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Interviewee: **Lori Cohen**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Lori Cohen
January 23, 2014

SARAH SCHULMAN: So we always start, you tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

LORI COHEN: My name is Lori Cohen. I'm fifty-two years old. I don't know how that happened. We're at 145 Hudson Street, which is my office. Today's date is January 23rd, 2014.

SS: Okay. Great. So where were you born?

LC: New York.

SS: And where in New York?

LC: Brooklyn.

SS: So you're a Brooklyn native. And what about your parents?

LC: My parents were born in Brooklyn, went to high school in Brooklyn. I grew up in Rockaway in, like, a housing project, and my parents moved us to Staten Island when I was about in third grade.

SS: There were not a lot of Jews on Staten Island when you were in third grade.

LC: No, we were really the only ones, and it was sort of interesting growing up, at first not realizing that you were different, but you were.

SS: Because in those days it was all Italian and Irish, right?

LC: And it was even more than religious, it was class separation. Like, my parents owned their own business, they were sort of white-collar workers, and everybody in our block was a blue-collar worker. And there was a real clash of expectations and it was a real difference, so it was sort of striking.

SS: Did you go to public school on Staten Island?

LC: I did my whole life, college, law school, been publicly school educated.

SS: So you're the best product of the New York City Public School System.

LC: Yeah, well, my sister also, but yes.

SS: So were your parents community oriented? I mean, did you grow up with values about accountability outside of the family?

LC: My father was president of our — I grew up in New Springville on Staten Island, so it was like a — you know, that was the name of the community, and my father was president of the association of the neighborhood and was pretty active in local politics. So, yeah, he was very—my parents brought us up with a real strong — an interest in what goes on around you and how it affects you and how you should affect it. For instance, at some point—Staten Island is very segregated, to this day. At one point, a black family wanted to move next door to us. They were doctors, but the people on our block did not think they should be living in our neighborhood. And I remember my father standing up at meetings and being screamed at and yelled at, because he was like, “Why do you care?” And that was sort of striking as an eleven- or twelve-year-old. Why do they care who lives next door?

SS: Did they move in?

LC: No. I think more because they decided they didn't want to move into that environment. But it was pretty—it was upsetting.

SS: So when did you start to become politically aware?

LC: My father worked on McGovern's campaign. He was a district leader, Democratic. We were like the only Democrats, I think, in a five-mile radius. So I remember working with him on McGovern's campaign, and then I went off to law school.

I went to college in Albany, so Albany is very — you're like right in the middle of state government, and I was a journalism minor, and one of the things I wrote about was government, so I had that interest. And then I went to law school, and, you know, when you're trying to decide what kind of law do you want to do, what kind of lawyer do you want to be, I became a criminal defense lawyer because that's where I thought I could help and affect the most people.

SS: And you still are a criminal defense.

LC: And I still am a criminal defense lawyer, yes.

SS: So when did you come out?

00:05:00

LC: Well, let's see. My sister says I was about eleven, but I didn't really — I had boyfriends all through high school and even part way through college. I came out in law school, was when I finally was like, "Oh, yeah, that's what that's all about." Then I was sort of — you know, my family was very — my father said to me, "Well, I love women. I can understand why you love women."

SS: That's nice.

LC: Yeah. My mother was a little bit more — you know. It's been a long time ago, so I think she was more worried about me having a hard life.

SS: So she made your life harder.

LC: Right. Well, no, she — you know. We cried and we hugged, and then it was like, “Okay.”

SS: So when did you put together politics and the gay community?

LC: Probably not till ACT UP.

SS: So you were never involved in any kind of gay community events, no lesbian community, nothing?

LC: No, because I didn't really even start to think of myself as a lesbian until I was in law school. Then I came to New York, I was a Legal Aid lawyer, and I met Jill Harris, and was pretty soon into my Legal Aid career when Jill's like, “Hey, we need some lawyers. Would you be interested?”

SS: Now, that's interesting. I didn't know that. Was Jill working for Legal Aid at the time?

LC: Yeah, Jill and I were Legal Aid lawyers together.

SS: And what was your specialization?

LC: We were both criminal defense lawyers.

SS: So she was already in ACT UP and then she recruited you?

LC: Yeah, she was there I don't know how much before me, but she's the one who sort of invited me to come and help out.

SS: And you had never done any kind of community-based law outside of the office?

LC: No, no.

SS: So at that point, what was your relationship with AIDS before you came to ACT UP?

LC: None.

SS: You didn't see anything in the cases you were representing?

LC: You know, it was so early, we were starting to see cases, but I think I became more aware of it after I become involved. But, you know, this is '80 — let's see. I graduated law school '86, so this is like '87, '88. So it was just starting. Everybody was starting to say the word "AIDS."

There's a famous story that Judge [Mary] Bednar is a lesbian judge. I guess she was lesbian. Yeah, I think she's a lesbian judge in New York, and she was sitting in arraignments and they were bringing in a gentleman who apparently the police thought had AIDS. They had gloves and masks. Anybody who was touching him had— like you would think they were going into some epidemic ward where there's some contagion. And they say to the judge, "Judge, do you want gloves?"

And she turns to him — and I'll never forget this — she says, "I'm going to arraign him, not fuck him. Thank you."

SS: Oh, wow.

LC: And I was like—. You know, I was like twenty-three, and I couldn't believe, like, a judge was — like, that just seemed so cool to me, that she was really, you know, putting it to him.

SS: I wonder how that started as policy in the NYPD, the glove thing. Do you know?

LC: I don't.

SS: All right. So Jill brings you in. Did you first go to an ACT UP meeting?

LC: I did. No, I think I went to an action as a legal observer was the first thing.

SS: And can you tell us what was the action? What did a legal observer do for ACT UP?

LC: I stood and watched and made sure that whatever guidelines the police said they had, they followed. If I saw something that seemed out of sorts, I took notes, and things like that.

SS: And had you ever done demonstration?

LC: No.

SS: Never?

LC: Never.

SS: So legal support was new to you?

LC: Right.

SS: And were you trained?

LC: Jill spoke to me about, you know, this is what they're going to do, this is what's going to happen, look out for this, watch out. Really, it was just to make sure that the police handled everybody correctly.

SS: So when people got arrested, did you then go to the prison?

LC: I don't know if the first time I went, but shortly thereafter I was really representing most of the people, so yeah.

SS: So can you just take us through, like, a case, a typical ACT UP case, what it would be like from a lawyer's point of view?

00:10:00 LC: Sure. It would depend on where it was, so if we were in Manhattan, by the time I had already been working at Legal Aid for about a year, so I knew a lot of the people, the court staff and the people involved, so we were able to arrange for people not to have to come to court. We were able to arrange — it was a better process here because we knew how it worked, we knew who to talk to.

So a regular case here, people would get tickets. They would then come to court all on one day, so back in those days, there could be hundreds of people coming to the courtroom, and most of them would get ACDs [Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal]. Most of the time, they wouldn't even have to come to court to get their ACDs.

SS: So what were they usually charged with?

LC: Trespass or obstruction of governmental administration or disorderly conduct, based upon, you know, sitting in the street or handcuffing themselves to something or being somewhere they shouldn't have been.

SS: Now, looking back from where we are now, it looks like the court was incredibly lenient with ACT UP. Was that because that was the way it was then and that's how all demonstrators were treated, or was there something specific to ACT UP?

LC: I think it's a couple of things. One, I think they were all white, for a large part. I think that mattered to the people in the court system. They were looked at like them. They had good lawyers. We knew Jill and I and later on Mary Dorman, we knew what to say to get what we wanted. And I do think it was a different time, a different administration. It was really the first time that so many people were coming at

one time, and the court system and even the D.A.'s Office had no idea how to deal. How do you deal with two hundred people in a courtroom on one case on one day? Well, we just get rid of them. So we benefitted from that.

SS: So when you say that the lawyers knew what to say, what did you know to say?

LC: Well, we were real criminal defense lawyers, so we weren't just lawyers who had become interested in the issue and therefore were willing to donate our time. We were people who were criminal defense lawyers first, so we knew how to defend people, we knew that, for the most part, anybody in the city who gets a ticket and comes into court will get an ACD. And we knew what to say if that person had already gotten an ACD before. Like we just knew sort of the ins and outs, and that was very helpful.

SS: Now, what would happen if you had a standard group arrest and somebody wanted to be their own attorney? That happened in ACT UP.

LC: That did happen.

SS: Do you remember a specific example?

LC: Yes. Well, I tried the St. Patrick's case, which was on Court TV, as a matter of fact. That was quite a show

SS: Can you give the background and explain what that case was?

LC: Oh, sure. ACT UP decided, rightly so, in my view, that Cardinal O'Connor had made his pulpit a political pulpit instead of just a religious pulpit, and therefore they felt that he was then open to be protested against like everybody else. So

ACT UP went into St. Patrick's Cathedral, peacefully laid down in the aisle, and then some people started shouting and disrupted the Mass.

Two hundred people, were arrested, I think, and eventually it was whittled down to — I think it was five people who went to trial.

SS: Now, why did those five go to trial and not the other 195?

LC: Well, you know, there was always this dichotomy. My belief was sort of you're not educating—all this talk about we're going to educate the public by having public trials, no one cared, in my view. I thought it was best to get people's cases taken care of, get them back out on the street to do what they wanted to do, and I think, for the most part, that's how people felt. They didn't want to have to come to court every day for two weeks. They had jobs or they had, you know, other things that they were doing. But I think these five folks felt like it was time to stand up and take a stand.

SS: And who were they?

LC: It was Ann Northrop, who represented herself; Charles King, who was a law graduate and represented himself; Cathy Ottersten; and I think there was somebody else, but I can't remember.

SS: So what was the advantage for them of representing themselves?

00:15:00 LC: They got to say whatever they wanted to say. I have to follow some rules. So if you were representing yourself, you could ask any outrageous question you wanted. You could make any statement at any time that you wanted. And, you know, both Ann and Charles are smart, so they used that.

SS: Do you remember anything that they did?

LC: Oh, you know, nothing specifically, but Charles, you know what Charles looks like. He looks like Jesus Christ.

SS: Right.

LC: And he did at that time. So he made a hundred comments about that. He would stand up, and he was well spoken, and he would just start talking, you know, just about how Cardinal O'Connor had really started preaching politics.

SS: Now Cathy was a transwoman in ACT UP.

LC: She was.

SS: And how was she treated by the court system?

LC: At that time, it had no issues with that.

SS: So they treated her like a woman? They booked her as a woman?

LC: Correct.

SS: Okay. So there was no problem.

LC: I think she was pretty transitioned by that time, if I remember, but it was definitely she was booked as a woman.

SS: So what was the outcome of the trial?

LC: I think we beat some small charges on, like, technicalities, like there was trespass, you had to do certain things to get a trespass conviction, but for the most part, they were convicted, but the judge gave them community service afterward, so there was no real penalty to them.

SS: So why did that happen? How come they weren't punished?

LC: Because what kind of punishment are you going to give folks like that? Are you going to put them in jail?

SS: Well, I mean, in New York City there's always this issue of do you have a Catholic judge, right?

LC: We never had that.

SS: You never had a Catholic judge?

LC: No, we never had that problem.

SS: Okay.

LC: Never—

SS: Because I remember with the Irish group, there was always an issue. If it was a black or Jewish judge, you had a different outcome.

LC: Yeah. We never—I handled, oh, my god, probably close to ten thousand cases, and we had —

SS: For ACT UP?

LC: Mm-hmm.

SS: You handled ten thousand arrests?

LC: Probably close to that.

SS: And how many arrests do you think ACT UP had?

LC: Oh, at least double that.

SS: At least twenty thousand arrests?

LC: Throughout its — you know.

SS: That's stunning.

LC: And not just in New York. I mean, we were in Albany, we were — maybe not ten thousand. Maybe five thousand. But, you know, a significant number. We had three hundred in Albany.

SS: So how would you handle it when people were arrested in Albany, for example?

LC: We went up there. Mary Dorman and I were handling that. Albany was actually a funny story, because they were sort of of the opinion they weren't going to let us come into Albany and do the things that New York City lets us do, so they arrest three hundred people and the judge decides, well, he's going to set bail on them. Well, we had people who had benefactors who had come with a lot of cash, so he started setting bail and we started posting it. And he was getting — you could see the judge getting madder and madder and madder and madder, and we ended up posting — I think it was like \$300. It turned out to be almost \$10,000 in bail.

SS: And somebody brought \$10,000

LC: Some—there was a —

SS: Do you remember who the benefactor was?

LC: I don't. I don't even know if I knew who the benefactor was, but I remember guys saying, "Don't worry." Okay, not going to worry.

SS: That's interesting. And you don't remember anyone connected with that money who we could ask?

LC: I don't.

SS: Okay. So they all posted bail.

LC: So they all posted bail and walked out, and then the judge says things like, "Well, you know, we're going to want these people back in jail."

Like, “Judge, then we’re going to try every single one of these cases, and you’re going to have three hundred trials of people, and that’s what you’re going to do for the next year. Is that really what you want to do?”

And you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and eventually they just agreed that they would ACD it, and they would exchange the bail money for a fine.

SS: So basically you would advise people to get arrested in large groups with large numbers.

LC: I think it’s helpful. I think that’s what happened with the Republican Convention.

SS: Were you involved in that?

LC: I was not, but you can see — I mean, they got arrested en masse, and there aren’t enough places to hold them. The court system doesn’t have, they don’t have the facility or the time, or really they don’t care enough to deal with three hundred people. What are you going to do? You can’t try them all because that would destroy the court system.

00:20:00 **SS: It’s so interesting that you say this about St. Patrick’s, because people are afraid to stand up to the church. There’s a perception that the church has a lot of political power and that they can punish you, but actually you’re saying that’s not the case if you have a good lawyer.**

LC: It wasn’t the case for us. Well, you know, if you have a lawyer who — listen, what did they do? They went into a church service and they sat down, they spoke up. So what? What’s the real harm in that? It’s hard, when you’re dealing with a

system that deals with people who kill people or other pretty heinous things, it's hard to argue that what these people do is so horrific that they should be punished.

SS: So that was an issue, then, trying to define harm?

LC: I think it was just that there was a real view that what people were doing was expressing themselves, and if they stepped over a line, they stepped over a line.

SS: Do you think that the courts in New York City were sympathetic to AIDS?

LC: The courts themselves?

SS: The judges.

LC: Some.

SS: Because you never went for jury trial, right?

LC: No, we didn't have a jury trial.

SS: Never, of all those ten thousand cases?

LC: Never, no.

SS: And why was that?

LC: There was really only one trial. In all the time that I represented, so from '88 to '91, really, when I did most of my cases, that was the only trial. There was a needle exchange trial before us.

SS: When you say that was the only trial, you mean the St. Patrick's trial or the needle exchange?

LC: The St. Patrick's trial was the only trial I ever did for ACT UP.

SS: Were you involved with needle exchange?

LC: I was not.

SS: Are you familiar with that case?

LC: Yes.

SS: Could you tell us about it?

LC: Sure. There were folks who were conducting their own sort of private needle exchange and got arrested.

SS: And who are they?

LC: I don't know who they were, but they were in front of Judge [Laura] Drager, who I perceived as a sort of friendlier judge, but I don't think anybody involved in that trial does. And they wanted to try a necessity defense, and a necessity defense has been tried or tried to be tried by a number of different protest groups from abortion, anti-abortion people, to there was some pro antiwar demonstrators, and it's very, very hard to convince either a judge or a jury that what you're doing is so necessary that it should be a defense, and it didn't work in the needle exchange cases.

SS: So what happened?

LC: They were convicted, but I think they also got community service.

SS: So did that case lead to any kind of policy change in needle exchange?

LC: It did. I think needle exchange has become legal.

SS: But if they got convicted, then what was the connection?

LC: I don't know if anybody who makes those decisions would say that that caused them to change the policy, but I think it was talked about more and their argument that this was saving—this was immediacy, this was saving lives, I think was

received favorably by the community as a whole, so I think it did change. I think a lot of things that ACT UP did might not have seemed like it at the moment, but down the line changed lives, changed the way things are viewed.

SS: So let me ask you some other things. Now, what did you do with people who were difficult?

LC: You know, there were some people who they just wanted their day in court, so that was fine. They could come to court and they could have their day. They could say what they wanted to say. And, you know, the thing with being difficult is after you get your way, you're sort of not difficult anymore. So if a person said, "I'm taking this to trial. I am not taking a plea. I don't want an ACD," well, once they had to come back to the court three or four times, they didn't want to do it anymore. So we had sort of the advantage of, "Okay, be careful of what you ask for, because you will get it." But I'll have to say, for the most part, people understood we were giving of our time. We were — they were pretty respectful of that.

SS: Now, what about people who were sick? I mean, we have a lot of footage of very, very sick people, some of whom were going to die in the next few months, being dragged away by the police.

LC: It's horrible.

00:25:00

SS: Do you remember anyone in particular?

LC: I don't, but I remember, I mean, I got arrested at one point.

SS: Oh, how did that happen?

LC: Well, that was pretty scary. It was a nighttime march. I don't even remember what for. And at that point, my role was more of meeting with the cops ahead

of time, trying to figure out what we can all do to make everybody safe. We were getting some good cooperation from higher-ups in the police department, and I don't know what happened, but at some point during the march I see a guy who's not dressed like a cop, doesn't have a badge on, pull a guy, pull one of our demonstrators out of the sort of en masse walk down the street and start beating him. So I try and sort of pull that guy off of our guy, and he turns around and he throws me on the ground, and he puts me in handcuffs.

SS: Because you assaulted a police officer?

LC: Well, because I tried to stop—well, that's what his claim was. But now, everybody — I mean, everybody in our march knew that I was a lawyer, and so now it became an unruly situation. It was sort of scary. I was on the ground, and all the protestors had turned around and were now facing us, and all the cops were standing here, all the white-shirts, trying to figure out, "Okay, what the hell are we going to do now?" So they gave me a ticket, and I had to go to court and it got ACD'ed, but it was pretty frightening. It was frightening at the time.

SS: Was there a lot of police violence against ACT UP?

LC: I think initially there was more because the police thought they could get away with it, and then they realized they couldn't, that we were smart, we had cameras, we were willing to call them out on stuff, and we were willing to sue them, and so —

SS: Did we sue the police?

LC: Yeah, a number of —

SS: On what case?

LC: Chris Hennelly.

SS: Were you involved in that?

LC: I was involved. I had another defendant, yeah.

SS: Can you describe what that was?

LC: Chris Hennelly, and now I can't remember the name of my client, and a young man and a woman went to St. Patrick's Cathedral or in that vicinity. I think they spray-painted something on the ground. And the police — I mean, they beat Chris within an inch of his life. He had some horrific injuries. My client had, you know, a nice black eye. They initially denied, you know, said that these guys were fighting back, and then we got their arrest photos, which took a long time, and their arrest photos showed how bad the beatings were. And Chris hired a relatively well-known police misconduct lawyer.

SS: Who was that?

LC: I think it was James Myerson, I think he hired. Yeah. And my client, they sued and won some money.

SS: And you won for your client as well?

LC: Mm-hmm.

SS: So that would travel through the police department?

LC: Well, and, you know, the videos. I mean, just every time some stupid cop did something, it just so happened somebody from ACT UP was with a camera there.

SS: Maybe it was James Wentzy.

LC: It could have even been James, right. And that happened so often that I think, you know, cops got a little smarter.

SS: And did you ever use that video evidence in court?

LC: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SS: Do you remember an example?

LC: I don't remember, but I remember a number of times we were lucky that cameras were in at the right time at the right place and got some good footage.

SS: So I want to go back to the issue of very sick people getting arrested. What was your feeling about that, or how did you experience that?

LC: You know, so much of the time it was hard to watch anybody get arrested. You know, just the process of it seemed violent in and of itself, you know. People are lying limp and they're sort of picked up by these cops who may not be the most gentle of folk. But when you, you could see that some people were pretty sick, and you just would pray that, like, somebody would be gentle. But, you know, it was pretty amazing how resilient people were.

00:30:00 **SS: Because a lot of support involved getting people's medicine, and it is amazing when you look at the — have you seen our film? I don't know if you've seen it, but *United in Anger*. We should get you a copy. You realize how young everybody was, and you see very young people looking very, very sick and then getting dragged off by the police. It's very disturbing.**

LC: It is. It's hard to watch.

SS: But I think at the time it was more normal to us.

LC: Well, I think it was just like that's what we did, you know. Everybody was so supportive. I would hear stories about when they were in the holding

cells sort of below the courthouse, of people singing and people were really there for each other, and that was really one of the best things about it.

SS: Now, I just want to talk about the role of lawyers in ACT UP. So lawyers did not make decisions about — no, lawyers were at the service of ACT UP. But lawyers all worked for free, like everyone else in ACT UP.

LC: Right.

SS: So you were processing ten thousand cases and you had a job. How did you do that?

LC: Well, it was a lot easier when I was a Legal Aid lawyer, because then, you know, it was just sort of part of my caseload. But in that time, in '91, I started my own practice, and I think it's your obligation, so you just sort of factor that into your day.

SS: And about the other lawyers, I mean, was that understood, or were there lawyers who wanted to be paid at one point? I vaguely remember that.

LC: I think there were lawyers who thought they would get paid, but, I mean, really, the people I worked with most were Mary Dorman and Jill Harris, and we were there because we were there.

SS: So how were you integrated otherwise into ACT UP? Like what other things did you do in ACT UP?

LC: I would attend the meetings. Oftentimes, like, there were so many small actions, so people would call you for help, you know. "If I do this, what do you think I'll be arrested for? What do you think will happen?" It was mostly that kind of stuff.

SS: Did you socialize in ACT UP?

LC: Yes.

SS: I think I was at a dyke dinner with you or something at Maxine's.

LC: Yes, I think I was. Right.

SS: So what was that all like?

LC: Well, you know, it becomes so all-encompassing. You spend so much time with these folks, they're your friends, and, yeah, for those years, that's what it was. It was parties at people's houses and it was fun.

SS: But did it separate you from the life you had had before ACT UP?

LC: No.

SS: So you were able to maintain all your other friends as well?

LC: Mm-hmm.

SS: So you were running your own practice, you were at ACT UP all the time, and you still were able to keep all that going?

LC: Yeah. I had, I had come back from — I went to law school in Buffalo, so I had come back to New York, so, you know, it's not like I had a hundred million friends in New York. My friends were spread all over anyway from college and law school. So coming back to New York, I would say the people I was most friendly with at first were the people I worked with. I mean, you know, you're working twelve hours a day. You're all gung-ho defense attorneys. So, you know, it was easy to integrate into ACT UP.

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

LC: I don't think so.

SS: So something like needle exchange, you immediately were for needle exchange? You didn't have to be persuaded to?

LC: No, that totally made sense to me. I didn't even see what the big deal was. These are people who are going to — they're drug addicts. If you can help save them by giving them a clean needle, what's the problem with that?

SS: And did you lose any cases? Did ACT UP ever lose a case? Well, you said needle exchange.

But what's your memory of that, Jim, the needle exchange?

JIM HUBBARD: That they won.

SS: They won.

LC: They did get the necessity defense?

JAMES WENTZY: I thought so too.

SS: I think so, too, because there's this famous photo of everybody smiling and cheering afterwards. We don't have any footage of that. Or the footage is in very bad condition.

JW: No, I have it, and it's good condition.

JH: Of the — afterwards.

JW: Afterwards

SS: But not the trial itself.

JH: The trial footage is really bad.

SS: Yeah. So I think we did win.

LC: Oh, well, there you go.

SS: I don't know if they won on necessity defense. What do you think?

LC: Oh, that might be it.

JH: I thought it was.

JW: I thought so, but I'm not sure.

SS: Was it on appeal? Was it an appeal?

00:35:00

LC: No, it definitely wasn't an appeal. It was Judge Drager, but I remember them hating her, and me thinking — because she was pretty good. As a defense attorney, we thought of her as a good judge. I don't remember.

SS: We'll have to check that, but I think that they did win. So aside from that, we never lost any case. Now, what do you think would happen today?

LC: Well, we lost St. Patrick's, but I don't think anybody really considers it a loss.

SS: What would happen if somebody tried to do today what people did then?

LC: Well, you know, I guess you could compare it to the Republican Convention. I just think the criminal justice system isn't prepared to handle a three-hundred-person arrest, so those cases — and, really, I think most people's view of cases like that is you're exercising your constitutional rights, and if you lie down in a street during the exercise of your constitutional rights, you know, that's really not such a bad thing.

SS: So you don't think that people should be afraid of the security state today, to do civil disobedience?

LC: No, I don't.

SS: You don't. Okay. We're going to quote you on that.

LC: You know, listen, they're listening to us no matter what, whether you're in ACT UP or not, or whether you're on someone's radar because of that, I mean, yeah.

SS: So let's move on. So were you in ACT UP when the organization split?

LC: I was.

SS: With hindsight now, how do you understand that event?

LC: It's sort of all foggy to me, but I remember — the only thing I really can remember firsthand and sort of separate it from what other people have said or what I've seen, is I remember sort of feeling sad that this great — you know, the greatest thing about ACT UP, I thought, was the community and the way that everybody stood together. Now we were going to be like everybody else. We weren't going to be able to be that cohesive group anymore. But I think it was probably necessary. I mean, there was a lot of arguing about crazy stuff, you know, stupid stuff.

SS: What do you think it was about, really?

LC: I think it was about people wanting to go different ways. You know, some people wanted to continue doing direct action and some people thought they had to — and I think probably in retrospect rightly so — work more within the system.

SS: Why was there resistance to that?

LC: I don't know. I mean, if they ever thought about it, one of the reasons that legally we were so successful in our criminal defense cases is because we knew how

to work within the system. So you have to know when to pick your fights and who to pick your fights with, and if you get more by sitting down and meeting with people and trying to help them get to a point that they can understand where you're coming from, that seems like a much —

SS: Okay. Let me posit this, and I invite you to disagree. There were a lot of different kinds of people in ACT UP, and when you're doing civil disobedience, it's a great equalizer, but when you get a seat at the table, only certain kinds of people can sit at the table. So then you're icing out all different kinds of people from the process.

LC: All the rest, right. But they were iced out anyway. I mean, I had no involvement in treatment. I didn't know anything about it. I tried to understand when they talked about it, but it would be like everybody saying they wanted to represent themselves. You just don't know enough at some point. And, you know, I understand the arguments, that it was elitist or — but I think at some point you have to have trusted those people to represent you and your views or ACT UP and its views, and that just didn't seem possible. People could not wrap their heads around that.

SS: Now, were you close to anyone who died in ACT UP?

LC: You know, I knew them and I had friends who died, but I wouldn't say I was very close with anybody.

SS: Is there any one person that stands out in your mind?

LC: No.

SS: Did you go to anyone's memorial service?

LC: Yes.

SS: Who?

LC: A bunch of people at the time. I can't remember.

00:40:00

SS: So when did you leave ACT UP?

LC: Probably after The Split. It seemed like things had sort of fallen apart. I still would do legal work for people who called me, but I wasn't sort of on the scene going to meetings and stuff like that.

SS: I only have one more question. So is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think we should be making record on?

LC: You know, for me as a young lawyer, it was amazing to be involved with people who really changed the world. You don't get that opportunity, and I really consider myself incredibly lucky that I was able to do that.

SS: We're all lucky that you were able to do that.

LC: You know, it's funny, people have said that to me, but I think I took much more from it than a lot of people I represented. And I don't mean that in a bad way. But I think, you know, you just don't get that opportunity to really — we all say we want to be defense lawyers because we want to help change the world or help represent people who change the world, but you don't really get that chance all that much. I mean, I do great work. I represent a lot of people I'm sure you've heard of, but to represent people who really changed the world, you don't get that chance, and I did, and I was lucky.

SS: That's great.

JH: Could I ask a clarifying question? When ACT UP went out of town, you talked about Albany, but what about like the FDA or NIH when you're out of state? What's the situation for lawyers?

LC: There were — was it in Atlanta? We hooked up with lawyers there, but I still would be — it came a point where people trusted me, so I would make sure I was there. Criminal defense law is pretty much the same all over. But I tried to be on scene and work with people.

SS: You went to Atlanta?

LC: I went to Atlanta.

JH: Well, but could you legally—

LC: No.

JH: You couldn't represent them?

LC: Right. I wasn't admitted in those states.

SS: Can you describe what happened in Atlanta?

LC: Not really so well. I really have very little memory of it, but I remember working with the lawyers in Atlanta. You know, like, you know who needs help, like who in our group you've got to be careful of this person, or this person needs medication. Like you sort of knew that, so that was good to have.

SS: And how were those lawyers selected?

LC: I think somebody knew somebody who knew somebody.

SS: Did that go to trial?

LC: No, none of those cases went to trial.

SS: Okay. So my final question is, just looking back on ACT UP, what do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement and what do you see as its biggest disappointment?

LC: Greatest achievement. I think there's a couple. One is the whole idea of direct action, and direct action, you know, with ACT UP, it wasn't just, "Oh, let's go in the street and lie down." I mean, there were plans and there were puppets and there were — you know. I mean, spectacle. And just how much that spectacle can change people's minds. So I think that's probably the longest-lasting thing.

I think the most real thing is they did change people's views on AIDS and on whether the help that people with AIDS should get and the funding and all of that, in my view, and maybe it's a warped view, but in my view, it's almost a direct result of ACT UP being on the street, talking about it, and keeping it on the forefront of people's thoughts. I mean, think about that. Again, it's amazing.

SS: And what about its biggest disappointment?

LC: You know, I'm sure most people would say the fact that it split and it sort of has petered out, but, you know, you can't run 100 miles an hour for a long period of time. You just can't. And I think it ran its natural course.

SS: Have you done any AIDS cases since then?

00:45:00 LC: I have not. I did a bunch with the Republic — well, I've done a couple. Every now and then somebody will call me and say, "Oh, we're going to release a banner in Grand Central Station. Can you come and just be there?"

"Oh, sure." So, a couple of times. A lot of people like to release banners, I think, in Grand Central Station. So I've met my mother for drinks, and my mother and I

sit there at the bar, and they release, you know. So I've done things like that. But now most of my pro bono work is representing people charged with serious crimes. But I'm willing to help.

SS: Thank you, Lori.

LC: You're welcome.

SS: Thank you very much.

LC: Thank you.

SS: Great. Interesting. I had no idea there were so many cases.