

# **A C T U P O R A L H I S T O R Y P R O J E C T**

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Interviewee: **Joan Gibbs**

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ACT UP Oral History Project  
Interview of Joan Gibbs  
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**SARAH SHULMAN: So we start out, just tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.**

JOAN GIBBS: Okay. My name is Joan Gibbs. Today's date is June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

**SS: July.**

JG: July, I'm sorry.

**SS: That's okay.**

JG: July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012. And I'm at my home on Classon Avenue in Brooklyn, New York.

**SS: And how old are you, Joan?**

JG: And I'm fifty-nine years old.

**SS: Okay, great. So are you a native New Yorker?**

JG: Well, I was born in New York, but I grew up — I spent most of my growing-up years in North Carolina.

**SS: Okay. And when you were growing up — I mean, I'm just trying to — the reason I'm asking you these background questions is I want to understand where the political person that you became came from.**

JG: Okay. That's fine.

**SS: So were you raised with very strong community values or political awareness?**

JG: Well, I was raised in a very rural county. The population now is 5,000, and it consists of five towns. The population when I was growing up might have

been 7,000. So it was very, very small. And it was on the coast of North Carolina. There was a lot of Klan activity, actually. It was in segregation, because now I'm talking about the fifties. I'm talking about the fifties and the sixties. I came to New York, I guess, in — I don't know. I can't remember. It was in probably '65. So I lived there from the time I was one year's old till, I guess, when I came in New York when I was fourteen.

So I guess it was a very religious town. The political values that I got came from my mother. My mother was a teacher, actually, who was fired for her outspokenness. That's how I got to New York. She was fired and came to New York, and me and my sister stayed in the South. So we grew up, it was segregated South.

My passion around racism came because when I was in the fourth grade, one of my cousins was lynched, a woman, and they quickly arrested and tried a black man for the trial for it, and none of us believed that he did it. We all knew him, of course, because everybody knew everybody anyway. So I guess that's where my passion —

**SS: And that was in your same town?**

JG: Yes, yes.

**SS: What's the name of the town?**

JG: It's called Swan Quarter, North Carolina. Swan Quarter, Swan like the bird, Quarter like the money.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

JG: And actually, if you study the history of Klan activity in the South, there was once — subsequently there was a shootout between the Klan and blacks. So that's where my passion came from.

**SS: And your mother was outspoken on political grounds and got fired?**

JG: No, well, my mother was sort of a beatnik or something, right? So she listened to jazz, read James Baldwin, took young people to get an abortion. That was not — she was separated but not divorced from my father, and then she had boyfriends. So the culmination of that was she was fired.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: And I should say that one of the other things she did that probably didn't endear her, well, there were some gay male teachers who were like her best friends, so she spent most of her time hanging around with them. All of them got fired. In one fell swoop, they got rid of all of them.

**SS: So you grew up in really an ideal value system in the home, right, gay-friendly, pro-choice?**

JG: Yes, in the home, yes. In my home, yes. And subsequently, most of my family is like that. My mother and father, they were divorced, but my father was not somebody who was homophobic either. Neither of my parents were.

**SS: So you came here in '65, and what school did you go to?**

JG: Okay. I went to Junior High School 45, and then I went to the infamous Bronx Science.

**SS: Oh, you did?**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Well, I went to Hunter, so there you go.**

JG: Oh, okay.

**SS: The same ilk.**

00:05:00

JG: Right. So you know that ilk, right?

**SS: Right. Okay.**

JG: Science was very political, though, in the sixties and seventies when I went there. I went there in '68, and that was the year of the teachers' strike, and a lot of political people were there. We had our battles, but a lot of political people were there.

**SS: Were there a lot of black students at Bronx Science?**

JG: No, no. I think at the time altogether, blacks, Latinos, and Asians, we might have made up 10 percent of the school, might have on a good day.

**SS: Right.**

JG: But I don't think so, actually. I don't even think we were 10 percent.

**SS: So when you were in high school, did you already know you were going to become an attorney?**

JG: No. While I was at Bronx Science I was supposed to become a doctor. That's why I was at Bronx Science, to become a doctor.

**SS: And were you politically involved in high school?**

JG: Oh, yes, That's how I became involved, was in high school in '68.

**SS: What kind of organizations were you working with?**

JG: Well, I guess I got involved with the Anti-War Movement, SMC.  
What was that? Student Mobilization Committee against the war. Then I was with – I

worked with the Young Socialist Alliance, which was a youth group of the SWP. Then I was very involved with Black Students Group in high school.

**SS: And were you gay in high school?**

JG: No. Well, it's interesting you should ask that. When I was in junior high school, we used to have slang books. Do you remember slang books?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: I hated slang books. Well, in ninth grade, somebody — well, in eighth grade as I was graduating from high school, somebody called me a dyke in the slang book. I didn't pay any attention. This happened again at Science, right? I didn't really — I just — I don't know. I wasn't — my sexual identity, I don't know, I wasn't thinking about it. But somebody did that again in high school, and one of my best friends, who is still my best friend, who's a straight black woman, responded to them, and not in a homophobic way, but just like, "How outrageous. Why you all do this? Why you all have these books anyway?"

And the other thing in high school, I was in the Black Students Group, and we did — there was a friend of ours, who was a flaming, flaming gay man, wanted to start up a gay group, right? So the black students, he came to us and told us this, and so we said, "Okay, what we will do is we will stand guard so you can hold your meeting." Because the faculty wouldn't support him, so we stood guard so he could hold it. He didn't get anybody — there were more people standing guard than were at the meeting. But hey.

**SS: What became of him?**

JG: I have no idea. I remember his name was Larry. He was a beautiful guy. I don't know what became of him. I'll have to ask Marilyn, my friend from high school. She actually lives up the street. I'll have to ask her, remember to ask her about him.

**SS: And then so where did you go to college?**

JG: I went first to City College. Then I dropped out. Then I went to Franconia College. Franconia College was your quintessential hippie school. It was in New Hampshire, Franconia, New Hampshire. So I went there for two years, and then I came back to New York, went to Marlboro College, because I was sort of interested in studying theater. So I went there for a little while, than I came back and graduated, put all my credits together and got my B.A. from Empire State College.

**SS: Me too.**

JG: Really? Where did you go?

**SS: I first went to the University of Chicago. I dropped out. Then I went to Hunter. Audrey was my teacher. And I got my B.A. from Empire State.**

JG: Why? What happened to Hunter?

**SS: I couldn't put it all together. So then they gave me credit for lifetime experience.**

JG: That's why I went to Empire. That's exactly.

**SS: Yes, that's why I went.**

JG: Which Empire State did you go to?

**SS: Shirley Ariker was my mentor. It was the one in Manhattan.**

JG: Oh, okay. I went to Bed-Stuy.

**SS: Very funny. So you stepped out of the fray for the wilds of New Hampshire, and then you returned to New York, and that's the early seventies, right?**

JG: Well, I didn't return to New York till the mid-seventies. I detoured. I stayed in Providence, Rhode Island, for a year.

**SS: Then you got politically active again in New York.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: In the seventies.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: And when did you go to law school?**

JG: 1981. I guess it was '81, '82. I forget now, but it was in '81, '82.

**SS: So when did you start working in queer politics?**

00:10:00 JG: Well, I guess in — I guess when I came back to New York. I was in and out of New York because I would always come and stay with my mother for a while. And I guess when I came to New York and started *Azalea*, because by that time, of course, I was —

**SS: Can you explain what *Azalea* is?**

JG: *Azalea* was a magazine for women of color that was formed in the seventies. But by then I had had — I came out, actually, actually, in '71, so most of these times in between that I was engaged with going to gay demonstrations. But I really focused after *Azalea* was started, and I should say *Azalea* was started because at the time people were constantly complaining about how the, quote, unquote, white feminist and lesbian publications weren't publishing writings by black and Latina women principally.

So then I decided, well, why don't we just start our own magazine and stop complaining. There's no point in complaining constantly. You just do it yourself.

**SS: Because you were writing poetry at the time, if I recall.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: And it was a pretty illustrious group. There was, like, Donna Allegra, right?**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Alexis De Veaux?**

JG: Well, Alexis was around.

**SS: Jewelle [Gomez]?**

JG: But she wasn't in it. Donna Allegra was involved in it.

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Donna — oh, let's see. Sapphire.

**SS: Sapphire, when she was gay.**

JG: We published our first —

**SS: When she was gay.**

JG: Yes. Let me talk about that. Because I recently saw that she was one of the top twenty LGBT activists. Did you see that?

**SS: No.**

JG: Well, she was. I thought it was odd, but I didn't say anything.

**SS: Very strange. Okay. So I remember *Azalea*, and then you guys were doing readings.**

JG: Yes, and organized conferences.

**SS: Community events.**

JG: Yes, stuff like that.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: Then we started DARE, Dykes Against Racism Everywhere.

**SS: Okay. Before you get to that, can you explain — this is just because we're making record here — the role that cultural events had in the political community at the time? Because now there's a real separation. So if someone's a poet, in a way they're outside of politics now, but these events used to attract hundreds of people.**

JG: Yes. Well, I think — I always think about that, because I grew up in the sixties. In the sixties, of course, politics and culture, culture was very much a part of the movement from even at the level of popular culture. People would say — what most classically comes to mind is probably Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, “Keep on Pushin’,” and stuff like that. That element stayed until the seventies, so people, if you were a poet, you wrote political poetry, right? You might write other type of poetry, but you also wrote political poetry, and there was a way culture was seen as part of organizing and educating people. I don't know to the extent that that's true today. I don't think it is.

**SS: No, they're really separate now.**

JG: I know. I don't know why that is, but it is.

**SS: But particularly the lesbian movement and the lesbian of color movement, poetry was the foundation.**

JG: Right, was very — right, was very much and very important.

**SS: The most prominent leaders were poets.**

JG: Right. Yes.

**SS: Okay. So then you started DARE. Now, do you want to tell us why you started that group, Dykes Against Racism Everywhere?**

JG: Okay. We started DARE — I was just thinking about it — in November, I guess it was, '79. Some demonstrators were murdered in Greensboro [NC]. They were members of this Communist Workers Party. They were having a protest against racism, and they were murdered by members of the Klan and Nazis. So we got involved in organizing. There was going to be a mass demonstration in Greensboro.

During the course of that, we would try to tell people, “You need to organize, reach out,” explicitly to the lesbian and gay community, right? So the group was very heterosexist, slightly homophobic, and so then we decided, “Well, listen, we should start a group, and then we can organize people going to these demonstrations.” And so that’s how we started.

00:15:00 So we started basically to challenge not only racism within society broadly, but also at a time within the lesbian and gay community to raise consciousness around racism. And the thought behind it also, which is when people talk about DARE, they never sort of get, was that by being lesbians and being active around issues of racism and the Left and particularly the black movement, we could also challenge homophobia. And so that’s — I think that when all is said and done, that will be one of DARE’s greatest legacies, reducing homophobia in the black community.

**SS: Okay. A couple of questions. At the time that you started DARE, there already was Salsa Soul Sisters.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: And what was the difference? Like why did you need to have DARE?**

JG: Well, we needed to have DARE because Salsa Soul [Sisters] wasn't really that political. I guess I can say that now. I guess they still exist. But that's the truth of the matter. And DARE was a multinational, multiracial group, because we wanted to try to bring black, white, and different types of women together just around racism.

**SS: Right, it was interracial.**

JG: Right. So that was a difference between Salsa Soul.

**SS: I remember some DARE demonstrations. I remember a demonstration at Bacall's.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Like there was an issue around racist practices at the lesbian bars.**

JG: Right.

**SS: Can you articulate that?**

JG: Yes, there was that, there was Bacall's and there was Blue's, too. That there was issues around blacks, patrons or wannabe patrons not being admitted and how they were treated within the bars, and so we thought we should take that issue up. It's interesting now. I don't go to the bars that much anymore, and most of those bars don't – none of them exist. We lost probably the best. My favorite was Bonnie and Clyde's.

**SS: Bonnie and Clyde's was the most segregated. It was like all the white women were upstairs.**

JG: That was after they had the restaurant. They didn't have a restaurant at first.

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

JG: No, they didn't have a restaurant. They used to just be downstairs. Maybe it became segregated later when they got that restaurant. But they didn't last long after they got the restaurant either.

**SS: No.**

JG: But they had great music.

**SS: But, I mean, it's hard for people to see it now in the post-Clit Club era, but in the day all these bars were — none of them were run by lesbians.**

JG: No.

**SS: They had white bouncers at the door, often men.**

JG: Right.

**SS: And black women were double carded, if I recall.**

JG: Right, yes.

**SS: So it was a completely different environment.**

JG: It was a very different environment from today.

**SS: So then it's interesting, because at the time of DARE there was a big gay Left, bigger than there is now.**

JG: Is there a gay Left now?

**SS: No.**

JG: We had conferences, we had meetings.

**SS: So DARE was in this larger coalition, CRASH.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Committee against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, and Homophobia.**

JG: Right. You were in that.

**SS: I was in that. That had many member groups.**

JG: Right.

**SS: Lavender Left, Committee of Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists, the various sectarian parties, CARASA [Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse].**

JG: What happened to all these people? Do you know what happened to them?

**SS: You tell me what happened.**

JG: I don't know what happened to them, because when I went to law school, I sort of like got off the beaten path. And then when I came back, I lost — I don't know. The only people I saw was Maxine [Wolfe], who was still carrying and still does.

**SS: But what's your view of what happened to that, that anti-racist gay Left that was so articulate at that time?**

JG: Besides growing old? Well, the Gay Movement has obviously changed a great deal. I think it was always a struggle, because I remember we went — some people from DARE and *Azalea* went to one of the — I don't know whether it was the first or second March on Washington. There was a conference or something, and we

were struggling around trying to get positions for — trying to get Left speakers at these rallies. So even then we were always not – marginal. We did a mighty bit of big left, but we were marginal, so to speak.

And I think that — I haven't thought about it in that long period of time, but I've thought about the Gay Movement most recently around the battle around marriage, and I think that comes out of there was always those who — I never liked this line. People used to yell it all the time, sort of like, "We are everywhere and we're just like you." I never liked that. I still don't.

00:20:00

So I think that the Gay Movement was captured by the more liberal people in it. When we get to ACT UP, I think I saw ACT UP as part of the Left, and then when that's — when AIDS, that was also captured.

**SS: Okay. Well, we'll get to that.**

JG: But, I don't know. I don't—

**SS: Because, I mean, there were groups like Men of All Colors Together. I mean, there's nothing like that now.**

JG: I know. I know.

**SS: There's not an expressly antiracist gay male formation.**

JG: I know. I know. I know. Me and some friends of mine were talking about trying to set up a group again. Unfortunately, one of the people who I wanted to be in the group is leaving, Kenyon Farrow. He's moving to —

**SS: To where?**

JG: — New Orleans. In his words — you should ask him, but he says — he lives in Bed-Stuy. He says he can't take gentrification any longer, so he's leaving.

**SS: Okay. So where did you go to law school?**

JG: I went to Rutgers in Newark.

**SS: So from the time you came out of law school, you were immediately a community-based lawyer.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: And you were doing social justice law.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: So where did you situate yourself after that?**

JG: Well, when I came out of law school, I first went to the Center for Constitutional Rights because I graduated early. I graduated six months early because I had taken more credits than I needed. So I went there, and then I went, after I took the bar, to the American Civil Liberties Union, where I stayed for two years. I was first a fellow in First Amendment law, and then I worked for the Women's Rights Project. Then I came back to CCR, and then I stayed there, and then I came — I went to Medgar Evers, where I am now. So I've been at Medgar Evers over fifteen years.

**SS: So you've only worked in social justice.**

JG: I've only worked in social justice.

**SS: And when you're working for these types of organizations, where does the pro bono part come in? Like when you say, "Okay, I'm going to defend these protestors," or these activists, is that on your time, or is that considered part of your job?**

JG: Well, when I was at CCR, a lot of times it was part of my job. Most of the time, it was not part of my job. It was just on my time.

**SS: Okay. So when did you first become aware of the AIDS crisis?**

JG: Let's see. In the mid-eighties, a couple of things happened. One, one of my best friends died of AIDS.

**SS: Who was that?**

JG: It was a guy named Jimmy, who lived down the street. Then I started volunteering at Rikers in the AIDS unit, because the AIDS unit was horrible. They had people segregated. I volunteered in the men's unit, and the place was leaking, rain coming in. It was just horrible, horrible. It was really horrible.

**SS: So they were segregated not to protect them, but to keep them out of the general—**

JG: Keep them away from the population. So that's when I became involved in it, when I became conscious of AIDS. And because of what happened to my friend, was unbelievable. He, at first, he had this boyfriend who had been in prison, and his boyfriend came out of prison and then he died shortly thereafter. And his family didn't tell any of us about it and claimed he had meningitis, which, cases of meningitis are very rare.

So we thought something was up, right? And then my friend came down with AIDS. But the way, he died at home, and when they came to get his body, they put it in a plastic bag and sort of just threw it down the steps. And it was in the daytime. So everybody in the neighborhood was outraged at this, that they would do this to him, because he lived over here all his life. So it was like, what are they doing?

And I had visited him at Bellevue when he was — they treated him horribly at Bellevue, too, so that was — so before ACT UP started, I was very conscious of what was going on with AIDS.

**SS: Okay. So what was your first involvement with ACT UP?**

JG: Well, from the first demonstration, which I think was on Wall Street, right?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Good. See, my memory isn't — I went and I was one of the lawyers for it. I don't remember who else was. I can't remember. Maybe it was the guy who was at the Lesbian, Gay — I don't know, but it was somebody else. It was a white guy. Do you remember who it was?

**SS: From Lambda maybe?**

JG: Lambda, yes. What was his name?

**SS: David Barr?**

00:25:00

JG: Maybe it was David Barr, yes. Maybe it was David Barr. I sort of think it might have been David.

**SS: And how did you get into this? I mean, who called you, or how did you become the legal observer?**

JG: Well, I think I knew people who were in ACT UP, and I decided to go to a meeting because I thought it sounded like really a great project. I thought it was an incredible project we were doing. Because I thought at the time, just the way people with AIDS were treated and just the way the disease was presented, it was just outrageous. It was just so homophobic and at the same time racist. So that's what I thought about it.

**SS: So what were the issues being a legal observer in ACT UP?**

JG: Issues? Well, the thing about ACT UP that I thought was very good is that there was not many issues. I mean, just talking to the police. I thought people in ACT UP, the affinity group, I thought that was a very good way of organizing. So that — my favorite demonstration was the one at FDA. Did you go to that demonstration, Seize Control of the FDA?

**SS: Yes, I did. Yes.**

JG: I thought it was wonderful because there was so much chaos and we kept this up for hours.

**SS: Let's get to that in a second. I want to ask you about City Hall. Okay. So you're negotiating with the police. Or you're communicating with the police.**

JG: I'm communicating. It wasn't really negotiating with the police.

**SS: What is their take on it? There's all these gay – homosexuals with AIDS sitting in the street, and it's new for them. This is the first time that there's direct action from people with AIDS.**

JG: What was their take on it? Well, I don't remember them being too friendly, exactly. They're polite. The police always are. They have to be. They can't be too outrageous. But I think they were first, at first, taken aback, because there hadn't been demonstrations like that by anybody, really. I could dare say before or since, just the militancy of them, and also the choreography of them too. They were very well-organized demonstrations. So I think they were taken aback, and they always thought, they knew — and people in ACT UP, the great thing also about it was people weren't

afraid of getting arrested. That was a new thing. People didn't used to just get arrested. They still don't. I guess Occupy Wall Street, sort of, but not really.

**SS: Well, I think, you know, the stakes were so high.**

JG: Yes, because it was a matter of life and death. People saw it as —

**SS: Right. So the FDA. Now, the FDA is a whole different ballgame, because it's not just civil disobedience.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: So how was the legal organized around that? Because, they could have been charged with quite a few things.**

JG: I know. Well, it was interesting. By that time, Mike Spiegel was involved, because I remember I came back with him. That was very interesting, because it was just really the legal observer, we were just there, because people who — the affinity groups ran that demonstration, they basically — and people were all over the place. You remember it, how people were here, there, everywhere, so it was very — it seemed to be disorganized, but it wasn't. And the legal — then, of course, this was now we're dealing with the federal government, we're dealing with different — this is not New York City Police now. This is some combination of federal, and I think the FDA is in Maryland, isn't it?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Yes, Maryland police. So that was — it was very interesting. But usually, I don't know, unless I'm forgetting the police, because if people are going to get arrested, people already said they're going to get arrested, there's not much negotiation to do except to negotiate the arrests. There was one time that — I don't know if you were in

that group. There was a group of women who were strip-searched. Were you in that group?

**SS: I wasn't in that group.**

JG: Because we sued and we won.

**SS: Okay. I want to get to that case in a second.**

JG: Okay.

**SS: Let me just ask you something else.**

JG: Can you stop because this guy is doing my study. Can we just stop for a second?

00:30:00 **SS: I want to get back to the Mike Spiegel connection, because this is the old Left. So there were quite a few people from the old Left that were involved in ACT UP. Mike, of course, was SDS. The women who were doing the stuff at Bedford, ACE and ACE OUT, Judy Clark and Kathy Boudin, and then a lot of women with AIDS who came into ACT UP came from Bedford. Then there was like the old May 19<sup>th</sup> people like Bob Lederer and Marion Banzhaf, and they were essential people in ACT UP. But all of that kind of bled into ACT UP, but it didn't announce itself, or it performed itself really differently.**

JG: Right.

**SS: I was wondering if you had any thoughts about that.**

JG: Well, I thought that was very interesting. I knew those people from other work, from work in anti-racism movement, and I knew Mike. I knew Mike also from that, but also who at the time was married to a good friend of mine. My thoughts of it, about it, I thought it was interesting, made an interesting mix. I don't even remember.

There was a debate at one point in ACT UP, whether ACT UP should become a 501(c)(3). Do you remember that debate?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: My position was I didn't think they should. I don't — did they become a 501(c)(3)?

**SS: No. Did they?**

**JAMES WENTZY: No.**

**SS: No.**

JG: But it was an intense debate for a while, back and forth, because it was clearly those who wanted to become a 501(c)(3). And I think out of ACT UP then there became 501(c)(3)s, like Housing Works, right? Housing Works and — what is it?

**SS: There was another thing also.**

JG: Treatment and Data.

**JIM HUBBARD: TAG.**

**SS: TAG.**

JG: TAG, right, yes. So I thought the mix of the old Left with younger people, I thought, was very good, made for some good discussions, both in the meetings and outside of the meetings.

**SS: But also the old Left people had to lose their sectarianism. They had to merge into a mass movement where they couldn't assume a vanguard position, and that's a shift.**

JG: Well they assumed a different way of talking, not that, just because — if you're outnumbered, you're going to adjust your stance, right? So it's not necessarily they had abandoned the notion of being a vanguard, it's just that —

**SS: But actually I think that they made friends with people outside of their formations.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: And they started to expand also in the way that they went politically, which was —**

JG: Oh, yes. Okay. Yes. That was interesting.

**SS: Yes. Okay, so you were at that discussion for the 501(c)(3). So can you just characterize what you think was at stake in that debate?**

JG: Well, I thought becoming a 501(c)(3) limits what you can do, because one of the things you can't do is lobby, right?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: A lot of what ACT UP did was lobbying in the sense that you're going down to Congress and going to City Hall or something, but it was lobbying in the sense of demonstrations calling for certain things. And I also thought because when you become a 501(c)(3), knowing the law as I do, 501(c)(3) highly regulated, right? You have all the forms you've got to present and doing all of that, and I thought that would change the political character of the group. I think that has been shown to be true over time with those groups of 501(c)(3). I think one of the problems with our movement right now is that it's dominated by 501(c)(3)'s.

**SS: Right. So that discussion was emblematic of where the Gay Movement was going.**

JG: Right, it was, and it's gone there now. And not only the Gay Movement, but the Black Movement, the Women's Movement. And I don't know if you read it, INCITE!'s book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Did you read it?

**SS: No.**

JG: It's INCITE!. It's a women's anti-violence group that's extraordinarily good, because they document, because they were a 501(c)(3) and they document how that has come to take over the movement and what it means when you have all these people getting money from Rockefeller, Ford, George Soros, what that represents, and people don't think about it.

But that's how come marriage, I think, became such a thing, because the money was put there and they tell you what to do with the money. You can't say, "Okay. I'm going to fight about — I want to do issues pertaining to homeless LGBT people." That's not going to get money. I'm sorry. Besides Queers for Economic Justice, Amber [Hollibaugh] and them maybe — I don't think Amber and them have as much money as those other groups. No, I know they don't, actually.

00:35:00

**SS: All right. I want to get back to the prison connection, because DARE did do a lot of prison work.**

JG: Yes, we did.

**SS: I remember going to see *Inside Women Inside*. DARE showed that film.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: First of all, why was that? What was DARE's prison involvement? What was that commitment coming from?**

JG: Well, it was coming from just a broad commitment to women and a broad commitment to particularly working-class and poor women. And women who are incarcerated, of course, fall mainly into that category, and so that was where we were coming from. Also some of us, myself, had did work — and DARE also, I think, did some work around it. I did work around Joan Little's case in the seventies.

**SS: That's right. Can you explain that case?**

JG: Well, Joan Little was a black woman from North Carolina who stabbed — she was incarcerated on some petty robbery case charges, and the white jailer — actually his name was Clarence Allgood; I remember his name — came in and tried to rape her, and she killed him with an ice pick. I should say this, because for the record, Joan and I are cousins. That's how come I can remember her case so well, and she comes from a town that's near. She's a cousin on my mother's side from near where I grew up in North Carolina. So we sort of grew up together.

**SS: But also what was interesting paradigmatically about that case was that it was DARE was a queer group doing work on a case that didn't have queer content, and that was new in the Gay Movement at that time.**

JG: You think so?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: There were a lot of gay people who were working on that case.

**SS: Right.**

JG: Around the country, around the world, probably.

**SS: But how many openly — how many organizations with the word “dyke” in their name?**

JG: Not that many, no, no, no. You’re right about that. But —

**SS: There’s a long history of gay people in progressive movements.**

JG: Yes, very long.

**SS: But not explicitly —**

JG: Particularly in the anti-racist movement.

**SS: Yes. But not explicitly queer organizations. So that’s an interesting part of the coalition vision that you had.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: So now AIDS comes, and you’re working in Rikers.**

JG: I volunteered at Rikers. I did that on my own time. I did it on weekends, because I was going with this group called ADAPT. I don’t know if they still exist. It was an AIDS group.

**SS: Yes. Who was that? That was — what was her name?**

JG: It was a woman.

**SS: Yes, it was a woman. You know how I’m talking about.**

**JH: Oh, Yolanda Serrano.**

JG: Yes, Yolanda Serrano.

**SS: That’s right. So you were working through her organization at Rikers.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: So can you tell us, at least from your point of view, what was the intersection of the Prisoners Rights Movement and the AIDS Activist Movement, as far as you could see it?**

JG: Well, I don't know as far as I could see it at that early stage, it was just volunteering and trying to change prison policy. I represented somebody out of that experience. I represented a Puerto Rican inmate who subsequently became my roommate, who I got him out of jail on basically humanitarian grounds, because I got some doctor who'd do an affidavit saying he was going to be dying in six months. Actually, he didn't die in six months. He lived a couple years. But the doctor didn't lie. He actually thought he was going to die in six months. The way the medication was, that he lived that long was really remarkable, because he had been on drugs and so he was really — and then he sort of, after he got out, he'd go back and forth between shooting heroin and cocaine and stuff.

So I think at that period, the thing around AIDS was basically to challenge prisons to treat people with AIDS or who were HIV-positive to, first of all, put them in general population and treat them equally. Then, of course, also there was also an effort to try to get people out of jail, particularly in New York, and I think around the country, to get people out on humanitarian grounds. And I worked on that because I thought, I think it's horrible for somebody to die in jail.

Then, of course, there was an effort, I guess not at the same time but thereafter to give condoms out, because the thing about prisons — one of my friends told me this, and I believe her definitely. She always says, "You know, people claim that they don't sleep with men, see, but I tell you, most of the men who in prison who have been

00:40:00

there for more than two years have slept with a man,” whether consensually or they raped the man, and that’s the thing about prisons that I think is slowly — people are slowly beginning to get.

**SS: And what is the status — I mean, what happened with the condom requests? Were there suits or was it just negotiation? And where is that now?**

JG: It was negotiation and pressure, but I don’t even think they do it any longer, do they?

**SS: I don’t know.**

JG: Hmm?

**SS: I don’t know.**

JG: No, they don’t do it. But they did do it, didn’t they?

**SS: Well, that was ACT UP Philly. That’s their big thing. But I don’t know what their success rate has been. You can’t get anything else in prison. How can you expect them – I don’t know.**

JG: What do you mean, you can’t get? I mean —

**SS: I mean, are they giving people anything that they need?**

JG: No. But you would think that they would give people condoms. because everybody knows that there’s a lot of sexual activity, either unwarranted, rape that goes on in prison.

**SS: Right. The ACT UP connection, I mean, there was a lot of prison consciousness because so many people had come out of Bedford.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Now, were you connected with any of those women?**

JG: In Bedford?

**SS: ACE OUT people who came in, Katrina Haslip.**

JG: Oh, I knew them, but I wasn't really connected with them. Well, of course, I know Kathy. I knew Judy Clark from decades ago.

**SS: Can you tell us a little bit about what they were doing? Do you know what was going on?**

JG: Well, I know what Kathy and Judy were doing, were trying to educate women in prison about AIDS. They really — that was very good work they were doing at Bedford Hills. I mean, Kathy is out, and I think Judy might be continuing it.

**SS: Well, we consider them to be part of ACT UP, and Kathy did agree to be interviewed, and then she refused to set a date. Then Judy we tried to get permission to go in and interview her, and it was denied.**

JG: Really?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Why was it denied?

**SS: We don't know why.**

JG: When was it denied?

**SS: Last year.**

JG: Oh. Why don't you try again? I'll help you try to get in to see her.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: Because I actually know her lawyer, so I could probably — you know who her lawyer is?

**SS: Sara [Bennett].**

JG: Sara, right.

**SS: Yes.**

JG: So I could just — did you ask Sara?

**SS: We did it through Sara.**

JG: And they denied her?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Really?

**SS: Yes. So, I mean, we have —**

JG: That's terrible.

**SS: And the problem is that every woman who came to ACT UP from Bedford except one has died, and that one woman doesn't want to be interviewed.**

JG: Who? You mean Kathy?

**SS: No. Marina Alvarez, who was a —**

JG: I remember her.

**SS: She's still alive, but she doesn't want to. And Deb Levine was interviewed, Mike's ex-wife, so she was very involved with all of that. But we haven't had any of the people who were inside be able to be interviewed about the development of ACE and the relationship with ACT UP.**

JG: And Kathy won't do it?

**SS: She said she would and then she disappeared from our correspondence. Any suggestions you have, tell me later.**

JG: Okay. I'll tell you later.

**SS: Okay. But it's too bad because this is an important part of ACT UP's history.**

JG: It is. It's a very, very important part.

**SS: Very important, yes.**

JG: I did know somebody who years ago, she didn't come to ACT UP but was very — she was always in and out of Bedford. You may know, because DARE did some support work for her, Carol Crooks.

**SS: That sounds familiar.**

JG: Yes. I don't know what happened to her. The last time she called, she called me with some complicated story, and I just said, "I can't deal with this story."

**SS: Now, did you ever have any conflicts inside ACT UP about legal strategy?**

JG: No.

**SS: No?**

JG: No, not really.

**SS: And did you ever represent ACT UP in court?**

JG: Oh, yeah.

**SS: Can you tell us about some of that?**

JG: Oh, that'll stretch my memory. We did a trial, you remember? What was that trial with the brother who died, a tall, thin brother who died in Chicago?

**JH: Ortez**

**SS: Ortez Alderson.**

JG: Was it Ortez? You know who I'm talking about, tall black man.

**SS: Yes. He had been an anti-war guy.**

JG: Yes, yes, yes.

**SS: Ortez Alderson.**

00:45:00 JG: Yes. We did a trial with him and some others, and I think — what was it about? It was some sit-in. My memory is fading. But we did a whole trial about it, me and, I think, David Barr and somebody else. And I did represent members of ACT UP in court all the time. I once represented Michael Signorile on a case that was hilarious, right? Michael had gotten picked up, sort like something about going to the bathroom, right? But anyway, he got charged. So when I got to court, I started out by saying, “My client here, he has an illness that requires him to go to court, and that’s why —.” I think he was pissing in the street or something he did.

And I just remember the lawyer, the judge saying to me, “Ms. Gibbs, stop it,” and dismissing the case. She didn’t want to hear. When I started talking about him having to go to the bathroom, she said, “I don’t want to hear this if there’s no public bathroom. Just stop it. Get out.”

**SS: And you don’t remember what the Ortez case was?**

JG: No, it was a sit-in. Maybe it was at the Health Department.

JH: Was it Stephen Joseph?

JG: Yes. It was at the Health Department, right? Yes, it was at the Health Department.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: Yes, see, he remembers. Were you in the demo?

**JH: No, but I’ve watched footage of the demo.**

JG: Of the action, right?

JH: In his office.

JG: Then I represented other people. Alan Robinson and I were roommates up until he died. You remember Alan?

**SS: No.**

JG: You remember Alan, right?

**JH: Yes.**

JG: He and I were roommates. He lived here. So, yes, I represented people in court all the time.

**SS: All right. So let's talk about the strip-search case, because there was some controversy around that.**

JG: What was the controversy?

**SS: Well, start at the beginning. So what happened?**

JG: I don't remember what happened, but some women in ACT UP were strip-searched, and we decided to sue, and the city actually settled because you're not supposed to strip-search somebody who is just arrested for some essentially violation or

—

**SS: But hasn't that law changed now?**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Now they can.**

JG: Yes, now they can.

**SS: That's right.**

JG: Well, what was the controversy around it? One of the controversies was I don't think the people who were — we had to allege that people — when you sue somebody, you have to allege some emotional harm, right? I don't think they were really emotionally harmed, because it wasn't too — What was the controversy?

**SS: They got money.**

JG: Yes, they got money.

**SS: And some people kept it, and some people gave it to ACT UP.**

JG: Oh, I didn't know that. We got money, but my office got the money. I didn't get no money. They kept the money?

**SS: Some of the people kept it, and some of them gave it to the organization, and it was quite controversial.**

JG: Oh, I didn't realize that.

**SS: But do you think that that helped real women who get arrested and were subject to strip-search, or do you think it was special treatment for ACT UP?**

JG: I can't answer that. It would reflect on my legal skills. I think — well, let's put it this way. As I recall, most of the women, if not all, were white, right?

**SS: Yes, exactly.**

JG: Right. So there's your answer. And they did, the city quickly settled the case. It didn't last long.

**SS: ACT UP was in its own sphere in terms of relationship to the courts, because it was privileged people to an extent or to the people who were not privileged, they became privileged by being in the ACT UP sphere, right?**

JG: Sort of like Occupy Wall Street.

**SS: That's interesting. Is that what's happening in Occupy Wall Street?**

JG: Well, no, but, I mean, Occupy Wall Street, all those people get arrested, right? They stay overnight, right? But then the court sets aside special sessions for them, thereby — I don't remember them doing that for ACT UP. I don't think ACT UP got —

**SS: But nobody really went to jail for ACT UP. Nobody was sentenced to time.**

JG: No. Nobody's been sentenced to time for Occupy Wall Street either, but I'm saying I don't remember them setting aside special courts and special times for people in ACT UP.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: So to that extent, people in ACT UP to that extent were treated like everybody else, but Occupy Wall Street, you could clearly see.

**SS: But in a way there was the privilege that was within ACT UP. If you were not a privileged person and you joined ACT UP, you ended up being more protected by being in ACT UP than you would have been on your own.**

JG: Yes, right.

**SS: Because it occupied a special sphere in terms of relationship to the court system.**

JG: Right.

**SS: And that can be deceptive, because there's an illusion of stepping up against the state on some level, but there's actually no punishment. It's only symbolic punishment.**

00:50:00 JG: Well, I don't know. Now, if somebody — most of the people, I guess, a lot of the times the trials were on Broadway, so for civil disobedience, and that's where it's usually violation, but the ones — yes, I mean, now I'm more conscious that anytime you're arrested, you could be harmed, because I do immigration law, so I know that if you are not a citizen or you have a Green Card, you shouldn't be getting arrested at all, really. I mean, because they do ask you for every — not only do they ask you every time you're arrested, but they ask you every time you're convicted. So you can be arrested and not convicted, you still have to tell them, and then they consider that.

**SS: Now, that was an issue in ACT UP, that there were people who were not citizens.**

JG: Right.

**SS: And what was your advice to them at that time in the earlier era?**

JG: Well, my advice was always to people who were not citizens to not get arrested, because you could always get — you know, it could come back to haunt you if you want to become a citizen, if you're wanting to become a citizen, you know. But, now — I don't know about then, because I wasn't doing immigration law at the time, but now even to renew your Green Card, they ask you, "Have you been arrested?"

**SS: Interesting.**

JG: So that can be very problematic.

**SS: One of the things that people always say to us is that now with the new security state, many of the things that ACT UP did, they wouldn't have been able to do. And I'm not sure about that, because I feel like if people were as desperate as people in ACT UP were, they would find ways to do what they needed to do. But it is true that the corralling of demonstrators, the needs for I.D. cards to get into buildings, there's a whole different environment now.**

JG: Right. Oh, you didn't ask me about St. Patrick's.

**SS: Oh, okay. Were you an attorney for St. Patrick's?**

JG: Yes. I loved it. That was a great demonstration. I did with another group — we did that years later. It didn't turn out so well, but. But I thought that that was a very important demonstration because I think the Catholic Church and I guess it was Cardinal O'Connor at the time —

**SS: Yes.**

JG: — were really playing a horrible role in the AIDS crisis, and with respect to LGBT people, and so I thought that there was controversy around that, because a lot of people didn't think they should do it. A lot of people were critical of it, and some people still are critical of that.

**SS: That's right.**

JG: I mean, I thought it was one of the better demonstrations, but, you know.

**SS: It was the largest.**

JG: Yes.

**SS: Now, did you go to court with the people who were arrested inside?**

JG: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I did part of those cases, yes.

**SS: And so did that case have a different feeling in the court?**

JG: Yes, because people thought it was really outrageous, and I think that might have been the first time — I mean, years before, I had been involved in a demonstration outside St. Patrick's around Bobby Sands, the Irish political prisoner who died as a result of a hunger strike. We were outside trying to get the Catholic Church to say something about this, do something about this. But, no, I don't think anybody has ever gone inside and demonstrated against the Catholic Church.

**SS: Actually, I was in a demonstration inside that had to do with Dignity being kicked out of something.**

JG: Oh, okay.

**SS: And that's where we stood up and turned our backs on the cardinal, but it was silent. But there was like ten people or something like that.**

JG: Did you get arrested?

**SS: Nobody was arrested, because that's not illegal to do.**

JG: No, it's not illegal to do.

**SS: Okay. So did you find that uniformly ACT UP was treated the same every time you went to court, or did it depend on who the judge was?**

JG: It depended on who the judge was. I mean, there were some judges that didn't think too highly of ACT UP and tried to treat people harshly or tried to give the lawyers a hard time. And really, as always, it depends on the judge you get.

**SS: What was the worst thing that happened to people?**

JG: Community service. People did a lot of community service.

**SS: So in the early nineties, ACT UP starts to fracture and split, and I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about why you thought that happened.**

JG: Want my honest opinion? I think the election of David Dinkins.

**SS: The election of David Dinkins? That is an original opinion. No one has ever said that. Okay. You have to explain.**

JG: When was he elected, '89?

**JH: Yes.**

00:55:00 JG: I think — I mean, I hate to say this, and I guess I will say it, because I think that it did, I think that once David Dinkins was elected, people were more reluctant to be — you know, when it was Koch, people were all around the city around various issues were protesting all the time. You know that's true.

**SS: Yes.**

JG: When David Dinkins became mayor, it tempered down. First of all, some people got jobs who would not have had a job.

**SS: That's interesting. Very interesting. Okay.**

JG: Right? I won't say who.

**SS: I know exactly who you're thinking of.**

JG: But I think that people just — they found it harder. It's like with Obama. People find it hard to really keep up sustained movement against Obama, and I think David Dinkins, the city basically went on, "Oh, let's give him a chance." People don't think that? I think that.

**SS: No one has ever said that to us.**

JG: What do people say it was?

**SS: Clinton.**

JG: Clinton?

**SS: The election of Clinton, and it was the downfall of ACT UP.**

JG: Well, I think, yeah, I think that helped, too, the election of Clinton, but I think it started with David Dinkins, because I don't think —

**SS: So the worst thing that can happen to a movement —**

JG: Well, let me say something.

**SS: Go ahead, yes.**

JG: Clinton, in my mind, was a neoliberal, if not a conservative, when he was running and when he was elected. People seemed to think otherwise. I don't know. You probably remember his election, and how he and Hillary went back to Arkansas so they could watch this, be there when this young black man who was mentally disabled was executed. Do you remember that?

**SS: No.**

JG: He did that during his campaign. He was campaigning somewhere, and he went there so that when they called them for the stay, he could say no, and he announced this proudly. I mean, this was like one of the many stupid things that he did to get elected. So, but I think Clinton might have aided, but I think it started with David Dinkins.

**SS: So the most dangerous thing that can happen to a movement is to have a Democrat get elected?**

JG: No.

**SS: Or a liberally Democrat?**

JG: I don't think that's the most dangerous thing, but I think, I think that's a factor. I also think a factor is that then there was treatments that were developed, and I think a factor was also the number of deaths of people in ACT UP. I mean, ACT UP — let's see. I had two of my roommates die, and I got sort of like I didn't want to be involved in AIDS work, because you have two roommates die of AIDS, then you're like, oh, you know. And I think that had impact on ACT UP. It's difficult, people constantly dying around you and going to funerals.

Then also in my personal life in 1990, my mother suffered a massive stroke, so I had to stop and take care of her, because she lived with me. So I had to stop and rearrange my life so that I could be able to take care of her at home.

But I think that there was a combination of factors, and I also think that the infusion of eighties and nineties people, the younger generations. That's an interesting discussion we should talk about sometime, about the difference between lesbians and gay men who grew up in the eighties and nineties and those of us who grew up in the other ones. I don't think they — you know.

**SS: But I want to get to this issue you're raising about appointments, people from the community getting appointed into government positions. Is there anything good that can come of that?**

JG: Well, I have sort of some — I have a government position now, an appointed position. I'm on the Voters Advisory something. It's the city agency that does voter assistance. Voter Assistance Commission, right? So what we do, what the city — I

was appointed by the borough presidents, believe it or not, all of them combined. I don't know how that happened. I still wonder. Scott Stringer started it, and I guess he got the rest of them to go along with it. But all we do is focus on ways to get people registered to vote and get people to turn out to vote, right?

And one good thing for me, though, is that ethically I now can't work on any local campaigns, so I have a ready excuse anytime somebody comes to me, oh, they want — I can always say, no, I can't do that. You know what I mean? And I'm so happy because this means I don't have to be bothered with all these dozens of people who are going to start running for the City Council next year or run to replace Christine Quinn. So, there's something. But my position is unpaid, which is very different from paid when you're actually working.

**SS: But also, as we said before the camera started, election fraud is one of the key issues in our society right now.**

01:00:00

JG: Right. But I think could it ever be a good thing to be appointed to a government position? I don't know? It depends on who's appointed and what they do in the position. But there were a lot of — you remember there's a lot of — Dinkins appointed a lot of lesbians and gay people. Do you remember that?

**SS: And many of those people are now the homo bureaucrats who are running the most bureaucratic organizations.**

JG: Really? Like who?

**SS: Marjorie Hill.**

JG: Who?

**SS: Marjorie.**

JG: Oh, god!

**JW: Yes, she's the one.**

**SS: Etc.**

JG: I know. Did you interview Larry Kramer?

**SS: Yes.**

JG: Okay. Did he talk —

**SS: But we didn't talk about that. But, okay, look at Christine Quinn herself. She was a community-based activist, right? She was in the Anti-Violence Project.**

JG: Yeah, but Christine was never as radical as Tom Duane, even when everybody thought that when she took his seat. She was never as radical as Tom.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: Because Tom, you remember, who used to get arrested.

**SS: That's right.**

JG: I don't remember Christine Quinn getting arrested.

**SS: That's true.**

JG: Do you remember her being anywhere? I don't remember.

**SS: It's true. I don't remember her getting arrested, not even on St. Patrick's Day. Actually, I don't know if that's a fact, but just —**

JG: Right. No, I don't think so, because I represented Dignity a couple times and, no, she was not arrested.

**SS: That's interesting.**

JG: So, I don't know what she was doing.

**SS: So as soon as you get someone who's kind of friendly —**

JG: I guess she was preparing.

**SS: — and they start appointing people, then you're in the co-optation process.**

JG: Yeah.

**SS: And do you see that happening with the Obama administration?**

JG: Well, I don't know. The one person I knew who's in the — well, I know people who are in the Obama administration, actually two people. One is very high up. I don't know if it's cooptation. It depends. First of all, genuine Leftists are very rarely going to get appointed to anything.

**SS: Okay.**

JG: Van Jones was sort of — Van, who was an intern of mine at the Center for Constitution Rights, was not that Left. Van liked to talk a lot, you know, and stuff like that, and you can see now from what he's doing. So genuine Leftists rarely get appointed to anything, or ever get hired by the government up in the high position. We can get a job with a city university maybe, hold onto that, but that's a different hiring process.

**SS: Right.**

JG: And I don't know who works for Bloomberg, really. I don't know who's in his administration.

**SS: I don't either.**

JG: But I know in Dinkins' administration there was — he hired a couple activists, people who were bright but were activists.

**SS: So when did you stop working with ACT UP, at what point?**

JG: In about 1990 or '89, probably 1990.

**SS: And why was that?**

JG: As I said, my mother had a stroke.

**SS: Oh, oh, it's personal. It's personal.**

JG: She had a massive stroke. She was paralyzed, and so I had to get a home attendant, and then I had to be at home every night, unless I could find somebody to replace me.

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

JG: No.

**JH: Well, actually I wanted you — you brought up the issue of the difference between gays and lesbians who came of age in the eighties and nineties and those of us who are older. I wonder if you could talk more about what you see as the differences.**

JG: Well, I think those of us who grew up in the sixties, like when I grew up, one, I was very influenced by the Women's Movement, and I was subsequently very — Black Movement and by Stonewall and all of that. It's just I think culturally we're different. I think some of the music and even the language of people who grew up in the nineties, I wouldn't use, like, even in jest, because I have a strong thing about language.

And then certain issues like I got into this debate with somebody recently who really didn't understand my adamancy about if I'm involved in a program, I want it to be gender balanced and racial balanced, otherwise, to me those are point of values in

my politics. But I don't think that is shared, because they grew up when there was abortion rights and then increasingly gay rights too. a time they didn't grow up when it was like people being — when there was absolutely no protection for lesbians or gay men. And there was no movement for a lot of that time. And so it's different. It's like young black people, right? They have no memory of segregation, so they don't see racism — they don't see or feel racism the way those of us who are older do, and I think young gay people suffer from that same thing. I don't know if I clearly answered your question, but I think that that's a problem.

**JH: They don't see the racism? Even with stop and frisk, they don't see it?**

JG: Well, I'll tell you something. I mean, this is a long discussion, but I'll put it in brief. If you are a young black person, right, and most — because I'm talking about about college-educated young black people now, right? They go to college, some of them go to Ivy League schools, top-tier schools, they don't feel — they don't see racism. They don't see it. I had a young black woman tell me recently that she had never been — she'd never been a victim of racism. Now, she's like eighteen, living in New York City. She comes — actually it's a class thing too.

**SS: But when someone's saying that, like, they're not seeing the institutions that they're living in. They're not seeing the big picture.**

JG: Right, exactly.

**SS: Yes. So it's a blindness.**

JG: It's a blindness.

**SS: Yes.**

JG: But I think a lot of young gay people think that too.

**SS: Right. Because in our generation, if you came out into the community, the leaders were like Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich.**

JG: Right.

**SS: But if you come out today, it's like Ellen DeGeneres.**

JG: Right. I wouldn't say that. Do you think she's a leader?

**SS: No, but that's who they see. There was no one who was out beyond the level of Adrienne and Audre.**

JG: Right, right.

**SS: That was the top.**

JG: And they were great people.

**SS: And now the top are these nothings. There are these voids.**

JG: Oh, that's interesting. Maybe.

**SS: See, and that's the people that hundreds of millions of people see.**

JG: And that's who they try to be like. That's the model.

**SS: Yeah.**

JG: That is interesting.

**SS: I only have one question left. So just looking back in hindsight — this is a hindsight question, how do you feel now, not at the time. What would you say was ACT UP's greatest achievement and what was its biggest disappointment?**

JG: Okay. I think ACT UP's greatest achievement was in changing, having real impact on the way people with AIDS were treated and on getting people treatment. And I think, politically I think ACT UP, to me, was one of the best

expressions of progressive politics in its practice that has existed since. I would say — I would say since the Civil Rights Movement, and so that's a high compliment.

**SS: Yes.**

JG: I would compare it to the Civil Rights Movement, because I think that that's — and I think it's unfortunate that a lot of people haven't studied the history of ACT UP and learned from that, because I think that Occupy might have gotten more further along and be further in a different place had they studied the history of ACT UP.

As far as its weakness, I don't know. I have to think about that. I mean, weaknesses, all organizations have weaknesses. I don't think it had that many significant weaknesses.

**SS: Okay. Great. Thank you. Thank you, Joan.**

JG: Thank you. Glad to do it. So you know Marjorie Hill?

**SS: Yes.**

**JW: I turned on the camera.**

**SS: You're plugged in.**

**JW: It's completely vacant.**

JG: You know what I didn't know about Marjorie Hill all those years?

**SS: What?**

JG: Do you know who her father is, right?

**SS: Her father is what?**

JG: Do you know who her father is?

**SS: No, I don't know.**

JG: Stanley Hill, the labor leader.

**SS: What?**

**JH: Oh, my god. No, really? I don't — no wonder she's —**

JG: Yes. That's — yes.

**SS: I never knew that.**

JG: Somebody told me that. I said, "Oh, now I get it."

**JH: That makes perfect sense.**

JG: Stanley Hill.

**SS: Right, the Democratic Party hack.**

JG: Right. So she's going to be here, Sarah, long after you and I are dead and gone.

**SS: I never knew that. That's really incredible.**

JG: Because you remember she was working for Dinkins. I wondered how she got that. But then somebody said after that, they said, "Joan, don't you know who her father is? What, are you crazy?"

**SS: I never knew that. That's incredible.**

JG: Yes. That's how she got in GMHC.

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**JW: And now she's going to stay there.**

JG: How's she doing there?

**SS: Well, are they doing anything?**

**JW: They're not doing anything.**

JG: Well, last time I heard, they were moving to Ninth Avenue.

**JW: Yes, they moved, and I haven't seen anybody there.**

JG: Really?

**JW: I've been there twice, just coming and going, but –**

JG: I know one thing they stopped doing. They used to represent people with AIDS who were immigrants, and they stopped doing that, because now everybody keeps coming, calling our office. It's like, wait a minute, what happened to Marjorie then?

**JW: I think she's a real complete vacant –**

JG: She's pretty though. She's stylish.