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P R O J E C T

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Interviewee: **Jim Fouratt**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Jim Fouratt
November 28, 2006

Sarah Schulman: So let's start if you could say your name, today's date, how old you are and where we are.

Jim Fouratt: All of that? I am a short, blond gay man and you are asking me to tell you how old I am? Okay. My name is Jim Fouratt, today's date is the 20th of November 2006. And I am 65 years old.

SS: Before we start the interview I just want to say I feel like I've known you all my life. I was remembering seeing you as a leader in the community when I was very, very young, still as a teenager. In fact, I remember my first experience of you, even before Danceteria, at the New School, you were on a panel, *Is There a Gay Aesthetic*, and you announced that you were getting married.

JF: Do you remember to who I said I was marrying?

SS: No.

JF: It was a well-known lesbian.

SS: Was it Jill Johnston?

JF: Yes.

SS: Oh, okay! And today you are wearing a wedding ring.

JF: Well there is a back-story to that. If you remember all of the participants were on their best behavior. And I think it was Vito Russo that was sitting next to me, and he kicked me under the table when I said that. And I said it really straight faced, and so many people actually thought that this was true, given everything that I had said before hand, it just showed the absurdity like the question like a gay aesthetic, for example. That you couldn't contain it in certain types of ways.

SS: Why were people asking you questions like that?

JF: That was in conjunction with an art exhibit at the Grey Gallery. I think that it's a legitimate question. It has to do with essentialist theory about gay and lesbian personhood, which is very out of vogue right now. So to a postmodern person it would be an absurd kind of question, but someone like myself who identifies as an essentialist, it is not an absurd question. But how it gets commodified, or the boundaries that put on it are, those are where the questions really lie. This has a lot to do with my understanding of Harry Hay's work.

SS: Because you believe that he is an essentialist?

JF: I do believe that there are four genders: Heterosexual male, heterosexual female, homosexual male and lesbian. I think that they are essentially different and serve different purposes in community and the fabric of humanity.

Yes, I am an essentialist. The last standing one.

Just to put this to rest. Which will explain a lot of the differences I have with what contemporary theory is around gender and sexuality. Which I understand pretty well.

SS: Well let's start at the beginning. Because your life story is the story of Gay Liberation in some ways. You've been there, you've been part of it. We were just saying that you were probably in every piece of footage of every demonstration that Jim Hubbard has shot in the last who knows how many decades. You were always there. You've been a witness to the entire birth of the movement.

So why don't we just start at the beginning. You grew up in -?

JF: I grew up in Rhode Island in the [county] of Washington. All of my life has been reparations for my first political action. I think I was ten, and I saw on television, this was in the '50s—One million citizens for America. I thought that was a very good slogan so I called and got these petitions and started walking around my really working class neighborhood. We lived in a pre-fab house at the time; it was like a big deal to my stepfather and mother.

The little sissy, fag in me even then knew that wasn't the best way to live.

Tape I
00:05:00

Anyway, I went around this neighborhood, and every time I would knock on the door—I was a really sweet kid — I would hold this petition out and I would ask them to sign it and the people would slam it in my face. Then my mom saw the petition and said, “What are you doing with this?” She ripped it up and I was very, very upset and said, “We don't support Joe McCarthy.”

So ever since then I learned to really question what is said, and rather than just believing what is said to me or what is in the newspaper or what was on television. I really thought it was a good thing. I didn't realize —

SS: But also it is kind of an odd impulse to want to run around with a petition as a child? It is unusual.

JF: Not for this child. I just thought that people worked together—I was a very precocious child. I had been pretty much around adults most of my childhood because I was very sick as a kid. So I didn't have as much as the socialization as a child. I acted as a young adult very early on. That was sort of like what I would do.

SS: Where your parents politically active or community oriented?

JF: No, not at all.

SS: They weren't active in the church?

JF: I was brought up a Roman Catholic. They never went to church. It was very important that they said that they did. It was very typical of a certain kind of New England Irish Catholic, Italian, and Portuguese neighborhood. No one's parents went to church, but you were expected to go to church. But on the big days, when you died, or when you got married that's when they went to church.

SS: So when did you start to feel apart from your community or that you were on a different path?

JF: Well, as I said, I had this unusual early childhood. I had rheumatic fever a couple of times. I had leukemia. I was one of the first kids to be cured of childhood leukemia. All of that meant a lot of staying at home. Not going to school. Being in bed or being in the hospital. I wasn't around other children. I had television. I watched television a lot as a child. In my darkened room. And I had a little fantasy theatre that I made actor dolls out of hairpins and put on little plays.

I felt I was different from really early on. I didn't put a name to what that was. I didn't want to be like the other kids either. I thought that I was smarter and that I was stuck in the wrong part of the world.

SS: And what did you think was the right part of the world?

JF: Any place other than Riverside, Rhode Island. And my parents had this kid that was precocious and read books, and didn't play sports. They really tried to understand me. My stepfather, in particular, I was not the kid that he wanted. He would buy me pool tables, and all this kind of stuff. But he really tried hard to figure out who I

was. So I don't have any damaging experiences from that. In a way, he was a good and simple man.

They worked hard to get me into the private Catholic school, which was a big deal for them. Of course, I wanted to go to the Episcopal Moses Brown private school, it wasn't enough that I was going to LaSalle Academy. Once again, I was stuck with what they could do rather than where I should be.

When I was in high school, I knew he had worked really hard to pay this money, for him it was a lot of money, and the only way you could get your school letter other than being an athlete, and that was to be the editor of the yearbook.

I am dyslexic, which means that I have a lot of problems with how to organize ideas, and the way that I write and things. But I became the editor of the school yearbook. And I did get this big L. I remember that he was very touched in his very simple way. I felt very good about it. I did it for him. I didn't really care about ever wearing this thing. But to him it was very important.

SS: Which came first, politics, arts, or being gay?

JF: Well, being socially responsible, which I recall being political at the early age I had gone to Catholic school and I had gotten—I wasn't damaged by my Catholic education in the way that many particularly gay and lesbian people were damaged by that institutionalized religion. I was taught about the Benedictines and Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton – these were the kind of people – as role models. Particularly Dorothy Day was very important to me. She was very much involved in the world. And when I read very early on about John Reed, and when I knew that Dorothy Day knew John Reed. It was

the '50s. There was Eisenhower and Kefauver, and the racketeer hearings on television. We were between wars.

I was interested in anything that would get me out of the house. I think that was the bottom line. It was not a very dysfunctional kind of family, a very Irish curtain type of family. Nothing was ever said or done. But I did not spend too much time in home. I got very involved in any kind of extracurricular activity that could get me out of the house. Now part of that was being this budding gay boy; because I would have to hitchhike all the place. My first sexual experiences were hitchhiking. They were very innocent in a way.

I didn't think that there was anything wrong with that. I remember my whole process of coming out sexually was sort of like, "I like that, but I would never do it." That was sort of how I sort of came out. And knew that I liked boys rather than girls. I was very popular with the girls because I was a good dancer and I didn't try to have sex with them.

Why do teenage girls like boy bands who are basically gay? You can get very emotional and you don't have to have sex with a person. In the late '50s this was really important because a lot of things were playing with the idea of sexuality, but not really doing it.

SS: But when you were saying you were having sex hitchhiking, that was with older men?

JF: Mmm, hmm.

SS: And you see that as a positive part of your growing up?

JF: Yes, I do. It wasn't a NAMBLA kind of situation. When I say older men, they weren't that much older. I had all my crushes were on my peers, but a little bit older than me. I had crushes on certain boys. I remember that there was one kid named Joe DiGiacomo, a northern Italian, blonde, blue eyed Italian guy, and he was really hot. Very cute. And you know how kids are.

Back then, you don't ever talk about this stuff, but you know it is going on. As long as you don't say the words or acknowledge it, the male bonding can take place. It's not sexualized, but sweet kind of emotional crushes can take place. I had those types of things without it being ugly.

I had a couple of bad experiences when I was a teenager. I got raped once when I was hitchhiking. The priest came and I was really hurt and they made fun of me.

SS: Did your parents know about it?

JF: No, no. And once some bigger boys taunted me and really physically abused me about being a fag. But I didn't think that was such a bad idea. I didn't think that being gay — Did we call it gay? — I guess we called it gay. I just never had a negative idea about it. I never struggled with, oh my god— just knew I was gay, I liked boys and I didn't see that — The weird thing that even in this working class environment in Rhode Island I didn't see anything wrong with that. And that sort of has motivated my whole life. I wasn't afraid of it. I was cautious.

Also, I was very pretty. I didn't think I looked a girl, but everyone else thought that I looked like a girl. Not so much in a negative way. But I was just very pretty as a boy. So I didn't pass for being a straight boy. I wasn't a real sissified guy, and I wasn't defensive in my way of being. A lot of kids become defiant in the way that they —

When they are treated poorly they throw it kind of back on them a kind of defiant sissidom. I didn't have that. I was in the best class in the school. I was with the smart kids. My friends were the important boys in the school, and some of them were jocks and they liked me. I didn't have bad experiences around being different.

SS: What did you do after high school?

JF: Well after high school I did have some. Well, today we hear so much about sexual abuse by Catholic priests and teachers. I have to tell you that was not my experience at all. I know today that the teachers that took an interest in me — there was one English teacher who was not religious. He was a secular teacher in the school, but he really took an interest in me and he tried to shape my reality, and he would caution me about how I present myself to the world, but it was all very not upfront about it. And now I know it was a gay man who was mentoring this gay kid. After high school—Do I tell the truth here?

Well I did this all with Martin Duberman and he lost the tapes, and then he had like ten hours to do it again, and I never gotten over—I really told him everything, and he really fucked up the materials, so I have this moment of—But now it is on video so I know it is not going to—

SS: For the Stonewall book?

JF: Yeah, the Stonewall book. Which I am as displeased as Fran Winnick who was left out of the book but was originally supposed to be in the slot where Karla Jay was at the last moment was to be put in. She objected so much to his way of describing her life.

Anyway, so I got accepted to Harvard, but no one ever talked to my parents or to me about scholarships, and there was no way that I could do that. The only option I had was to go to Providence College which was the Dominican jock school that I wouldn't be caught dead going to. Or go to the University of Rhode Island, which I wouldn't be caught dead going to. I had a really grand idea of who I was, and where I should be. Also I wanted to go to Harvard.

And then the day came and I realized that wasn't going to go there, and the only way to get out of that tracking and to get out of that house was to go to the seminary. So I had this — my vocation was that I'm going to find an order, which has movie stars or celebrities or something like that. There was this one order had this priest, who was this jazz priest, Father O'Connor, who used to go to Newport every year. I used to go to Newport. I grew up in that part of the world — to the Jazz festival. And they had Ellwood Keiser who was a priest in Hollywood who made films; he actually made a film about Dorothy Day. They had magazines that they published. They were preachers, and it was sort of a theatrical sort of thing. I decided that was where I wanted to go. It wasn't that I had this incredible personal experience of Jesus; it was that I had a spiritual bent of doing good, and this was a way I could do it.

I knew I was gay, but I didn't know how I was going to do that in the world as an adult. So the idea of doing this, and you could be celibate. And all that sort of stuff was all or nothing.

My parents were very upset that I would make this choice.

This is the part that I asked Martin Duberman not to put in the book, but he did do some of it. I am going to say it now, because it is a different time with my mom. I was

Tape I
00:20:00

an illegitimate child. And if you go to be a priest in the Roman Catholic Church you have to get a dispensation if you are illegitimate. And this was a very dark secret with her. And they put her through hell. It was really awful what they did to her, but she did it. And I went off to a Paulist Seminary and fell in love with the traveling beatnik poet, had sex with him, got crabs, which I didn't know what they were. In the seminary I remember picking something off of my pubic hair and rushed down to the lab and put it under that lab and saw it moving, with all these legs. I didn't know what the fuck it was. I thought, oh my god, I'm dying.

I go to the head superior who was this ex-Marine chaplain who couldn't be more who he was. I said, "There's something terrible!" He looks at me and says, "Where'd you get those?" And I blamed the Mexican nuns who were doing all the laundry at the place; it must have been from them. And then he made me completely shave every hair on my body so everybody knew. It was very humiliating.

In my class is a pretty well known writer today named Phil Nobile. He was a prick then and he is a prick now. I used to make fun of him all the time. I was smarter than him and he was very insecure about certain parts of his physical anatomy, which I also would make fun of.

I was doing this project about male nudity in classic art. And he reported me of having nude pictures of men. And this Marine called me in and said, "What is this about?" I explained what my project was, and I explained that my adviser knew that I was doing this. He said, "Are you homosexual?" I was taught never to lie. It is something that I am really not even good at today. I have this grain about telling the truth that is so much a part of who I am. So I said, "Yes." I didn't tell him about this beatnik

poet who I of course fell in love with and was blonde and beautiful. He wasn't like Allen Ginsberg, and he got killed in an airplane crash about three weeks after. About once a month we would get 50 cents to go to downtown Baltimore. So I went to the library, and there was this reading and that were I met that guy.

To close that chapter there was a big scandal in this particular order about two priests who were about to be ordained who had written a thesis on homosexuality as being an expression of love. And they said they were homosexual and said that it was God's plan, and that caused a homophobic panic in this order. And they got thrown out. They did get ordained in Hawaii by some gay bishop later on.

Do you want all this stuff?

SS: This is great. Well, I am interested in how you came out, how you became political and how you got to New York.

JF: So I was given fifteen dollars and told to leave. So I got in the bus and came to New York.

SS: Were you upset?

JF: Well my game plan was completely turned around. I was upset because I thought he was trying to make me feel like I had done something terribly wrong by telling the truth. I knew about inverts and that historically homosexuals in the church had been celibate. There was a plan for them, whatever,

I didn't go home. I didn't go to Rhode Island. I got off of the bus to New York City. I went to Sheridan Square where I had been once before and there was this blond man walking across the street carrying a missal, a Catholic missal. And I followed him, and he took me home, and that was my first boyfriend.

And that was in 1960.

SS: Where did you live?

JF: My first apartment was on 10th Street across from what became the Ninth Circle. It was Mickey Ruskin who owned Max's Kansas City. His first place was there and it was called Deux Megots and it was a poets and writers kind of hang out. Julius's was on the corner, and in the afternoon there was a little salon of writers: Sandra Scoppettone, and Sally Fisk, and Diane DiPrima when she was a lesbian. And this opera singer who all the women were hot for who turned out to be Dame something-or-other, a very famous opera singer. And they were the sort of people that I hung out with. I always hung out with the lesbians, even then. I feel more comfortable –

Tape I
00:25:00

SS: Did you know Trude Heller?

JF: I knew Trude Heller and I worked as a go-go boy at Trude Heller's, twenty-minutes on, twenty-minutes off. I was there when she was having her affair with Barbra Streisand, who I don't think is a lesbian, by the way, but I think will do anything to advance her career. She always have. It is something that I quite frankly admire. There are only three artists that I've personally known, one is Barbra, and one is Madonna – I can't remember who the other one is – It will probably come to me. Someone more contemporary – who nothing stands in their way of their vision of themselves. And most artists I know are very conflicted all along the way. These are three people that – one with not great talent, but with incredible discipline, and one with great talent and incredible discipline who got what they wanted.

SS: I want to get back to you, but I have to ask you for my own personal knowledge. Was Trude Heller Carmen McRae's lover or is that a rumor?

JF: I don't know that. I knew Carmen McRae. I thought that Trude Heller was involved with Chris Connor, but they were two butches. People were very much into their roles at that time. Particularly the women. Carmen was sort of like Nona Hendryx, sort of blurred. You sort of knew that she was a lesbian, but it was all blurred. I would like to think that she wasn't Trude Heller's lover. Trude Heller was not a nice woman. She was a tough mafia dyke.

SS: Right.

JF: But in my apartment on Tenth Street, Blossom Dearie lived on my first floor. She is incredibly homophobic, if you didn't know. I've seen her at Danny's Hideaway over the years and she will say things like, "If there are any gay men in the audience, I want them to move to the back, I don't want to sing to you."

I remember her as being this tiny little blonde thing with this tiny little voice. And the most stereotypic, heightened, bulldyke you could ever imagine was her girlfriend and they used to fight like cats and dogs. And of course the little tiny frail femme was completely in charge of this big tough bull dyke. I learned a lot of swear words from Trude Heller.

So this kind of duplicity in the private life in the Village. Bohemians, we didn't think of ourselves as gays and lesbians, particularly. We weren't homosexuals. We were bohemians. And it was Sandra Scoppettone and that set. We were bohemians with Living Theatre. It was this incredible mix of people who lived outside the boundary. Jazz musicians, black people, black people who slept with white people, gay people, theatre people, and artists. The Village was really underground. It was really bohemian. It was really great to be a part of it.

SS: When did you start getting involved in the arts and how did you come into it? I know you had a bookstore at one point.

JF: I got involved with the arts when I came to New York. Well, I had wanted to be an actor but then I decided I would be a priest who could be an actor, because I didn't know how to be an actor otherwise. But then I got a job with the National Shakespeare Theatre, which was put on by the people that had the Phoenix Theatre, which was a big repertory theater in New York City in the early '60s. And every summer in Cambridge they would have this national Shakespeare festival. I had gone in '61 to live in Cambridge. And he said why don't you come and take classes. They'll let you take classes. I just went to move into Adam's house, and I was one of the people there, but I wasn't registered, but I just went to class. I pretended that I was registered and that I could take classes. I knew all of the early Boston people who became part of the Factory. There was a small part of Boston's cultural pieces. The black woman whose name I can't remember—

Jim Hubbard: Dorothy Dean?

Tape I
00:30:00

JF: Yes. Dorothy was — Hilton Als wrote a terrible piece about her. He is such a terrible writer. He takes these things that are historically important and nobody knows what the truth is, and then he makes up this terrible story when they are much more interesting. But Dorothy Dean was the black fag hag intellectual among this group of Bostonian intellectual gay people around Cambridge and Boston. And that summer that I was there, I started working at this Shakespeare festival as an apprentice, and I fell in love with the advance man, Morty. I always had a thing for Jewish guys. Being so unJewish, I found Jewish boys really sexy. So we had this affair then I came back to

New York and it turned out that he had a boyfriend and that he wasn't going to see me. One of those branding growing up experiences as a gay man. And I moved into this apartment on the West side in the '70s and one of my roommates was named Jerry Douglas and I remember he and his lover, whose name I don't remember, turned about to be the most quality porn film maker of the '80s and '90s. He made the quality narrative porn films.

SS: Like which ones?

JF: None of them come to mind. There was one about the military. But they always had narrative lines. There was a story line and there was a script and that was what he became, but at the time he was a Broadway dancer, and I remember moving into this place and he said, "Your name is Angela." For Angela Lansbury who he thought I looked like. I didn't have any sense of myself as being a girl. I knew I was a femme. Being a girl. Being called Angela would really embarrass me whenever he would do this.

So I got into that world. Very different from downtown world. Bohemian world, but the upper West Side, Broadway, Chorus boys, drag names. All this is closeted and all this is an underground community. It is so different today. Today everybody knows everything about everything. Everybody's parents know everything possible that could happen to their child who may be gay or lesbian. Back then it was all secrets and mirrors. And it was great for that because it was very special. And you didn't feel mainstream at all.

SS: When did you start getting involved with producing? Did you come in first as a performer?

JF: I was an actor. I studied for seven years with Lee Strasberg and in the early '60s you didn't have to do any other work, that was it. He had fifty students, and if you were one of them, that was it. I got involved with the—I always had this sort of dual thing, uptown downtown—I got involved with the Caffe Cino and I did a number of plays at the Caffe Cino.

SS: What roles did you play?

JF: Angels and fairies and little things like that. It was the theater world of Harry Koutoukas and Charles Ludlam, Lanford Wilson, and so there was the Cino, which was very — Ondine, who became an Andy Warhol superstar, but Ondine was there. And Ondine had this huge dick and everybody knew he had this huge dick. And one day he said come here, I want to show you something. And I thought I was going to see this big dick, which I had heard about. I came across so innocent. I wasn't as innocent as I came across, but I was like your little innocent — I just seemed so blond, blue eyed and innocent. So he takes me into the bathroom at the Caffe Cino and pulls out this humungous Italian dick and proceeds to take out a syringe and shoot himself up in his dick, because he was a speed freak. Before crystal, there was speed. I will never forget it because it bled. It was not a nice, it was a shocking experience. Everybody knew what was going to happen. I came out and I must have been ashen faced and they all sort of made fun of me.

Tape I
00:35:00

The Cino was a lot about speed. Speed was a poor people's drug. And most artists were poor, so you do speed and you write like Koutoukas, image image, crash crash crash. And you don't have to eat. My rent was \$34 a month. It was a very different time. You didn't have to really work at all these jobs to survive,

SS: Did you have a bookstore at one point?

JF: I never had a bookstore. Craig [Rodwell] had the first gay bookstore, and I was friends with him when it was on Wooster Street,

This is all early '60s: The Living Theatre, Caffe Cino, I did a couple plays when La MaMa first opened up when it was on Second Ave. I got my picture in the *Village Voice*, doing an Arrabal play; *Picnic on the Battlefield*. That was the world. I lived in uptown, Lee Strasburg, who all the downtown people hated.

Then Joe Chaiken — at one point I got very suicidal. I can't tell you why. I don't remember the reasons why, but I remember I was working — Joey had asked me to be one of the people that he started the Open Theatre with. They even started these exercises to do this thing. So I went over there with sweet Joe, and I had this crush on Joe, but it was really hard to tell him I had a crush on him. He was very professional about it all. I remember one day I was feeling so despairing, in only a way a young artist can feel when they are young, and I went over to this place, and what I needed was for him to have sex with me, but I didn't know how to negotiate that at all. That's what happened and he saved my life. I won't be more graphic than that. Those were the kinds of experiences that one could have at that time. In retrospect it was very sweet, very innocent. There were drugs around. The Living Theatre — I didn't do drugs. But like the Living Theater with Julian [Beck] and Judith [Malina] I was hanging out there and became one of the soldiers in *The Brig*. And I saw *The Connection* and I thought *The Connection* was like something I had never seen. I became friends with Shirley Clark who was a filmmaker, and she filmed that. And then she did *Portrait of Jason* and Jason was a male hustler pimp, who later became Lou Reed's boyfriend. He was bigger than

life. He was Leigh Bowery before there was Leigh Bowery and Shirley captured that in the film. There was something very, very scary about this big black man with a tongue on him like nothing like I'd ever heard before. At the same time, he was very warm. These two things.

Anyway, this is about ACT UP.

SS: That's Okay. That's Okay.

JF: So this is early '60s. Then we get to middle '60s, which is the back room of Max's [Max's Kansas City]. I was the political person in that room. I was a hippie. A little later I became a hippie. I had the Communication Company, which was a street sheet that was an organizing tool for the hippie community in the Lower East Side. There was no East Village. It was called the Lower East Side until the real estate people came over. I lived on Bond Street in a loft that I paid \$200 a month, two floors. I rented out the top floor, and didn't have to pay any rent. So my social consciousness continued to be a part of everything that I did, and with Strasberg — In 1965 I was doing a scene with this woman named Marquette Kimball, who was a German woman who later founded a theatre company that was well known here in New York. She asked me to do this scene with her, and I said okay. And we were going to go rehearse, and she said I am going to a demonstration and would you meet me at the demonstration. It was in Father Duffy Square, in Times Square.. It was the first demonstration against the War in Vietnam in the country. Literally the first one in the country. And I didn't go knowing I was — and we got — They weren't dressed like cops. They were in suits. They were Secret Service people. They had little pins on them and they chased us all over the place. A very radicalizing experience for me, and I got arrested and the former mayor of New

York was the judge, Mayor [Vincent] Impellitteri — I really thought that if you tell the truth, this was a very radicalizing experience for me, that if you tell the truth, justice is on your side.

SS: And you still think that?

JF: No, this was the moment when I knew that that, this was very radicalizing for me. We got arrested and I noticed that a woman was shooting, a newsperson was there that I knew from Rhode Island—I had a television show, a Junior Achievement show, and she was around that station—And I saw her out of the corner of my eye. And I get charged with running around the street, attacking the police, and using expletives. None of which was true. And I thought I'll get this woman who works for ABC to get the footage, which showed five people jumping on top of me and arresting me. The government seized all the footage, and the network had given all the stuff up. And there was nowhere to get this. It was my first sort of like, oh.

And then I got my best friend in high school's father was a Senator from Rhode Island.

JW: Sorry to interrupt you, but we need to change tapes.

SS: Okay, so you were saying that your friend was the son of a senator.

JF: Well my friend John's father was Senator [John] Pastore who was the last honest Italian politician in America, I think. And I got him to write me a letter, a character reference letter which I had, my little thing to go to court.

Long story short, I'm found guilty. The cops get up and lie. The cop's aren't telling the truth. No matter what I said I was lying. That was shocking to me. It was a radicalizing experience. It was very branding experience for me because I knew that

telling the truth was not enough, and that the system was not based upon being truthful and power and all that stuff.

I hadn't had a real education in politics. Communism and all those kinds of stuff was like a fashion trend. But I didn't read Lenin; I didn't read all those books, and nobody else I knew did. But we would say that we would identify with that.

One of the people also arrested — we used to have these meetings — and he was this really sexy, redheaded guy named Phil Luce. And he was in the Spartacist League, which later in my life, I really started to hate because they almost destroyed Gay Liberation — but we can talk about that at some other point. But he was so sexy, but he turned out to be the C.I.A. plant in the group. And that was my first experience of that, knowing you can't really trust anybody, and being sexy is not enough.

SS: What organization was that?

JF: His organization?

SS: Yea.

JF: It was the Spartacist League.

SS: So did you continue in the anti-war movement?

JF: Well, that was the beginning of the anti-war movement, and I had this really pivotal experience in my coming out as a radical. And, yes. And so I became very much involved in the anti-war movement.

SS: Wasn't that antithetical to what was happening at Max's?

JF: See this is the odd thing. In Duberman's book he quotes me as saying that I really did not like Andy Warhol. And I asked him to change that when it came out. Because that was Marty's language. I liked Andy. You know? My friend Claudia Vidal

who was a Chilean artist had written a couple of Andy's early scripts. And he had taken me to the factory, and I sort of knew Andy. And I was the one who would bring all the political stuff. Mickey liked me because I would bring the political information into the back room at Max's and everyone would take my little communication. And if there was any a need for money, Andy was the first person who write a check. All these closeted, now famous art world figures, but gay, closeted, not particularly political in the conventional sense were always the people that would pitch in. They were always interested. So I was like this mascot in this sense. Person who was political.

SS: So why did someone like Warhol and Rauschenberg not take overt positions political?

JF: Well I think they took positions. They took artists, liberal positions, but I was talking more about them being not out. Certainly in the theater, but certainly the art world – the art world was very straight. With a lot of gay artists coming up. You had the musicians; you had the Bernsteins and the Gian Carlo Menottis. Which I had tapped into that whole world also, because it was the gay subtext. But people controlling the discourse were heterosexual white men. In the art world and in the music world. You had the atonal music which was really heterosexual men's response to this—That's a whole other discussion.

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And I think that in the middle '60s to be against the war was not popular. And I also remember reading Eric — who's the playwright who translates Brecht?

SS: Bentley.

JF: Eric Bentley wrote a book about the Blacklist. And I remember reading this book, and I'm in Strasberg world, actor, studio world. And my heroes are Elia Kazan,

these are the great directors, and these are the people that you want to be in their movies. They were the best. And I am reading this book, and I read what people did to each other. Jerry Robbins ratted on people, you know? It was very hard for me to bring these two things together, about how people that I really respected as artists had really been such rats. Kazan, and — you got rewarded, Kazan got rewarded, Jerry got rewarded, and that moment — this is going back to my kid's idea of you tell the truth, you don't lie. They compromised themselves and their careers were advanced, and other people — Conrad Bromberg was in my acting class, and his father had jumped out of the window, he was a very famous actor who had been blacklisted. So I lived around this world of the older people who were blacklisted, my heroes, most of whom turned out to be ratfinks. It was a really growing up moment, because how do you as an artist conduct yourself. You had the war. And this was all part of what made me come out.

SS: Having witnessed all this, do you feel like people like Johns and Warhol were making calculated, conscious decisions about being semi-closeted or closeted to have more power in the art world?

JF: I don't think it's on that conscious level. I think it is very unconsciously operative. It's about survival. To this day I will still say there were no gay actors in Hollywood. Of course, everybody I knew was gay and certainly in the '60s, but nobody was gay until you were fucking with them. It was because actors couldn't hire themselves. They were dependent upon people to hire them. And the *Confidentials*, and the blacklisting, blacklisting was also about homosexuality, as well as — the double thing if you were a homosexual and a communist that was really the total anathema. I think that people were afraid. There was no role modeling. Harry Hay was out there in

Los Angeles. And the Mattachine Society, when it started, with Rudi Gernreich, who was called Rudi X. I have another whole story about how I know all that. Those people, that was a different world. In New York City, while gay people, homosexual men, were very much the makers and movers of the culture, they were not out and the dominant voice was that of heterosexuality, or pretend heterosexuality. I don't think there was any other way to do it.

SS: When is the moment and who were the people when artists started to come out and say that they were gay?

JF: I think it was after Stonewall.

SS: And who?

JF: I think David Hockney, for example. I think that the Brits were different. The Brits could always be gay, if they were of a certain class. They could be tortured gay like Bacon, or they could be fey gay like Hockney, but they were the best of their generation. If you were that good, and you were British, you could be odd, different, queer, homosexual. That was part of the social context in which you could be an artist. Not in America. Ginsberg was aggressively open about his homosexuality. Rarely would anyone say this — I don't know if I should say this — and Allen was a friend of mine for fifty years — I thought he was incredible homophobic, he did not like gay men. He only went after straight men. So, he became the hero of straight liberals. He was their idea of what it meant to be a homosexual. Now, he's a great poet, you know? He's a great poet. And he is a great figure. But, as a gay man, a conscious gay man — and I had all these discussions with Allen, particularly around Peter Orlovsky. Their creating of a false image. Allen was out, and there was that world of Frank O'Hara. Once again

you had these poets who were gay, and there was like this little cult or clique about them, and they were in control, but in the face of the world, no. Frank O'Hara was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. He wasn't a fag poet. He wrote poetry. And Larry Rivers, who had his gay side to him, did a painting of Frank O'Hara's dick, not just his dick, Frank O'Hara with his large member, which was shocking, if you hadn't seen those kind of things before.

So to get back to your question. No, I don't think it was calculated. I don't think it was conscious. I think it was the way it was. And you had your private world, you see? This is the thing I said by bohemia or the underground. It was very hidden and different from mainstream. And if you crossed over into mainstream, that still remained your private world, but it was not a part of your public image.

SS: Now after Stonewall, you got involved in overt gay politics.

JF: Yeah.

SS: What was the first organization that you were part of?

JF: Stonewall was very radicalizing for me. I had been very politically active in the anti-war movement, and the art world, and the cultural response to the world. There were many gay and lesbian people in these different organizations. They were incredible homophobic. I just never thought about it. Abbie Hoffman was someone I was very well associated with, and he was incredibly homophobic. He did horrible things to me, which we can talk about another time. But I just put up with it. That was the way it was. I liked him; I liked what we were doing. I was like, okay. I'm out. I never would lie about whom I was. I remember my lover Howard — Abbie would come to my house, and Abbie would never look at him. Howard was so cute. This little Jewish

boy with black curly hair and blue eyes. And Abbie would never look at him. Abbie would leave and Howard would say, “How can he be your friend? He won’t even acknowledge me. He is talking to you about fixing you up with women in front of me.”

I never thought about it. As long as I was open about who I was, I just accepted it. Because there was no other way to do it. Because I wanted to be a part of the scene. Part of my motivation was my own ego. I wasn’t going to give up – become something other.

The night of Stonewall, I was working at CBS Records, I was an assistant to Clive Davis. I had one of the three house hippie jobs in the music industry. They were great jobs, and that’s another whole conversation. And I was just who I was. And I never thought of myself just being a homosexual. I thought I was Jim, who was this, this, this, and gay. It was never like, “I’m gay, and I paint.” It was all — I don’t know how to say this — I always felt integrated with my homosexuality and all my other things, which is not what most people I knew then, and I realized afterwards, was a big problem. How do I integrate these things together? For whatever reasons I felt like I could do that. And I paid for it.

I testified at the first hearings for Intro 1 here in the city. And they couldn’t get anyone to say that they had been discriminated against. They had all these politics. Of course, it was GAA who was organizing it. They didn’t like me, and I didn’t like them. But I agreed to testify. I had three significant — when I was a young actor I worked at Eastern Airlines as a reservation clerk and I was fired because Colonel Rickenbacker does not want homosexuals working here. That is what I was told.

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When I went to CBS, when I was hired by the president, and then human resources said that I had to fill out all these forms. And I said, "I don't have to fill out anything. Go talk to Clive Davis." They got very, very upset. They wanted to know my military status. I said that I was 4F. And they said why were you 4F? And I said, "Because I am a homosexual." And they said, "That's cause for you to be dismissed." I wasn't dismissed. When I decided that I didn't want to wait tables any more at one point, when I was a young actor, I wanted to be a cab driver and went to get a hack license. They asked what's your military background, and I said I was 4F. Why are you 4F? Because I was homosexual. They said that's illegal and because it's illegal to be a homosexual, you cannot get a hack licenses. And I testified to that at the hearings and all these City Council people were, oh my goodness, is that true? They changed that. Within two weeks if you were 4F because you were homosexual, and you had no criminal record, you could get a hack license. But that was the reality in which people lived. There were many people who were discriminated against in the workplace. But to get them to say that out loud. Even with Intro 1, with Gay Liberation in place, it was still incredibly difficult to get people to admit it.

SS: Now let me ask you, in the early GFF and then GAA –

JF: Now let me go back to the night of Stonewall. So I'm coming home from work. It's 10:30. I am walking — I live on Waverly place where I live today — I am walking down Christopher Street, and I see this police car parked in front of this dive bar which I never went to. It was really horrible. And drug den, chicken hawk heaven. And it's there, and I'm a political person, and I walk over there and I see what's going on and certain things happen. I go to the corner to the telephone, and I call up all my radical

friends and say, “You’ve got to come here, it’s going to be —” And not one of them would come.

SS: Your straight friends?

JF: Straight friends, yeah. Not one of them thought it was important. It was eye opening for me. I remember Allen Young, who was closeted at the Liberation News Services. I knew he was gay and I knew he wasn’t out. I was like, “Allen, this is historical.” Anyway, he came.

SS: What was upsetting about that?

JF: I just — people like myself, I’m not the only one who has this experience, given so much to the anti-war movement and felt entitled that when our time came. That’s what’s upsetting about it, because I expected people to show up. I always showed up. I was in Newark during the riots. I was blah blah blah. I expected that people would show up. And I just had never thought that they wouldn’t. That’s how homophobia works. It isn’t always overt. It isn’t always the ugly experiences. It’s that feeling of superiority.

When I went to Hollywood in the early ’70s and got elected at Actors Equity, I got elected by the old commies, and then when it got time for me to get elected an office, they all pulled their support for me because they thought that a homosexual should not be in a position of power.

Anyway, then that night a lot of people like me showed up, who had been active in other movements. A lot of lesbians who were active in the Gay Liberation and in the Women’s Liberation Movement. Those people showed up, and we all had political experience. So for those four nights — I loathed this David Carter and that horrible book

that he has written — It was not a riot. A riot is where people are out of control. This was a very well organized — people do not want to talk about it — but we knew about what we were doing, the people who were political. Most of the people that were not there were not political, because gay people could not be political. They were so excited to be part of the party. Finally something for them at the end of the '60s.

The Motherfuckers showed up that night. The second night. And they started throwing bottles. I knew The Motherfuckers from the East Village.

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SS: Was that Tuli Kupferberg?

JF: No. Not Tuli Kupferberg. Ben Mireya, Super-Joel. The Motherfuckers were like thugs. Like leftist thugs. They were going to beat up everybody. They were just like thugs.

There are two groups that would always show up whenever there was a potential police situation: The Youth Against War and Fascism, who were the first leftist organization that would show up with their banners. Leslie [Feinberg]. I remember seeing Leslie come down that street that second night.

SS: Because they became part of Workers World Party.

JF: Yeah. Youth Against War and Fascism was a part of Workers World. There was Leslie. And I always thought, was that a boy or a girl? I assume she was a girl. She was working class. But Leslie was there the second night of Stonewall. And the Youth Against War and Fascism and the Workers World were the only left group that showed up. They were like Sparts, and nobody wanted to talk with them.

And so I remember going up to The Motherfuckers and I said, “If you are going to throw bottles” — because you have all these gay people that said that they threw

bottles and beat up cops, and it did not happen. I'm sure to them, subjectively, they thought it happened, but it did not happen. "You've got to go to the front of the line, because these people in the front of the line have no idea what to do if the police will do." So I stayed in the back with them, trying to stop them from throwing the bottles. And we would get people to run down different streets. When I say it was organized, we knew how to keep the police—Because many of us had political experience being in the street—So we had people running at all different streets. People just had a good time. But we knew how to do that for four nights, so it wasn't riot.

Martha Shelley and Michael Brown. They have both the new Mattachine people. They both sort have been involved in Mattachine. They are ultra-conservative. The kind of "We are just like you, except what we do in bed" organization. But we were the people who took drugs and were hippies, and we weren't like you. We were one of your worse nightmare. That was won of our slogans, "Your worst nightmare and your best dream." That was one of our little posters.

The Mattachine Society – this does relate to the ACT UP stuff – on the second and the third night, called for a community meeting at St. John's Church and they wanted to calm everybody down, and hold candles and hold a vigil. They had this heterosexual woman, a sociologist, who had written a lot of good things about homosexual. She got up and said, "You are good people, you have always been peaceful, and you have to show them who we are." And I got up and said, "No we're not." I was in cowboy drag. My rock n' roll clothes. I didn't think of them as S&M leather stuff, I just thought of them as my rock n' roll clothes. Michael Brown and I had talked about Bob Christgau who was a *Village Voice* [writer], and he was teaching at Alternate U, which was on

Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue in the space that the Living Theatre used to be in upstairs. And he got us a room, and that we could go and have a meeting. And we took people out of that meeting at St. Johns and went there and that was where the Gay Liberation Movement was formed, that night. And it was Martha's Shelley's idea to call it the Gay Liberation Front, because of the National Liberation Front.

So the consciousness of people, who had been political in the anti-war and in support of the black revolution, and the women liberation, came out of those movements and came into GLF. Sadly, that story hasn't really been told. The books that have written about it. The research has all been — whatever people wrote, they never talked to most of the people who participated in it. But it was very diverse. From the beginning there were people of color in there. The gender stuff: butches, the femmes, the drag queens, and the academics — a very diverse group of people. And because Women's Liberation was really the model that this meeting procedurally was run, we had this real fear of leadership because it was very male. We had no spokesperson. The chairman got picked out of a bag. Literally, that's how you became chair. Some of us, like myself, were more articulate, more verbal. And to shut people like me up, literally, not just me, but people like me and me, we'd do the American Indian where we'd go around in a circle, and everyone got a chance to speak before you could speak again. This is what caused GAA to be formed more than any other thing. They couldn't stand waiting. Arthur Evans — and I understood how frustrating it was because I had to really had to figure out when I would speak, and what I was going to say. It was a really — it really made me think. Good process, but then it was interminable. Because the meetings got really large. You didn't have to speak. There was an actual talisman that was passed

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around. And people like Sylvia [Rivera] and Marsha P. Johnson. Sylvia wasn't at Stonewall the first night, but it didn't matter because she was emblematic of the kind of people that were around Stonewall. Marsha P. Johnson was there, but Marsha P. Johnson couldn't talk like Sylvia. So everyone's voice got put into the mix. And it drove people who were into *Robert's Rules of Order* and into male socialization, including women. There were three women that went with them.

SS: Which women?

JF: Nat. She was a lawyer. She was the first secretary. She was this butch — it made perfect sense why women would go, if you weren't into women's consciousness. Because all the action is with the boys anyways. The woman who was the bouncer at Johnny's — what was the dyke bar on 14th Street? Not Johnny's — it's a lesbian bar on 14th Street. This is the woman that claims that she was the passing woman that I talked about who sparked the whole thing at Stonewall outside. She claims that she was that person. She's not. She was a mafia bouncer at some loathsome dyke bar on 14th Street. But she was very male identified. She organized a softball team. She was a security person. She is usually in the Gay Pride Parade in the very front in a car with Connecticut license plates and all these girls around her. She is a fraud. Historical fraud anyway.

SS: Let me ask you this. In those days, Gay Liberation Front and GAA, who were the people that you remember from that time who were later in ACT UP?

JF: None of the GAA people were in ACT UP. None of the GAA people until Marty Robinson got sick. Bill Bahlman also was in GAA a little later, not in the very beginning. But those were the two that became active in ACT UP because they were sick. Jim Owles died of AIDS without telling anybody he was sick. He was the first

president. And there was a reason for this — and I don't want to say that I hate GAA, that they are all bad people. But it was single-issue politics. GAA was really birthed by the old homophile movement. Who were the actors? Jim Owles and Arthur Bell and Vito Russo and Allen Roskoff. It was Kay [Tobin Lahusen] and Barbara Gittings who were so terrified of the left because of their experiences in the '50s of what happened with gay people who were leftist. They, literally, were in the background mentoring the GAA people. This is not a story that has been talked about. The homophile movement has now taken over rewriting that history. Like Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin who was her lover, and Roz Regelson who is a judge now here. They were vehemently anti-leftist. It really came out of what had happened to gay people who had been in the left in the '50s around McCarthy. The homophile movement was not leftist. They threw Harry Hay out because they wanted to be like normal Americans. That was the whole — and today I will tell you that I understand all that, but at the time I was really pissed off at all that. But today, I have actually apologized to Barbara Gittings, not that I had done anything so horrible to her. But I told her that I understood and I respected what they had done.

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SS: So who were the GLF people who had gone into ACT UP?

JF: In the very beginning, people like Arthur Evans, they were at the GLF meetings. And they pulled out, very much like Treatment & Data pulled out of ACT UP. If you recall, they didn't like the way ACT UP was going. That committee formed that other organization. It is the same sort of thing.

SS: So Jim Owles, those people who went from GLF to GAA? What about the people who refused GAA and stayed in GLF?

JF: They were mostly women.

SS: Did any of these people end up in ACT UP?

JF: No.

SS: So you are saying in terms of first generation gay activist politics that GAA had more influence on ACT UP than GLF?

JF: That's a complicated question. Number one, I was active in GAA. When GLF dispersed, and it really was organizational dispersal, it wasn't like it faded away. It was really much involved in its philosophy. Everyone went out into different communities and organized and lived certain kinds of lives. But I was in New York, and I remember going to GAA. And those people whose names that I just mentioned, including Marc –

SS: Rubin.

JF: Marc Rubin, yeah. He said the most horrible things about me on the internet that I can't answer. I went to GAA and I started to talk. That's where the action was. And they put me on trial, and they had a public trial about whether if I could be a member of this organization or not. They claimed I was violent, which I'm not. I never have been violent. They're more violent in their rhetoric than I ever was in mine. But because I'm a trained actor and I have a certain ability to speak on my feet, I won the vote, and they were so upset that they had to make me a member of GAA. They called me a communist and an FBI informer. Now, you couldn't be a communist if you were a fag. And they didn't have many FBI informers who were homosexual. I won, but they have been really bitter ever since then. And I played my part in that bitterness.

SS: So what was it like for you to work with those people in the ACT UP context?

JF: Well there were all these other people. In ACT UP? None of those people were in ACT UP in the beginning.

SS: Except Vito.

JF: Marty Robinson had been my boyfriend, had been my lover before Stonewall.

SS: Another Jewish guy?

JF: Another Jewish guy with a big dick. Yes. A carpenter. And Rubin has printed that Marty Robinson was never my lover, that I was lying. That it's so impossible — I mean he was my lover, I knew this guy. He was a speed freak. He was in ACT UP, and he had AIDS, and he was doing a lot of speed and he was really crazy. He was hard to deal with. I remember when Michael Signorile, not Signorile — the one who's the troublemaker —

SS: Petrelis?

JF: Petrelis. Michael Petrelis moved into Bailey House with the first group of people. He did not have HIV. It wasn't even known at the time. He didn't have AIDS, but he thought it was a good deal, live on the river. It's this former boutique hotel owned by Roy Cohn. And after a year, everybody died. This was when everybody died. Michael put on twenty fuckin' pounds. I went up to him — I would never say, you're not sick. I'm not a doctor. But I said to Michael, you are a wonderful role model, if you are sick — I'd say it like that — to show that people can survive. So, why don't you get a job and move out of house, and let someone who is really dying move in. And he was really angry with me that I would challenge him on that level. I remember [Marty] Robinson

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coming up behind me and saying, “If you fuck with Michael Petrelis one more time, I am going to fucking kill you.” And I believed him. It was a kind of AIDS anger that almost AIDS dementia kind of anger.

Because Bahlman’s brother’s Ed, had 99 Records, which was one of the critical early punk New York record shops. Bush Tetras was on it. And I knew Ed from my club life. I had more than one life. Most of these people had one life. And so Bill and I had a detente friendship, but Marty was part of the Lavender Hill Mob. It was difficult to work with them. When it came to ACT UP, but ACT UP had it’s own tensions. You had a whole bunch of young people who were not political — very much like Stonewall days — unpolitical, who were suddenly being told that they were dying. And they were privileged for the most part. They were the best of that group of people, they were white, they were good looking, they were upwardly mobile, they were educated and they had no politics. And they were told that they were going to die. They had no politics other than the politics of death, which is not a good place to start. So for people like myself and Maxine [Wolfe] and people that had some history and had some understanding of the isms — the male chauvinists. I mean Larry Kramer was the worst — misogyny. The misogyny that that man would come out of. Most of those boys — and I am old enough to call them boys at the time — had no understanding. I can’t say they were doing something consciously; they just never had been exposed to any of this. By the time 1986 came around, all those politics were sort of in the wind. So people like myself who it was logical to become active in ACT UP for me. Two weeks after Larry founded Gay Men’s Health Crisis, I started something at the time, which was called, Wipe Out AIDS. Wipe Out AIDS was started as a sort of tea group. GMHC was very much for white gay

men who were sick or afraid of being sick. The founders all thought, my sense of this is, that if they founded this organization they weren't going to get sick. They did some good. All except for Larry, they all died.

My experience of the early days of GRID was that everybody was affected by that. The people that were sick, the people that were afraid that they were going to get sick, and the people that loved them. Some of those people could have been family. So we set up an organization for all those people, and we set it up like a tea group. We'd all sit around a circle and we'd all talk about our feelings. And every one got to say something. And GMHC was set pretty much so that only white gay men, at that time. That organization went very early. Wipe Out AIDS changed its name because people thought it was too hostile. It became HEAL, which has it's own controversial history. I will say it is about self-empowerment. What we are trying to do – because Larry was writing in the *Native* at the time these really terrifying articles saying that everybody was going to die, and if you were sick or that you knew someone who was sick, and the only message you got was death, that there was no hope at all. And we tried to set up a group that gave some sort of hope. We didn't have the answers, but we wanted to — ever since the old kind of feminist politic. You've got to have hope. You just can't deal with death.

I went to the meeting that Larry called. I had a history with Larry. Like Larry's calling the mayor a murderer, and there was going to be a meeting with the mayor, and the mayor's person says, "not with Kramer." And I was one of the people going because I was going to ask for the building that was going to be the community center. And Larry called us all up, and said, "Don't go, he won't let me go." And I remember saying to him, you can't call someone a murderer and expect him to sit at the table with you. I am

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not saying that you don't call him a murderer, but you can't have it both ways and, of course, Larry made it difficult for everybody else. And they kicked him out of GMHC for the same reasons. So he's calling this meeting and this is what Larry's very good at. He called this meeting and 50 people showed up and to my view, those 50 people started ACT UP, not Larry Kramer. Larry Kramer played a very significant role in ACT UP, but it was not his child. It was all those people in that room that started it and decided to continue with it. It was very logical for me to go to ACT UP. I actually moved away from HEAL because it had been set up and it was so antagonistic to the politics of ACT UP and I just sensed that the politics of ACT UP were very, very important. Whether we all agreed about the science, there was something very much like the original GLF in a sense in its motivation.

SS: I have a question. Oh, new tape.

JW: Save that thought.

Tape III
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JF: Part of my dyslexia is that I am circular in my thinking. Women understand it better than guys.

SS: That is fine. Okay, so you and some of your colleagues, gay people who had been politically active for twenty years basically before ACT UP started and then you walk into a room with all these gay people who had never been politically active. Why not?

JF: Why hadn't they been politically active? They didn't have to be. Single-issue politics really triumphed in the late '70s. And until AIDS happened you could live a pretty open gay life in New York City, in the business world too, not everywhere in the country, but here you could do it. GAA had two primary messages, one was, Gay Is

Good, the other was Sex is The Organizer. Now, someone like myself coming from my Harry Hay sort of thing, is what does Gay is Good mean? What does gay mean? Where did we get that idea? Is it birthed in response to oppression? Is our behavior – is this who we are? Or is this a reaction to oppression?

So that's what consciousness raising. See GLF had consciousness raising, GAA did not have consciousness raising. Not one single man that went to go to GAA nor the three women who went to GAA were in consciousness raising. Bob Kohler was never in consciousness raising. To me it was the critical lynch pin of GLF consciousness was consciousness raising, because it asked the basic questions of who are we? Where do we come from? What do we want? What is our place in the world? GAA made everything sex is good, or gay is good. To me gay wasn't all good and sex is a very volatile issue, and all the men issues around sex about intimacy. Gay men had always been told by society, you don't exist, but you can have sex as long as you do it anonymously and not in our face. So when you said you were a gay men the only thing that you knew was that you could have a lot of sex, if you wanted to, if you lived in the right place. And as the '70s came along that got hyper. You never had the opportunity for the kind of public sex that the '70s brought post-Gay Liberation. One of my biggest contentions was that the New York Police Department declared hands off the piers, where it was a no man's land. It was completely like the Wild West – the Wild West Side. Where the police did not go in. You could have a lot of sex. You could get robbed, and you could get killed, but the police would not invade that. But this is my contention; it is very much based on Wilhelm Reich's ideas. They thought that if they keep people at a constant state of tumescence, they would not be political. Because to be political there has to be

something that you are reacting against. That is a theory that doesn't fly with many people, but I am going to hold to it because I think it is true.

SS: So now you come to ACT UP. So what made you decide to get involved?

JF: Well I went to the meeting. My life has always been through happenstance. Being sort of in the right place at the right time. I don't always think about, but there is something very much a part of me that gets drawn to, that wants me to be a part of. I went to that meeting with all my feelings about Larry, because I thought this was important. I was still doing HEAL. I had stopped doing my club. My club life had sort of fallen apart because of mafia battles and stuff. I had gotten sick, not with AIDS. I had some back surgery, but I had been put into Lenox Hill hospital and because I was thin and I was gay they treated me as if I had AIDS. And I had all these signs outside my door and everyone would come and see those signs and people walking around in those space outfits. And I knew I didn't have AIDS. Everything I thought I knew about how you got AIDS, I knew I was not at risk for it. But I was treated that way. So I really got a good insight into an irrational response to AIDS. So when Larry came about — The first people that I knew in 1981 it was Hibiscus, was his professional name, but this kid named George Harris who I'd known from La MaMa. His family had been a part of La MaMa. The Harris family, George went to San Francisco and lived with Irving Rosenthal's collective. And I lived in San Francisco around the same time and I saw this beautiful child become this beautiful drag queen, or gender-free spirit called Hibiscus. And I saw him in the '70s with the Cockettes and the Angels of Light, and then drugs and prostitution. I knew George a long time. And his sisters came to me at Danceteria and said George is sick. The Harris Sisters, part of his act, the Screaming Violets they were

called. And said, “George is sick in the hospital, and we need to do a benefit for him. “ And I said, “What’s wrong with him?” And they said, “Well, he’s got GRID or something.” I’ll never forget this. I went to see George at St. Vincent’s and people don’t understand what those experiences are like. I walked into this room where there is this beautiful man who is completely distorted in his body. His fingernails had all grown out. He was green. It was grotesque. There’s no other way of talking about it, what the disease had done to him. And I knew he was going to die. I sat in that room. This was one of my first experiences as an adult where someone was dying and who hadn’t OD’d. And later during the ’80s, who didn’t die of AIDS. But this guy was going to die. He was younger than me. He was going to die of whatever this thing was. And I remember going back to the club and saying to his sisters we would do the benefit and then he died and we made it into a memorial. That was my first one.

The second one was Klaus Nomi. There was a journalist named Henry Post who was the *New York Times* style – the fag job at the *New York Times* – he was the style editor and then he went to the *New York Magazine*. He did a really lovely profile of me. So I liked Henry. He was always good to me and he was an in-place media person. Henry got sick. And he had pulled his life together. He stopped using drugs and he had gotten himself a boyfriend. He was like really on a track to be writing a book and writing at the magazine. And he got sick and he was really pissed off. I remember going to see him at Lenox Hill [Hospital] and he said to me Klaus is down the hallway. And I thought, “Klaus, who I had helped in his career and I had known, Klaus?” And he said, “But he doesn’t want anyone to see him.” And Henry died. And Anna Wintour was wonderful. She was his best friend. She was, I always acknowledge these icons that

were supposed to be perfect bitches who were really good at that time and she was one of them. She was good.

And so I decided that I was going to go see Klaus. And Lenox Hill has this circular, round hallway. You walk around all the rooms that are off on the side. And I walk up to his door and there was this little crack in it. And I couldn't push the door open because Henry had said he just looks awful. And I walked around again and I thought, "How do I do this?" Because I am not good at pretend. I thought if I could just find his eyes, I will be okay. I could talk to him. And I walked in and he was like, "Oh Jim I am so ugly." Now, he's a very vain man. "I am so ugly. Don't I look ugly?" I am looking him right in the eyes and I knew I couldn't lie to him. And I said, "Yes you do." And he said, "Oh, you are the only one who tells me the truth." Because he knew.

This was 1981. Then I met Michael Callen. Because my friend Richard Dworkin, who had been my old boyfriend and was working for me answered an ad in the gay newspaper saying "Gay musician looking for other musicians to make gay music," and it was Michael Callen. And I said, "What happened?" "Well, he made brownies and I didn't leave." And a week later I said, "How's it going?" And he said, "Well I really like him, but he's sick. He has GRID." I don't know where it came from, but my first response was, "Do you love him?" And he said, "Yeah, I'm in love with him." And I said, "Well, if you're in love with him, none of that matters, does it?"

And he proceeded to have this relationship. And I got to know Michael. Michael never joined ACT UP. Michael had very little time for the ACT UP boys, but he never put them down. Michael never criticized them, but he wouldn't be a part of them. That was in the very beginning. These were the first people I knew who had AIDS. From

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1981 to 1986. So there is a whole history there of my being involved with AIDS and trying to find a different way from GMHC. In the early '80s, all these gay men are walking around saying this is a new virus that's fallen from the sky. You couldn't talk about sex. You couldn't talk about lifestyle. You couldn't talk about drugs. And for good reasons. This is the GAA influence. They were so afraid of losing the gains if people knew what their lifestyle was like and the moralistic judgment that would come down. That is why one of the founders of the AIDS Coalition, which used to meet weekly at the Center — it was just so hard, and these were my issues, coming out of, What does it mean to be gay?

SS: What was your role in ACT UP?

JF: I was in the media committee with Michael Signorile and Jay Blotcher because that was stuff I knew how to do. I would go to the Treatment and Data Committee, but, of course, I would have a different point of view. Let's just get it out in the open. I am an AIDS dissident. I don't believe in HIV. And I could talk, but I learned that I had to talk from the model. I understood the model they were coming from. I could talk it. I could understand it. I think it's really important to not —

SS: Was there a significant group of people in ACT UP who did not believe in HIV?

JF: No. You had a bunch of scared — for the most part they were men who were sick and they were terrified of dying. So a certain substrata of that group would look into alternatives and look into taking responsibility. And there were those people, but the majority of them no. Not at all. They were angry and they were frightened, and they

didn't want to die. I respect each of those things. What was the writer's name? The funny one? The published one?

SS: David Feinberg?

JF: Do you remember when David came to say goodbye to ACT UP?

SS: You mean when he came in screaming on his I.V. from St. Vincent's? I do remember. Tell us what happened.

JF: Well, he was dying and he knew he was dying and he was impatient. And there was all this politicking going on in the room. He was really fucking angry with everybody and it was authentic. And to me that is what was really going on in the majority of people in ACT UP, underneath all the sexiness and the politics and the empowerment. The wonderful thing about ACT UP was that these apolitical boys, and they were apolitical, not non-political – not their fault – and then they were politicized or radicalized by this life experience. Coming out? Most of them came out for the first time, outside of the little world they lived in. Saying that they were sick. These were very dangerous things to do, and standing up to people collectively and having fun. And one of the big organizing tools of ACT UP is fun. I could go on and on about the problems with ACT UP – we can talk about that, because they were real – but the really positive stuff was it said that you have a voice. You have the right to have fun, you have the right to make art, you have the right to be sexy, you have the right to live. ACT UP said that you don't have to die. That was the message really. And that was very much against what Kramer had put out in all of his writings in *The Native*, which was, "You're gonna die." And then there is Larry saying, "Drugs into body! Drugs into body!" He's not sick yet he just wants everybody to march into the front line, gut checking everybody,

if you don't try this drug, you don't want to live. Because he wanted to know what to take when he got sick. That's a really hostile thing to say, but I really think that is what happened.

SS: Well a lot of ACT UP'S treatment was based on a common agreement about the existence of HIV – a lot of the treatment trajectory. So how did you cope with that?

JF: To thy own self be true. To me, it was more important that we learn if it was possible to work together. This was the future of the gay movement to me. The gay male movement had died. The women's movement had gone on. Lesbian feminism had gone on. Women's liberation had gone on. Lesbian separatism had happened. All that had been a vital community that really embraced and empowered many, many women, a lot of them lesbians, but not all lesbians. The gay male movement just dissipated. It became one big sex party until this happened. So stepping back from my own experience, regardless of the differences, this was good. It was about being visible and owning your space. It also brought out all the homophobia. The homophobia of liberals. The homophobia of closeted politicians. I was never as angry at [Mayor Ed] Koch as Larry Kramer was, but Larry Kramer lived in the same building as him. And it was two queens in an elevator colliding. I don't make any excuses for Ed Koch, but I had an understanding of him because of the closet.

I had been on the mayor's inter-agency task force as a public person, so I knew things were happening. But, Larry, because he wasn't invited, didn't think anything happened. Everything is black or white with Larry.

SS: Let me ask you about the media committee. So when you got there what was different with ACT UP's media committee than previous media work in a gay context?

JF: Well, Signorile, for example, is a good way to look at it. Here is a young gay man, smart, sort of a sissified boy, who is a gossip columnist. He works at *People*. He's doing all the things that Henry Post had sort of paved the way for. He was accepted. He could be this gossip. He could be smart, and he could be fashionable. So he gets involved. I've never heard Michael talk about what – because he wasn't HIV positive, that I knew of. And of course, no one ever said they were negative. You couldn't say you were negative because if you did that — I never said that I was negative, and people would assume that you were positive. Certainly outsiders would think that if you were in ACT UP that you were positive or had AIDS. I don't remember Michael talking about his status, but my assumption was that he was negative and I could be wrong. But he brought all this cachet – I mean he was working for *People Magazine* – to the skill of media manipulation. This is a different generation. Some of them went to school and they learned about Marshall McLuhan, and they knew about this type of stuff, and it wasn't leftist, politically correct. You could figure out how to spin it to get them to listen.

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SS: How was it for you to adjust to that Mr. Truthteller? Now you're in spin land.

JF: Listen, we live in this world where culture, it's a different world. Everything is commodified. We're not even saying that word yet, but everything became commodified. I feel that I am one of the architects of gay identity politics, and it

completely wasn't what I was about. My goal was not to make us into something totally separate. My goal in the beginning was to pull yourself out to see where you are different and how you're different and then to look at what you have in common with all the other people. Well commodification stops at that, no matter what the group is, at market you don't want to find out what you have in common with other people. You want to show how you're special and how you're different and how you dress and this and that. So leaving how to adapt to the culture as it is with some sort of integrity, if you will, is always a challenge. But to me it was an exciting one. I also come out of the theatre. ACT UP was very theatrical. It wasn't contradictory for me because I had done a lot of that myself about spinning things in club world. When I had clubs before MTV, that was political work for me, but I never said that to Page Six. It was about getting ideas into a culture in which people are not suppose to think. So to me this was very interesting about how do you spin AIDS? Some of the stuff I did not believe in. I did not agree with the de-gaying of AIDS. When that one person would put their hand up in the meeting when someone was making an announcement about some gay thing and say, "This is not a gay organization. This is an AIDS organization." And he was usually a gay guy who was part of that group that had decided to de-gay AIDS so that it could get more funding. Now I didn't agree with that.

SS: Do you think that worked?

JF: Yeah. If you consider Jesse Helm's de-gaying of AIDS success. Now we have "men who have sex with men." Because you couldn't say homosexual, you couldn't say gay. That is the only reason that that term came into being, it was a funding term. And all the funding organizations who were doing AIDS work had to use that

language. It still drives me up a fucking wall. “Men who have sex with men who are not gay.” I know what is behind that; I think there are men who have sex with men who can’t say they’re gay. But to make that a separate category which is fundable, because you can’t get educational funds for people who identify as gay. This was Jesse Helms. How do I feel about that? I think that was wrong. I thought you expand the definition of AIDS. In ACT UP in the early days, no one was a junkie. Gay people don’t use drugs. We use them recreationally. Michael Shernoff wrote a famous article in *The Native* saying, “We are different. We use drugs to celebrate our tribalism.” The Saint mentality. This is a therapist who’s talking about – we’re not different. We get sick and we die. Physically we’re not different and our bodies don’t respond differently.

So people like me would talk about needle exchange. That was a no-no in ACT UP for a long time because, “we are not junkies. We don’t do drugs. Those people do drugs, those black people.” But some of those black people happen to be gay? Oh, no no no. So how racism worked in ACT UP, was it conscious? No, it was part of the culture. You have a white dominant gay male and white lesbian culture that could be called racist if you were of color. They think they were doing a good job. They think they’re going good work, but they just had never had the experience of dealing with people of color, and certainly not empowering them.

In ACT UP, the only people of color – the Latinos – well Ray Navarro, what a lovely man. And Diego, these were the — Ray was such a loss. He was such a gifted artist. There are so many gifted artists, but I was thinking about him and he was such a sweet man.

JF: Did you every work on any of the big actions?

SS: Yes.

SS: Well tell us some of your favorites.

JF: The FDA action.

SS: What did you do there?

JF: Media. When I say media, it's also being a watch guard. It is also making sure that, since I had a history of dealing with police and what they do — I never sat down and got arrested in ACT UP. I had done that many years ago. That to me was not a radicalizing experience. But I would not take that away from someone. I don't think getting arrested when it's arranged with the police and you get off is politically that great, but I understand what it does to the person. It really does something to take that action. And I think it is really condescending when people say, oh it doesn't mean anything. But I didn't need to do that.

SS: What were the reporters like at the FDA? What was their reaction, the Media, the people at the FDA when you're talking to press people?

JF: Let's take Elinor Burkett. Elinor Burkett wrote a book called *The Gravest Show in Town* [*The Gravest Show on Earth: America in the Age of AIDS*]. It is one the best AIDS books, and certainly about ACT UP, and the politics of co-option by the pharmaceutical industry and of good people. It's a terrific book. But Elinor Burkett I met in San Francisco. We had decided that — I don't think I'm telling secrets out of school — during the AIDS conference there where ACT UP — people were assigned different reports who we knew were closet gay. To sleep with them to get our message across. All is fair in love and war. Some of them were sexy.

SS: You actually know the names of reporters who people from ACT UP slept with? Can you tell us?

JF: No. I don't think that's my place. It is the place of the person who did it. I don't think – it's not about the personality. It was a tactic that was discussed and strategized to get the message out and it worked. It worked. Elinor Burkett happened to be a heterosexual Jewish woman of fifty years old who had been a professor of Latin American Studies, tenured, when she gave that up to become a journalist. Went to Columbia School of Journalism at the age of fifty and graduated first in her class and then became a reporter at the *Miami Herald*. She saw what was going on and they all thought she was a dyke. She wasn't a dyke. Marty Delaney was horrible to her, would always call her a lesbian. I am sort of lost here in the moment.

SS: When you are talking to reporters, you're standing at the FDA, there are gay people in costumes and getting arrested and climbing on the building. And you're trying to communicate this to reporters where were they at in relationship to what we were doing?

JF: Well by that time first of all the fact that ACT UP was doing this at the FDA, that sort of an institution that no one ever challenged or questioned, if you're a good reporter you know that there's a story here. They're not ramming the door down, like some straight people would do. It's like a Renaissance Fair almost. People running around with white medical jackets with blood on them and their hands. And all these affinity groups. Now, affinity groups were something that came out of the '60s. That was what we did in the '60s. And the politics of an affinity group, so you didn't have to believe in everything in ACT UP, but you believed in your group. Very, very important.

These are called cells. This is the old communist method. Now they're called affinity groups. We had them in the original GLF. These were cells because everyone didn't want to talk politics. Some people wanted to plan dances, and they were part of it. Some people wanted to talk politics and some people wanted to talk about being Latin, and some people wanted to — that all happened in ACT UP too. I think that Maxine was probably the person most responsible for that, that's my understanding, other people may have, but I think she may have brought that kind of concept, that anarchist concept to the way ACT UP did its actions. Which was sort of a challenge to the boys that thought they were in charge. Or the former debutante who's now a radical who left television journalism to become one of the boys, Ann Northrop. She didn't identify with the women in ACT UP, she identified with the boys in ACT UP. Like the Nat who went with GAA. It is a particular kind of woman and lesbian, and I understand it. I am critical of it, and I may make fun of it, but I understand it. Why not? If you had a choice between hanging out with the people who no one is listening to—

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SS: Jim, I only have two more questions. Is there something in particular about ACT UP that you would like to talk about that we haven't discussed?

JF: Yes. ACT UP has sort of been imaged and romanticized as this gay male, HIV positive person with AIDS organization, and very little credit is given to the women that stayed through the thick and thin of it. Did not separate with Larry Kramer's misogyny, who stayed. To me, some of the real heroes that are not talked about are someone like Terry McGovern. Mark Harrington gets the MacArthur. When he got the MacArthur, I wrote him a note that said if you are really MacArthur material you'll give

this money to Terry McGovern. He didn't. He drank it away, or whatever he did with it. I'm sure he did something good with it.

So that one aspect, the positive — the role that the women played continually being put down. Continually losing when they would bring up a sexism issue in the group, but stayed. It's one of the real identifiers of that time where women in ACT UP — it was mostly lesbian, but it wasn't only lesbians. There were some very involved heterosexual women who stayed through to the very end. I think that their presence, for me, anyway gave a sense of compassion to the sense of anger and this sense of aggression, and the sense of male bonding that was in ACT UP.

I don't want to diminish the male bonding part of it. These were people who were sick and were told that they were going to die, and that they were bad. But then there's the contradictions in ACT UP. Sean Strub, head of the finance committee, okay. You can imagine about 1989 that ACT UP must have had a really fabulous mailing list. With lots of money people on it. And lots of addresses that you can't get. Well, he stole it for his business. Now is that right or wrong? I would say that's wrong, but in the real world America today, probably he should get a gold star for that.

And then there are the things like — you have an organization that is fighting to bring about change in behavior and consciousness about a disease and the Fundraising Committee comes in with having a benefit at the first re-opened back room at the church, what's that church, the Limelight. And I'll never forget it, it was such a contradiction because this was going to be a backroom with no lights, no condoms, no anything. It was just going to be a backroom, and they were going to have a benefit there to raise money for ACT UP. And I remember raising this point very strongly and making a motion, and

the women supporting it and we lost. We lost. That's a contradiction. It's a deep contradiction, which if you really want to talk about what's underneath of ACT UP — the role sex plays in it. The relationship to sex. One point, if you were HIV negative, you could not speak at a meeting. I don't think that the only people who can talk about AIDS — certainly gay men who are not HIV positive, I think, are effected by AIDS, they really are. That came out of the same people. The Sean Strub group — that you couldn't speak if you were HIV negative.

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And yet people stayed there. I remember, it was very hard for me, but I understood where that was coming from and I couldn't walk away from it although I thought it was wrong. I couldn't walk away because there was a bigger enemy outside called the government and it's lack of science, and it's lack of society and it's judgment. There was a bigger thing. And my criticism comes down to how we don't get along in ACT UP. That I learned from how did I go into a GAA meeting? Same dynamic.

I just want to talk about the sex stuff.

SS: Go ahead.

JF: When you have a group, you know the actions like going to, the incredible action at Yankee Stadium, "No Love No Glove."

SS: Shea Stadium.

JF: Well I am a gay boy who doesn't do baseball. Except I like the way the green looks and the pretty uniforms. I think that was pretty much a women's action, but the guys went with them. So you have all this, no love, no glove, and then there is all this unsafe sex going on. There are sex parties. And how do you negotiate a discussion between people who are told they are anathema and they should not be sexual and talking

about being responsible. And then the whole, it moves to, well we shouldn't have to self-reveal, and everyone should just — I don't agree. HIV negative person hears that very differently than an HIV positive person or a person with AIDS hears that. How do you negotiate those discussions? Very, very difficult. It's very easy to walk away, but I don't think most of us walked away of those who disagreed because it was in that container, that cauldron of ideas that there was some hope. And then people dying, and dying, and dying and dying. How could I criticize someone who is screaming at me with anger which I feel is undeserved, and I know that I am feeling it on my left and I am feeling it on my right and and feeling it right in my fucking face. And I know it isn't really about me, it is that they are fucking angry because they are going to die and I'm available. Forget it

How do you negotiate those things?

And we did. We somehow did, and this is the strengths of ACT UP until the cocktail. It's just really interesting once the cocktail came along, where did the activism go? Just like GAA. We got to have sex. We got to get a job. And very few people stayed. And the ones that did were called crazy. The ultra-this or the extreme-that. I don't know how I feel about all that, but if you believe that HIV is the cause of AIDS and if you believe that the cocktail prolongs life. And if you are in the fifty percent for those that the cocktail works for, like Sean, why not get on with life? But if you are in that fifty percent that took all those drugs. Or if you are in that fifty percent like Keith Haring or Ethyl Eichelberger who got access to one of the analogs besides AZT, what was the other one?

SS: ddI.

JF: ddI. I remember this really well. ddI came down the pike. Every time a new drug would come down the pike ACT UP's Treatment and Data would get all excited and people would get all excited. And for someone like me who thinks about side effects, and long term, and quality of living, and all that sort of stuff that's as important as taking the new drug. ACT UP got the inside path to access to that drug. And Keith and Ethyl both got it. And they got it in large dosages when they found out later that that was lethal. And Ethyl Eichelberger committed suicide and Keith died. Now am I saying that ACT UP caused that? Or ACT UP's Treatment and Data people caused that? No I don't say that, but I think that it has to be said that that is what happens when you don't step back a moment and say, what are we putting into our bodies? But I also recognize it's easy for me who is not dealing with dying to ask that question. When a person is desperate and you've got Larry Kramer screaming, "Drugs into bodies! Drugs into bodies! If you don't want to do this, then you're not helping!" And all that sort of stuff. And the doctors who don't believe in giving choice to their client. Who don't believe — who say you take this, you take AZT or you're not my patient. This is awful. This is going on. So all that negotiation that at least in ACT UP it was raised to some level of consciousness because people would not even think about this stuff.

I said to you that I identify with the AIDS dissident position, when I would say that at a meeting, and I didn't push that line, I really didn't push that line. I thought there were other things, but then you are completely thought of as crazy. You are just dismissed. I have a right to my point of view; we have freedom of thought here. I could say that people that I worked with in HEAL's quality of dying was compared to the other people that were taking AZT was much better. They all died, but the quality—That was

my experience. People would say, oh, you macrobiotics, that's fucking crazy. The only reason to do macrobiotics in my point of view was that they taught some self discipline, which was the thing that I thought, was most lacking in gay men that I knew. Before we had these programs about sexual compulsion, which I really believe is something that affects gay men in a heightened way more than heterosexual men and women and it is real and it comes out of what does it mean to be gay. How society affects us. Before we had those programs, you couldn't even talk about it and when those programs first came in – [End of Tape]

Tape IV
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SS: So you were talking about sexual compulsion.

JF: It goes back to homosexuality is wrong, it's a sin, and it is evil – all your life you're told that. Then you sort of reject that and become sexual and then someone says I think you are behaving sexually compulsively. Are you getting pleasure out of this? There is a whole definition of compulsion. And then you have someone like Michael Shernoff saying sex is not an addiction like narcotics or drugs. Well, in my experience it is. My personal experience and my experience of other people. And what happened in ACT UP is that because so much negativity was coming down on people's lives – the message – never said it's your own fault. You did this to yourself. That's bullshit. People didn't know any better. Unless you talk about intimacy issues among men, you talk about the quality of relationships and you talk about the quality of the sexual experience. None of that was talked about. Before ACT UP and even in ACT UP. Unless you talk about those things then you can't say, it's your fault. Michael Callen said I got off the bus from Indiana and I picked up a gay newspaper and it said have as much sex as you can and the more sex that you have the better gay person you are. And so he

went off and had all this sex and he got all these diseases and he wound up having AIDS and he said wait a minute. What's wrong with this picture? I did what I was told to do and so I got sick. I mean I'm really encapsulating what Michael said. And that is essentially what he said.

How do you put your arms around someone and tell them that they haven't done anything wrong, but how do we go forward? There wasn't enough of that. And how do you say these things and not make people think you are judging them. That is the biggest thing for me. Can we have an idea out here that we can talk about without it being seen as a judgment that you are bad, I'm right and you are wrong? Let's just talk about this idea. Maybe I will learn something from you and you will learn something for me. I feel the same way about the gender stuff. You can't have a discussion about it.

But we know from the plague in the Middle Ages that people fucked themselves to death when there was no hope of any way of living. And those are bigger life sort of questions beneath all of this. What did we learn from ACT UP? We didn't talk about class.

One woman comes in and every other woman wants to sleep with her that's lesbian. And her name is this, and she turns about to be one of the richest women in the world. And she did good work in ACT UP. And she can move out of ACT UP when she wanted to. She wasn't sick. But what brings someone like that into it, and what makes her hide who she really is in that and what makes her able to move away, with the privilege. Not personal, this is not a personal attack. It is just all these things that go on that no one talks about, that are surprised to find out about later.

That is what I loved about ACT UP. There is always a surprise about someone. And sometimes you don't learn about it until they are being buried. Or sometime you don't know about it until years later when they show up later with a wife and three kids.

SS: So what was the best thing that ACT UP accomplished?

JF: The best thing is more than one, first of all. The most important thing, I think, is the sense of empowerment it gave to people that were stigmatized and presented a visual image for the world to see of people that were not afraid of being sick. At least externally. Incredibly powerful. This is the GLF story, this is the connection of GAA and this is the through line of not being ashamed of who you are. And seeking community so you are not alone. And then exposing the government and the complicity of liberals and, this is my big message, by the way. I really loathe liberals. I really do. I would rather have a homophobic conservative any day of the week because I know who I am talking to and I know what they are going to say. We can actually have a conversation. I have had better conversations than with the liberal who knows all the right things to say, but in his heart. Hillary Clinton. To me.

Tape IV
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But it stood up to the government and it stood up to the complicity between the pharmaceutical interests and government agencies. It stood up to the profiteering off of people dying. The inaccessibility of drugs to poor people. Even if I disagree with some of the politics, the science of it. This is what it did and this is always empowering to people.

It empowered other people to do the same thing. Other disease groups wanted to be like ACT UP. Very important. It says that you can't be mired in shame and fear because shame and fear, from my point of view about disease, will kill you. If you can

stand up and be alive until you die then that is a message for everybody in this society.

And I think that ACT UP did that.

And I thank Larry for calling that meeting. I am critical of Larry, but you know. Michael Callen would always say to me, "Oh Jim, Larry's a good person." But he said this about you. "He's one of our heroes." And I had to say, what does Michael mean by that? Because I respected Michael Callen. I will say that. I have a lot of problems with the way that Larry does things. I think he is so selfish and privileged. But you know, if he hadn't called that meeting I don't know if there ever would be an ACT UP. And some of the people that I have been critical of in this little discussion, I also have respect for. We didn't talk about the whole HIV-positive person's unsafe sex. The right to have unsafe sex, which came out of POZ magazine. There are a lot of things we didn't talk about. Others will talk about it if they will. I don't want to throw away everything that made me feel alive and part of something because something's disappointed my or I disagree with them. If it had been so totally that I wouldn't have stayed. I am an HIV negative man and I have to sometimes just listen. I am a man and sometimes I had to just listen to women. I remember a woman saying to me, "Why don't you just shut up, so we can figure it out for ourselves, Jim. Yeah, you have the answer, but why don't you let us figure it out for ourselves." I'll never forget that because I never had thought of that. I thought I should just tell you what to do. In the same way that people listening to people with AIDS or people that are HIV-positive, really hearing what their experience rather than telling them what they should be doing or judging them on the basis of whatever.

This is the gift of ACT UP, and it role models for other groups of people what to do. With all the human contradictions that are in it. I refuse to give up my place in that

and my role in ACT UP. I feel that I raised all these things on the floor. I didn't win a lot of my ideas, but that is how it works. That's how it works.

SS: That you very much.