP core was small; but the response from the community was large.

SS: Canadians have a different relationship with their government. So were they into direct action, and was there –

BC: Oh yeah –

SS: – like getting arrested –

BC: – yeah!

SS: – and all of that? That was –

BC: They had die-ins–

SS: – happening?

BC: – and everything. Absolutely. Yep. Um hm.

SS: And who were some of the key players in Canadian AIDS politic?

BC: David – Michael – I don't, I'm not remembering last names. Michael, David – um – Michael's partner – actually, Michael [Hendricks] and his partner [René Leboeuf] were the first ones to get married in Québec when they passed the gay marriage law. Hm. There were more people, I just can't remember their names. I'm so bad with names.

SS: You're cold. Is this on?

JW: Tim McCaskell?

SS: Tim McCaskell?

BC: Yes, Tim McCaskell, yeah. And there's another one, too, who wrote. He was a writer. And he – he wrote for The Fugué. I'm trying to remember the name of the people that worked with The Fugué. The Fugué, is like the gay monthly sort of like our NEXT or HX. I'm trying to remember his name. I see his face, and I can't remember his name, it's terrible.

And Jules DE-NEUVE-A-VILLE, who was a photographer who photographed a lot of our actions. Yeah.

SS: So you were away when ACT UP split, in New York.

BC: Right.

SS: And what's your understanding, even with hindsight, of what happened?

BC: Um – I mean, I just felt like it – you know – that time and where we were at, as far as a country, as a people, as a nation – I mean, all that stuff kind of had an, I felt, had an effect on that happening. That's one of the reasons why I wasn't in a rush to come back to New York, and I went from Montreal to Paris to London, and did my thing in Europe. But I feel like I think that it was a sign of the times, and like – yeah, yeah. Of course, I was disturbed by it. I mean, it was like, you know – I felt like we still needed to rally together. It wasn't like everything was fine, and it was like, okay, we can go home now. Yeah.

But understandably, you know, again, it was, these are issues that people are very passionate about. And there's bound to be some clashing and butting of heads, yeah.

SS: Okay. So I only have one more question. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important?

BC: Well – I think it's important to realize that the impact of being involved in ACT UP, and how that plays out in your life and your personal decisions and what you decide to do with your life. Like I think that ACT UP, my experience with ACT UP has affected all aspects of my life as far as my

career decisions; being aware that whatever it is that I do, to always play a role, and making people aware of the issues. So starting my own talk show; the book that I'm writing, honoring my Aunt Lula, who was there for me when I was rejected by everyone else, and gave me a safe place to feel empowered and feel like I could make a difference, and that I should go on living. Even my design consulting. I mean, when I work with people, helping them with their wardrobe and their interiors, I wanted to create a concept where it's not just about adorning them or adorning their place, but like really connecting with that person, and helping to make them aware that we're all precious and that all life is precious. And as a gay black man, in that work, really showing them that we're great; we have a lot to contribute, and we're human beings, like everybody else, who just wants to be loved and accepted and have the opportunity to contribute to the betterment of our world, yeah.

SS: Okay, so here's my final question.

JH: Oh, before you do that. You said you were in Paris. Did you have any involvement with—

BC: ACT UP Paris? Yeah, yeah. I mean, I worked with them a little bit, yeah. I mean, I went to some of their meetings, and did some demonstrations. It was fun.

JW: Christophe?

BC: Um hm. Oh yeah! You know Christophe. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: And how was that different from ACT UP New York?

BC: It was – I felt like they were really like, ahhh!, like it was really, really, um – and of course, I didn't understand fully everything, because my French was a little rusty, but I just felt that they had a hard time coming to decisions, and there was a lot of, it was very, the atmosphere was really aggressive; I felt like really, like, whoa, you know.

SS: About what? What was the fight about?

BC: It didn't matter. I mean, it was like –

SS: Okay.

BC: – we were always, there was always some kind of, like, ah, yelling, or like, you know—I mean, the French are passionate, too. I mean, you know, but I just felt – I don't know, I felt like – I was happy that I experienced my ACT UP – time with ACT UP New York, you know what I mean? Like I felt like – I was happy –

SS: Okay.

BC: – that I was there. Yeah.

SS: So my last question is, just looking back: what do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you feel is its biggest disappointment?

BC: Hm. I feel like ACT UP's greatest achievement – was empowering the community, and making a positive dent in the healthcare system, as far as like helping people living with AIDS to have a better quality of life.

I felt like we made a difference as far as awareness to young people coming up to – also about safe sex and making healthy choices.

As far as disappointment? I don't know. That's an interesting question.

I really don't feel like, I don't know, I feel like ACT UP was so critical in saving my life that – I can't really say – anything that was disappointing, personally. I mean –

SS: Okay.

BC: – there were some, you know, like some, some people felt like maybe it was a little white, and not all-inclusive. But I felt like, you know, I'm black, and I'm standing in front of the room, doing the chalk board, so –

SS: Well –

BC: – and also other ethnic people there, and transgender, and I think it's just – you had to want to be involved. You had to stand up, and make yourself present and known, you know.

SS: There was this whole community of women of color who came from Bedford Hills to ACT UP. Did you ever interact with any of those women? Katrina Haslip, or –

BC: Um – that name sounds familiar.

SS: Okay.

BC: Yeah, yeah. But they came up for a moment –

SS: They got – HIV-positive women, and they had been incarcerated, and then they came into ACT UP.

BC: Oh, yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes—

SS: But you don't remember particular –

BC: Um – that one name I remember, but I don't remember all their names.

SS: Okay.

BC: But I remember their presence, and that it was very critical that they were there, and they made a really great difference. Yeah.

SS: Okay.

BC: Because they spoke up. They stood, you know. Like I said, you know – it was important, if people are going to be there, to stand up – and be visible. It's not the kind of place where you could come and sit and just kinda sit in the back of the room.

SS: It wasn't for shy people –

BC: No, no, no, no, no.

SS: No. All right, well, thank you so much.

BC: Yeah, thank you for having me.

SS: Thank you for your –

BC: Yes.

SS: – time. Okay.

BC: Wow.

SS: Oh, my god, you've –

BC: I'm so bad with names.

SS: – been all over the world. What?

BC: I'm so bad with names, I'm so bad –

SS: That's okay. Now, none of us can remember anything, at this point.

BC: It's like –

SS: But you're amazing –

BC: – who's that guy –

SS: –because you've been in three different nations' worth of ACT UP.

SS: Nobody else can say that. Yeah, you really have that international perspective.

BC: It was fun, yeah.

SS: Yeah.

BC: Well, the ACT UP Montreal thing was just really, that was also empowering, because – remember, I like, you know, when I was here, my first two lovers had died of AIDS. And so that's another reason why I got involved with ACT UP, because it was just like, I wanted to – make a difference.

00:55:00

SS: Wait a minute, Blane. I asked you – hold on a second. I asked you what your experience with AIDS was before you came to ACT UP. You didn't say that you had two lovers who died of AIDS.

BC: Oh, I didn't – I don't know, I didn't – think about it.

SS: Oh, okay.

BC: Yeah. But um – yeah, my first two lovers in New York both died of AIDS. That's one of the reasons why I –

SS: But when you were with them, or, or much later?

BC: No no no no no. When I was with them.

SS: Oh, okay.

BC: Their names I remember.

SS: What were their names?

BC: Ralph Daniel and Richard Royal.

SS: Okay. Yeah.

BC: I have a ring, a friend of mine in Toronto was a jewelry designer, and he did this series of bands in memorial, AIDS memorial bands, and you could put the names of the persons that you lost – he would engrave them on the band, and I still have one, yeah.

SS: Oh.

BC: Yeah. I mean, I don't know why we didn't talk about that.

But –

JH: They died before you came into ACT UP, or –

BC: Yeah. That was part of the reason why I joined. Yeah. I remember when I was, when we were talking about sowing my oats and running around – yeah. So Richard – Ralph Daniels was my first lover. He was the one that didn't want to go out, so I would go out and party, and come back home. And then Richard Royal was the editor of *Central Park*. It was like a – a bimonthly periodical, with like a collection of poetry and short stories and photography and et cetera. I met him through that because he photographed me for the book, and then we started dating. He was the second lover. Probably my longest relationship. Yeah. And they both shunned me away when they were going through their process because they didn't want me to see them like that. So that was frustrating.

SS: Yeah.

BC: So – yeah. So that was another reason why I felt like, okay, well, what can I do to honor their— and also to help people living with the disease not be ashamed –

SS: You think they were ashamed; that's why they –

BC: Yeah.

SS: Yeah.

BC: Well – Richard Royal totally – I don't understand. Like he was – his family accepted him, his job, he had the best job, all his friends. But it was this internalized homophobia that was just eating him away. And I saw it just totally destroy him, you know.

SS: Um hm.

BC: Like he wouldn't want to hold hands walking down the block

—

JW: Did he allow you to go all the way to his death?

BC: No, he moved down South, with his sister in Florida, when he was dying. He totally cut me off. Yeah.

JW: And the other?

BC: And Richard — I was in Montreal when — Richard Royal — Richard was in Florida, and Ralph Daniel; he started off as a really, really healthy guy; like a vegetarian, whatever. And I had a opportunity to go to L.A. with a friend to help dress him. He was a stylist for the Academy Awards. And so he said, yeah, go. Because he didn't want me to resent — like if he said, no, I don't want you to go. And he hooked up with this guy, one of the black dancers from "Chorus Line." And they got introduced to cocaine, and —

So when I came back, he kicked me out of the apartment.

SS: Oh.

BC: It's funny, because I experienced that with him, and also with my lover when I moved to Montreal. So cocaine is a — an issue, yeah.

But, yeah. So when I came back, he was a totally different person. It was really, like, it was awful. He threw all my stuff out in the street, whatever.

SS: Oh.

BC: So I wasn't with him when he died. So – both instances, I was not with them, yeah. And it was really – painful. Yeah.

Yeah, I don't know why I didn't talk about that.

SS: That's okay. It takes awhile. Trauma –

BC: And it's also –

SS: – escapes.

BC: – trying to remember everything, yeah, yeah.

SS: Yeah.

BC: But I think that that was – that's important to be said, though, because that was the – that was the, really the trigger that made me really jump into ACT UP, yeah.

SS: Right.

BC: Are you taping?

SS: Yeah, we're taping.

BC: Oh, oh, okay, I didn't know! Okay, good, good, yeah, yeah, yeah, that was important. I felt like, there— I felt like that was, uh – my way of empowering myself, because I felt like, I felt so helpless. I felt like, okay, what do I do, I can't do anything, you know.

SS: Right.

BC: And that was another reason why I went to Montreal, because there was nothing really keeping me in New York. Except for ACT UP, of course. But that was a opportunity for me to sort of like — how can I say it –

second chance on love, second chance on life, whatever. Unfortunately, that didn't last too long. But it was a great time. He came to New York, he walked with me in ACT UP—Gay Pride in New York.

SS: Okay.

1:00:00 BC: And then I went to Montreal, and I walked with him in Gay Pride in Montreal. At just one point, it was just like, it just – he'd come home later. He was a maitre-d' at a restaurant. He'd come home late at night. And I'm there trying to like, you know, get up in the morning and find work, and he'd come home late at night with his friends, and I'm trying to sleep, and they're in there doing coke and playing music and talking loud, blah blah. And then he'd come to bed all messy, and want to like have sex, and it was just, it just kind of didn't really –

But you know, when you meet somebody, you don't know everything about them, obviously. And it was fast, because it was just like, we met; he came to New York; and then I moved to Montreal; and there I am.

But the good thing about it was the good work that I was able to do. I didn't just pack up my bags and come back to New York. I was like, I came here for a – you're not the only reason that I came here.

SS: Right.

BC: I came here for a bigger purpose, and I stayed and fulfilled that. So I felt that everything happened for a reason, and it was all good.

SS: Okay, great.

JW: And it wasn't Kingdom Hall.

SS: Right.

BC: Right! And his best friend became my best friend.

SS: Okay.

BC: Yeah. Luc Desaulniers. Yeah.

SS: Okay, great. All right. Thank you, Blane.

BC: Thank you.

JW: Luc is the guy you did the ball with?

BC: Yeah.

JW: Okay. Could you spell his last name?

BC: L-U-C, is Luc. And then Designer is D-E-S-A-U-L-N-I-E-R;
Desaulnier.

SS: Okay.

JH: That's one of the biggest problems with the transcripts –

BC: Oh, right, right, right, right.

JH: French names are—

BC: Tricky, yeah, yeah. Do you know – what's his name – Pablo
D-I-E-R, Pablo DWYER. He writes with the Montreal Mirror. And he comes to
New York a lot. During the ACT UP days, he helped us with ACT UP Montreal,
but he would come to New York also, and go to ACT UP New York meetings,
and just kind of inform himself, and then he would write about it. Him and – I'm

trying to remember David's last name. David – David Shannon. David Shannon.
That's who I was trying to remember.

SS: He was the other –

BC: He was major org-, ACT UP Montreal. And he's a reporter, and like – yeah. He just came to New York to visit me at Thanksgiving. That's who, I wanted to say his last name, but – David Shannon is a really –

JW: We have it on tape.

BC: Michael, and Michael Hendricks. See? Now it's coming to me. Yeah. David Shannon, Michael Hendricks; two big, big – and Pablo DWYER. Michael Hendricks was the one who got married to his partner – the first gay union once the law was passed. Yeah. And they – even now, they still – you know – when something needs to be addressed, they're there. So ACT UP Montreal is still active; it's just much smaller. So, yeah.

JH: *United in Anger* is playing in Montreal on Friday.

BC: Oh, wow!

JH: Michael is going to do the Q&A.

BC: Oh, cool. So you know Michael! Oh –

JH: I don't – only through email.

BC: Oh, oh wow! Yeah! Oh, that's amazing.

SS: Where is it playing?

BC: Yeah. Rialto?

JH: At –

SS: Oh, that's awesome.

JH: At McGill.

SS: Oh.

BC: Wow. I'll have to tell my friends. Okay. I have to do a little – actually – do you have a – a formal – press release or something, where I can do, like, I can type the –

JW: Michael probably does.

BC: – the event, and like –

JH: Yeah –

SS: On our Facebook page?

BC: – put it on, yeah.

JH: You know, I don't know if there is.

BC: Oh, because I can tell a lot of people.

JH: Let me –

JH: I'll look on my e-mail.

BC: Yeah, because I have a lot of friends that I stay connected with in Montreal on Facebook, and that'd be great to post that, like, today or tomorrow. Just to help—And when you showed it here, where was it?

SS: We showed it at the Quad.

BC: Okay.

JW: And at the MoMA.

JH: Right, yeah.

BC: How was the turnout? And how long was it running?

JH: For a week and we did pretty well. We got a thousand people to come over the course of a week.

BC: That many went towards your project that you are doing now?

SS: Yes—this thing has been going on for 13 years.

BC: So you basically need money to put towards it

SS: Well, I think we're still down.

JH: On the film, yeah but it's still grants.

BC: Can we show it again?

SS: Yeah, we can still show it, sure.

BC: Did you speak to Whitney or any other museum?

SS: They know about it.

BC: Oh you did show it at MoMA? When was that?

JH: The first time was February 2012 and then in December 2012.

BC: Okay. That was it. And what's that?

JH: That's me. I was just practicing for the Kickstarter. I gave away autographed posters.

BC: Oh cool, you raised money on Kickstarter? Awesome.
Awesome.

JH: Yeah. It did well on Kickstarter but—

BC: The Kickstarter worked?

JH: Yeah but it's a lot of work.

BC: It is a lot of work?

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JH: Yeah. I hated it. I hated every moment of it.

BC: But it was worth it? You need a team just for that.

JH: We did. We had these kids who—

JW: Bless their hearts.

BC: Yeah. Amazing.