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Interviewee: **Joe Ferrari**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Joe Ferrari
October 23, 2010

SARAH SCHULMAN: You start by telling us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

JOE FERRARI: All right. Got to tell my age. Thanks a lot. {LAUGHS}
My name is Joe Ferrari. I'm fifty-one. We are at 51 West 19th, apartment number 4, New York, New York, 10011.

SS: And today is?

JF: Today is October 23, 2010.

SS: Joe, where'd you grow up?

JF: I grew up in Wantagh, Long Island.

SS: And where were your parents before you moved there?

JF: Brooklyn and the Bronx, pretty much a whole New Yorker crew. I was born in Manhattan, but we moved to the Bronx, then Long Island and lived there pretty much most of my life, although I've actually lived in this apartment more than anywhere else.

SS: How long have you been here?

JF: I've been here since '89 or '88.

SS: Oh, wow.

JF: In fact, the first time I came to this apartment was for an ACT UP committee meeting, Logistics.

SS: Who lived here?

JF: Lee Schy, my future boyfriend at the time. I had come here for an action. I think it was called Logistics, or it was probably the Actions Committee meeting on a Friday night back in like '87, I think November of '87.

SS: So the most important years of your life all happened in this apartment.

JF: No doubt about it.

SS: So are you Italian on both sides?

JF: Three quarters Italian, one quarter Irish.

SS: What did your parents do?

JF: My mother was a housewife. My father worked in finance for Union Carbide and some other companies like that.

SS: So was he commuting into the city?

JF: He was commuting into the city, yes. He was pretty much a right-winger. He still is now. Haven't changed his mind on too many things myself. We've been estranged quite a bit over the years. We talk and all that, but he's adamant in his opinions, as am I.

SS: Oh, okay.

JF: Exactly. No, literally, yes.

SS: So since you and I grew up in the same era, growing up in the sixties, but you're in Wantagh and you're seeing all the stuff on television, do you remember having thoughts about the Anti-War Movement or seeing the Black Power Movement on TV?

JF: Yes, you know, somewhat, but I definitely seeing them, and again growing in a household that, well, my father was certainly not happy about those things, though I was much more interested in them. I think I was more inspired by the Hippie Movement itself. I was a little bit young and not maybe paying attention or understanding kind of civil rights or the Anti-War Movement too early on. I don't think I really started to wake up until really the end of the [Richard M.] Nixon era. I vaguely recall that, and then started paying attention a bit afterwards.

SS: What do you remember noticing about the hippie era? Did you have long hair?

JF: I did. I mean, at that time I was really quite a young kid, so it was things like beads, bell bottoms. It was all the basic stuff that as a young gay kid I was somehow associated with the fashion elements of it, as ridiculous as that clearly might be. That's what I saw as a little kid. That's what attracted me to some degree.

SS: Do you think it was the style or do you think that it was feminine or anti-masculine?

JF: I don't know. I don't even know if I thought of it as anti-masculine necessarily, though it might have been. I think if I looked back at when I might have thought or realized I was gay, one would call that an association with the feminine, though by gay standards I'm considered butch, at least people say. {LAUGHS} So I never wanted to be a girl or necessarily literally dress up as a girl, though I do have a fun story about dressing up as a girl as a kid that maybe I'll quickly really share. I didn't know. It was really almost like a homophobic moment.

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So I'm in first grade. One of the things is they have like a little house set up. In those days people weren't really even reading in first grade. You just kind of lumped around and got to associate with people, I guess. And they had a whole kind of like kitchen set and a whole box of different things, whatnot. I put on a dress, and they made me take that off. They made me take the dress off. So not only that, in fact, this other girl, Shari, is the one who kind of said something first, and she got to wear the dress. So she's walking around with the dress, and I stepped on it as she walked by and made her fall. That was kind of my first I don't know what, sort of standing up for my— my first—

Exactly. Gay action. Not that I knew what that was really then at the time.

SS: Were you gay in high school?

JF: No. Really just coming out, not even really very clearly in college, no, not at all. I mean, gay. Obviously, I was gay, right? I mean, I wasn't out in any way. I had sex a little bit, was very uncomfortable about it, really closeted about it, certainly felt it, but in those days and certainly in my upbringing there was nobody around. I wasn't really even aware necessarily of gay people. My first kind of awareness on some level of gay people was from this book *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex But Were Afraid To Ask*. I don't know if you're familiar with that book, but it doesn't really say too many great things about—

SS: Sort of the light bulb up the rectum?

JF: Light bulb up your ass, people in bathrooms doing what Republicans do. I guess that's what they're still focusing on, the Republicans, these days. They go in

the bathroom, they hit each other's shoe, and they have their wide stance, so it was all about that. It was seemingly kind of terrifying.

SS: Were you developing as an artist at the time?

JF: Even that wasn't really happening for me. I wasn't really encouraged. I actually went to school first to do finance and was doing that. I didn't really follow – I didn't really find myself. I had a lot of issues, some of which tied to being gay, some of which just the way I was brought up, but I denied myself a lot. On some levels ACT UP was a real period of growth for me. I always joked it was my formative years on a lot of levels, whether it was learning about who I am within a particular community, learning about that community and about our country and about politics and all of that, but also becoming comfortable with myself, and at first through expressing anger at what had been held back. I mean, I think that was a big part of it, or certainly an important part for me as an individual, was expressing anger. I don't think I did express anger as a child all that much. I was a nice kid. I was a good kid. I did what I was told, for the most part.

SS: So did you become aware of the gay community before you became aware of gay politics? Were you going out?

JF: Oh, yes. Oh, certainly, yes.

SS: How did you start going out and meeting guys?

JF: Going to bars, really, was the first thing. I went out dancing a lot with my cousins and such. My family was really into going out dancing. So even while I was in the closet, we'd start to go out to some bars together, not necessarily gay bars, but start to meet gay people and be a little bit tied to that.

SS: Like disco?

JF: Yes, yes. I even went to Studio 54. My aunt was like a regular there at the time. Seriously, I'm not kidding. She brought her kids and her nephew. I was like seventeen and went there. But eventually started going to gay bars and meeting gay guys.

SS: What were the bars you went to?

JF: Well, at one point I was living in Connecticut, so I was going to some bars up there. But in the city here, The Saint, Paradise Garage, dance clubs like that, and then also local bars like The Bar, which was around even back then. This is 1980 or so, '81, '82, that type of thing. But also New Age bars or Pyramid Club, Danceteria, bars that weren't necessarily gay but were mixed, and I was there as a gay guy, for sure. I was still in the closet to my family, but was out as an individual.

SS: So if we're talking The Saint, Danceteria, it's right before the Apocalypse, and so—

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JF: I knew about AIDS even at that point. That was around 1980, '81, or so, when I first started going out, so people knew there was some disease going on. What it was, what caused it, how you got it wasn't really very clear, but there was an awareness in the air of—

SS: How was it expressed?

JF: I'm trying to remember the first time I even met somebody with AIDS. I wonder when that might have been. That might have not been until about '84 or '85. It's hard to remember. I don't think I knew anybody before then. I had been dating this guy in Dallas, and one of his best friends had AIDS and he looked terrible, and that was

something that made me aware of what was going on. I'm not quite sure if we understood safer sex then too much.

SS: Were you afraid?

JF: I was terrified, yes. Didn't stop of me, of course, from getting laid; it didn't stop me from being gay; it didn't scare me into the closet. It kind of felt in line with on some levels it was tied to, again, living in a homophobic world and a homophobic environment, on some levels not fully accepting or liking myself. So AIDS kind of fit into that. You kind of accepted that as a just punishment on some level, not 100 percent, but it was under the surface like that.

SS: Did you just make up arbitrary things like, "Oh, that guy's fine because he looks healthy"?

JF: In terms of worrying about who I slept with or—

SS: Yes.

JF: Yes. You know, I think at the time the thoughts were things like, "Do I have KS [Kaposi's sarcoma]?" You were always looking for KS. You were looking for lesions or PCP pneumonia. Those were things that really you were only vaguely aware of at the time. Was it poppers? These are these early thoughts about AIDS before really any of us knew.

SS: When did you start to see KS around? It's something that's disappeared now. People don't really understand what it was exactly.

JF: Yes. I mean, it was really probably the only visible marker of AIDS early on, or one of the ones that somehow got media coverage so that you kind of had an idea what that was.

SS: But could you walk in the street and see it?

JF: You kind of could. Not a lot. You would know. At that time there were some people who would have it on their face and look somewhat wasted. None of my friends really had that early on. A few people did develop that, usually in a very small spot, nothing really as noticeable as some of the most overly thought about images of a guy covered in these type of lesions. But it was something that you were looking out for. I remember myself not really again – that would be the thing, you'd get a bruise and you were concerned.

SS: So when did it really get into your life?

JF: About 1987, one of my very good friends, he had had an infection in his foot, went to the doctor, it wasn't going away. He was HIV-positive. That was startling on some level, because at that point I really didn't have any close friends that were HIV-positive at all, and that was a wakeup call and that's what drove me to ACT UP.

SS: So you didn't go to any other organizations?

JF: I did not. Straight to ACT UP.

SS: How did you get there?

JF: My friend Kevin Sutton, who has died of AIDS since really only a couple years later after that, he and some other friends had heard of ACT UP and we were all like, "All right. Let's see what we can do about this." We kind of felt like we needed to do something. We wanted to do something. We were all growingly aware of what was going on politically, and we immediately went to a meeting.

SS: I have a weird question to ask you, Joe, but you were the classic ACT UP look. You had the black leather jacket. You had the Doc Martens. I remember you very well.

JF: I never thought of that as ACT UP.

SS: And you looked great in it. But was that your look before you came to ACT UP, or did you acquire it when you got there?

JF: A mix of things. I mean, I lived in Little Italy at the time. East Village was inspired by that, yes, so I don't think that developed any – I don't think ACT UP. No, ACT UP got me to spray-paint my boots pink, I think. I started doing that sort of thing more, definitely started developing more of a feminine side to my personality as a political statement, I think. I don't think ACT UP really inspired that too much.

SS: ACT UP really was an East Village phenomena.

JF: Yes, counterculturally-wise, I would say so. I mean, there wasn't a Chelsea then. We didn't have that type of thing, and New York City was very different too. The people who were here, a lot of them were people who lived here or were people who grew up here. That's what I meant by live here, people who already lived here. So there were the types of nationalities and types of people who kind of were in this mix already, and then there were people who came here because there was no other place to come to, being a freak or being an artist or being kind of different. You know, it's very different, of course, now. And the kind of normal, good gay type of people didn't necessarily come here. It was kind of scary in New York City at that time for those type of people.

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SS: Now they're everywhere.

JF: This is the problem, exactly.

SS: Why do you think that it was the East Village gay guys who really created ACT UP and it wasn't cloned culture? Because it was the clone generation that was being devastated by AIDS.

JF: It's hard to say, of course, right? And there were some of those people who certainly were participating, right? I think just because there was this sort of countercultural, this other way of looking at the system not accepting what was going on. I remember the first time I went to Fire Island in a "Silence = Death" t-shirt. It may have been around '88. I was spit on by a gay guy. I mean, remember that year, '87, '88, we were, "You don't speak for us. You are not part of our community. You guys are stirring up trouble." There was a real feeling of that. People who were older, who were settled in, who really had incorporated the closet into themselves, were afraid of us, were afraid of stirring the pot, afraid of calling attention to gay people.

SS: So why do you think that you went directly for that?

JF: I don't know. I don't know. Somehow I was primed up. I can't say I was politically savvy, because I wasn't. I wasn't really very knowledgeable. I was reading the paper, I was aware of things, but I didn't really have a real leftist understanding of things. I didn't really have a full breadth of understanding of the communities of people involved and all of that or a sense of really our political system necessarily. So I don't know. I'd have to think about that more.

SS: So you walk into ACT UP and—

JF: Walked into the main meeting, yes, on Monday night.

SS: Did you know people in there?

JF: Didn't really know too many people, no, didn't really.

SS: So what was your first impression?

JF: Maria Maggenti sticks in my mind. She was in the front of the room. I think it was Maria; might have been Michael Nesline. Not quite sure. She welcomed us right in, "Oh, hi. Who are you? How are you? What are you here for?" I was with my friend Kevin and a couple of our other friends. I'm not quite sure who it was, maybe Robert Getso, not sure, Stephen Swett, a few other friends who are also friends of Kevin. And we just listened and tried to see what was going on, what are people doing, tried to understand what is this community of people, what are they trying to accomplish, how can we fit in, what can we do, and I immediately then decided I would get involved with the Action Committee.

SS: What was the Action Committee?

JF: So the Action Committee was the committee that did all of the logistics for the actions, figuring out where we were going to go, how we were going to do, how do you handle civil disobedience, how do you plan a march or a demonstration or a sit-in or whatever it is, so the logistics of actually performing a demonstration.

SS: You had never done any of this before?

JF: None of that, never.

SS: You made a beeline for the leadership.

JF: I don't know if that was leadership. It wasn't sort of an intellectual pursuit, clearly, though of course it was, and certainly people were on there who might disagree with me and have certainly an intellectualized understanding of what putting on

a demonstration is. That's not where I came into it, though. For me it was do something physical, do some action. It made sense to me that that's where I kind of might fit in.

SS: So can you give us an example of some logistics that you had to work out for a particular action?

JF: Yes. Going down to City Hall and looking at the area, where we going to sit, where were the places where the walking picket might be, where would we ideally block traffic, if that's what we were going to do? What was going to be the time of the day? How many people are there? What's the subway entrances? How do people get to the place? How do you communicate this out? All of those types of things.

SS: So let's say you had answers to all of that. You'd come to the Monday night meeting and give all this information openly in the meeting?

JF: To some degree. There wasn't a lot that was hidden. I think there was an awareness that undercover agents and cops and stuff could be there, but I don't think there was a great fear. ACT UP was pretty much very much open. There really was not much secrecy. You would get the details of that in the Action Committee meeting, what was going on, and some things were kept a little close, but ultimately, no, everybody knew what was going on.

SS: That's a very interesting strategic decision.

JF: Yes.

SS: To not be defensive, to not try to second-guess what the government's going to do, to just say openly who you are, what you're going to do, and then produce hundreds of people to do the action.

JF: Certainly. Yes, I think it was.

SS: Was that discussed politically?

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JF: Was that discussed politically? Yes, I'm sure. Well, yes, everything was discussed endlessly, over and over again, and loudly and intensely. I don't recall really people wanting to be secret. I think that was the strength of ACT UP, or one of the many strengths of ACT UP, was that there really was a feeling of everybody was really participating. You knew what was going on. It was a real – I mean, obviously there was leadership, obviously there were people who were more persuasive than others, but there really was a feeling of democracy. I don't think I ever really worked within any sort of democratic institution like that before or ever since. I think people really had a vested interest in participating, people had a vested interest in sharing information, letting everybody know what was going on and why.

SS: How did conflicts get resolved? Can you give me an example of a conflict?

JF: I'm sure there's a million of them in my head, but I can't somehow get one out. But, in general, as you know, on the floor conflicts might get resolved by they would be expressed to the people on the floor and eventually a vote was taken what we would do or not do, especially if somehow a conflicted decision was involved.

SS: So was it majority rule?

JF: Yes.

SS: So what happened if somebody was really against something and then they lost the vote? Would they just move on?

JF: Yes. Well, I mean, on some level move on. On some level you try it again another time. People's opinions who might differ would be expressed perhaps

endlessly, maybe not that night, but it would go back. Maybe the rest of the room would learn over time to grow to that opinion. There were certainly lots of things that went on that maybe the room or the floor didn't understand at first or that people were – you know, it was a learning process, I think, for everybody. I think me as a white gay guy, it was a learning process to understand people of color and their issues and what their involvement is in terms of AIDS and the rest of the community and the gay community and the rest. So I think that for all of us we were there learning. Many people had, on some level, an open mind to begin to understand what was going on.

SS: I want to go back to the City Hall action. So this is civil disobedience at the center of the City Hall action.

JF: Right.

SS: How was it decided that that was going to be the case?

JF: I don't recall, honestly. I mean, I think that might have been my first really big action to participate in, and I was in the Action Committee meeting, and I don't remember how that might have been figured out that that's what we were going to do. It seemed like that was a fait accompli on some level, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe there was really some real discussion and trouble about whether we were going to do that or not. We knew we needed to get people to pay attention to our message, and picketing on some level gets some attention, blocking traffic gets a degree more. Civil disobedience presents a different level of seriousness with the issue you're trying to present, so I think there was an awareness of that. There were people there who had a history of performing civil disobedience, but also a knowledge of the history of civil disobedience and its role

in democracy and its role in getting an agenda across and getting disempowered people to express what they want to get expressed within the culture.

SS: Who were some of those people?

JF: Amy Bauer, of course; old-school people like Marty Robinson, Maxine Wolfe. There seemed to be a broad spectrum of people that seemed to understand these things certainly much earlier than I did. There were books to be read or things to understand..

SS: Why was ACT UP committed to nonviolence? Because ACT UP never committed an act of violence. It's amazing that so many people –

JF: You know, I don't know. A lot of us had a lot of intense anger and a lot of us might have been persuaded to perform an act of violence, perhaps. I think we all knew that that would not really get us anywhere. I think there was a real feeling — I think maybe I missed the initial discussions where nonviolence was pursued. I mean, I think from the successful black Civil Rights Movement, Gandhi, those were strategies that worked. We saw that they worked before. It made sense that they would work now. We didn't have guns. We weren't really going to win a violent overthrow of the government.

SS: But it is amazing that no one ever beat up a cop.

JF: It's kind of amazing. I think it came close to wanting to beat up bashers outside of ACT UP in the beginnings of Queer Nation. I still feel that a little bit now.

SS: But even that never happened.

JF: Even that never happened. We are a peaceful people. Who knew?

SS: Is that true?

JF: It is. It's obviously true. It is true. I don't want it to be 100 percent true. On some level I had dreams of – not myself personally, but reading a headline of like “Gay Activist Kills” somebody somewhere over something. Please. But we don't do that, and it's okay. I'm okay with that.

SS: Just one more question on civil disobedience. What was the role of civil disobedience in the culture of ACT UP?

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JF: It was pretty integral, I think. I think there was a real feeling that that was our best tactic. That was our strong tactic. I mean, there were other strong tactics, obviously, when it came to educating people, getting out our message in a variety of ways, but when it came to demonstrations, that was the money shot. That was the thing that really pulled attention. People got arrested, so therefore people were serious. It also bonded people. I think going through that experience, learning to trust your fellow activist, putting your body on the line, saying, “I am so serious about this, I'm going to jeopardize my livelihood, perhaps, or even my life.” Not that that happened, but there was a degree of that. So I think it was a bonding, growing experience. I think it was something that really helped ACT UP develop on some level. I think had we not done that, had that not been that intense, had people not really put their lives on the line, and, of course, there was no reason why we wouldn't, we were dying, so it kind of seems like it made perfect sense to me, anyway.

SS: It also really underlines how wrong everything was, that we were the ones being arrested, when we're trying to make this a better world or trying to

get this country on a justice track. I think, for a lot of people being arrested the first time is just shocking.

JF: It's exciting. I mean, it was exciting.

SS: Everything's at stake.

JF: Yes, and I think you felt validated being an enemy of that state at that time, you know. There's no doubt about that.

SS: Did you ever have these moments where you just couldn't believe that the government was doing this stuff?

JF: No. {LAUGHS} Can't say that.

SS: You can't?

JF: No. I grew up thinking the government would do that to us. I think the thing that I didn't grow up knowing, and that ACT UP convinced me of and I think is still relevant today, is something I think Robert Garcia said in maybe *Testing Limits*, I don't know, some film someone made somewhere, "Direct action works." Being in a democracy, it's not enough to vote. It's not enough just to sit around. You have to participate. You have to educate yourself. I mean, these are the key learnings of ACT UP. Educate yourself, know what the issues are, know what you can do about them, spread that word, bring these ideas out into the public discourse. That's how we got our point across. How else do we manipulate the government or corporations? It was through getting the word out. As good as demonstrations were, no one really cares that much individually about getting arrested. It's more that these were vehicles for the ideas to get expressed.

SS: Now, when you were on Logistics—

JF: I keep on shaking from nervousness. It's so weird.

SS: Did you ever work on a demonstration that failed?

JF: That failed? Probably. Not that I'm necessarily remembering them all that much. I mean, on some level they always worked. I mean, they might have failed. We didn't change the world with every demonstration, so in that sense many of them failed. But we built a team of people that understood what was going on. We had fun. We learned about each other. We educated ourselves, at least. We became more knowledgeable and articulate about things. From that level, they always worked.

SS: Now, when you were on Action, you were doing the national demonstrations?

JF: Yes.

SS: So were you behind the scenes on the FDA?

JF: No, that one I wasn't. Pretty much going forward past that, NIH, CDC, even the New York State one, I was at that point running the Action Committee meeting, at least the coordinator for that action.

SS: Let me ask you about the NIH action. What did we win at that action?

JF: Well, we got a lot. I was in the Costas affinity group, so at that point in time we had pulled off to do some separate actions, and at that time we were focusing on getting women with AIDS, issues about women with AIDS paid attention to because at that time they weren't paid attention to at all. Basically the only concern for women with AIDS, really, was concern for the children, for the babies, their unborn child, really.

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I'm not quite sure if the CDC definition of AIDS had been changed by that point. I can't recall. From that level that would be important because the definition of AIDS, which was based on a particular group of diseases or symptoms one might have, they were pretty much exclusively or mostly associated with men, and the diseases or symptoms that were associated with women were not paid attention to, so they weren't included in the demographics of the crisis, and, more importantly, they were denied care because they weren't really entitled to legally the care such as Social Security benefits or whatever until they met this definition. So changing the definition had importance.

SS: So you think that was won by the [unclear]?

JF: I don't know if that was won by. It's really hard for me to really pull together where all this stuff even sat chronologically. I think that was an important thing for me, in my head, about what my affinity group was doing. We had separated off into kind of—

SS: Tell me about your affinity group. So do you want to explain the name Costas?

JF: Costas? Yeah. Costa Pappas was a member of ACT UP, great guy, really fun, another creative, beautiful, incredible person lost to the AIDS crisis, and he was a friend of many of ours. When we had formed affinity groups, these kind of somewhat separate cells within ACT UP that had some level of autonomy, we named the group after him.

SS: Who was in the Costas?

JF: Oh, a bunch of us. Max[ine Wolfe], Avram, me; Lee [Schy], Phil [Montana], Michael Perelman, Heidi Dorow, Maria Maggenti, David Gips. Tons of people I can't —

SS: How often did you guys meet?

JF: I don't recall. It depends. We were meeting based on particular actions, so there was an action coming up and we were planning some particular thing about that action, then we met as much as necessary. It was a point in life I was doing ACT UP three, four, five times a week. It really just depended, but as a group, probably once a week. But that doesn't mean even that we're meeting once a week as a full team. If we were working on something, we were working on it all the time.

SS: So can you tell me one of your favorite Costas actions?

JF: I think the NIH really was. I think that was really kind of exciting, because we rented our own van, we had our own kind of site. The main demonstration was at the main buildings on the NIH. We decided we would go do something separate simultaneous to that thing while the focus was there, and we would invade this one guy's office, whose name—

SS: You don't remember?

JF: I can't remember now [Dan Hoth]. And that was really exciting because we had to do something that was really very separate. We didn't really have the same protections one might feel being part of a bigger demonstration or even the oversight of media to keep control, and we took over someone's office there and demanded, basically, that they pay attention with women with AIDS. So we had to rent a van. We got to the place. We kind of snuck into the building. They didn't know what

was going on. We took over their fax machines, took over an office there, wouldn't leave until we were arrested, that type of thing.

SS: It's interesting, because the whole thing around the CDC definition, it's one of the really only times – in fact, I can't think of another time – when a basically male organization with men's money and connections put their force behind something that would make women's lives better. I can't think of another example in history, honestly, and I was wondering, why do you think ACT UP was able to do that?

JF: Well, I mean, I think you could conversely ask what the hell were the lesbians doing there? I think that basically the point is, at least for me as a white male, I think participating in ACT UP, I learned about all of these other issues beyond my own self. I think that that was on some level part of that initial anger, I think, in ACT UP was white male surprise. "Wait a second. We are the chosen people. What do you mean you're not paying attention to *us*?" I think communities of color, women, were like, "Duh. Of course not." I think on some level there was this growth that happened that people in ACT UP, certainly gay white men, learned about other, the situations, points of view, and oppression of other people, and I think it became a non-brainer to even worry about or think about women at that point. It became obvious that we would do that.

SS: It's so weird because at that moment so many gay men were feminists and were putting so much effort and resources into women, and now when you look at the gay male community, it's like it never happened.

JF: It's kind of true.

SS: What do you think made it go away?

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00:35:00

JF: There's a lack of political consciousness among the gay community now, because people aren't really dying like they were. People have moved here from a different world. It's a whole generation later. They don't even know what we did. They don't even know what they have is based on what went on before them. They — and when I say “they,” the younger gay male community of today, and probably women as well, have no idea or very little idea, unless they really are looking into it, what they have today in terms of gay rights or equality or whatever it is they have was fought for. I don't think anybody realizes that.

I think people think now, because you look back and the whole culture has changed, that maybe we got what we got because people were nice. And we didn't get what we want because nobody was nice. Nothing we got was not fought for. Every single thing, whether it was things that initially I thought was stupid, like Michaelangelo [Signorile]'s saying, “We've got to worry about people on TV and movie stars.” I was like, “Dude, who gives a shit?” But all that stuff was important and key and pivotal. But every single thing had to be fought for, and this is probably why we're in a little bit of the situation we're in now totally politically is that people don't understand what it takes to be involved in a democracy. You have to participate. You have demand. You have to push. Nobody does something because they're nice. Nobody ever did anything for us ever, period, end of story. Everything was fought. It doesn't mean they didn't grow and learn the rest of the culture, but their arms had to be twisted. They had to be led and led, at minimum.

SS: So you think that in order for gay men to be feminists, they had to feel oppressed?

JF: The gay men to be feminists? No, they had to understand, maybe, oppression, perhaps. I think there's this whole thing about males not understanding why do – well, of individuals not understanding other individual situations to some degree, and how does that happen? By participating in something, being educated, being open to being educated. ACT UP was a real vehicle for educating people.

SS: Now, were you emerging as an artist during this time [unclear]?

JF: Yes, to some degree.

SS: How did that happen?

JF: Well, it wasn't really about political stuff necessarily, though it kind of came to be a bit. I mean, for me that was opening up to myself. I was always artistic as a kid, but pursued other things in my life based on what I thought my life should be, which can equate into being in the closet and denying my own individuality and being something else, whether perceived myself as straight or working in business and whatnot. So as I started to kind of flower into who I was, or participate in the community, people that were also not only gay but creative, it helped me as well.

SS: But also, I mean, you were with Lee.

JF: Well, there's that whole other individualized thing, yes, certainly. I mean, my boyfriend was an artist.

SS: And he was already an artist.

JF: He was always an artist, yes.

SS: Was he a gallery artist?

JF: No, you know, he never made that 100% work for him, sadly. He didn't really get that right. I think he would have liked recognition, yes.

SS: Do you mind if we talk about his work?

JF: I would love to.

SS: Yes, because he did these amazing photographs about the family, right?

JF: Well, he did a whole bunch of things, but, yes, there was this whole bunch, and had I had time, I was actually going to put a bunch up for this thing. Yes, he had been doing a number of different artworks, many of them – well, starting with photography, then Xeroxing images and putting them on the streets. Once he became politicized and started working at ACT UP, they took on a decidedly queer taking, and this whole idea of family, of extended family, or of created family.

JW: We have to –

SS: Oh, we have to change tapes?

JF: Oh good. I can go to –

SS: So we're talking about Lee's work.

JF: Yes. So, Lee's work.

SS: So he was already doing wheat pasting. Now, wheat pasting was a big part of gay culture at the time, right? That's how you found out about everything.

JF: Yes. I mean, I think for him, well, kind of like artwork on the streets was something that was going on to a degree, not necessarily gay-related. I'm trying to think if wheat pasting was as common in that way. I almost didn't associate it necessarily with gay life until ACT UP. It was part of our methodology.

SS: Or part of New York life.

JF: Yes.

SS: Because that was the “Silence = Death” project.

JF: Right. Clearly it was the strategy, but that didn't inspire him to work on the streets. He had been doing it prior to that himself.

SS: So did he start switching to gay content when he was in ACT UP?

JF: Yes. Yes, very much so.

SS: And was that conscious? Were you guys talking about that as he was making it?

JF: Yes, I think he wanted to — he was influenced by — I mean, ACT UP was a big part of his life, as it was mine, and he was HIV-positive from the minute I met him. He was HIV-positive when he joined ACT UP. And he, like everybody else, became educated and politicized, and that became part of who he was. His stuff never became darkly political necessarily, or only political. It was always tied to these kind of joyful moments of individuals and people, and he tied that into being gay as well and being part of this gay extended family. Not only did Lee do artwork about this, but he also started organizing some fun events tied around being gay, specifically July Fourth parties at Long Beach, which were kind of genius. Some of them were really classic, and many of which then generated a bunch of photographs.

SS: So like how many people would come?

JF: One of the second ones, I think, that we had, it might have been almost a couple hundred people. It was truly extraordinary, a couple of hundred gays and lesbians on a typical straight beach, Long Beach, being as queer as we can be, having up a big pink triangle flag, doing blanket toss, having people flying, women without their

shirts on, which, of course, brought the cops around. Guys kissing or same-sex couples kissing was, of course, something to be seen.

Tape II
00:05:00

So on some level is both a blast, a fun time to be had by all, and kind of a fun presentation of gay culture and gay people, men and women, clearly, for the people around to see and admire and enjoy. I mean, some of the funnier moments were like a mix of very radical gays and lesbians and half-dressed and who-knows-what dressed, and little kids wanted to hang out because we were having fun, building sandcastles. It was a very mixed bunch and really a cool event.

SS: I remember that one of the things about it is that it made it possible for us to act normal.

JF: Yes.

SS: Just go to the beach and act any way we wanted to.

JF: That's right. Be ourselves, not – right. Because the fear was if you had gone to the beach by yourself, two gay men, and made out, for example, you could get beat up. I mean, in those days, Lee and I walking down the street, people would give looks. People would say things. Every single thing we did felt political because of the world in which we were living.

SS: So those events that you guys were running, they were part of this kind of bubble of ACT UP world we all lived in.

JF: Yes.

SS: Where there was your whole social life, your holidays, everything with other ACT UP people.

JF: Yes.

SS: Were you able to maintain your friendships with people who weren't in ACT UP?

JF: I did. We had a lot of friendships that were outside of ACT UP, mostly gays and lesbians and artists, for sure. There was a period of time during ACT UP that I was a little bit less interested in straight friends or people that didn't really understand what was going on, but that doesn't mean I didn't have straight friends, because I did. I have plenty of them, and I still do, more so even now. But the bonds of ACT UP were really very deep. (A), we were spending a lot of time together in general, just time; (b), we were watching half of our friends die together, and that is really key on a lot of levels. One is that you're sharing this experience of pain, but not only that, there was a feeling when people were dying of AIDS at least then in the late eighties, you were spit upon, figuratively, if not literally in some cases, that there was not only shame in it, there was something like you really should be hiding that.

So there was a real feeling that we were taking care of each other. We were there for each other. We had deep pain of watching people die, we had the extraordinary joy of being together, and we built a community, I think amongst ourselves, that really protected us and gave the community of people the strength to be ACT UP, to do the things that got done, to become the people that we were. That was really very much key because the rest of the culture really didn't provide a place to be yourself, to be gay, to be queer in that particular way, to be politicized in that particular way.

SS: So when Lee started to make treatment decisions, did he go inside ACT UP to get that information?

JF: Yes and no. I mean, yes, for sure, but there were other issues with treatment at the time even for him as an individual. He really liked denial for a long time, and he had his own issues about that. He, on some levels, kept some things from me. I was kind of stupidly wanting to push for everything. He kind of on some level, I think, wanted to just die. On some level there was this – because he went through a lot. We had to do a lot of different things, injections, all of that sort of stuff, intravenous treatments, obviously medications. It wasn't fun. It wasn't joyful. He was extraordinary in putting on a good face. Lee was really big at making everybody else have a good fun time; genius at it. I don't think I ever met anybody like that in my life. There are people like that, but he's one of the real rare ones, and tied to that, he kind of hid his own pain a lot, even from me. It's not like we didn't share it or talk about it all, but I'm saying on some level he definitely held back.

SS: What about inside ACT UP? There were a lot of sick people in ACT UP who were making all kinds of treatment decisions.

JF: That's right.

SS: Were they talking to each other?

JF: Yes, yes, definitely. I mean, there was an extraordinary amount of information, and on some level the people in ACT UP had more information than anywhere else or anybody else. I think that was another key learning was, it almost seems the rest of the culture has kind of followed along, that you have to be involved in your treatment decisions. You can, on some level, trust a doctor and their expertise, but within reason. And certainly with AIDS is something that at that time was fresh, new, research was ongoing, but on some levels partially hidden. You relied on people in ACT

UP to be able to let you know what was going on, what was some of the options, what are the results of some of these various treatments.

SS: So were you going to T & D to keep up with it?

JF: We weren't going to T & D ourselves, but using people's knowledge from T & D and the community at large that was informed, say, by T & D to make decisions.

SS: So could you call Mark Harrington or some – ?

JF: Certainly, yes.

SS: And ask what about this, what about that?

JF: Definitely, of course, and that information was never held back. It was something that was shared all the time, and there were other organizations and other groups within ACT UP, People with AIDS, whatever. I don't remember. Subgroups or communities, little groups at the center, that information was shared, and some of it was distilled from whatever they learned at T & D or elsewhere.

SS: I don't think people realized that there were new treatments every day, many of which turned out to be nothing and some of which were very difficult, and people always had to make decisions about whether or not to try something when nothing before had worked.

JF: Right.

SS: So were there particular treatments that you guys decided to pursue that were in vogue at that time?

JF: No. Lee died in '95, so like right at the protease inhibitors were starting to come across, so things seemed really kind of desperate, and he would do the

minimum that had to be done, so taking Bactrim as the T-cell count gets below 200 to avoid PCP pneumonia or whatnot. Lee had a lot of living to do, as he would say, and he wasn't looking to focus a lot on that. I think on some level he let other people tell him more about what to do than he was – we didn't spend a lot of time researching separately from what we were learning from other people.

SS: We have this footage of you in your sparkling youth at the second CDC action in Atlanta. Can you tell us about what that was about and how you got down there?

JF: Yes. There were two. That was when we went down in the buses and we stayed in hotels.

SS: Is that the one, Jim?

JH: The second one was the one in the rain. The first one is the one where everybody stayed at the same hotel.

JF: Oh, okay. That was awesome. Second one, oh, my god, I don't know if I can pull – you have to—

SS: Let's start with the first one. So why were you guys going down there?

JF: Well, there were a couple of reasons, and now I'm forgetting what the CDC itself, but it was in Atlanta, and it was also against the sodomy laws there, so we were tied together with doing that, and I don't even remember what the exact issue at the CDC itself was. I don't even know what year that might have been, '88, '89. I'm not really sure.

JH: 1990.

JF: 1990, god. Yes, it all really blurs for me, honestly. And on some levels, although the CDC action itself was big there, I seem to have more of a memory of the anti-sodomy law type of demonstrations and the fact that we kind of went there as ACT UP New York and kind of on some level participated with a broader coalition of people from down there and got to share with them our empowerment, our excitement, and there was a lot of interest in that, working with people, or at least just getting to know people outside of New York City and kind of bring the excitement and commitment, dedication, fierceness of ACT UP down there and inspiring other people to demonstrate.

SS: Because at that point there were other ACT UP chapters.

JF: Right.

SS: ACT UP Atlanta and all that, yes.

JF: Yes. So it was a real feeling of that. I was doing photography at that first action, for whatever reason. I didn't get arrested at the first one, because I felt like I wanted to do pictures, for whatever reason. You can do one or the other, kind of. It's a little bit of a pain in the ass to get arrested and have your cameras with you.

SS: What's in the footage?

JF: What's in the footage? I don't know if I remember.

JH: It's actually in Gary Noble's office, and there's a point where the security guard is really nasty, and he walks off, says he's going to go get a van to arrest everybody. And somebody says, and I'm not sure whether it was you or not, says, "Get a big van." Then you just have this disgusted look on your face and you throw something across the room.

JF: It's funny, I'm not remembering.

JH: It's the sort of thing that you would never remember, but it's just [unclear].

JF: Yes, I had a bit of anger. I definitely was able to express my anger. I wouldn't fight or anything. My biggest memories, oddly enough, from those CDC actions are kind of fun events. Probably the best one, and maybe tied to the idea of a big van, which is probably the most fun I've ever had getting arrested, because there literally were so many of us. There might have been over a hundred of us getting arrested, which was also very odd. Usually you're separated in a bunch of ways. They put us in a gigantic big room, over a hundred of us, all together, and this was, again, the type of thing Lee would do. Hundred faggots in a room, bunch of chairs, he organized musical chairs. So it started with the whole room and just Lee singing and then stopping, and one person, one person less, ends up I was actually, oddly enough, one of the last ones, me and I don't even remember who at the very end. I lost, but someone else won. But it was this incredible time that we spent in jail where we actually got to play musical chairs with a hundred gay and lesbian activists.

[interruption]

JF: My roommate Mike, good old friend of mine, who I met the summer after Lee died.

SS: So you guys were just having fun in prison?

JF: Well, you know, just having fun. There's that aspect of it. There was a lot of fun to be had. I mean, despite watching your friends die, being arrested and harassed, and there was a lot of harassment also in Atlanta at the time. I'm trying to think who it was. There was at that time – who was it? Somebody was charged with having

like fireworks, explosives, on them, and that was planted by the cops. So that was a really interesting kind of little moment. So the cops were playing some sort of games, so there was a lot of tension going on, a lot of harassment. Always the cops usually would pick off one or two people, make them stay overnight, make them have greater charges, do something. Who was it that they said had —

SS: One of our people?

JH: Was that the NIH?

JF: Oh, maybe it's the NIH and I'm getting it all mixed up. He was in my affinity group, too. Red hair. I'm forgetting his name. Don't put this on TV. What's his name? I'm having a blank.

SS: [unclear]?

JF: Yes.

SS: Okay. We'll ask him about it.

JF: Yes, ask him about that. Yes. They said he had cherry bombs or something. I'm pretty sure it was him, something like that. Maybe it was the NIH. You're right. They're all kind of conflating a little bit.

But, yes, that CDC action, those are the things that stuck in my mind was the kind of fun times we really did have, going out at night, being in The Bar, the movie *Marta*, meeting some of the people who I would then befriend, sharing a room with Paul Teeling, I had not met before, Rod Sorge, who's now dead.

SS: Did you ever have a trial?

JF: Me personally? Never. Everything always got off, yes. Never went to trial. Got arrested a number of times, but never, never brought to trial.

SS: Now, do you remember when there started to be irresolvable conflict in ACT UP?

JF: Well, there always seemed to be. {LAUGHTER} Well, I think as ACT UP got older, as the issues got more complex and difficult to pursue, initially it was there's a fucking AIDS crisis going on, to the minutia of how one would deal with the specific aspects of that, and as the community of people involved with ACT UP grew and as the awareness of ACT UP grew and the success of the tactics, it became harder to manage and harder to get a cohesive force of people to participate. Yes, I started to kind of dwindle away at that point, myself, and not attend as many meetings. I think that was towards the early nineties, maybe '92. I'm bad with the dates. I think the last time I really participated quite a bunch was in coordinating the action up at New York State.

Tape II
00:20:00

SS: So let's talk about that. So what was the issue that got you –

JF: I can't even remember now what the core — we were trying to get some sort of change obviously in New York state itself, which was not providing some sort of funding, but I don't even remember what it was now. I don't remember the specifics. I remember just planning the logistics of working with buses and getting people up there and all of these — at that point it was like twelve different buses and all of these people to manage up there and manage a picket and all the rest of that. I was kind of tied into that. In fact, my affinity group did something entirely different, and I couldn't participate with them because I was doing the main action.

But at that point, there even wasn't a real feeling of cohesion. Even at that action, I seem to remember that – see, it's so hard to really pull all this stuff I haven't thought about in so long, what the issues were and why. There seemed to be less

cohesion around even around that action. It was our anniversary action at the time, so it may have been like the fifth anniversary. I'm not even sure. I think so. We wanted to do something big and we wanted to go, at that point, at the state.

SS: It's interesting that you raise this question, and Marlene McCarty talked about this, too, about how when things got more complicated, they got harder to convey.

JF: It's true and it's obvious, and, again, our initial points were there's an AIDS crisis going on, people are dying, and once the government accepted that, articulated it, and decided they would do something about it, the details of what you do became a lot more complicated, and different fiefdoms were fighting for limited resources, attention, etc., to have some individual aspect of those concerns addressed in a particular manner or not.

SS: Those were the conflicting questions. It's like it's too complicated when you have this thing about pediatrics, this thing about prison, and this thing about homeless, or is it that there's this large problem in the way this country is constructed and is there a way to address that that's coherent?

JF: Well, yes. I mean, I think yes and no. If we had fought for, say, just universal healthcare, right, and made that the focus, not that we would have accomplished it, but, say, if one had universal healthcare, whatever that might mean, some delightful socialized medicine, maybe a lot of these other issues would have been dealt with.

SS: And how come we didn't do it?

JF: I don't know. I'm sure it came up. It certainly came up a number of times in terms of how we might approach things. I think there was a feeling that – I'm

sure there were a number of conflicting feelings, and I'm probably not the one to articulate them all, but I seem to kind of recall our issue of AIDS. On some level we're tied to the gay community. Of course, that also evaporated away over time, as say, people of color or women who might have been straight were involved or not people of color, but people with HIV, the intravenous drug-user community, and different communities that had different attachments or different involvements to AIDS that weren't just gay men. And GMHC itself kind of changed over time in reference to the communities that are affected by AIDS as that evolved over time, where it became recognized over time.

There's probably a lot of opinions. One is like how many years can an organization, an activist organization, maintain itself. What is the arc of its effectiveness and power and excitement while, (a), many of its initial goals had been achieved, and, (b), a number of the people had been killed and aren't there anymore. Yes, I don't know. I'm a little lost as to give an explanation for all of that, but I think that has to do with, (a), our success; (b), the changing demographics of people, and the wider possibly demographics maybe makes cohesion a little more difficult, and, again, the nature of how one deals with AIDS.

There is a level of complexity, and tying it all into something, for example, like universal healthcare would have almost been another organization. It would have been a real change of the organization entirely, and that would mean then, what, superceding some immediate goals for some larger goal that probably seemed entirely unattainable and probably was entirely unattainable, versus trying to—

SS: Although if you asked a group of people who had no rights and were being decimated by a horrible disease and were really abandoned by their families and their government, if they could force the country to change, they would have said that's impossible.

JF: Right. Exactly. And I'm not one to say that getting universal healthcare is impossible. In fact, I feel like we probably – not “we” in the collective we – fucked up because we kind of had the opportunity a few years ago, and we let the Tea Party kind of manage that.

So, again, separate from ACT UP, the progressive communities have often had a hard time, it seems, organizing themselves around one common goal or one cohesive easy-to-remember goal, and this was something that came up a lot of times in how we articulated our points of view in front of the media, which was to stay on the talking points, which was a new idea to me and which was something Ann Northrop and probably other people really had instilled in people's understanding and became common knowledge in the rest of the culture but was really key, was distilling the idea to something simple and easily communicated and media-savvy.

SS: How did you get those talking points? Would they be handed out at the meeting?

JF: Sometimes they would. Usually they would be discussed or they would be directed. “This is what you say.” Or the basic thing of, “It doesn't matter what question they ask you. This is what you want to say. Don't be distracted by the question. That's not the point.”

SS: So I want to ask you about the split. With hindsight now that you're wiser and older and all that, looking back, what do you think really was the cause of the split?

JF: I could be nice and just say burnout, really. I mean, I think ultimately that's really it, without trying to take sides of different people's opinions and whether they're irreconcilable or personalities involved over time. I think much of it comes from the fact of success and burnout, and people who are really committed to what they wanted to do, and people had strong opinions in ACT UP. They were able to express them. They were committed to getting them done. Obviously, some of those opinions differed, and that creates tension at times. But I think of ACT UP really as a successful organization. I think its splitting or evaporating to some degree is kind of inevitable over time. You know, things come and go.

SS: Do you have anything you want to ask Joe, you guys? Is there anything important that —

JF: Well, I was going to mention before this, one of the first things I had done with ACT UP actually had to do with Lee, was when I had come to this meeting here in this apartment, Bill Lent was organizing – it was called like the Midnight Raiders or something. He wanted to go around. He had some indelible paint, the paint you draw the lines in the streets with, and he wanted to do dead bodies in front of all of the galleries down in SoHo at the time. So that's how I even got to really hang out with Lee. Lee, him, and I started going out and doing that. We did that one night. We did it at the galleries downtown, we did the department stores in Midtown, and started drawing outlines of dead bodies all around, to get attention to the fact that even the artistic

community, full of gay men, was not paying attention to the AIDS crisis. That was one of the first both artistic but also—

SS: Bill Lent?

JF: Bill Lent. You should get him. He's alive and around and is in New York City. I'll hook you up with him. He's on Facebook. Look him up, or I'll send you his information. You should talk to him.

SS: So the feeling with all the artists in ACT UP that the galleries were not acknowledging what was happening?

JF: This was early on. This was '87, I guess. But, yes, the artistic community – well, no community was paying attention to it, right? But it seemed particularly ridiculous that a community such as the arts community that had lost men to AIDS or people to AIDS was not participating in that or wasn't paying attention.

SS: Now, this picture that you're painting is so much of these outsiders putting posters on walls of buildings, painting on sidewalks, sitting down –

JF: There was a real sense of being an outsider. There's no doubt. I mean, there was definitely a sense of being an outsider from the culture, and being even an outsider from the gay culture. There was the Garden Party. What was that, '87, '88?

SS: What is it? First say what it is.

JF: So it was at the Center, a party at the Gay and Lesbian Center, a party that's thrown annually to support the Center. Prior to ACT UP being there, the gay community was full of people who were obviously gay and lesbian but not in the same way ACT UP was radicalized, and they had a vested interest in maintaining whatever limited connections that they had to the political powers that be.

Once ACT UP became part of the gay community, there initially was a fight for who represented the gay community, and the feeling among many of the at that time institutionalized gays, what we would call the good gays, said, “You do not represent us.” This was that same situation I was saying when I went to Fire Island the first time with an ACT UP t-shirt and literally got spit at. This guy just spit down, said, “You people are causing trouble.” Someone started yelling at me right away, off the ferry – blam.

And it was that same sort of scenario just happened at this Garden Party. There was an awareness, a feeling among the established gays and lesbians, I don’t know what to call them, that this subset, this group of outsiders was causing trouble, probably going to make their situation worse, making a lot of noise, and we needed to be told we didn’t speak for them. Of course it only took a year before that was over. We did speak for the gay community, we were the gay community, and the gay community all understood that fairly quickly.

SS: Yes, in the first year there were all those articles against us, David France in *The Village Voice*, Daryl Yates Rist in *The Nation*.

JF: Yes. Right. Then they grew up. They saw what was going on.

SS: Or in Daryl’s case, he died.

JF: Yes. Whatever it took.

SS: So I only have one last question. Is there anything else that wasn’t to talk about?

JF: No. You know, of course, now that you stirred up some things, maybe someday you guys will do a follow-up thing, now that you’ve gone through a hundred

and something in eight years. Maybe you can spend another eight years of your lives doing that. {LAUGHS}

SS: [unclear] sixty. {LAUGHTER}

JF: Exactly. I wish I could. I wish I could pull out just tons of information. I don't know how to really extricate it from myself.

SS: Well, you've told us a lot of great things.

JF: Okay.

SS: My last question is, just looking back, what would you say was ACT UP's great achievement and what do you think was its biggest disappointment?

JF: The greatest achievement on some level is the empowerment of gays and lesbians and other oppressed people to fight for their rights, that direct action works, that we *can* change what goes on around us. I think that's phenomenal, and I sadly think it's somewhat forgotten. Well, not really forgotten among the people that participated, but somewhat unknown, and we need to get that answer out today more than ever on issues that have nothing to do maybe with gays and lesbians. I don't care about gays in the military, but I care about healthcare or whatever else.

But the point is, how you participate in a democracy is important. If you remain silent, you then are complicit in the rest of it. You can achieve nothing by keeping your mouth shut. You can achieve way more than what anybody thinks you can achieve by doing something. Direct action works. Direct action really works, but you've got to do it, and people on some level, I hope that we can encourage the next generation of people to get involved.

So, to me, that's the great success, that it taught people that we can effect change, and we have. So much has changed. It doesn't mean that we're in a perfect situation. It doesn't mean that gays and lesbians aren't oppressed. It doesn't mean that gays and lesbians aren't getting beaten up and hanging themselves. It doesn't mean that there's not prejudice against us. But people with AIDS are better off because of ACT UP. The lives of gays and lesbians are better off. The way we're represented in TV and in the media has changed. Anything that we have today really was achieved either through ACT UP, Queer Nation, or the ideas that people learned.

I think, again, if there's any sort of failure, it's that twenty-five years later, I don't even know if people know what ACT UP is. Whenever I'm with a twenty-something-year-old gay person, I try to spill the beans about what went on and why. And many of them are ignorant prior to that. So I think our greatest failure so far is that we haven't kept this consciousness alive today, and, hence, we have people today who are complacent, unpolitical, unempowered, and don't really understand what it means to be involved in a democracy and feel powerless or feel that in light of all of this right-wing rhetoric and shit that gets through the media, etc., that our response is denial, don't vote, don't do something, it's not worth it. That's what we don't want to give in to, because you never want to give in to the idea that we can't change anything. You never want to give in to the idea that it's not really worth it.

Tape II
00:35:00

Many people, even from our community, will say the Democrats are the same thing as the Republicans. And on a lot of levels they are. I'm distilling it just down to that conversation. But a lot of important levels, they're not. And we never want to give in to complacency, denial, and sticking our heads in the sand again, and somehow

we have to figure out, maybe these videos or something, I don't know, to help the next generation figure out how they participate in democracy and help this nation evolve.

SS: Thank you.

JF: Thank you.

SS: That was great, Joey. Thank you so much.