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Interviewee: **Kim Christenson**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Kim Christenson
June 26, 2010

SARAH SCHULMAN: So the way we start is if you could say your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

KIM CHRISTENSON: Okay. Kim Christenson; I'm 55; it's June 26th, right, 2010; and we are in the library at Fordham Law School.

SS: Right. We are. Where did you grow up?

KC: I grew up in a rural area in southern Ohio; very rural. We had cows walking in the halls when they left the doors open. And a lot of the people I grew up with were either farmers, or some people drove up to Dayton to work at Delco and NCR and stuff like that.

SS: How many generations had your family been farmers?

KC: Actually, my grandfather came here. He was a coal miner. And saved enough money to buy a little bit of land. And then my dad inherited that.

We lost the farm when I was about – 13, I guess, in high school. It was just not possible to make it anymore. And we did keep about, we kept a small amount of land, and we kept some of our favorite animals. {LAUGHS} My parents were big on rescuing animals, like from rodeos and stuff. We had all these horses that were broken-down horses from rodeos, and dogs that had been dumped, and we just had this whole menagerie of animals.

SS: So was that an ethic; protecting the weak, on some level, or were they –

KC: Yeah, I think so. It was interesting, because my – the area was very conservative, extremely conservative, in many ways. But partly because my grandfather had been in the mine-workers' union; my dad had very different politics from a lot of the people around. We had a cross burnt on our lawn at one point, because he had a fair number of African American friends; he took them out to dinner, had barbecues, all this stuff. It was a big deal.

And so yeah, I was exposed to a kind of a different – the area was conservative, but there was a different strain in my family. I wouldn't call it radicalism, and that's too strong. But it was a – it was a real solidarity tradition, from –

SS: When you say the “mine workers union,” like Jock Yablonski, and the United Mine Workers, is that – ?

KC: Yeah. My –

SS: Radical union –

KC: Yeah. My grandfather was accused of having Wobbly tendencies while he was working in the mine workers. That was a bad thing to have, when Tony Boyle was in office!

But – it wasn't – people didn't talk politics that much. But it was just kind of in the air. I mean, you would rather die than cross a picket line. It was just not something that would – it would be like trying to walk – I can't imagine. There's no language for the idea.

So there was that tradition. Also, it's funny, because the school I went to is actually designated in the Johnson administration as a poverty school. They had these designated poverty schools. And so what that meant – is that we got free student teachers from Antioch. {LAUGHS} So in high school, I was reading Angela Davis, and Huey, and all this stuff, in this little bitty, there were a hundred people in the school, you know, altogether, and there's cows and pigs running around, and we're reading Angela Davis. It was really – it was very – interesting combination.

So yeah; the politics were complicated, I'd say.

SS: Was there any visibility for homosexuality, the gay rights movement?

KC: I – no. There was no visibility for the gay rights movement. There were a couple of extremely brave people who were out in my high school. Dawn Daffler, who got the crap beat out of her on a regular basis by guys from the football team. And there was one guy — Tim Terry, who actually later committed suicide — he wasn't as out, but there were strong suspicions, that he never – you know, he never said no.

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I remember I was very involved in — we can talk more about this later — in anti-racist stuff and antiwar stuff by the time I was in high school. And John, this friend of mine, and I had formed a SDS chapter and all this stuff. And I remember, we went to a antiwar dance after a big demo. And my best girlfriend, Gerri everybody was dancing together. And Gerri said that she was in love with me.

And this dance was in a barn, which'll tell you something.

I literally ran out of the barn and ran about a half a mile down the road. Because I just could not – it wasn't so much that I thought it was wrong, but there was no language. I didn't even know what this meant. I mean, because I knew I'd felt the same

way. But I didn't know what that meant. It was like, that's impossible. It's just impossible. And you couldn't really imagine a life.

I mean, everybody in my high school, all the girls got married when they graduated. And that's what you did. You settled down, you were the farmer's wife, or factory worker's wife. Those were your options. Or maybe a miner's wife; but you didn't want to do that.

And so it was like saying you were a Martian or something. It didn't compute for me for a long time.

SS: Now did you go to national SDS conferences?

KC: No. I did go – we did go to some regional stuff – including, god help me, Kent State. Which is where there was a lot – I went to Ohio State a couple times for big things, and went to Kent State a couple times. And Miami University – Oxford. They had a lot of stuff over there, stuff going on there. Including a famous flush-in, where everybody flushed all the toilets at midnight and shut down the water supply.

{LAUGHS}

So yeah, we went to, went to those areas.

We were pretty isolated. I mean, it wouldn't have occurred to me.

What, oh, I did go – we did go to the Moratorium marches. I went in '69, '70 – a couple other times, to the big things, where there'd be buses. You'd drive to Columbus and get in the bus, and something like that. But it was more local than that. We did a lot of demos. There was an Air Force base about half an hour away. And we did demos up there.

We also – it was a different – a lot of the guys I went to high school with were getting drafted. And so this was not a theoretical thing for me. This was Gary Dean

and Jim Crowe and all these guys – some of whom came back really messed up. And – so we also – we did a lot of, like G.I. organizing. Went onto bases and handed out leaflets – that’s the first time I got arrested, you’re, you’re allowed to stand on the sidewalk, but you weren’t allowed to stand on the road, or some kind of nonsense. I can’t remember what it was.

And MPs were all there. And I had, I’ve got a connective tissue disease, I’m very disorganized. I fell off the sidewalk onto the road, which made me subject to arrest, right? {LAUGHING} So it was kind of ridiculous.

So there’s a lot of draft counseling, all that kind of thing.

SS: I want to ask you about the style of that kind of early political organizing that you experienced.

KC: Yeah.

SS: Was that like a very ideological, heavily theoretically based or was it in the ACT UP tradition of creative direct action?

KC: It was very creative direct action. I don’t – I could not tell you what the ideology was – except – because the people involved in it went all the way from Larry Gare, who was a Quaker; who was a pacifist; to this guy Logan, who was in the same group, who was – I don’t know what – he might have been SWP or something, I don’t know. But – the only thing we all agreed on was: this war is bad and should be stopped. And if you believed that, you were in the group.

It’s also because in this area, there were not that many of us. This is a pretty small group. We could easily fit in a classroom. So – we didn’t really have the luxury of being ideologically very pure or rigorous, or there wouldn’t have been anybody left.

SS: Did people try to recruit you to parties –

KC: I think Logan tried to recruit me to something. He also made a pass at me at the same time, so I told him to fuck off. I didn't, heh, didn't really – I just wasn't – I don't know exactly why, but I was not very interested in that. It just didn't seem – I was just interested in the activism. I wanted to get the demos going; I wanted to do the draft counseling.

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I mean, it – in some ways, there was a little bit of a feel like ACT UP, because – these were people I really cared about, and their lives were in danger.

And my brother-in-law got drafted, and sent to Nam. And he's been a mess ever since he got back. A loud noise, he belly-crawls on the floor and yells "Incoming." He can't hold a job; my sister's tried to quit her job and stay home with him.

So I knew – I knew what this cost. So I just wanted to end the damned thing.

So it was not really part of – later, I would think, and learn about, anti-imperialist stuff and whatever. But at that point, it was, oh my god, Steve's in Da Nang. His letters are becoming increasingly incoherent. My friend Gary got drafted, and my friend Jim got dra-, it was much more immediate; let's get these guys back.

SS: So where did you go to college?

KC: I went to Earlham, in Indiana. It's a Quaker –

SS: – Quaker school.

KC: Yes. Got a scholarship. So –

SS: Okay. So when you got to Earlham where did you put your energies at that point?

KC: I was still doing antiwar stuff. We'd – it was a different feel to a lot of it, because it's a Quaker school. And so they were doing a lot of vigiling and stuff like that. Which – I thought that could be useful, but – there was some tension, because I wanted to have loud, noisy demos; and they wanted to vigil.

But I did – I have to say, I did respect a lot of those people. There were people who had protested World War II, who were still doing it. So I respected their commitment and their longevity. I just thought their tactics were a little naive, frankly.

SS: You mean like witnessing –

KC: Yeah. Which, it's a good thing to do. And there were a lot of guys I was in college with — Larry Anderson — we had to go to his trial. He got sent to federal prison for refusing to be drafted. I mean, there was all this kind of draft resistance stuff going on.

I now have mixed feelings about the stuff we did to end the draft, because it made – the military is now just poor people, instead of a little more mixed, class-wise.

But there was a lot of that stuff going on. I also did some – that's when I kind of reconnected with the labor tradition, and I did some UFW, farm worker stuff; grape boycott, lettuce boycott.

SS: In Indiana?

KC: Yeah. And helped to organize some of the tours of people going around the country, speaking, and stuff like that.

SS: That was a movement that was very one-on-one. You'd stand in front of a grocery store, and talk to each person who was going in –

KC: Right.

SS: – it was very direct and communicative.

KC: Yes, yes. And –

SS: As opposed to mass demonstrations.

KC: Right.

SS: Right.

KC: Yes. Though we did have a couple big demos, but it was mostly small-time organizing. And in some places – actually, I found Indiana to be much more conservative than Ohio at that point. In Ohio, especially in the southern end, there was more of a tradition – [Howard] Metzenbaum was in the Senate from Ohio at that point. So there was still a union tradition coming out of the southern manufacturing and mining end, in Ohio. Indiana, it was harder to organize. The KKK was actually more active in Indiana than it was in southern Ohio, at that point. And there wasn't really as much of a union tradition.

In Ohio, you could kind of appeal to people's – at least their ancestors' union tradition. And so they might listen to you when you were talking about farm workers. Indiana, that didn't happen. You just got screamed at. {LAUGHS} Which is all right, you get used to it. But it was – see, I did some of that.

And I started – I had done a little bit of women's stuff – in high school. I remember, in the little SDS chapter we had, I formed a women's caucus that was me and Cheryl and Debbie – it was a women's caucus; big women's cau-. But we – that was the one thing that I was more ideological about. We put up position papers about women left – all this kind of stuff. And called some guys to task for their behavior. There was some of that that went on.

In college, then – I did a, not as much as I would do later, but I did some feminist stuff. It was before Roe v. Wade. And so my roommate and I actually

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organized kind of the underground railroad to get women to Mexico for abortions, and then to New York, after New York legalized abortion. And so we had to raise money, and all this stuff. And I remember: I had this car. My dad used to — how stereotypical is this — but he used to rebuild cars. We always had cars on the front lawn on concrete blocks. And I had this old beat-up thing that had started out as a Mustang. But different parts had been replaced so often it didn't even look like much of anything. And it didn't have a door. So there's this piece of wood instead of a door.

But anyway: but I had a car. So I was the one who was supposed to drive women to the airport. So that was the big thing –

SS: How much was an abortion in New York?

KC: It was about \$120.

SS: When it first was legal.

KC: Yeah. It was about a, it was a hundred, something like that. The problem was getting the money for the airfare.

SS: I see.

KC: Which was a lot more expensive than the abortion, at that point.

SS: And the women were put up by women here, right, in New York?

KC: Yes. Yes. So we had some friends and connections, and people like that, in New York, who would put people up.

SS: So Medicaid didn't cover for out-of-state.

KC: No.

SS: Okay.

KC: No. So we had to do a fair amount of fund-raising, and it was – it was a little complicated, because of course abortion was still illegal where we were, and it was a little dicey. It didn't last for too long, because Roe v. Wade – whatever.

So that was the main feminist stuff I was doing, at that point.

SS: Did you go straight to graduate school –

KC: No. I actually – I had a fair amount of debt after college, and I just didn't think I could go straight to graduate school. So I did a bunch of ridiculous jobs. Some of the jobs, oh my god. I actually sold aluminum siding for awhile. I worked in a concession stand in a roller skating rink. I was a secretary. You name it. Oh, and I tuned cars. That's when I learned to tune cars. That was the best. You could just work for an afternoon, and make, make a hundred and fifty dollars; as opposed to working for a week and making a hundred and fifty dollars. So I actually set up a little auto repair thing in the backyard, and I could work on people's cars. That was by far the best job.

Then eventually I got – I got accepted to UMass, and got a TAship, which meant I didn't have to pay tuition. So that's when I could afford to go. Because I didn't –

SS: So it's like '77?

KC: Yeah, '77. That's when I came up there.

SS: Had you been exposed to the gay movement before that, or – did you see it when you got to Amherst? It was a hotbed, in that area.

KC: Yes. That's why I wanted to get to Massachusetts. I had actually been around – I was with this guy — he later came out, too, which is really funny — but he was in grad school at Ohio State, so I was living up there for awhile. And I got – I got involved with this group called Women Against Rape, which was a really radical group,

when I think back on it. It was an anti-rape group that was explicitly not cooperating with the police. That was not the point. It was to teach women self-defense, and to do neighborhood, women patrolling neighborhoods, and this kind of stuff.

And I remember – I'm not going to say his name in this, because she's still a friend of mine, but I developed this wicked crush on one of the other women in Women Against Rape. And I decided at that point that I had to get the hell out of Ohio. And I remember I talked to my little sister, and said: I don't know exactly what's happening to me, but I know I don't want it to happen in Ohio. So I think I need to leave.

That's when I went out to Massachusetts, and I really didn't know – my sister came with me, actually. We had another one of my dad's old rebuilt cars. It was falling apart. And we just drove out there. And found a place to live, and –

SS: You didn't know about Lesbianville and –

KC: Well, I knew, I knew there was something going on in Amherst. I had seen in – because I was reading *Off Our Backs* at that point, and I had seen something about a lesbian-feminist conference, or something, in Amherst. And I was like, oh, I want to go there. But I just had these vague notions that this would be a place where I could, you know, be who I, whoever it was I was becoming, and I wasn't really sure what that meant, actually.

I have to say, I – by that time, I – I was also raised very religious.

SS: What church were you raised in?

KC: Lutheran. The evangelical wing of the Lutheran. It's funny, because they were – they were very good on issues of race. I have to say some of the earliest anti-racist stuff I did was with my pastor. And school desegregation in Cincinnati; all this stuff. Very good on race. And not bad on the war, not as good as I would have liked.

But they opposed the war, and the Republic- But anything about sex, women; oh my god! I mean, it was so bad.

And I had – so I think that also kind of impeded my development, if you will, around those things, because I was – I eventually kind of sloughed off a lot of that. But boy, a lot of that stuff was really just drilled into our head, three times a week. Catechism; I used to be able – you used to be able to name a Bible verse, and I could say it.

It was, it was serious indoctrination there. So anyway, what was I –

SS: Oh, being exposed to the lesbian community, and –

KC: Yeah, it was like – oh, I don't know what the right – it was like going to Disneyland. You know, I was like, yay! {LAUGHS} Women's Action Collective, and a women's center, and I was just like –

SS: And was that all off-campus, or was it integrated into the school?

KC: Some of it was integrated into the school. Now one thing: I was – I'm an economist, and I was one of two women in my program at that point. And it was a left political economy program, which is, that aspect is really good. The amount of sexual harassment in that program still boggles my mind. I can't count the number of times I had professors with their hands on me – just, it was just ubiquitous. It was amazing, the amount of stuff that went on. And I think that also – that also ended up putting me in touch with a lot of on-campus resources. Because I – silly me, like something was going to happen. I reported every time this happened. I'd go fill out forms at some office, and you know, blah blah blah.

Found out later that the ombudsperson I was reporting most of this to was a friend of one of the guys who was harassing me. And he was calling him and telling him everything I was saying as soon as I left the office. It's ridiculous.

So yeah, I got very involved with the community out there. One problem I had: I had figured out by this time that I was bisexual; that I was – I fell desperately in love with a number of women. I actually had one long-term relationship with a woman. But I was not going to – I was not going to pretend like I didn't have these other feelings, too, even if I decided I wasn't going to act on.

But that was not okay in Northampton, in the late '70s. It was just not okay.

So I decided, kind of shut up about that, frankly, for a while. Because it was – there were too many fights to fight, you know. Dealing with all these guys at school, and all of it; it was too much.

But there were many aspects of that community that were really wonderful, actually, and that I – even though I didn't always agree with people, still have a lot of good feelings.

I just went back. We had a — I'm getting ahead of myself — but we had an anniversary march for those of us who had – I helped to start this group called Gay and Lesbian Activists. It was kind of a left LGB group. It wasn't – "T" was not a question – it was a question, but we didn't recognize it as a question at that point. We were pretty ignorant about things. But we had a reunion march a couple years ago; all of us with our gray hair and everything. And it was a very good organization. It was an organization where I felt really at home, in many ways. Because it was a left

organization. We did solidarity work with Latinos Unidos. We did all this stuff. But we always did it as out gay folks.

So we went to, there was a big strike up in Greenfield Tool & Die when UE [United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America] was striking up at Greenfield Tool & Die. And GALA went up there, with all of our banners, right? And marched on the picket lines. Which at that point was kind of like – whoa! You didn't really show up at UE strikes with gay banners in '79. You know, it was not really what you did.

So there was some very interesting stuff going on with that group.

SS: That period was the Lavender Left period, right?

KC: Yes.

SS: There were socialist gay groups popping up around the country –

KC: Yes.

SS: – hard to imagine now, but –

KC: I know.

SS: – quite a few.

KC: Yeah, I was actually, I was in a socialist-feminist collective for a long time, where we sat around, you did all this reading, and all this. And I was in GALA. And I was also still involved in, I was doing some Central America solidarity stuff; CISPES and all that kind of thing. So there was a lot of stuff going on. And I was doing a little bit of stuff on campus at that point, with the Women's Center, and things like that.

SS: So when did you move to New York?

KC: Let me just say one more thing about Northampton. The other thing that happened then in Northampton — and I want to say this because I think it's been

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erased from historical memory starting in '80, '81. It was after we'd started the GALA marches. And they were becoming pretty big and loud and – we'd regard them as liberation marches, not pride marches. We had a different idea of what this whole thing was about.

But we started getting some very serious harassment. Somebody fired a gun through my window; cut the brake cables on my car; there were death threats on my phone. It got to the point where I would just – it got funny, to tell the truth. At the time, where I'm going like yeah, okay; you been saying this for six months. Either do it or just shut the fuck up, you know? It was just ridiculous.

And then there were a couple of gang rapes, of women in the group, with people making it clear that this was political; that this was not random violence.

And the police were refusing to do anything about it.

It turns out that one of the guys – it turns out it was a group of neo-Nazis. They actually had literature and swastika and all of this stuff. And one of their leaders was the grandson of the chief of police! And the chief of police knew about it, which is why he didn't do anything about it.

So they did some – they left a grenade in front of the women's bookstore. And it got pretty intense for a while.

And eventually, there was a closeted ADA — assistant district attorney — in the DA's office, who did some investigating on his own, and figured out who this was. But it got – I remember, actually, one of the things that I think – what I eventually, I was – I was scared for myself, but I was also scared for a lot of the community. It became, the community was pretty petrified. And Jedda and I and a couple other women – I had been up in the country, so I had known guns my whole life. You had to have guns.

There were rabid raccoons that had to be shot, and there were snakes that had to be shot, and you know, you had guns.

So I decided to buy a handgun, and got — I had a closeted friend at the *Journal News* — and got my picture taken on the firing range, practicing, with a handgun. Right? And it was not a big deal for me, because I'd done this since my childhood.

But I never got another death threat on the phone, after that. It was very interesting.

So anyway, that — but it — I learned a lot about politics during that time, because there were a lot of very well known lesbians in Northampton — oh, eventually, the ADA figured out that it was the grandson of the chief of police, and got this guy arrested. This was after one of them — this was after the brake cables got cut on my car, and it was very dangerous. I almost ran into a kid. It was a mess.

But he left fingerprints all over my car — duh. These guys were not — that's one thing you gotta say about neo-Nazis; they're not too bright. If you try, it's not that hard to catch them.

So he got arrested, brought to trial. And I had to go in and identify, you know, yada yada. And what was interesting to me is that there were a lot of very well known women, lesbians in the community who didn't want to be in a courtroom. And Latinos Unidos, who I had done solidarity work with, and they packed the court. They packed the court.

And I was like, what is there some other case that? They were like: no. When the Klan came over, you guys were here for us. We're here for you. If they're going to identify people, they're going to identify all of us.

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And it was a very important lesson to me about the people who are there when the chips are down are not necessarily the people, number one, who talk a lot, and number two, who share what you would think of as your identify characteristics.

It's people who have – who know what it's like to be targeted, were the people who were there that day. And actually, his name was Robert Kremensky, this particular guy who was convicted. He went to jail for three months. And then he had a mental breakdown, because he couldn't stand being in jail, and they let him out. It was kind of amazing.

And I didn't even – jail was not the point anyway, as far as I was concerned. But – but it needed to be fought to make it clear that this was unacceptable, to treat lesbians like this. This was not, this was not all right.

So that was the experience I was actually coming from when I came to New York, and it kind of –

SS: What year are we in?

KC: Let's see: '85.

SS: Eighty-five. Okay, now, had you ever worked with gay men?

Yes, in GALA.

KC: In GALA, yes.

SS: So AIDS was identified in '81 and '82.

KC: Yes.

SS: But I don't know how present it was in Northampton.

KC: It was a little more present for me because my sister's boyfriend was a hemophiliac, actually. And he had – he had to do a lot of Factor. He was very, very severely hemophiliac. So he had gotten sick pretty early in the epidemic, actually. And –

oh, and by the way, condoms do work. My sister slept with him for seven years and is not infected. But I saw – I was beginning to see the way that he was being treated. It was the whole thing where the nurses — not nurses — but the aides would leave his food outside the hospital room; all of this stuff.

So I had, because of Mark, I – I didn't, for me, the personal experience of AIDS – started out through my family, and not through the gay community so much. Though by the end of my time in Northampton, I remember; one of the last marches: I was usually the MC. Gerri and I were usually the MC's for the march. And we had a dancer who came and did a memorial dance for people with AIDS in one of the last ones before I left. And I remember – I remember – it kind of stuck this thing in motion in the back of my head – this is going to be a big problem. But I wasn't – in touch with it very much. But it was like, ooh. One of those things on the horizon that is going to be – going to be a problem.

SS: How did you get to ACT UP?

KC: Actually, I think it was – I had known Mike Spiegel through SDS stuff. And he was working on – let's see. Oh, I'm sorry, I need to back up for just a second.

The other thing that happened when I was in Northampton is, I needed a lawyer during all the harassment stuff. And hired – for twenty dollars, I didn't have any money — but got Brian [Glick] to be my lawyer, who was with Peter at the time, who died of AIDS. That was another connection. And then Brian and I got together. So he actually came to New York with me. And – well, sort of. He didn't really move, but he would come and visit and all this stuff. But so, whatever.

And he and Mike Spiegel were also friends. So we both knew Mike. And Mike was in ACT UP. And said – I don't know, I must have brought something up about either Peter or about Mark — something about AIDS — and Mike said, oh, you gotta – you're interested in AIDS, you gotta come to ACT UP. So –

And that was right arou-, it was right after the Cosmo demo. I had heard vaguely about that. And I did know I wanted – it was – in Northampton, it was fine to work in this organization with men, but I also wanted an organization where there was a strong women's presence. I didn't want to – because there were some gay organizations around Northampton that were predominantly male, and I just – I didn't feel very comfortable with that. So I wanted something where there was at least a good crew of women I could work with.

So I showed up. Actually, I remember, I – my first meeting – I was brand new to New York. And my first big thing was, oh my god, I found the community center. I can get lost in my own, my own house. I have no sense of direction.

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But I remember walking into the room, and just loving the energy. It sounds funny, because obviously, there was so much despair and so much pain and everything. But there was a lot of hope, also. There was all of this, we can do something about this. We don't have to just be powerless. We can change this.

SS: I'm going to ask a huge conceptual question.

KC: Oy god, okay. {LAUGHS}

SS: So there are plenty of people in ACT UP that came from the kind of tradition that you came from.

KC: Yes.

SS: They had an analysis; they had applied it to many different movements –

KC: Yes.

SS: – had a large agenda and go through life and the –

KC: Yes.

SS: – and I’m one of them. Seeing where the action is, and going in there, trying to get social change.

KC: Right.

SS: And then there are people in ACT UP who had never had a political thought in their lives –

KC: Right. Yes.

SS: – and came to ACT UP because it affected them personally. Now what was that relationship like, between those two different kinds of people? And there were plenty in between, as well.

KC: I actually think that there was a lot of tension, I think, between those groups. And I’m not sure that’s a bad thing. I think, I think ACT UP had a lot of tensions about gender, about race, about class — a lot of unacknowledged tensions about class — and a lot of tensions about perennial activists, like us, versus people who just were worried about AIDS.

Well, I shouldn’t say “just”; it’s not a “just” thing.

But – I don’t – and I think, so I think that caused a lot of contention. But I also think it might have been healthy, that the – because one of the things that I saw go on — and I also helped start ACT UP Westchester; we can talk about that later — but one of the things I saw go on: some of us who are political activists over a long time can get lost

in our heads and our analysis, and forget about stuff that's happening day to day on the ground, and does this person have their drugs? And on the other hand, the people who are – this is their first time they've ever dealt with anything, can have a hard time putting it into a bigger framework.

So when that works well, I think it can be incredibly productive, and keep us activists, us perennial activists, with our feet on the ground, and help people who are not activists to see what's happening to them in a bigger context, but also to be more effective. Because if you just think about how am I going to get my next prescription refilled, you're not going to do the things that'll actually help you get your next prescription refilled.

So I think that can be helpful. But it's not pleasant. I take very seriously Bernice Reagon Johnson's quote about: if you are comfortable, you're not in a coalition and you're not doing politics. You're doing support groups. And so I think it's important to be – to be in those kinds of mixed groups. They tend to blow up over time. They don't tend to be very stable. But I think while they last, they can be productive.

SS: Do you think that that played –

JW: We should change tapes.

KC: Okay.

SS: I'm jumping to the end now, but ACT UP in some ways broke down around the question of access.

KC: Right.

SS: And you could say that partially that had to do with people who had an image, a political image, of transformation that was quite broad. And people

who were focused on their own immediate experience only. So that is what happened, partially, at the end –

KC: Yes.

SS: – of that contentious relationship. Of course –

KC: Yes.

SS: -- some people became incredibly politicized by being in ACT UP.

KC: Yes.

SS: But some people who were lifers burned out and never did anything again.

KC: Right.

SS: But I mean, it ultimately expressed itself politically, this conflict.

KC: Yes, definitely. I, and I think that had we not all been so traumatized by so many people dying so quickly that we might have been able to continue to do the emotional patching up and the compromising that could have kept the organization going. I think it was – so many of us were so devastated and burnt out by the number of fu-, I mean, I, I actually bought two more funeral outfits, so that I could – because I didn't have anything black. So I went out and bought a bunch of black dresses. It was a point where I couldn't get to the dry cleaner between funerals.

And some of it was people I went because I respected their work. But some of it was, like when Ray [Navarro] died, when Tom [Cunningham] died; like this. It, it was my heart being pulled out of me. And then to go to a meeting, and try to be emotionally present, and figure out, okay, this one and this one are screaming at each other; how can we get them to hear each other? I think a lot of us who could have helped

with that did not have the emotional resources left, because we were so – it was just so hard to be in that kind of situation for so long.

And I think some other people have said this in the interviews, but – I think it's good to, when somebody dies, to stand up in front of the room and go, ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS. But that's not enough. I'm sorry. When somebody died, and took my insides with him, ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS, fist in the air, is not sufficient.

And I think it's – so there were – I think as long as there were enough of us who had our emotional resources together, and could some of that, because I remember Tom Cunningham, for example, who had been in T&D, and then kind of drifted towards more of the social activist stuff. And I remember him running back and forth between people during meetings; saying, no no no, this is what she means; no no no, this is what he means and trying to get people to talk and listen. And a lot of those people died. And a lot of the rest of us who were left were so – I remember feeling kind of emotionally unable to function, at points. And I think a lot of people felt like that. So we didn't – I think when people feel like that, sometimes they get rigid; and they get unwilling to listen and unwilling to compromise, because they're so traumatized and so scared.

And so people who might have – today, bring them down, sit them in this room, they could talk to each other, they could figure it out. In the middle of three funerals this week, and – whatever, it – there wasn't enough of all of us left to work out some of that stuff.

And maybe given the nature of the crisis, that was somewhat inevitable, though I think if we had paid more attention to some of that, we might have at least

prolonged the organization for a while. I wish to God that ACT UP had, in its full manifestation — I know there's still groups that call themselves ACT UP or whatever — but the thousand people in Cooper Hall could have lasted long enough to deal with some of the international questions. Because the — if there had been a really nationally functioning network of strong, well-organized groups like ACT UP to deal with some of these questions about international AIDS, I think it could have made an incredible difference. And —

Even I was thinking: when they started doing the mandatory names reporting stuff. I said, they couldn't have done this if we could have had a thousand people in Cooper Union last Monday. They couldn't have done it. And just all this stuff that goes on. Little things that — and now it's on page nine thousand of the *Times*, instead of in the front.

Tape II
00:05:00

So I think there's been a real — a real loss. So I don't know. I remember thinking, I — I said this to Ann. I still can't say her name right, but Ann Cvetkovich. But I remember being at that meeting, where the 076 trial was being debated. And I said to her, I remember feeling like I'm standing on a train track, and I am watching a train come at me. And I am too exhausted and burnt out to get off the track. It's coming at me, I know it's coming. And I'm just like, okay, just hit me. I can't, I, I can't. I can't.

So yeah, I think there were a lot of things that came together. But so it, it takes, it takes a lot — and I've learned this then with ACT UP Westchester and a lot of other groups, because — that it takes a lot of energy, and people who have certain kinds of emotional presence and emotional skills, to mediate those brand-new-activists, seasoned-activists kinds of things. And — it takes a lot of energy. And I think we just didn't have it.

SS: Okay. This is kind of a weird question, but – so you were a Lutheran from Ohio.

KC: Right.

SS: Most people in ACT UP were Catholic or Jewish. I mean –

KC: Well –

SS: – It was Jewish, Italian, Latino – that was basically –

KC: Yeah.

SS: – the overall. And then there were the gay guys from the Midwest who had come to New York, and weren't –

KC: Well –

SS: – either Italian and Jewish, or whatever.

KC: Right, right.

SS: So what was that like for you, just in as cultural style?

KC: I do remember – I loved the politics of ACT UP, and I loved the activism. I do remember feeling culturally a little – a half a step off a lot of times. And – at first, I identified it – well, I think some of it was being rural. My – the analogies I would make would make no sense to people. And the analogies they were making to me made no sense to me. The ways that people would talk, I didn't – and some of it was also being new to New York. And people would say, oh, let's run up to here or there. And I'm like I know where the Village is; I know where Midtown is. That's about it. I just – I didn't even know whether the Bronx is north or south of Manhattan. I literally just got here.

So I identified with that. And I also – when I first got into ACT UP, I remember feeling a little class-alienated from some of the people who were very

prominent, who clearly had come — and they were talking about Ivy League schools, and all of this, and I had gone to undergrad school on a scholarship, and then went to a state university. I was feeling a little bit like, ooh, I'm out of my league.

SS: But there were also people in ACT UP who were basically homeless —

KC: Well, that's what I found. I'm just saying, the first meeting, I felt like — because Larry was there, and talking about something going on at Yale or whatever, and I was like, oh my god. But then I started — as I was there longer, I was like: no, that's not, there's much more going on here than that. And started to feel more comfortable about the class stuff.

But yeah, there was still some — it wasn't tension, it was just kind of — I'd say something once in a while, and people go: Hunh? So yeah, I think that was true.

SS: The question of class in a gay organization — gay men — if there's a potential class mobility available to gay men —

KC: Yes.

SS: — who no longer have to marry women of their class;

KC: Right.

SS: — and who can pass in the gay community, and can have upward mobility.

KC: Right. Yes.

SS: And you saw that in ACT UP.

KC: Yes.

SS: So people came from all backgrounds; but also it was very constantly in motion —

KC: Yes.

SS: – what class people were living in.

KC: Yes. I do remember because I have a head for numbers and do economics, I was, I worked with some of the finance stuff for a while. And the whole debate about whether to get tax exemption, and I helped write that leaflet about the different alternatives and all this stuff. And I remember: we went to a meeting. It was – I can't remember the name of the committee. It was a financial alternatives committee, or something like that. And we were going to get some pro bono advice from our lawyer, which I thought was a great idea. And went to this meeting, and I walked in to the building. And there was an original Jackson Pollack in the room where we were going to have this meeting. And I was like: oh my god! I might spill coffee on it!

Tape II
00:10:00

I was just like – and I was, I felt so out of my element. It was on the Upper East Side someplace. I'd never been to the Upper East Side.

SS: So it gave you more class access being in ACT UP, in a sense.

KC: Yeah. Yeah. In a certain way. Yes. But it turned out it was okay, because I knew enough about spreadsheets and numbers and whatever that I actually could make a contribution. But it felt a little strange.

SS: Is there a correlation between some of the class access of ACT UP, and some of its successes?

KC: Oh, definitely. No, I think that's –

SS: What is that relationship?

KC: Well, I – see, I think one of the reasons ACT UP was successful is because there were a number of us — largely not of that class — who had a long political history, and knew how to do leaflets and demos, and how to, all of that stuff. And then,

there was a group of people — almost all male, almost all white male — who had access, in ways that I couldn't even understand when I first got there.

But I think that combination was really powerful. Because they had a sense of entitlement and connections that if we wrote a good leaflet, they could get it someplace that I couldn't get it. They couldn't write the leaflet because they didn't know how. They didn't know how to do a lot of the on-the-ground political organizing. But they did have kinds of access that I think were very helpful.

And would call somebody at the *Times*, or call somebody at CBS News — all of this stuff. I wouldn't even know.

So that's another one of those tensions that I think was — I think they learned some politics from us, and we got access to some resources that we wouldn't otherwise have had. That tax lawyer on the Upper East Side was, I, god knows how many thousand dollars he would have charged if that was not pro bono. And there's no way we could have gotten that advice.

SS: Now I want to ask you about this whole 501(c)(3) thing. C4.

KC: Yeah.

SS: What was the — when did that come up as an idea? Why? And what was the debate?

KC: The reason it came up is that a number of people wanted to make major donations to ACT UP; sometimes in their wills and sometimes just a bunch of money. And they wanted to get tax exemption for it. And in a couple cases, they were — it was iffy whether they'd be willing to give the money if they didn't get tax exemption for it.

And so some people – we don't need to get into the individuals. So there were several people — Dan Baker, some others — who thought we should pursue this question of becoming tax-exempt so that we could get this money. This was serious money. This was like –

SS: This was when we were raising like a million dollars at the –

KC: Yeah.

SS: – art auction that time. Okay.

KC: Yeah. This was like a 2-million-dollar possible donation, from one person.

SS: Did that happen?

KC: Some of it happened, not all of it. So that was the impetus, was these people who wanted to give money but wouldn't give it unless we were tax-exempt.

I had worked with a number of tax-exempt organizations — you know, yada yada. I had, I had mixed feelings about this, to tell you the truth. On the one hand, if somebody's waving a check in front of you, and you need money, it's hard to say no we're too politically pure to take your 2 million dollars! I'm like, oh my god, I've never seen 2 million dollars in my life.

On the other hand — and there were — well, on the other hand – the government obviously can get in your business when you're tax exempt in a way that they can't when you're not. And –

SS: What they can do?

KC: Well, they can audit your finances. And in the course of auditing your finances, they can find out a lot about what you're doing, and who's doing what, and it, it gives access in ways that can be problematic.

Now there are other things that I wanted to explore. For example: IFCO, Interreligious Foundation Community Organizations — they do a lot of Cuba solidarity stuff — and I knew the guy who was the head of that at the time, Lucius Walker. And he said that he was — I don't know if I should say this on tape — he was willing to serve as a (c)(3) sponsor, which meant they would take the donation, and basically launder the money for us.

SS: Great.

KC: Right? And I thought that was a viable alternative. It was going to be complicated, because we were — the way he was willing to do that is if it's some organization that is within the purview of what his organization does, that he's allowed to serve as a sponsor. And whether AIDS activism was within the purview of IFCO was a little — questionable. So it was going to be a little bit of work to see if he could do that without endangering his own organization's tax status.

Tape II
00:15:00

But that was more of the kind of thing that I probably personally would have pursued. But it — I think — I think it became — what do I say? This fight became much more symbolic than real, in certain ways. And it became more about our basic stance to the government than about — and about the police, and whether there was police infiltration. All of these things kind of came into this discussion — some of which were real, and some of which were totally irrelevant.

So I remember being in front of the floor that night, trying to make sense of this discussion. And some of it was about whether we should try for (c)(3) or (c)(4), which was another possibility; or whether we should do the, go through IFCO; and some of it was about stuff that was just about the government in general, and the FBI, and all of

this stuff. And so it became a really complicated discussion to try to figure out and mediate properly.

And like I say, I sort of had a small preference toward the IFCO option. But I would have – I could easily have lived with anything the floor wanted to do. It was not something I had a big – sometimes I had big things to grind –

SS: What did you decide to do? Did you decide to go with it?

KC: I'm sorry, what? Yeah, they decided to go with the (c)(4). But see, the problem with the (c)(4) is that the donors then don't get tax exemption. There's much less oversight by the government. It was kind of a compromise. I frankly thought it was not a great compromise, because – I felt like the (c)(4) kind of – if people were worried about government entrée into our finances, they kind of gave them that with a (c)(4), but they didn't get the tax exemption anyway. So I thought, let's either – why don't we either go in whole hog, and go for the (c)(3); or say, fuck you, IRS, and whatever.

It is true that in cases where – the government has been known to use the tax system to go after leftists. They were prosecuting MoveOn for supposed campaign fin-. How many different organizations are doing funny campaign finance stuff, right? And they go after MoveOn? Please.

SS: But who was going to give \$2,000,000?

KC: I actually can't – I – I can't.

SS: Are they still alive?

KC: Uh, no.

SS: Okay, wow.

KC: No. But we actually had to sign confidentiality agreements –

SS: Oh, wow.

KC: – on this committee, because people were worried about different people's finances being known, and whatever. So I actually can't. But, but yeah, there was it was a number, it was that big one, and then there were a couple other sizeable donations that people wanted to do. And like I said, that particular one ended up giving a fair amount of money, though not the whole thing, it was also, you see – it was also complicated with estate taxes, and all of this mess. It was a very – complicated mess.

SS: Now what were some of the committees that you worked on?

KC: I did – well, I was on committees for a lot of the major demos — the FDA, NIH, stuff like that.

SS: We have footage of you at the NIH pre-action meeting.

KC: Oh yeah? Oh my god.

SS: While Tony – what's Tony's last name?

JW: Malliaris.

KC: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Yeah, I love that rap song, actually. That's very good. Actually, there were a number of them that I was on the planning committee for, and then I wasn't well enough to go, which was frustrating. I couldn't do the CDC action; and I couldn't do Stop the Church. I had been real – La Cocina, the affinity group I was in, was very involved – Ray [Navarro] was in La Cocina, I was very involved in that. Getting ready for the Church action. And I had pneumonia, I just could not do it. I actually – I tried to get my doctor to, he was like – no! Heh heh heh. Your blood oxygen's really low. You are not going to go outside in December and scream!

So I couldn't do a bunch of them. But the main standing committee — I mean, I did women's caucus stuff. And then the Women and AIDS booklet.

Tape II
00:20:00

There were a couple other things. I actually – I did a little bit of stuff with T&D, not a lot. But I was kind of a science nerd in high school. So I found some of that to be interesting, and I also kind of – one thing I thought it was important to do was to – do things to try to heal those splits a little bit, and to get some of us who were more political to sit on T&D, and maybe get some T&D people to come to La Cocina, and try to get a little more communication going between these groups. I wasn't very successful, partly because it was just – you know, too much. By the time you got done with the regular ACT UP meetings, and then women's caucus meetings, and – I was driving an hour each way for this. And I was also trying to get tenure at SUNY at the same time, so things were a little – and there were fights up there.

SS: I want to ask you about being sick in ACT UP. Now ACT UP, was an organization where there were many sick people.

KC: Right.

SS: And so what was it like to be sick in ACT UP?

KC: It was an exercise in denial. It was amazing. I remember when Ray lost his sight — and yes, I will get back to the basic question — but Ray lost his sight, and I made an announcement to ask people to help read some of the ACT UP literature onto tape for him, so he could still participate in demos. And I got all of these people who just attacked me mercilessly, saying that was not political. And you know that's service, and that has nothing to do with ACT UP.

And I was like, wait a minute: this is to enable one of our long-time members to know what's going on, and to come to demos when he feels better. This is, I'm not trying to become GMHC here. I want to help this particular person.

But it was –

What was it like to be sick? In some ways, I think – in some ways, it was – my background as a disabled and sick person was helpful. Because I know how to work the medical system in ways that very few people in that group did before they became HIV-positive. I've got a very rare connective tissue disease; most doctors have never heard of it. I was misdiagnosed until I was in my twenties. I know how to get what I want out of doctors, and I know how to get what I want out of insurance companies. And I've taken them to court; and I have always won. You learn how to pull strings in this system.

And so particularly with individuals who are friends of mine, who are not getting things they needed from doctors or from insurance companies or whatever; oh, oh, give me the phone. They're not going to fuck with you like this. Give me the phone, I'll write the letter, let's get a lawyer to write a letter.

So I think it was – it was not new to me to be in hospitals and to be fighting for medical access and all of that stuff. So I think that was helpful.

I know when Ray was real sick, there were a number of things I was able to help him get and do that – you learn how – you learned who to talk to, you figure out who's –

SS: So what about in the meetings or at the demos? Was there –

KC: There was not much consciousness. It was kind of frustrating, actually. And I remember, even a couple of small-group meetings that would be held in a fourth-floor walk-up. And you know, I had to go up on my butt. I couldn't do it. I literally could not get to meetings.

Yeah, I think – some of it – I mean, I felt for people around some of this, because some of it was people who were terrified of dying, and needed to deny that at

that point, AIDS could be fatal – wasn't always, obviously. So I think there was a – don't talk to me about that, I don't want to hear about it. Especially when I'd get pneumonia. People would run like la-, it was amazing! I'd say I'd had pneumonia. Boom! Everybody's gone!

And I could understand. It was a little frustrating.

SS: Why, because they thought it was contagious?

KC: No, because they didn't want to hear about it, because they were afraid they were going to get pneumonia. I would get these emotional reactions from – from a lot of people, actually. So it could be frustrating, at times. I didn't find much disability consciousness in the group. There wasn't – I remember, for example, Harry and I were friends –

SS: Harry Weider.

KC: Yes.

SS: He passed away.

KC: Yeah, I know. I know, hit by a car.

SS: I'm just saying that for the record, for the tape –

KC: After all he went through. You know, and he was so afraid he was going to get killed by the police, and then he got hit by a car. So oh my god, Harry.

But I remember – I was talking about just trying to function in demos; and trying to figure out, for example, for me, getting arrested is a life-threatening experience. Because I'm severely diabetic, I've got all these things. If I get held overnight and I'm not fed, I'm dead.

So he and I were talking about the ways in which – and sometimes that was frustrating. I remember – if you – and even in terms of going up against the cops,

and the ways in which radicalism would be defined as physical courage. Whereas Harry and I had physical courage every day, trying to breathe. But that didn't count as physical courage, right? If you couldn't run and – there was a real emphasis on physical vigor and strength. And so not much attention paid to – well, I remember, for example — at the NIH demo — I was in a chair. I was in a wheelchair. I absolutely could not walk. I had a broken, I had dislocated and then broken two metatarsals in my foot, and I just could not put weight on it. It was excruciating.

I didn't know what was wrong, and I had just done it before I left, and I went back and found out they were broken, and I had to get surgery, and yada yada. But anyway, I could not put weight on this foot.

And it was interesting, because I was down in D.C., trying to navigate the Metro system, which I was not familiar with. And I remember, a couple of times being left on platforms, and things not being accessible. And it's one way Tom Cunningham and I became close, is that I was kind of flipped out. Here I'm sitting on a subway platform. I have no idea where I am; I can't get anywhere; there's no elevator. And I can't walk. And Tom came up behind me, and took my chair, and said: okay, don't worry, I'm not going anywhere until we got you out of here.

And I was like, thank you. Okay, I can breathe now.

So some of the people, and I think Ray and I bonded around that too, because Ray got really sick, and he would understand if – there were just a lot of things I could not do. And at that time he was blind, or whatever. So we would kind of bond around – around our limitations, and kind of the unwillingness of the group to look at those questions very carefully. And I understood it. I understand: if you've been able-

bodied your whole life, and you suddenly have a life-threatening illness; that that must be – an incredible blow.

One of my first memories is a doctor telling my mother I wasn't going to live long enough to go to school. Right?

So this was — she slapped him, by the way. Right? Which I thought: my mother was real crazy, but that was one of the things I was like: go, Mom! Which, that was kind of – a good symbolic action, in terms of the medical system, as far as I was concerned, you know? Fuck you!

But I can imagine that if that had not been your experience, and you thought you were healthy, and then all of a sudden, you're in your twenties or your thirties or whatever; and you're facing this; that you might not want to – you might either not want to or be unable to deal with somebody else's physical limitations very well.

And I would push it. But I also had some compassion for people who ran when I had pneumonia, because I knew what was going on for them. And it's not easy, if you're dealing with your own, and somebody else's, too.

My sister, my little sister got breast cancer a few years ago. And it was interesting to watch her confront her mortality for the first time. She's been frighteningly healthy her whole life! Marathon runner, this whole thing. And I remember thinking: wow, this is like — and she wasn't very pleasant in the process. And I remember thinking, wow, this is like watching some of those people in ACT UP. It's that same thing. You have this illusion – you had this illusion that you were going to live a long and healthy life. And you're finding out that may not be true.

Sometimes it was frustrating. I remember, I was supposed to be – a Hoffman-La Roche demo in Nutley. I was real involved in organizing that. And I got

pneumonia again. And I remember, I woke up that morning: and I was trying to figure out, my fever was like 102, 103, or something like that. Is there any way I can do this? Maybe I can drive the van, and stay warm. And it was just – I was dizzy, and there was no way this was going to happen.

But yeah, it was frustrating, just on its own terms sometimes. And then sometimes it was frustrating to – people's reactions, or lack of awareness.

SS: I want to ask you about campaigns. And I know you were involved in many. But if you could pick one that really stands out for you, and take us through it, that would be helpful.

Tape II
00:30:00

KC: Okay. Let's see. Hm. Hm. I guess I would probably say the NIH. One thing that was interesting to me and yes, I will go through it in more detail, but one thing that was interesting to me: a couple years ago, I went back — I'm a packrat, so I have a lot of handouts from things. And I looked at the stuff from the FDA demo, and I looked at the stuff from the NIH demo. And the similarities were interesting, but the differences were also interesting. Because – and some of it was lip service. But by the time of the NIH – there was serious stuff about women and access and people of color, at least in the demands. And I went back and looked at the FDA stuff, and – nowhere, nothing.

So I was not involved in writing that NIH stuff. But there had, it was heartening to me to look at the – it was basically mainstream T&D people, I believe — very predominantly white and male — there had been some increase in consciousness about certain kinds of issues.

SS: But also because the Women with AIDS movement –

KC: Right.

SS: – was not in place during the FDA action.

KC: Exactly. But this whole process had started to change. I think there was internal change in the organization, not nearly as much as we all would have liked. But there was change within the organization as time went on because of outside movements, and because the dynamics within the organization. You get screamed at often enough for being sexist or racist. You think you're not being effected, but eventually some people made some change.

In terms of the action itself: I was in the Invisible Women affinity group. That was fun. And we wrapped ourselves in gauze to talk about women's invisibility in the AIDS epidemic.

I was also a little bit involved during that action with the PISD caucus: People with Immune System Disorders. One of the side effects of my disability is immune disregulation. So I, obviously, I get pneumonia. Pneumonia and I are old friends. But I get a lot of other kinds of weird infections, too, so I was a little bit involved with them.

And I'm not sure what you wanted. But the meetings and the – blah blah blah.

SS: What was the demand at the NIH? Why was there an NIH demo?

KC: To my mind, there were – it isn't one. You'd have to say several. And I think different groups had different emphases, obviously, on different demands. I think the T&D people were primarily concerned about the lack of any kind of cutting-edge experimental drugs getting into the ACTG pipeline. That they were doing 27 ways of looking — excuse me — at AZT and ddI, and it was getting ridiculous and boring. And they weren't really – the government research has to be cutting edge. It's going to

have to be more so than the private stuff. So if the government wasn't doing it, it probably wasn't going to get done.

So I think they were very concerned about that. Invisible Women and some other groups, I think, were – we were very concerned about the lack of women in clinical trials; and also the lack of funding for ADAP and lack of financial access to what drugs there were – not that they were great.

So I think for me, those were the two big demands on that demo. There are a number of other subsidiary demands. But I think those were the big ones.

SS: What was won at the NIH.

KC: I'm sorry, what?

SS: What was won?

KC: Which one? Well, actually, I think it helped – I'm not sure it helped a lot with the first one; but it did help with the second one. It was part of a process, the women's health movement and a lot of other people — it wasn't just us, by any stretch of the imagination, but part of a push to get Bernadette Healy to take women in clinical trials more seriously. And at this point, there's a lot more women in a lot of clinical trials.

So I think it was part of – and again, I don't want to overestimate our importance there; there were a lot of other women's health activists doing a lot of stuff. But I think we were part of the push to open up trials.

And I think that's really important. I know from my own experience that I've been put on drugs where I get side effects where my doctor is like, what?

And I ask – and he'll say, I've used this on 25 patients before.

And I say, what was the gender of the 25 patients?

And he goes: oh! {LAUGHS}

Hello? I'm having, my liver enzymes are through the roof.

This didn't happen with men.

Well, guess what? I got a higher percent of body fat.

So I think that is really important, as somebody who's been on the other end of it. It's not good to take a drug and have no idea what's going to go on.

SS: I want to ask you about the speeding train, as you refer to it, 076.

KC: Oh, okay. Oh, yes. That was part of the speed-, there were a number of cars on that train, shall we say. Here I go, with my rural analogy again.

SS: What did you feel at the time, and how do you look at it now?

About 076.

KC: I think at the time – let's see, I'm trying to remember. At the time, it felt to me – like a tragedy, actually. Like a classical Greek tragedy, where you've got two groups of very well-intentioned people. And I do believe that everybody – I'm sure that there were people in ACT UP who were just there for bad reasons. But by and large, the vast majority of people were very well-intentioned, and trying to do what they could to end this crisis. And because of class and gender and race and etcetera differences in background, they had very different ideas about the right way to go about that.

And that – more upper class white males thought that you sit down in rooms with people and negotiate; and some of us who were not from that background would say, no, you stand in front of the building and scream.

And what I actually believed then and believe now is that the people inside the building will not get anywhere unless there's somebody outside the building

Tape II
00:35:00

screaming. Martin Luther King said: I could not be Martin unless there was Malcolm. Right?

So – I actually think you need both. But I think that was one of those times where the inside people and the outside people both dug in their heels, and took out some of their terror and frustration and pain on each other, instead of on the people who should have been getting it.

And like I say, I remember being at that meeting, and I remember, I had been to a funeral the day before. And that – I was trying to get up the energy to speak, and I literally didn't think I could do it. I thought I might pass out if I tried to stand up, I was so exhausted and drained.

And I say, it just felt like, god, here it comes.

SS: A lot of people have discussed this inside/outside strategy. But I'm just going to put out my thoughts, and you tell me what you think.

KC: Okay.

SS: There's a personal issue, of people who could never be an insider, who have no choice, and have to be outsiders. And then as the people who can be insiders start to become them, there's a resentment or an anger – You know what I'm saying? It's not just a strategy decision. It's –

KC: I think that's true. And I also think – and I hope this – I'm not being condescending to anybody. But I also think that some of the people who were screaming the loudest were people who were very new to politics; and who were not used to making any compromises, and thought that the way you, you fight it to the end. Right? And I think that some of us — not all of us — but some of us who had been involved in other political struggles for a long time – were going, ew, ew, you didn't need to say it that

way. You could have said the same thing nicer, and he would now not be jumping up and down screaming. There was some political naïveté, also, in the way that some of these things were presented and brought out in ways that were unnecessarily provocative, maybe.

Now, I agree with you that there was – there was some resentment for people who were inside, and whatever. I'm not sure how much of that is about – inside with respect to the AIDS crisis, and how much of it is about inside with respect to broader things.

I mean most of us on the Women's Caucus committee — we kept changing our name, whatever — we were never going to be bond traders even if we wanted to. I didn't want to be a bond trader. But there is – it could get old sometimes, listening to people talk about their, oh yeah, I'm going to fly, do such-and-such, I'm going to go to Fire Island for the weekend and relax; I'm going to ng-, ng-, ng-, ng-, ng. And I'm sitting there: okay – because I was also – one of my sisters is very disabled, and I've sent her a fair amount of money. And I'd be sitting there thinking: okay, how many gallons of gas do I have in the car? How many – can I get home? Right? Do I have to try to get five bucks from somebody to get enough gas to get home.

So yeah, I think there can be more generalized kinds of class resentments and whatever. And the people, because we didn't talk about broader politics that much, the people who had the privileges and the access could be almost humorously unaware of their privileges and their access, and assume that other people had the same privileges and access when they didn't.

And again: I don't think that was badly intentioned. But it could get on your nerves. I mean like, oh, please.

Tape II
00:40:00

Tape III
00:00:00

JW: We have to change tapes.

SS: All right. Let's go back to 076.

KC: Okay.

SS: So 076, just to recap was the trial in which pregnant women were given drugs to keep their fetuses from seroconverting.

KC: Yes.

SS: And a huge controversy in ACT UP.

KC: Yes.

SS: Do you remember where you came down on that controversy at the time?

KC: I was concerned about the trial. I remember – if I remember correctly, it had a placebo arm in it. Which, I did not like placebo trials at all for AIDS drugs. I thought it was really stupid, especially when it was AZT. It wasn't like this was a new drug. Duh; we already know what it does. And we already know what happens when women are HIV-positive and give birth. It's not like they needed a placebo arm here.

So that, I thought that was really stupid.

And I was also – because I had worked on the *Women, AIDS and Activism* book, and talked to Risa [Denenberg] a lot, I was worried about this kind of one-shot approach, where the women would just get it near delivery. And I was worried what that would do, in terms of resistance, for her; that later, she might be resistant to the only – well, there were a couple other drugs; ddI and stuff, but sort of the main drug, that she couldn't use it for herself. So I was worried about that.

So I did think there was a basis for concern. I also — and Marion [Banzhaf] and I had talked about this somewhat — I also took seriously that some of the women of color who were involved in the process of putting this trial together thought that it was flawed, but better than nothing.

So while I didn't — it was one of those things where I didn't like it — What I would have liked for us to have done and I don't know if this would have been possible, I would have liked for us to push harder to make some significant changes in that trial. That, no placebo arm. I think that is something that might have been winnable.

And something like the women who are on this trial get free AIDS medical care for life, because you may be forcing them into a situation of resistant HIV.

So I guess I would have preferred some kind of a compromise thing. And if we could have gotten the whole organization behind a compromise, I think we might have gotten something.

I don't know. I have to say, I wasn't as involved in the machinations around setting up this trial as some other people were. But that was what I would have liked.

And of course, what happened is the positions became very bifurcated, and you were either for it or against it. And I think a lot of other tensions and conflicts were kind of being played out through the fight —

SS: What were they?

KC: — over this. Well, I think some of the stuff we talked about, in terms of class and gender; and to some extent, race; access, non-access. Politics versus broader political view versus a day-to-day drugs-into-bodies kind of thing.

This kind of became a lightning rod, I think, for a lot of those kinds of conflicts. And I don't think we had the emotional resources to do the kind of – we had, at some times in the past, come up with compromise positions, and T&D would come with something, and some of us would roll our eyes and go, okay, but why don't we add this and do that. And you'd have David Robinson chairing, and figuring out how to get people to talk to each other and come to some kind of middle position.

And for some reason, we didn't seem, for a lot of reasons, I think we didn't seem to have that ability at that point.

SS: Now anyone who was in the feminist movement and knows the history of feminist movement, would understand the critique of 076. Women had always been these vectors –

KC: Vessels, vectors, yes. Exactly.

SS: It was the same argument that the anti-abortionists used. It's all very familiar.

KC: Right.

SS: Do you think that the fact that 076 actually turned out to be successful, and that now there are no more children born with HIV in this country, does that justify or trump that situation? Does it prove that people were being knee-jerk, in some way?

KC: I don't think they were being knee-jerk. I think that – it's like Tuskegee, right? That African Americans were real reluctant to take AIDS drugs because they had been messed over by the medical establishment so many times. And I think a lot of women were like, eh? Here we go again.

Tape III
00:05:00

It's a problem when and this is going to sound like a really strange analogy, but it's a problem when you're living out your history, instead of the present. And I think – I remember my father said that about Vietnam, right? That his generation looked at Vietnam and saw World War II. Right? And it's – you can respond to things that happen in the past, and that can be helpful in informing how you look at things in the present. But you have to be careful to draw some lessons from the past, but not to draw everything from the past, because maybe this time it really is different.

And I think that's some of what went on. Women – even then, I think we tend to forget how badly women were – women as a gender — including different races and classes — were being treated by the medical establishment. And how paternalistic, and all of this stuff. And god knows, I've experienced that.

Don't get me started. So I think it's understandable that people reacted quickly and strongly and with a lot of anger. It was not the right way to react, in this case.

SS: So it's ironic that that completely divided the at the very same time that everybody was united around changing the CDC definition.

KC: Yes. Yes.

SS: And that that was a years-long –

KC: But see, I'm not sure those are disconnected. I think that there, frankly, I think that there were a fair number of white men who were like: yes, this CDC thing is the right thing to do. And we're gritting our teeth because we know it's the right thing to do. But this is driving us fucking nuts. We really want to be doing drugs into bodies. Right?

And so I think there was also resentment on that side of the aisle, if you will, that – because I would hear rumbling of, why are we wasting time on this shit? Right? And people would vote the right way. Right? Because it was so obvious. How could you not agree with this?

But I think it was part of this broader fight about the priorities of the organization. And I think if 076 had not come on the heels of CDC, that there might have been a different reaction from the – and I'm overgeneralizing with the T&D people, because there were people in T&D I was friends with, and whatever and did not have this politics. But you know what I mean – that kind of drugs-into-bodies politics. I think that some of those people were getting fed up with what they saw as the social — what do I say? — social change, social welfare, in their view, orientation of the organization; and this was the straw on the camel's back.

And so they were not – it isn't just us that wasn't compromising there. Right? It was also the other side.

SS: But this is in a way where the conversation started 3 tapes ago. Which is, the people who had what I call a freedom vision, or had a very broad vision; and the people who were really only there for themselves and for them that never changed. And every time that lifelong political people enter into a movement that is part –

KC: Wait, I'm sorry. I have to say something, though. I'm not sure that we can say that they never changed. Because I did see a number of them –

SS: Right.

KC: – really change.

SS: Right. But some of them –

KC: Right.

SS: – did not.

KC: Some of them did not change. Well, you know, there were going to be a half a dozen of those guys who were not going to ever change their minds. And you know – most of, but –

SS: Isn't that a larger political problem, outside of ACT UP that when you have a broad political vision, and you go into a movement that's constituency-based, and you're not that, or you're not or you're vaguely that constituency.

KC: Yeah. I'm dealing with this right now. What I've been doing lately is union organizing. And this is the same thing that those of us who are doing some of the organizing, and etcetera, and we want this to be social movement unionism, and part of a broader thing, and take a stand on the war, and take a stand on this and take a stand on that. And they're like, we want higher wages! Leave us alone.

And again, it's very complicated. But see, I –

SS: What union are you working with?

KC: Well, lately – no, I'm – help, I was helping to organize food service workers, first at Purchase and then at Sarah Lawrence, actually. It was different unions. It's –

SS: Right. It is your constituency, it's your workplace, but it's not your job.

KC: Right.

SS: Right.

KC: Exactly.

SS: Yeah.

Tape III
00:10:00

KC: Yeah. But what – see, it’s a problem, but I also think that it — this is me being naive, probably — but it’s a real opportunity for some education. And that given the god-awful ring-wing state of this country, that we need to use those opportunities for education every time they present themselves. And – within this — I’m just thinking about this union now — within this union of I think all immigrant workers, all of them with strong religious backgrounds, etcetera, there is now a nondiscrimination by sexual orientation clause in the contract. And that was a very interesting process. But it was a process. And if somebody’s kid now comes out, it’s going to be different, maybe.

So I – I guess I feel like – maybe it’s a combination of non-optimism about the current state of the country combined with thinking that I’ve seen a lot of people change. But change isn’t always obvious right then, and it sometimes doesn’t show up till five years later, and you realize that something has happened. But I came from a farm in southern Ohio. People change, and I’ve seen it.

And the thing about ACT UP is, we needed it to happen really fast, because we were in the middle of this — and we still are — of this god-awful crisis. And so we needed people who had access to pay attention to issues of race and class and gender really fast, because the people we were working with and we loved were dying from lack of access. And so there was this urgency to it that was real, but also made it – sometimes more difficult for those compromises and those educational processes to go on very well.

SS: So let’s move on from the theoretical into the personal.

KC: Okay.

SS: Can you tell us a little bit about Tom Cunningham; how you met him, and what he did in ACT UP?

KC: Let's see, how did I meet Tom?

I honestly don't remember how I met Tom. It might have been through Roma because I had known her from some of the women's stuff. And I think I bonded with Tom because – well, part of it was that Tom was also friends with Ray, and Ray and I were real good friends.

I think I bonded with Tom because Tom was somebody who took seriously the questions about science and some of the biomedical issues being raised in T&D, but also tried his best to have a broader social vision. And talk about access and all of these kinds of questions.

So I think – and we just got along, too, as friends. We just – get on the phone for hours and talk about our love lives. It was just – whatever that chemistry is between friends.

So I think we had somewhat similar political – somewhat similar. We had our differences, but we had – that aspect was similar.

And I also really respected the amount of work he put into that organization. It was amazing. He would be at the workspace starting at nine in the morning, and he wouldn't go home until 10 at night. He really dedicated his life to that organization. And I didn't always agree with everything he did. But I have real respect for people who put their money where their mouth is like that.

So I tried to be supportive of him, in a number of ways. And when he got real sick at the end and stuff, it was –

So yeah. And I liked the PISD caucus. That was a good crew.

SS: How did the organization respond when a significant leader, like Tom, starts to really get sick and starts dying?

KC: Well, that was one thing that I actually didn't like: is that – when somebody would start to get sick, it would become personal. And his friends and people who were usually disproportionately women, frankly, would go and take care of somebody. But there was not an effort made and this is what I was trying to do with this stuff with Ray, and I probably didn't do it very well — but there was not much of an effort made to keep in touch with, or even keep information going to people who were now too sick to sit in a 90-degree room for six hours on Monday night, and to go scream at the cops on Tuesday morning.

And there were – I knew there were a lot of people who were in the organization but couldn't do that anymore. And I don't know exactly what the format should have been for that, but it – I know it was – well, what we did with La Cocina is we started to meet at Ray's house. And so he didn't have to go anywhere.

Tape III
00:15:00

SS: Was that an affinity group?

KC: Yes.

SS: – or was that Ray's support group?

KC: No, it was an affinity group that met in Ray's kitchen; hence, La Cocina.

SS: Who was in it?

KC: Let's see. Catherine –

SS: Catherine Gund.

KC: Yeah. It changed over time. Let me see if I can remember who was in it.

Marion –

SS: Banzhaf.

KC: Yeah. Aldo Hernandez was kind of in and out of it. He would be in, and then he would go. Ray's lover, Anthony [Ledesma], who was kind of tangentially connected to ACT UP. Let's see, who else.

Oh, wow, I'm totally blanking out.

Oh, Rachel Lurie.

SS: Oh yeah.

KC: Then there were a bunch of people who were kind of in it and out of it at various times. Alexis Danzig; Monica Pearl. Amy Bauer was – La Cocina started out as a big affinity group, and then we got too big. And then we kind of split, and Amy and Alexis and some others kind of went into – they were sort of connected and sort of not. So – I'm trying to think there were a couple – oh, Robert Garcia was in it for awhile, then he got too sick pretty early to do too much.

Ah. Oh god, what was his name? [Alvin], African American guy with dreads? Anybody remember? Long hair. He had Bell's palsy. He had a – anyway. He was in it for awhile. So people were kind of floating in and out.

Keith Cylar was in for a little while. I don't think Charlie [King] ever was. I don't remember him being there.

Let's see. Oh, Zoe [Leonard] – was in for awhile. A lot of the people from La Cocina ended up being in the Women and AIDS book group. It was kind of an evolution. Frankly, what happened is, Ray died, and Anthony got too sick. A bunch of the men were not in it anymore. So the women kind of became the book group, by and large.

Oh, and Deb Levine.

SS: Yeah.

KC: Deb Levine was in it, yeah. So we started meeting at Ray's house. And the affinity group kind of started doing support stuff for Ray. But like I say, we didn't really have much of a formal way to do that. I wish we had figured out a better way to do it.

SS: I just want to ask you since you're friends with Tom. Did you have any insight into the controversy on the Xerox machine? Do you remember this?

KC: I – I remember there was a controversy, and I remember making a conscious decision to stay the hell away from it. It seemed like one of those things that nobody was going to win, and I didn't want to get into it.

JW: That's why you needed the 2-million-dollar check.

KC: Right, right. But I was just like, okay, no, you know.

SS: When did you leave ACT UP?

KC: Let's see. I would – it was the early '90s. I kind of, I didn't leave. I kind of dribbled out, if you know what I mean. So Ray died at the end of 1990. I was still really active for about – a year, maybe – maybe a year and a half, something like that. And then, when I started to – a bunch of my students and I had started ACT UP Westchester. And I started to do more stuff with ACT UP Westchester. So I was coming down into the city less often, because I was just doing more up there. And frankly, I felt like – at that point, I was – I would say I had some connection with ACT UP New York until about '94. But I was doing more up in Westchester, starting in about '92 – than I was doing in the city.

SS: I only have one more question. Is there anything important that you think we didn't cover?

KC: Let's see, let me think. I guess I would just – I would say a couple words about the book.

SS: Yeah, okay.

KC: Because –

SS: Women, AIDS and Activism.

KC: Yeah. That was one of the most intense, crazy, and productive experiences politically I've had. It was, we basically kind of all lived together in Monica's apartment, and did takeout, until we got the damned thing done. It was – but it also – we worked together really well, considering – Risa was bringing in all the medical information, and Marion and I and Rachel were talking broader politics, and it worked well. We also made connections with ACE in Bedford Hills – AIDS Counselors and Educators. Some of us had had, for political reasons, connections with some of those people beforehand.

But it was – and the other thing I liked about it is, we made a conscious decision to have ACT UP voices, but to also, half the book was to be direct testimony from women with AIDS. And that forced the book – we would have done it anyway, because we had the politics of it. But it forced the book to deal with issues of class and race from the beginning. Because the vast majority of the people we were interviewing for these little, mini-snippets in the book were women of color, largely low-income women of color.

And so it shifted the debate in the book group, in a way that was not happening on the floor. It was – we could not talk about women and AIDS without

centrally talking about race and class, and about the medical system, and Medicaid and Medicare, and childcare, and all this stuff.

So the discussions that we had — and we had two editors, but they did the copyediting — we all vetted every word of that book, which is kind of amazing, when I think back on it. I don't think I've ever been with a group of a dozen people who vetted a 250-page book. But we wanted to — I mean, obviously not the interview sections. But we wanted to all agree on all of the politics. Or at least — by the time we got to the end of it, it was — you either agree, or you're too tired to raise your hand to object. That's how we got to the editing phase, it was like, okay, I don't care.

SS: It actually really was a vanguard inside ACT UP.

KC: Yeah.

SS: Because I'm starting to be able to conceptualize now, having interviewed 120 people, is that the women with AIDS movement is really one of the most significant trajectories inside ACT UP and one of the things that caused one of the — the most broadening changes inside and this is the precursor to that.

KC: And we also — we distributed it free in prisons and homeless shelters and a bunch of other places. And I have to say, the — we got a lot of feedback from women. It just broke your heart to read these things. We would get these wonderful thank you notes. We got it translated into Spanish, too. That was one of our demands of the press. And it was — it really brought the women and AIDS epidemic home to me in a way that had not been the majority — what shall I say? — the majority feel of ACT UP.

Yes, women were there, and we talked about women and AIDS, whatever. But when we were dealing with the book, it was a different kind of experience with AIDS. One that I won't forget. Emotionally very fulfilling, but also very wrenching, at

the same time. And dealing with – I had gone into Bedford Hills and done AIDS ed and other stuff a few times, and – it's a different experience, when you're dealing with women who have no access.

SS: Now, our connection to Bedford is basically through Judy Clark and Kathy Boudin and Judy had been in a political formation with Marion, and what's his name? The alternative guy. John's boyfriend.

KC: Greenberg?

JH: Bob Lederer?

SS: Bob Lederer.

KC: Ah, Bob Lederer. Yes.

SS: Yeah. So there was a preexisting political relationship and they basically did the first prison AIDS program, right, inside Bedford?

KC: Yes. I had – Brian [Glick] was one of Kathy's lawyers. So I had known Kathy for a while. And I had actually been visiting Kathy; and we had done some other educational stuff before I ever got in ACT UP, and whatever. I had done some – actually taught an intro to women's studies class; I had done a – she and I were doing some elementary – economics, economic self-sufficiency, independence; how to fill out your – how to get a job, how to do a resume, just this kind of stuff.

So I had had some experience with Kathy, and then this, that also kind of – went into this.

SS: Because you were part of the Mike Spiegel, old SDS –

KC: Yeah, though – Well, I wouldn't –

SS: – with Brian.

KC: Yeah. It was more through him. Because I would go in when he was visiting to talk about the legal stuff. And I didn't know about the legal stuff, and I didn't particularly want to know about the legal stuff. So I'd be like, so – what's it like here? Where do you all meet?

Tape III
00:25:00

SS: But what's interesting just historically is that the reason women with AIDS came to ACT UP is because of this old Weathermen and May 19th –

KC: Right.

SS: – left relationship or sectarian left relationship.

KC: Right. Right.

SS: That ultimately ended up broadening the AIDS movement profoundly.

KC: Yes.

SS: Which is really interesting. And I just wrote this in a letter for Judy Clark's clemency –

KC: Oh, that's interesting.

SS: – campaign.

KC: That's interesting.

SS: They had an enormous impact.

KC: Yes. I mean, one thing that, I tell my students this, and sometimes they even believe it. Which is you don't know the impact of your actions. And you have to figure out the best thing you can do at the time. You close your eyes and swallow hard and jump. And things like that many years later can help to create women and AIDS movements, and all these things. You just don't know what is going to – what's going to happen. So I try to end on an optimistic note.

SS: Okay. Well then, here's the last question.

JH: Before you do that, I just want to ask about ACT UP Westchester and how is it different working in a small group, rather than a much larger ACT UP New York?

KC: Let's see. Well – I would say, not so much because it was small, but because it was Westchester that there were differences. One of the things that I was really worried about is that there was no AIDS education in any of the colleges in Westchester, in any of the high schools, etcetera. And a bunch of my students and I had formed an ACT UP chapter at SUNY Purchase a while ago. And we had done campus stuff, and we actually got an HIV test site, anonymous test site on campus, which was the first one in the state. And it's still anonymous. We have kept an anonymous test site. It has been a legal battle like you wouldn't believe.

But that's been a drawing point for students all over Westchester. They come to Purchase, they get tested, they don't have to have their names, whatever.

So then that became kind of the basis for a lot of AIDS education going on on that campus. And we did some – the usual kind of ACT UP zap things. There was a guy who worked at Valhalla, Westchester Medical Center, who got fired for being HIV-positive. He was a pharmacist. And so we did a big demo, and press, yada yada. He got his job back.

But eventually what I wanted to do, and what we did, is we formed a consortium of all the Westchester colleges and several of the high schools; and came up with a curriculum. And it was approved by this, and the Department of Health. There were a couple of closeted lesbians in the Department of Health, and they helped do this all.

So we came up with this curriculum that was to be taught in high schools and colleges in Westchester. And then we set about the process of battling to get it enacted at the Catholic colleges. Which was a lot of battle. But in most cases, we won. CNR — College of New Rochelle — took up the curriculum. Iona, it's still a battle, frankly. They're heavily connected with Jesuits, and it's hard.

Mercy did it; Marymount did it. So — and it kind of formed a group of students, faculty and staff who were interested in AIDS in Westchester; kind of centered around, frankly, me and the Department of Health.

So there were a lot of thing, we'd have World AIDS Day, we'd always have a big conference, and bring people, and all this kind of stuff going on.

Because it was Westchester, it was more heavily focused on education than on direct action. And frankly, there wasn't — we did some stuff about ADAP, actually; and access in terms of insurance and all this kind of mess. But there wasn't much stuff about drugs into bodies. It just — it was more of a advocacy and that kind of, and educational group.

And one thing that is heartening to me: I was also teaching this class on the political economy of AIDS at Purchase. I taught that for 10, 12 years, something. A lot of my students — a bunch of my students joined ACT UP New York, actually. I'd see them at meetings. But a number of them went on to do AIDS activism in other parts of the country, where they ended up, and they send me pictures of themselves getting arrested and all this stuff, so.

So I think it was a good — we had the — it was a real fight to keep it going, from the beginning. The administration at Purchase was incredibly opposed to us from the beginning. It's funny, because you think of Purchase as being a liberal place, and the

students, by and large, are, and many of the faculty are, but the administration was terrified of being labeled a gay school, an AIDS school, all this stuff, so it was a real battle.

Tape III
00:30:00

But there was some – there were some real changes went on in curricula in colleges, and even in some of the high schools. New Rochelle High School instituted a very gay-friendly HIV curriculum and sex ed curriculum and stuff, as a result of some of the things that went on.

And we did get a New York State network for a while, among colleges. But that was real hard to keep up. It was just, you know, Buffalo, Albany. It was – this was before email. Right? So I remember Xeroxing and mailing things all over the state, and after awhile it just became –

But the Westchester group got some stuff done. And some of that is, is still going. I talked to some friends of mine at CNR the other day, and they're still, they've still got a – they're still on a Catholic campus, handing out condoms in the health services. So – some things, anyway, were changed up there.

SS: So looking back — far back —

KC: Oooh!

SS: – what would you say was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you think is its biggest disappointment?

KC: I'd probably say that the greatest achievement was to change the debate around AIDS, to change the public perceptions and the debate. And it went from being – this invisible tragedy to being a political issue.

I also think that it helped, helped to educate a younger generation of LGBT activists in ways that they might not otherwise have been educated. They got

exposed to left politics and to other ways of looking at LGBT politics in ways that they might not have. And one does not know the long-term impact of that. But I think it's positive.

I think the greatest failure, for me, is that the organization largely split, and was not a major player in many of the debates around international HIV and AIDS stuff. And I think that is an unbelievable tragedy. Because a consistent left critique and gay-positive voice is so much needed in all of these international AIDS debates, and etcetera. And there are some people still doing that work, and I and some of them have great politics, and I greatly respect them, but they don't have a thousand people in Cooper Union to back them up when they need it. And I don't care how flowery your rhetoric is if you can't, if you can't say in the Tony Malliaris song — you ever been embarrassed by a thousand of us? If you don't change your ways, we're on a bus, have been embarrassed by a thousand of us, right? If you can't say that, I don't care how good your rhetoric is, you're not going to get anywhere.

And so I wish that we still had that power, which we don't have anymore, and that's hard.

SS: Great. Thank you, Kim.

KC: Thank you.

SS: Thank you so much.

KC: Thank you. Okay.