

**A C T U P**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**P R O J E C T**

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Interviewee: **Ron Goldberg**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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## ACT UP ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of Ron Goldberg

October 25, 2003

**SARAH SCHULMAN: If you could say your name, how old you are, today's date, and where we are?**

RON GOLDBERG: Ron Goldberg. I'm 44. It is Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>. We're in my apartment in Manhattan, on 51<sup>st</sup> Street.

**SS: Ron, you were one of the most hard-working and visible people in ACT UP. How did you first come to the organization?**

RG: I was sort of reading about it. I was reading at the time the *New York Native*, and there were articles in there. I remember particularly the first demonstration, and the time when the cops were arresting them in Washington with the gloves – and the “Your gloves don't match your shoes, we'll see it on the news!” And I was like oh, that's interesting. And actually, I went to the Center to participate, to sign up to hand out leaflets about the March on Washington that was going to happen. There were only about a handful of us. It was kind of – all right I'll do this, but this isn't what I thought it was going to be. But then, ACT UP started coming in for meetings, and it was like, let me check this out. And I think it was the meeting where they were talking about what they were going to do for Gay Pride, and whether or not they were going to hold coffins in the thing, and Griffin Gold got up and was like, “We are *living* with AIDS, not *dying* with AIDS!” So it was this incredible drama meeting. But it was great, and I'd been looking to find some way to sort of hook up with the community. I was very nervous about doing the buddy thing – GMHC just didn't seem to – I was very nervous about that level of commitment, and I didn't think I could handle that. But this was a bit theatrical,

in the streets. Okay, this I can do. And I started – I think I went to my first demo – it was actually after Pride, but then I started going pretty regularly for a lot of years.

**SS: Had you ever been politically active before?**

RG: Back in the day – in the late sixties, as a kid –

**SS: You were 10 –**

RG: But literally, you know – 10 through junior high school, a little bit. We were political at home in terms of there was always a political conversation. We always read the papers. You mentioned a Republican – aside from Jacob Javits, until he ran against Dick Ottinger – that whole thing. I wasn't really – I'd done the moratorium thing, but it was more because everybody was doing it. And I was very young – it was the tail end of that. But, I'd certainly been politically aware. When the AIDS stuff really started, I always did the walks. I always did those kind of things. But, certainly nothing at this level at all.

Tape I  
00:05:00

**SS: Did your parents ever take you to demonstrations?**

RG: No. I went mostly with friends. I remember them signing me off to do a moratorium. I had to get a note from my parents that I could participate, since it was senior high school, and I was in junior high school. But, no.

**SS: Did they raise you with any kind of sense of responsibility?**

RG: To the community? Yeah.

**SS: And how was that conveyed? Where did you grow up?**

RG: I grew up in Great Neck, for the most part, though I always considered myself a New York City kid – I was in here all the time. I had a religious upbringing. It was reformed, but it was very much full of responsibility to the community. My parents

volunteered at Temple or the senior center. There's sort of a long history – on both sides of my family – of a lot of volunteerism. So that was sort of in there, and that's part of what you did. And actually, when I got involved with ACT UP – I think that's when they finally – their perception of me and me being gay and homosexuality really sort of changed, because they understood this. My mom – when I would come to her and start talking about running the Action Committee and the problems I was having, she was like, okay – because she was used to running committees. She's done this – the volunteer situations. And suddenly they saw it as a very positive thing, and that they were very proud of what I was doing. They were very, very upfront with that. That was really nice.

**SS: When did you come out to them?**

RG: In college. I came out twice. The first time was in college. It was senior year, and they were sort of stoic about it – it was sort of interesting. I mean, it was a very progressive household, so there was never any of the real *sturm und drang*, out of the house, any of that stuff. But, there was this real sense of loss – think of it as mourning – around what they had thought and seen for me. And, they asked how did I know, and – it was 1975, '76. And, then it was fine, but we just didn't talk about it for a couple of years – I mean really, what was going on in my life? I could talk about how my auditions were going or not. My money situation or not. But, we didn't talk about my friends, we didn't talk about a lot of things. We worked at it for a while. I started going on family vacations and stuff, and we had a lot of really hard, hard conversations. I think their view of what being gay was, was out of some media, dark room – who knows what goes on down there by the piers kind of thing.

**SS: In other words, accurate.**

RG: [LAUGHS] But, never for me. My whole thing was – I'm so hopelessly middle-class. For me, being gay is like my Lauren Bacall poster – it's a very different thing, which they could understand because it was my father's original cast albums I grew up on. So then after a while, we got to sort of another point where I said, you know – I was able to talk about my friends and what I was doing, and it started to go much further. ACT UP, I think, was the final piece of that in a lot of ways, because by that time we were very much talking. They knew what was going on in my life, and all this other stuff. They were certainly worried about AIDS and whatever – but, the fact that I was being political about it – that it really had turned me on, in a way – I mean, I was really engaged intellectually, politically – passionately involved – and they could see results, too. They understood what we were fighting for. That sort of really flipped the page for them, in a big way.

SS: **It's a really interesting point that you're making about your parents seeing you as a more complete person because suddenly you were productive. That somehow that justified the homosexuality on some level, because that is sort of emblematic of what happened to the larger community. Our whole social status changed on some level – so, that's quite emblematic, right there. So, you'd never really been in an organization before – a political organization?**

RG: No.

SS: **And how did you participate as a gay person, socially, before you came to ACT UP?**

RG: I was gay – I was in theater.

SS: **You were an actor.**

RG: I was an actor. I had lots of friends – a majority of which were gay. We would go out. We'd go to bars, we'd go to dances. We'd rent a week in Fire Island. Again, it's still the early '80s I guess, when the GMHC stuff came. We'd do the walks, we'd do all of that stuff. And I was very much involved in getting people involved with that. One of the restaurants I was working at, actually, wanted to hold one of the early benefits, and a lot of the staff was just like, if we're not getting paid, we're not working. And I was like, I'm definitely working, and if we need people I'll gather friends. And I got a whole bunch of people in, and within a month basically we were all working in the restaurant. So there was that stuff. I went to Gay Pride every year. That was my favorite day of the year.

**SS: Did you march?**

RG: Usually we would sort of stand and watch until some really great music came on. One year, the Mummers passed and they were playing *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and it was like, "Oh we are in!" And actually, the year – right before I joined ACT UP, when I was doing the stuff for the March on Washington – that was the first year I actually marched. And I was by myself handing out leaflets, and I remember I was going down, going, "Ronnie and Nancy inviting us in October, come to Washington!" – had to say hello. And just kind of going side to side and sort of putting on this little bit of a show. And I remember running into some friends who said, "Oh, I didn't know you were political." And I said I guess I am – because I knew that was important. That was sort of a big moment. And we always did wind up marching, and the idea of marching down the center of the street, as a gay man – though it was only once a year. And of course, the thing with ACT UP became – it was sort of a central tenet of the whole organization.

Yes, it was an AIDS organization, but so much of it was also – for me, and I think for a lot of people – as a gay man, as a gay woman – that our lives have value, meaning, absolutely down the street every day. We’re not asking for your – please give us this thing. We’re people, we demand it, it’s part of – there’s no discussion here, it’s our rights. That was sort of the turning point.

**SS: So who was the first person in your life who had AIDS?**

RG: It was interesting because I was really, really fortunate in that the people – up until 1987, my circle was really untouched. I mean, I read about people. Michael Bennett’s death destroyed me – which was about of lot of things, also. Slight side trip here. The day he died, I was sort of a mess all day long, and I decided I would go see *A Chorus Line*. So I went back, it was still running. A bunch of people who were going back, because he had died – and a bunch of Japanese tourists – and watching the show. And I’d seen the show quite a bit when I was younger, and I realized, oh my god, no wonder – I mean aside from the whole thing about being in theater, it’s so about being gay and being a teenager. No wonder I was completely devastated by the show, always – thrilled – and identified so intensely – it’s all about adolescent sexuality. So that was a gay death, that it mattered – Charles Ludlam, and a lot of the theater stuff.

Tape I  
00:15:00

It wasn’t really until I got involved with ACT UP that I actually knew people with AIDS. I’ll never forget Mark Fotopoulos, who was at my first demonstration. I’d seen him I guess at the Gay Pride parade, and he had that sign that he used to carry: “Living (blank) Years and (blank) Months with AIDS, No Thanks to You, Mr. Reagan.” I think he was probably the first person I knew with AIDS, and I was so devastated by it – just the fact that he was able to put that out there, and to own that. At the time, it was so

shameful – shame is the wrong word – the idea of identifying as having AIDS – oh my God, people would fly in the other direction. I remember wearing at that first demonstration my Silence = Death button and sort of – I mean, even just putting that on your jacket was a statement. A) it was a statement that you were gay, because there was the pink triangle – whether it was true or not. And then, for people who even knew what that was about, people just assumed that you must have AIDS. And that was a big deal. And then, to go on and to be standing next to this guy, with this poster – and I actually recognized his name, because I am a theater geek and remember seeing him in shows. So I knew who he was, and we became friendly, which was great because he was an amazing man.

**SS: Which shows was he in, since he's not here to tell us?**

RG: He was in *Rags*, he was in *Cats* – *Cats* must have lost like ten or twelve litters worth of dancers to AIDS – *Harrigan and Hart*. Actually, he was in *The Loves of Anatol*, which was the show that John Simon left and said, “Fags – I can’t wait until AIDS gets them all,” when he was leaving. He was in that show. That’s when he found out he had AIDS. Actually, I have somewhere something he’d written about when he found out he had AIDS, and this whole thing. It had an incredible impact on me. He was one of my heroes, and actually when I was writing the book that I was going to be writing on ACT UP at the time, one of my main – in my head, my main goal was that I would be able to tell Barry Paddock, who was this new kid in ACT UP at the time – this young boy, really sweet – and that he would know about Mark Fotopoulos. And that was what was important to me.

**SS: So, this thing about being next to people with AIDS, people thinking that you might have AIDS, and then of course, the ever-present threat that some day you might have AIDS – which of course a lot of people in ACT UP were living with at the time. What was your relationship to all of that threat? You chose to put yourself in the middle of that.**

RG: I didn't know whether I had – it was before the test and stuff. It was early, early, so everybody was just sort of assuming – I'd been doing the safe sex thing for a long time. I always sort of had in the back of my head that I was fine. Belief in stereotype – I hadn't done the back rooms. There was a lot of stuff I didn't do. But I had just come out of doing a reading of a play called *The Survivor*, which is all about the Warsaw ghetto, and it's about this gang of kids who are fighting against this huge enemy. But there'd always been something in me that was – I don't know whether it was a Jewish thing, or how I was brought up – but I always wondered how I would have reacted were I in Warsaw at that time – if I was old enough for the Civil Rights era, McCarthy – just sort of these central events. How do you respond as a person? And, this was – it was what needed to be done. It really wasn't, I didn't think, I knew enough so that I knew that coming into contact with people wasn't going to be an issue. In terms of people thinking I had AIDS – maybe I did, who knows? But it was the good fight. Not to completely over-romanticize the thing, but some of the romantics is what carried it.

**SS: Well, where did you get that message from? Because not everybody feels that way.**

RG: It was my upbringing, really. My parents always did sort of speak out – the Civil Rights Movement – those were early heroes. I remember reading those books

when I was fifth and sixth grade. Martin Luther King died – Those examples – my father actually worked at Voice of America when McCarthy was going on, and he didn't appear, but I guess some of his research was quoted, and that was always a point of pride. My Dad volunteered for the Air Force in World War II. There was just this sense of the good fight, and it's something that was always been important to me. Actually, right now my cousins are visiting – they're 17 and 15 – and they were asking about some of the ACT UP stuff. So they think it's really cool that Uncle Ron and Uncle Joe got arrested at the White House: "Tell us about it again!" And I just said, you know, it was a defining moment for me. I may not be as involved now as I had been, but I've answered a central question for me, which is okay, if your community is attacked, if there is – in a moment of, you've got to make a choice, do you do something? Do you stand by? Do you watch? What do you do? I don't have to question that anymore. And in a profound way that's a real load off, because I know. And that's really an amazing thing, and it's a real gift.

**SS: Let's talk a little about the specifics of ACT UP, because we're trying to explain to the future what it was like.**

RG: Good Luck

**SS: So you came in and you went to your first demonstration. Which one was that?**

RG: It was at Federal Plaza. It was right after Gay Pride, because they wanted to have a demonstration after Pride. You've made this big statement, you've handed out these flyers, let's get the people in to do something. And it was a rally –

**SS: Let's just focus on that for a second, because that's one of the strategies. Can you just sort of articulate that idea?**

RG: Sure. The idea is if you do this major outreach – and Pride was always an outreach, because you wanted to tell the community something – you wanted to send some sort of message to them and pull them in. And since we were an activist group, the point is, once you do that, you then don't sit them down in a meeting. You get them into the street, you get them into a protest, you get them to do something – because that's the drug. [LAUGHS] That's the thing, because once you can get people involved on that level, they'll sit through the other stuff that needs to be done. But once they sort of see and experience the “empowerment” – to use a phrase we bludgeon to death – that's when people start putting the pieces together for themselves. So you always want to get people involved actively, as quickly as possible. Don't get them in to sit at a meeting. Get them in to join us, and make it easy. Don't make it – come and you're going to have to do this whole – you show up. You show up at the rally, then these people will get arrested. It doesn't have to be the people you're getting at the outset – but just so they can sort of see how it works, and sort of get the sense of what the fight's about, and what that energy is.

**SS: So, Gay Pride recruited you to an action?**

RG: Yeah. I mean, I'd actually been to a meeting before – because of the other thing – but they handed that out and I was like yes, I'll be there. And it was a rally at Federal Plaza. There were speakers, initially. It was an early demo, so there were speakers – Phil Reed, I remember. I remember Mark with his poster, and then we kind of marched around, and they started getting arrested on the steps of – the Foley Building, maybe? It was the courthouse, I think. There was a picture they used for years – Mark

Aurigemma and Frank O'Dowd and probably [Michael] Nesline – a lot of the early usual suspects. And they were shouting and getting arrested. So that was my first, and then I hurried back to my temp job. Lunch was over.

**SS: So what made you decided to really plunge in?**

RG: It was a bunch of things. One, I'd really for a while, really, really wanted to do something. It was really important. The acting stuff wasn't panning out in a way that I liked. Yeah nothing was happening, but part of what I went into acting for also was this sense of community. I wanted to communicate something. What's happened to me a lot of times, is that a lot this stuff – and part of the reason I'm not in theater at the moment – is that a lot of the stuff that I was looking to theater to provide for me, I was able to find in my life. And the example of this play I'd just done, and that here was an opportunity to do that in real life – well, what was the comparison? And I wanted to get involved in something that was bigger than me. And I knew this was important. I had friends who I thought – it wasn't necessarily going to be me. I never really thought I was fighting for my life – in that literal sense. But there were other friends who I figured – and it's important. So the idea of that kind of involvement – and I just threw myself into it. There weren't other friends of mine immediately who were involved. There were others who would come, but it was really something I did on my own which was actually for me, kind of surprising.

**SS: So, what was your first responsibility in ACT UP?**

RG: I joined – it was the pre-cursor to the Actions Committee – Logistics. I joined the Logistics Committee because – here's some principles for you – because I thought Michael Savino was cute. [LAUGHS] And, I remember, before that, there were

also a couple of demonstrations, because there were demonstrations every week, for God's sake. I'd been to a couple by then, but I joined that committee and we were planning some actions – I'm trying to remember what the first action we planned –

**SS: Who else was on Logistics?**

RG: I think Eric Sawyer was in it at the time, Savino. The first guy I dated in ACT UP, Eric Rosenblatt. Who else was in that committee? Oh, Dan Butler – later, of *Frazier*. Alan Klein came in, I think around the same time, I think for the same reason. We met at Michael's apartment. I think we were planning the AIDS Commission demo. Maybe that was it. The AIDS Commission had been announced during the summer, and it was that disaster.

**SS: You have to explain that whole thing.**

RG: President Reagan finally said the word "AIDS" sometime in 1987, and he decided that there would be this commission that would research AIDS. And of course, it was Cardinal O'Connor. It was all these right-wing homophobic people. My favorite of course, was [Dr.] Cory SerVaas, who ran the *Saturday Evening Post*, and had these hateful editorials. And I remember John Nalley making the ineffable chant of "Cory SerVaas makes us *nerv-as* with her mobile testing *serv-as*," because she had this mobile testing service that would go around and test people for AIDS – without any sort of scientific or – it would be like, "You have AIDS. Bye."

**SS: Was this before the HIV test?**

RG: I don't remember the exact chronology of when the HIV test came in. It's all fuzzy. But she did have this mobile testing service, so there must have been some sort of test – but no one knew what to do about it. So you're positive, and then what do you

do exactly? The head of Amway was on it – this hateful, hateful group that had no idea about AIDS. So we were trying to figure out, how do we deal with this? And we would zap them when they were in New York, but we were planning this demonstration down for their first major hearing in Washington. So I think that was probably the first demo that I really got involved with organizing. And that was like, several busloads down to Washington.

**SS: What happened at the demo?**

RG: It was at the National Press Headquarters, I think. And we had our signs – two sides to your signs. Never just one side, because you go around in a circle – someone sees your message, and someone else has just seen the back of a sign. Also, be careful about your colors.

**SS: Oh, tell us.**

RG: Because yellow on white doesn't show up in black and white. There are colors that don't show up. So, we're marching around in our group – in circles outside – before the hearing began. And then people started to go into the hearings, because they were open. And, I was sort of in charge for keeping the line going. So there we were. I think Eric was wearing a Reagan mask. He was in a grim reaper outfit, with a fake scythe, and a Reagan face. And every hour, we were blowing off some sort of horn to symbolize people dying. That's another thing – simple is better. My whole idea of a demonstration is, someone who's going by on a bus or who's walking by will understand what you're doing, quickly. Not like, "Well, you see, in five minutes, we'll be doing this." Or sometimes street theater gets so involved with the theater, you lose the message. People should get it immediately, or as quickly as possible.

So, people were going into these hearings. And after a while, I remember going in. And what was incredible about that was one, you looked at these people and assumed they had all this power or whatever. They were an impressive group, to put it mildly. There was one gay guy on – Frank Lilly, I think – who used to be a doctor for the Reagans at some point. But they had no idea about anything with AIDS. It was astonishing. Our people – Larry [Kramer], I think testified. [Michael] Petrelis I'm pretty sure testified. There were a number of people who were going up and speaking. And we were all sort of crammed into this room – very small space. And there was sort of the realization of, they don't know anymore than I do. It was really amazing, because we invest these people with such power and such knowledge – oh, they must know what they're doing, or how can I possibly speak up, because who am I? And this was clearly a case where they knew less than any of us. I mean, they were saying things – well, that's just garbage. And there were a number of times we did that, and we tried to – later, the Civil Rights Commission – the Send in the Clowns demo, was sort of a classic of that.

**SS: Why don't you just tell us about that one.**

RG: Another commission they brought up was this –

**SS: Was this under Reagan still?**

RG: Yeah – the Civil Rights Commission. They were going to finally look into AIDS discrimination. And this was when I was actually running the Actions Committee – reading the papers. I had stacks of newspapers, because I would comb through trying to find things, and I actually found this smoking gun article. It was about this big in the *Times*, on a Saturday, and it was basically saying that the whole point of the commission really was to prove discrimination against people who were forced not to discriminate

against people with AIDS. What about the small homeowner who's subletting, and finds out their subletter has AIDS – how are we discriminating against them? And that was sort of the thrust. I was like. “Oh, smoking gun, here it is!” Again, it was this collection of people that were put onto the Commission by Reagan, with the exception of some holdovers like Mary Berry, who had been there from probably Carter – certainly, administrations past. Anyway, they were having a hearing, and having all these incredible people speaking who were like, “The AIDS crisis is over, there is no crisis.” *The Heterosexual Myth of AIDS* – he was the guy who was actually the administrator of the Commission, the guy who wrote that. “There is no AIDS among heterosexuals. Clearly, everyone who has it who is a heterosexual, is really homosexual – if AIDS exists at all.”

So, for that commission, the question was okay, if we go into a regular demonstration, aren't we just legitimizing what they're saying? How do you combat that? The whole thing really is just a circus. And initially, I think Maria [Maggenti] came up with, oh, we should let bugs out, or marbles. And then someone said, “It's just a circus, isn't it? Why don't we get clown masks?” So we called it the Send in the Clowns demo – or I called it the Send in the Clowns demo, because I'm a Theater Queen. And what we did is – we kind of showed up – we took a busload of people down, and we showed up at this meeting. We came after lunch, and we heard in the morning that here was this horrible testimony going on, and then we just sat there. We went to our seats in the audience, and we all had these half clown masks on. And we just sat there. And the commission came in, and they were facing us, and you just saw their faces drop. And the press was like, “Oh, clown faces! Here's an image.” We were trying to think of ways to

interrupt the proceedings. We did tick, tock – this was the first one where we took off our watches to show time’s running out. At one point, we did “Tick, tock, tick, tock.” And there was another point I think we all turned our backs, when somebody said something about there not really being an AIDS crisis or something – we kind of turned our backs. And then this guy said something, he was showing his graphs – “And if you look, the curve of this line” – and you think, it was really bent over – so everyone kind of bent over and sort of mooned the commission without taking off our pants or anything. Mary Berry was hysterical laughing. The liberal people on the committee were having a great time. Everyone else was like – and we were only in there for 20 minutes, because it started to get tense and the police started to go in, and it wasn’t worth taking a bust on. We’d made our point. It’s not about getting arrested. It’s about making your point. If you need to get arrested to make your point, great. If you can do it without getting arrested, why get arrested? But it was this incredibly empowering, because we completely wrecked it. The committee had no legitimacy. They just sort of fizzled off into nothingness, and we were really able to undercut them so severely by doing this – by being funny, by being smart, and not playing into this situation they’d set up.

**SS: Now, how did Logistics become the Action Committee?**

RG: I think it became just an overwhelming thing. I mean Logistics essentially was just like – demonstrations, to a large part, were sort of plotted out in the room. Okay, this is where we should go. You go this way. The traffic’s going this way, so you march with the traffic or against the traffic. This is a good intersection. We’ve cased out the area. Logistics is about casing out the area, seeing how it’s laid out, seeing if it’s a

private property situation, where exits are if you're going inside. If you're stuck at the UN and they've put you in that park, what do you do?

**SS: Oh, Dag Hammarskjold Park**

RG: Which is like, let's surround you by trees so no one can see you – on First Avenue, which will have no traffic – which is where I took my first bust. So, it's really casing things out. Actions – I think they were better when we realized there were a lot of different pieces of it, and that needed all to be coordinated. I think it happened before the March on Washington, in '87.

**SS: Would the Actions Committee come up with ideas for actions?**

RG: It went both ways. A lot of times what came out was, what evolved eventually was the Actions Committee sort of wound up doing these big demonstrations and formed campaigns. But initially, actions came off the floor. We've got to do this – and if you look at the time, we were doing two and three a week, sometimes. And a lot of them were zaps. There was a Zap Committee, too, at the time. So there was Logistics, there were zaps – which were the smaller actions that would take place on the down and dirty, very quick. And there was a two-way, because sometimes the floor would come up – something would happen in the paper and the whole floor would go, “Yes, let's do an action.” Okay, the Actions Committee will take this and figure out something to do. A lot of times, it was just where we were going to go, what it looks like.

**SS: What was the approval process? How long would it take, if somebody came in with an idea, for the group to say yes or no?**

RG: Sometimes, it was pretty instantaneous. Yeah, let's do something – when there was a crisis. There were times we left the room early.

**SS: Like when?**

RG: There was one time Mario Cuomo was speaking – I think he won the election; it was like, Election Day. And he was speaking uptown, and he'd never done anything about AIDS, and we crashed his party.

**SS: You just left the meeting?**

RG: We left the meeting. Another time, there was something about St. Vincent's [Hospital] – I don't know if there was some bad treatment? I forget who it was. It might have been Sharon Tramutola, maybe? Anyway, somebody had had a bad homophobic experience at St. Vincent's, which was right down the block – in the gay community, for God's sakes. So we left the meeting and just did a kiss-in there. So, there were times when things happened that quickly. If it was a major demonstration, it would take awhile. You'd say, we're thinking of doing something – whether it was an anniversary demonstration. And the Action Committee finally went out of the cycle – it stopped existing at all, because groups were organizing their own demonstrations. It sort of became, you know – the affinity groups that would form, within the larger actions. Initially, the large actions were about training people how to do actions, and you'd sort of have these affinity groups that would meet and plan their own actions within the framework of the larger action. So, the Actions Committee would be in charge of the larger framework, and then the smaller groups would sort of integrate within that.

**SS: Can you give an example?**

**SS: You remembered something during the break, about the approval process.**

Tape I  
00:40:00

Tape II  
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RG: Actually, the first demonstration I worked on, when I took over the head of the Actions Committee – the AIDS Commission was coming back to New York for hearings, and so we knew they were coming and said, “Okay, we’re going to plan this thing,” and we got our group together, and it’s like, “Oh let’s not do the same old, same old. Let’s not just march around in a circle outside, that’s so tired, let’s do something else.” And we thought of this whole scenario – and we were going to use another part of the city, because we hadn’t been down to Union Square. We came back with what we thought was this brilliant, smart – we went into this whole – mountain of empty pill bottles we would all throw into a circle, because there were no drugs coming out – all of this great theater stuff. It was powerful, except of course the Commission was going to be several blocks away. We weren’t going to involve them at all. We were making a statement. And the floor went ballistic on us. I mean they just gave us our heads. They hated it. Alan Klein and I were co-chairs, and we were devastated. Oh God, what do we do? And I just kind of went, “Listen, we give them the demonstration that they want. This is what they want, so this is what we’ll come up and do.” So it’s like okay, we’ll come back next week, we’ll listen to your things.

And the next week, we came back with basically what they’d said – which is, they wanted to be at the Commission. They wanted to be outside. Rush hour – yes, we’re going to miss the news report maybe, but we wanted to be there in force. And we said, okay, this is what you wanted, so this is what we’re giving you. These are the logistics. Be there. And the room was so excited that what they wanted to do, we were going to be able to do. It was a great demonstration. We had incredible turnout. I think it was one of the first times there was sort of unrehearsed civil disobedience that went out. There

was a real energy, fire to the demo. And the lesson I kind of learned there was, really it's about – your job is to allow the empowerment of the floor – what the floor wants to do. You make it safe, you make it work, you try to make it – tie as much as you can in it. We did manage to get live coverage on the news, because it was happening at six, so they cut to us. And we had enough numbers so that we were able to do that. We also did some press releases, prior. But it's really not about your great idea – it's about the floor, and the people of the group, and getting them excited. Because you can have the greatest idea in the world, and if no one shows up or no one really cares or is enthusiastic about it, it doesn't really matter.

**SS: You were one of the people who really took leadership in ACT UP.**

**Can you define what that meant?**

RG: Thanks, first of all – thank you. There were a lot of different kinds of leadership that went on in that group. I always kind of felt that there were a number of us, and one of my skills was I really liked talking from the floor. I think there were a number of us who – we participated quite heavily, but particularly as the group started to split up into factions – whether it was T&D [Treatment & Data Committee] or whether it was Maxine [Wolfe] and the zap affinity group people – there were a number of us who spoke from the floor. And, I think it was a question of trying to hear what was going on. And again, it was about allowing other people, everyone to feel empowered. It was about doing – and even when you facilitate, it was about trying very hard to keep – there was a question of keeping all the pieces together, from flying apart. But, part of that was about connecting to what it was we were there about, and it wasn't about my own agenda, or your agenda, it was really about this larger issue. People had different agendas. People

were there because they were – some people were sick themselves. Some people thought they were. Some people had lost people. There were a lot of different reasons people were there, and people were coming from a lot of different places. And so to me, it was about allowing all of those people to get what they needed out of the group, and also to allow the group to do what we needed to do. We had a very large task ahead of us, and I wasn't a science geek, and I don't have a real mind for science – so, I couldn't contribute there. I was Chant Queen – my unofficial position was always Chant Queen, which was really just about getting everybody enthused, but also on topic. I mean, part of that – the key there, to pat my back for just a minute – part of what that was also about, is not only just rhythm and enthusiasm, but how do you get a sound bite? If someone is covering the event and they're talking, and in the background they hear something – if what they hear can convey what the event is about. “Healthcare is a right” – it's not poetry, though it does have a rhythm if done correctly. That's what we're there for. Everyone practice that. The chants also became the sound bites of people, when they were picked out to speak to a reporter. They would go, “Well we're here because, healthcare is a right.” And it sort of became part of the text.

**SS: So what were some of the great chants?**

RG: “Healthcare is a right, healthcare is a – pump up the budget!” You get these counter-rhythms going – that was always a big one. I mean it was bad chant, but it was a lot of fun, which was – “City AIDS care is ineffectual, thanks to Koch the heterosexual.” The “ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS!” – which always sounded like “ACT UP, Fight Back, Fried Eggs!” by the end of it. For a Chant Queen, I really should

remember more of these. I've got pages of them, somewhere. There was a lot of them that were based on the same themes.

**SS: You talked about live feed. How conscious was ACT UP of timing actions?**

RG: Extremely, extremely conscious. We were so conscious of the media. A) we did our own media, which was incredibly important – because when no one was covering us, we could still create coverage.

**SS: So, what was that?**

RG: Well, we had our own video collectives from the get-go. There was a joke, you know – they'd take pictures of us going to the bathroom. It was everywhere – we were always on video. There were several full-length videos that were made, *Testing the Limits* – many others. It was central to the organization – from, if not the very beginning, just about – that we aren't necessarily going to get mainstream coverage, it doesn't mean we don't exist. And it was about documenting what we did and getting that out around the media, because when the media wasn't going to pay attention to AIDS – and they hadn't really been – how do you get the message out? Well, you can't depend on them, so you create your own. It was an incredibly media-savvy group. And, often we would do things – I mean that whole FDA action, which I'm sure other people have talked about, is sort of classic, in that the action didn't really have to happen. It was all accomplished before we got there. We just showed up for the pictures. There was this incredible campaign. We did a lot of research, we had a lot of really incredible scientific information going in, which was also a real special thing about ACT UP – we did our

homework. I mean, we learned the system and taught it to each other. But, there was all this press for the FDA. We were going to shut it down.

**SS: Were you on Actions Committee for the FDA action?**

RG: I participated in it, I wasn't running it. I did participate.

**SS: What were the demands?**

RG: If you want, seriously during the break I can give you the fact sheet.

**SS: You have it all here, in your apartment?**

RG: Yeah, I have it all here because I was going to write a book, and I haven't figured out to give it to someplace, because it's in order. It's in good shape, too – how to preserve that. But, I believe part of the thing there was about placebos. They were using placebos in trials, and that seemed to us – when it's healthcare – one of the central tenets was that, there are no cures for AIDS right now. These drug trials are healthcare. The people who are in these trials are using this for their – lives are at stake. Therefore, this idea of pristine science in this ivory tower where trials are done with placebos, when you know that people on placebos are going to die. That's just untenable, we don't buy that, that will not happen. And also, this was a population that was savvy and breaking those codes, anyway. So, let's do tests in the real world. It's healthcare, so treat it like its healthcare. Give people options. So, no placebos. There was something about the whole drug testing process in the FDA took years – we don't have years. This disease was taking people in months. How do you – whether it's increasing enrollment, allowing community groups to do – community doctors to participate in the process and taking more anecdotal information. Where your cut-offs are, in terms of when – if you know this dosage – they were doing AZT dosage that was insane. The drug was killing people.

And they know – well this is triple dosage and this is not good, and we'd know, anecdotally, in the community that you could use this much, and get the same result.

**SS: Do you feel that you know people who died, because they took too much AZT?**

RG: I'm sure. There's no one I can point to definitely, but we lost a lot of people. And a lot of that was drugs that weren't available, tests they couldn't get into. There was strange qualifying criteria, too – if you'd taken AZT, you can't take ddI, ddC, and all these other drugs. And if you'd taken this one, you can't – well, anybody who'd been diagnosed with AIDS was on AZT. So basically, we were writing off that entire population. And we weren't going to stand for that, and that was wrong.

**SS: So when you went to the FDA action, were you in an affinity group?**

RG: No, I was actually one of the Marshals. I did a lot of marshaling. And chanting.

**SS: What was a Marshal, exactly?**

RG: A Marshall's role was to keep everybody safe – allow everybody to do what it was that they intending to do, without risking other people's safety. It wasn't about stopping affinity groups from doing things, for instance. It was about monitoring it. It was about trying to make sure it took place in an orderly fashion. But it's about – if Michael Petrelis wanted to go and blow up at somebody or something – okay, he can do that. He just can't do that from the center of everybody else. If you're going to risk arrest, and your affinity group is all, that's cool – just make sure people understand around you that that's going to happen, so that people don't get put in situations that they're not prepared to get into, as much as possible.

**SS: Where did this philosophy come from?**

RG: This came from the non-violent people who brought it to the organization to a large extent – I learned it from Amy Bauer, Maxine. There was a definite – the anti-violence probably came from people who were involved with the earlier Vietnam War demonstrations, but who had a longer, political background, and an activist background. It was very central also, to the group.

**SS: Did you ever Marshal at a time when anyone from ACT UP violated any of them?**

RG: Oh yeah, all the time.

**SS: What would happen?**

RG: People would start getting – you know, we all agreed we'll do this. I mean at St. Patrick's [Cathedral], what was going on inside – and outside was a whole other situation – very volatile and very emotional, on both sides. The police were very emotional about guarding St. Patrick's. There were a lot of people in the organization who were very emotional about St. Patrick's, and what that represented, and in terms of their own Catholicism or not. And there would be people who would take up the barricades and start pushing forward with them. And it wasn't about necessarily stopping them. You might want to – if someone was really blowing their lid, it was about watching them: "Are you okay?" Trying to diffuse the situation. It was a judgment call. You didn't want to interfere with people doing what they needed or wanted to do. On the other hand, you didn't want people to be hurt. If the cops were arresting somebody or treating somebody very badly or dragging them – "Careful, that's my foot." "Careful, that's my friend, sir could you please be careful?" Or, you would take the officer's

number. There are any number of things you would try to interact to diffuse the situation, because we didn't want people hurt. We also had people who were sick. People had medications. So there was a lot of health concerns involved, and we were very conscious about keeping our group safe – which again, doesn't mean not arrested – but safe.

**SS: Did anyone ever get hurt while you were Marshaling?**

RG: There were a couple of demonstrations where the cops got pretty out of hand – dragging people around.

**SS: Do you remember anything specific?**

RG: I think it was the City Hall action, where all the women were strip-searched. I don't know if that was Wall Street II or City Hall – one of them. There was that huge strip-searching thing, which turns out it had been going on in the city for months, with all these other women. But then they ran into media-savvy, middle class, predominantly white political women, and suddenly it was this huge scandal. And then it came out they'd been doing this for months. No one told them they shouldn't be strip-searching women prisoners. Yeah, okay.

**SS: What I'm trying to get at – was there any violence that you experienced?**

RG: You know, it depends on definition. When we were down in Washington with Tim Bailey's coffin, and we were going to march from the White House, and we were all in a parking lot. The police weren't going to let us get to the parking lot, and we started to take the coffin out, and the police were pushing the people who were trying to carry the coffin and pushing the coffin in, and it almost fell over. That was violent, in a lot of ways – there was certainly that. There were times when there were people who

overreacted or reacted to police. We were trained not to react. We were trained to be passive, whatever. But there were things that happened – it's a very emotional experience. The demonstrations were incredibly emotional. You'd see a lover get dragged away, or a friend – something would happen to them, and someone would just go ballistic. There were definitely people who hit cops, and you just sort of diffuse that situation as quickly as possible – get them out of there. So, things would happen. There were times when the cops would arrest pretty roughly. It was City Hall, I think, when we sort of surrounded the place, and then we had affinity groups going on at all these different times, and there was one group that went around the corner. They said, "Oh, we'll fix them, we'll block traffic, and there won't be any traffic for them to sit down in." And so, I think the Marys went around – or one of the groups, it was one of the FDA groups, something three –

**SS: Wave III.**

RG: Thank you. Wave III went around the corner and stopped traffic, and the police didn't know about it for a half an hour. And they got really angry then. And, they would pile people into buses, and then a group would come and sit in front of the buses. So they would get really angry, and there would sometimes be some real maltreatment that went on. I think to some extent you would have to expect that to happen – not that it's right – but you would expect that would happen.

**SS: I want to ask you about Tim Bailey's funeral. Can you tell us a little bit about Tim – what he was like, and how the decision to have the funeral happened?**

RG: Tim was a hoot. He was part of this group called the Marys, who did a lot of demonstrations, actually in the later years of my being there. They were, maybe they started in the 90s – ‘91, ‘92, they were very active, and 1993. It was men and women – very much a mixed affinity group, and some of the men were sick. And they decided they would have political funerals, and that was part of their will – that when and if I die, I want a march, I want a political funeral. There had been one just prior the election, I believe. George Bush, Bill Clinton – George Bush One – I can’t believe there are two! And Mark Fisher had died just before then, and there was this big march from downtown. We had the ceremony in Judson Church, and then we marched in the rain up to Bush’s headquarters – this was in New York – on 44<sup>th</sup> Street or something, and had the funeral there – which was pretty profound. Tim Bailey was another member of this group. Tim was a designer. He worked for the designer, he worked for – I’m going to flunk now – for *Sex and the City* –Field.

**SS: Patricia Field.**

RG: He worked for Patricia Field. Bad gay man. I remember getting a call – I did a lot of work with the Marys, I was an unofficial Mary – and they needed logistics, they need help with Marshaling, because they were really going to be involved with the logistics of the embalming, the body, the coffin – getting it across state lines. There was a lot of stuff that had to happen. And Tim’s family was also aware and supportive of this. News went out over the wires, the toms-toms – this is happening, we’re going down to Washington, if anybody wants to come. We rented a couple of buses, and we went down to Washington, and we waited – Clinton was in office by then. And by this time, the

organization had sort of moved to – we'd had an ashes action also, where we'd thrown ashes of loved ones over the White House fence.

We were very much at the point, where – I mean '91, '92, '93, for me they were dreadful in terms of people dying. People who had survived for a while were dying. AZT wasn't working. It was a very tough, tough time. So it was very much about, literally, bringing the bodies of our dead to where we thought the blame lied – where a significant portion of the blame lied. And making that quantifiable. It wasn't just about nice things, here's a dead body – this was someone who we loved, who we valued. And, there was some delays in the car getting down there, and by the time they did we'd been around for a couple of hours or so, so the police were on to us. And there was this whole back and forth between the police not letting us get out of the parking lot. And Tim was in a coffin in the back of a car. And finally we started – never mind that, we're going to take it anyway, and we started to go and lift it, and the police started pushing back, and Tim's brother was there and went crazy – just started screaming and yelling. And basically he got arrested. And I remember Jim Aquino then took the bust I think, because we didn't want him being in jail alone. So someone took a bust just to make sure he wasn't alone. And we weren't allowed out of the parking lot. That was a really tough day.

Tape II  
00:25:00

**SS: So what did you do, did you just stay in the parking lot with the coffin?**

RG: We certainly had onlookers. I think at the end of the day, it was kind of a disempowering event certainly. I think we spoke. We talked about this is what he wanted and what he stood for, and where the blame lied. I think we did actually march

around at some point, and there was some weird reactions from some of the cops and some of the onlookers as well. I was more or less in my Marshaling mode there, and we were also very conscious of – since it was so emotional – trying not to have a situation develop because it was so emotional. Some of the cops I think were snickering at one point, and we sort of got all over them. I think the lead cops kind of pulled those guys later.

**SS: What happened to the body at the end?**

RG: The body was taken back to New York.

**SS: Who were the other people in the Marys?**

RG: Michael Cunningham, Joy Episalla, B.C. Craig. Amy and I were honorary. Jim Baggett, Tim Bailey, Mark Fisher. I'm missing some people.

**SS: Did Mark and Tim just stand up at ACT UP and say, "When we die, we want you" –**

RG: No, they wrote wills. It was in their wills. Actually, they went through a very long process.

**SS: So while they were alive, they –**

RG: Yes.

**SS: And, what was it like to receive that information from a living person?**

RG: It wasn't something we talked about a lot. My memory of it was that it was known, but it wasn't announced until – but that the Marys were planning something like this. These were the first times we were doing this, so there was a lot of concern about it getting out and getting quashed before things could happen. So it was sort of

tightly held information. But we talked about, in theory, the concepts of – I mean we'd had a number of political funerals, or certainly, memorial processions – David Wojnarowicz, Jon Greenberg – it goes on and on and on. So there was certainly talk of other ways of activism, about upping the ante – how do you continue to make a point when people get dealt to, “Oh, ACT UP is in the street, again. Oh, they're protesting, oh, they're stopping traffic.” The challenge from a completely planning point of view is okay, how do you keep engaging the beast? Because one of the things I think ACT UP realized is that on the one hand, we had people working – I mean, this is the inside/outside strategy. We had people through T&D, through other organizations, who were doing the science, who were getting involved and actually managed to get into the meetings. It was of course, the pressure outside that got those people inside. Okay, so they're doing their stuff. Okay, how do you then engage the media, which was the only way of getting to people – to changing the general atmosphere. I like to think that maybe we tried to do, one of the things we tried to do in the larger sense was – AIDS wasn't even talked about when we started. Reagan hadn't said the word. So it was about getting AIDS recognized as a national issue. This wasn't just a queer issue in New York and San Francisco. This wasn't just a drug user issue, this was a national – and now obviously – an international issue. How do you do that? How do you change that mindset? So that everyone goes, of course. In the large sense, along with all the drug stuff that we did, I think that's what we were able to accomplish – was getting AIDS onto the agenda. Now, the problem came, of course, once it got onto the agenda – great. Now, it's on the big list of problems you can't help – great. But we got it onto the list. Small glories there.

**SS: What is it like to be in a room everyday with people who you know are going to die, they know they're going to die, and you're discussing their death strategically?**

Tape II  
00:30:00

RG: For a long time it was used – in the first couple of years, you were very aware of people dying. It could be a cudgel – yeah, that's fine, but that's not necessarily the right thing to do, anyway. There was always sort of a dance in terms of, "I need this now, for me." And you can't say, "No you can't." – yeah, you do. How do you say, "That's true, but what we need to do is this." It's a dance. Sometimes we were able to do it really well. Sometimes we were able to incorporate a lot of stuff, and we certainly – I don't think, in a cynical way – used peoples' health as a cudgel against the powers that be – to have someone going, "I'm dying. I'm taking this drug, and it's not working, and I'm going blind." People aren't used to that. And people in power particularly – if you can get in close enough – it's very powerful. So we did use that. I think for a long while – at least, and what allowed me to stay in the group is – I thought we were clearly making a difference. People who were there were living longer. What became hard for me after awhile – I was there from '87 until probably '93 or '94, somewhere on the cusp there – was the realization that AZT wasn't working, there was nothing in the pipeline – this was before the cocktail. And people who'd been alive for a while, and who I grew up in the group with – and a lot of my personal friends, outside – they were all dying, pretty regularly. And it was just this sense of – you know, I'm not going to be able to save any of the people in this room. It turned out not to be true, but the group had changed substantially. But also, this sense of – nothing I do is going to help any of these people. It became incredibly difficult.

**SS: Who were the people? Do you remember some of the people that you were thinking of in those terms?**

RG: Aldyn McKean died. [Bob] Rafsky. Bradley [Ball] had died – he'd been out of the group for awhile. The winter of 1993 was just bad news. There were just a lot of people who had died. I'm trying to think who else had passed right around that time, but it was a really steady drumbeat of people. I'm trying to remember when David Feinberg died. People were getting really, really sick. Robert Garcia. I may [not] have the timings down, but there was just this sense that these are the people who had been in the group for a long time, and who –

**SS: Did you talk to people personally? Did you sit down with people and have conversations with them – intimate conversations with them about their illness, about their death?**

RG: Jon Greenberg also. In all honesty, not so much the ACT UP folks. Certainly, people in my own life. I had a really good friend from college, David Serko, who was in ACT UP. He was one of the Boys in Black, he was on the Swim Team for a while. He was my closest friend from my life who came into ACT UP, and participated in that for a number of years, and we sort of went the whole distance. I mean there are other people – Bradley – people I was with pretty much through to the end point. How much we talked about death and dying, not so much. That's just not where the conversation necessarily went.

**SS: So how was it handled in ACT UP culture – that some people were sick and dying?**

RG: I mean there were the announcements. Interestingly, the first death I remember in ACT UP was actually a suicide – it was Steven Webb, which happened pretty early on. I was just beginning to take a bit more of a leadership role in the organization, and Steven Webb was one of the first founders of the group, and helped to put together the original document and he had been Avram [Finkelstein]’s lover, and he killed himself. And the group was just sort of – it was a very small, by ACT UP’s standards – group at the time. So that was really devastating – especially somebody who killed themselves. Really significant, there was the weekend where it was Vito Russo, Oliver Johnston and Ray Navarro died in the space of a week – and I think Kevin Smith, also – within the space of a week. And you found out about one at another one’s funeral. And at that time it was still a family. ACT UP for a long time, was – there was a core group. You’d have your three meetings a week. After the Monday meeting, we’d all go to the local restaurant, whose name is escaping me right now.

Tape II  
00:35:00

**SS: Woody’s.**

RG: Woody’s and we’d sit around, and take up the whole back, and there’d be six tables worth of people. And it didn’t matter – people who politically were on very different wavelengths – but we all sat and joked around. Bradley and I would think up song parodies. So when people within that group died, it was a real blow. Oliver was one of the people behind Silence = Death. He was in that group. Ray Navarro was the Outreach Committee, and the Majority [Action] Committee, which dealt with people of color and AIDS. He was central to that.

And Vito Russo – which, for years I thought was probably the worst loss we ever took, because he was a real hero. He was smart, he was funny, he was politically aware,

and he didn't – He said what he thought and no one could take him badly. Imagine the alternate side to Larry. Vito would do his "Celluloid Closet" and we'd show *Caged*. And he'd say, "Please, politically – look what it's doing. "You've got the big dyke warden and stuff, but I like it." You couldn't argue with that – he was so genuine. He would have been able to – that was the thing in ACT UP – we lost so many of our people – our key, visionary, leader people, and that takes a toll on the organization. So how it was eventually dealt with after awhile was at the Monday meetings, there'd be an announcement – this one died and some people would say something. After a while, there was just this horrifying rote of, "This person died and la, la, la, ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS." And they'd always say it three times, and there'd be the silence, and we'd go on. And I remember very distinctly when Robert Garcia died, who was – aside from a buddy, he was also very key in Outreach – he *was* the Outreach Committee, for a long time, and the Majority Action. He was just a real spirit also, in the group. And he hadn't been around. What would happen is that people who had been there for a while would get sick and disappear off the floor. So, a lot of the newer people wouldn't know who these people were. So Robert died, someone said something, and the three ACT UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS – which drove me crazy. And we started going on, and I remember, "Point of personal privilege" – whatever the hell that was. "Sorry, I just have to interrupt. You have to understand who this person was, in terms of where we are now." And a couple of us old-timers just brought these points across, because after awhile they were just names. And unless they were dying in the room – like, David Feinberg came back and almost died there in the room, after yelling at us.

**SS: What did he say?**

RG: I was actually not there at that meeting, but he was pretty furious. But David was always pretty furious. How do you stop making – these were people, and very powerful, strong – anyone who came into that room – you had to give anyone who came into the room, and stayed for any length of time – credit. Because it was not an easy place to be. Emotionally it could really be devastating, because we were dealing with death. You were dealing with huge issues. You were dealing with, your government doesn't think you deserve to live. You were dealing with all sorts of your own baggage, and the fact the person next to you could be dying. And it wasn't a polite room, and people were also very smart, and it could be pretty brutal. So, anyone who managed to stay there for any length of time – you had to give them some credit. And some people were actually very involved, and really gave of themselves. Part of the motivation of why I was trying to write a book is that I didn't want these people to fade away into – I wanted some sort of memory monument – something to make them understand what these people were able to do. And the reality is yes, these were extraordinary people, but I don't know that they thought of themselves as extraordinary people in their own lives. Some of them did. [LAUGHS] There were some people who were pretty high on themselves, but there were a lot of people, by the real world standards – so many of us were temps. So many of us were doing something else. Anybody can do it, if you've got the commitment.

**SS: Do we have to –**

**JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.**

RG: I saw him take off – Come to the point!

**SS: You promised to sing us a song.**

Tape II  
00:40:00

Tape III  
00:00:00

RG: One of the things – among my many talents – we, ACT UP, would have – and actually, this is something that was actually really key to the organization, in a funny way, which is that we played a lot together. For all the yelling and screaming and emotion – there was a lot of emotion – but it was also a very funny group. There was a real camp sense of humor, which was part of demonstrations often. It was part of certainly the floor, and we would have these talent shows to celebrate. The first anniversary, we'd have a talent show. The second anniversary, we'd have a talent show. And people would go on and do all sorts of stuff. And, I would do my Julie Andrews does the Tracy Chapman songbook thing. Bradley Ball, who was one of the founders of ACT UP – the first secretary of the group, and co-wrote the original document – was incredibly central to getting the organization on to some footing. And he was just handed a piece of paper and told “take notes.” And that's how he became secretary. And it was lucky he was picked. Whoever it was, handed the right person the notebook. And we would sit around and re-write songs at dinner. And so, one year – I guess it was the first year of the talent show – I think I wrote to “Fugue for the Tin Horns” from *Guys and Dolls*:

*I've got the drug right here, it's called Acyclovir,*

*And though it's used for herpes, I have no fear,*

*It can do – you know.*

*You don't know where first it was Ampligen,*

*Now you've got me on Isoprinosine.*

It was me, Nesline and Bradley who did “Fugue for Drug Trials” at one of the talent shows, and ironically Paula Trichler was there – an academic. She wanted permission to use the song, and I have it, it’s in a book now – “Goldberg’s use of the song indicates” – and she deconstructs the whole thing, and I was just writing a number for amusement. But it’s a very funny thing. And through the years, I did – there was Kennebunk – for us going up to George Bush, to the tune of “Camelot.”

**SS: One of the things it raises is how sophisticated people in the rank and file of ACT UP were to all the different medications and all the different compounds. How did you learn it all?**

RG: We were taught. There were people who really worked at it – whether it was Iris [Long] or Mark Harrington or Jim Eigo – my God, Jim Eigo was incredible with that stuff. It started out with the Treatment and Data Committee. It actually started out as Issues, which was Herb Spiers’s Issues Committee. It then became – as the issues became more diverse – there’s something. We’re just going to have *an* Issues Committee for the AIDS crisis. As we discovered there was more than one issue, it sort of broke into other groups. And there was Treatment and Data, which was dealing very specifically with drugs into bodies – which also brings me to the point, ACT UP had a number of issues from the beginning. It wasn’t always the only immediate issue was never always just drug into bodies. That may have been Larry’s initial issue, but people came to ACT UP with a lot of issues, that were there from the get-go. But, drugs were certainly central. Treatment and Data would go through and analyze the trials, they would analyze what was going on, what was out there. We also had a lot of expertise, because people were on them. I’m taking this. So, we had a lot of anecdotal information, as well. We

had doctors, we had patients, we had people who were even involved in the set ups of the trials. And so that stuff would be analyzed, and then that information would be fed back to the floor. They would come and they would say, “Okay, this is what’s going on, and this drug is working, and this is why we have to do this.” And then Actions could go – oh, well – how should we do this? Well maybe we should do this, maybe we should do that. As we got into larger things, like the FDA, there were teach-ins. So, you could get information from Treatment and Data. They would publish information that would be on the back table, you could read. You could go to a meeting, and certainly find out – though, going to a Treatment and Data meeting was incredibly daunting because they were so involved in the minutia of things – that if you’re someone who science words just sound like Charlie Brown’s teacher, you weren’t going to get it there. But then we would do a major action around drugs – whether it was the FDA, the NIH. There would be teach-ins.

**SS: Now, you did a big teach in for the FDA. What did you teach and how did you become qualified to teach it?**

RG: Well, a document was produced from Treatment and Data that was sort of a handbook – all about the FDA, the drug trials, sort of walking you through everything. And this was written by the people on Treatment and Data. History of the FDA, why things went this way. It was information, but obviously with a political understanding. It wasn’t pure science. It was also a political understanding that, oh – drug companies are political, as well. So when they wanted to do this with legislation, this is what happened. And then they would go through the process of how a drug trial goes. Then there would be – okay, this drug, and what we know, and how this is being done, and this drug. So

you go through a book that was this thick. And in the back was a vocabulary. It was an incredible document. Then it was realized that in order to get everybody up to speed, we were going to have teach the group, so we held teach-ins. There were a number of us who were, like – I imagine we volunteered, but there were some communicators – Robert Garcia, myself. There were some other people who were just very good at relating to people. They weren't going to get caught up in the science speak, necessarily – and be able to sort of communicate it to everybody else. You studied the book. You went through a teach-in with one of the people who really knew their stuff, and then you tried to translate it into a way that –

**SS: So the scientists did the work, you would do a tutorial with them, and then because you could talk to people and they couldn't, you would do the teach-in.**

RG: Yeah. But one of them was always present, in case there was a real science issue. And, it wasn't that they couldn't communicate – I mean, they wrote this incredible thing. It was comprehensible; you could understand it. But there was a tendency among some of the people to be able to – they get so involved in the arcane information. It's like, okay what's the main point here?

**SS: How important was it for people in ACT UP to understand all of this?**

RG: It was the whole ball of wax. One of the reasons why – there were a couple of reasons why ACT UP was as successful as it was, even as it grew into this unruly amount of people. I mean you have 300 people at a meeting – that's a lot of people. Because everybody understood – it was important that everyone understood what we going to an action about – what we were fighting for. Our idea was that anybody who goes to an action should be able to speak on whatever. We were very wary of there being

the same faces all the time. I mean obviously, there grew to be certain people who had a much higher media presence within the group. But for the most part, anybody should be able to be picked out of a demonstration. If someone puts a microphone in your hand – “Why are you here? What are the issues?” Anybody should be able to respond.

**SS: But where did that value come from?**

RG: It’s an empowerment thing. We were very lucky, in that the people who came to ACT UP with a political background – because a lot of people didn’t really have it, a lot of people were coming from completely other places – had a real understanding of peaceful protest, civil disobedience and empowerment, because the group was all about empowerment. That was the juice. It was such an incomprehensible time. What was going on was nuts. As Vito said in one of his speeches, “You’re in this war, and the bombs were picking off people left and right of you, but you stepped outside. You stepped across the street, and no one knew anything was happening.” I remember talking to my folks about it all the time – imagine World War II, and it’s just your family in the war, everyone else is going about their business. So to try to get a grasp on what seemed so huge, so incomprehensible – I mean, why were people seeming randomly, at these incredible young ages, getting these horrible diseases and dying? And no one seemed to care. What’s going on?

**SS: Why didn’t they care?**

RG: I think there are a variety of things. I’m one of those, I generally think people are good people. There are people who [think] people are generally jerks, and never mind. But I’m one of those [who thinks] people are good people. You give people the opportunity, and they will try to make the right choice. Sometimes that gets a little –

Tape III  
00:10:00

there was no information. I think it was shrouded, the information was shrouded. I think on a powerful level – in terms of the powers that be – it was happening to a convenient population or convenient populations. It was gay people who were just getting what they deserved. It was junkies –

**SS: Who felt that gay people deserved it?**

RG: Certainly within the right wing, religious right – that's back to Leviticus, isn't it?

**SS: But how about within ACT UP? Were there people who did not get the support that they needed – outside of ACT UP?**

RG: I'm sure. Look, anyone who was Catholic was not getting the kind of response they needed, from the get-go. There were certainly people who – in terms of health support, in terms of money. I mean there are so many issues involved with AIDS. There's poverty, there's drug addiction, and how as a society, we deal with that – how we deal with poverty. How we deal with lack of information.

**SS: I'm trying to find out about specific people that you knew who died, or who were sick. Did you ever talk to or witness somebody who did not have the family support, who didn't have an immediate, inner circle of friends?**

RG: I have to say, no – not in my experience, which is certainly not to say that it didn't happen, and I'm sure it did. Also what would happen is, there would be people from within ACT UP who became the immediate circle. There was a lot of that. There was so much caretaking that was also going on, which was another aspect of the organization. It was also a support group, for all intents and purposes.

**SS: Is that because that person chose ACT UP? Or was it because they didn't have anything else?**

RG: You know, there were people who did. I didn't. There were certain people who went and dealt with homeless, Haitian immigrants. There were a number of different aspects, which I did not get involved in. And to be quite honest, I didn't really get involved in those stories.

**SS: But of the gay men that you knew – in these support groups that you're talking about, were their families integrated?**

RG: Some were more than others. My friend David Serko's family was very integrated. Bradley's family came in and came out. Other friends, some less, some more. There were also the people, where it would happen – particularly within ACT UP – people would get very sick, and they would disappear off the floor. They would go back to wherever they were from, and you wouldn't hear until the news would come.

**SS: Can you think of someone like that?**

RG: Robert Garcia disappeared off the floor, until we heard –

**SS: Where did he go?**

RG: I think his family was from California.

**SS: He went to his family?**

RG: Yeah. This is for the record so I don't know for sure.

**SS: What about someone like David Feinberg? Do you know – was his family involved with him?**

RG: I don't think so. It was done by the friends. The family came down to the funeral, but that was arranged by Wayne Kawadler. People sometimes had very

aggravated relationships with their family. What would also happen is people responded to dying in very different ways.

**SS: Can you give some examples?**

RG: Yeah, sure. My friend David was the very accepting – he'd been sick for a long time, he'd lost his sight. He would still go out. He would still go to demonstrations, God love him. He was pumping an IV going up to Kennebunkport, and still looking great. When he died, his whole family was there. We were all there. He said goodbye to everybody. He literally went into the light. Unbelievable. There was by the same token people who were just very, very angry. David Feinberg was extremely angry. He came to ACT UP with an IV and would say, "I'm dying, and it's your fault because you keep fucking around!"

**SS: Why do you think he was so angry?**

RG: Why not? Who knows how old we were at that time – early 30s, mid-30s, maybe? And you're dying. And David was angry and cranky to begin with. It was his normal style. And Rafsky became incredibly angry – sometimes, in meetings too. This was something that would happen particularly if they had a really forceful personality. It could – I don't want to say distract or block – it could certainly blindsides you, because the rage is so intense. And although it's not really you, you understand it's not you, it does warp things. It warps the "Okay, yes, absolutely I understand, but we need to do this." And that gets incredibly painful. I think people get angry because, why not? Also, there were mental effects to the illness. People really went off the deep end. They would go crazy.

**SS: Did you have any friends who you felt went into dementia?**

RG: Bradley certainly did a bit – although he was more isolated, it wasn't walking around the streets. But you know, strange things would be said and they'd go into whole other netherworlds, and you'd wait until they came back. And these people were terrified. You were losing your mind, you were losing your ability to walk and talk. These were a lot of people who lived by their brains, and to lose that – I mean I don't know, the idea of Alzheimer's or losing the ability to communicate.

**SS: I guess what I'm trying to get at, or really get articulated is – you talked a lot about, “We're dying, nobody cares.” How did people get the message that nobody cared? How did they get the message that their life didn't matter?**

RG: That's easy. No one was talking about – from a political point, there was Bill Buckley and the tattoo article. You'd open the *New York Times* and there would be this editorial about – well, we should just be tattooing people with AIDS on their buttocks. Particularly, as a Jewish person, boy does that send off alarms. Or, you would have the media editorial, “Now it can happen to anyone. Now we should care.”

**SS: Well, I wanted to ask you about that, because you brought up this issue of the myth of heterosexual AIDS. Looking back, do you think that AIDS really was a gay disease?**

RG: A disease has no sexuality really, but it certainly affected the gay community. It clearly also affects people of color. It's a sexually transmitted disease. Did it ever break out into the mainstream? No. It didn't break out into the mainstream.

**SS: Why do you think that is?**

RG: Good question. I think part of it is just interaction. I mean the gay population tends to be a bit ghettoized – though that's a generalization. We find that a lot

in communities where people don't identify as gay, but men have sex with men. Or drug use communities – it certainly goes over there. And it's different internationally. It's not a gay disease in Africa or in Asia – that's not the case. Here, that's just where it landed, and it was quite a population. It created this big boom. I think we were very successful, for a while, in cutting transmission down. We had lots of education – which no one would back us up for. I mean this is the other thing. Why people don't care? Well, because the government won't pay for a study that says “gay,” that says “condom.” So, they're not interested in giving you the tools to save your own life. We don't care. But, I pay taxes. This was sort of the middle-class argument – but, but, but, I'm a citizen. I pay my taxes. I work at a job. I'm a responsible – part of the journey being within ACT UP is also understanding, but you come from privilege. So part of the initial anger is that initial anger of what you mean? These were people who were brought up – myself included – you're a citizen, the government takes care of you. You get sick, you get taken care of. Your life is not written off. And yes, you may be aware that other people's lives are written off, but that's not you. So imagine the shock when you discover, what do you mean me? There's this sense of entitlement, that actually proved to be very useful for the group, because it really sparked – there's nothing that gets anybody more angry than to discover that their entitlement is taken away. What do you mean?

**SS: But how come all the liberal Jewish families, and the college friends – how come those people weren't saying, “Wait a minute, you can't treat our son this way, we have to start a big movement, this isn't right.”**

RG: That's an interesting question. To some extent – my own, possible thing is – a lot of these movements take a lot of energy. It's a young thing. You can do it when you're younger. Sex in this country is very taboo, regardless, and the idea that it's considered a gay disease. And it's not that people were necessarily – people are still to this day are still embarrassed by the concept of men fucking, and it has to get past a lot of baggage. I didn't feel – certainly, my folks didn't come to demonstrations. My brother did. My brother showed up actually, pretty early on. And I was certainly supported. They would contribute financially. My parents weren't demonstration people. But it never occurred to me to ask, to be quite honest. I don't know if this can be extrapolated – I thought it was my fight – my community, my thing, my battle.

**SS: A couple of other things I wanted to ask you about. You were the facilitator. How did you sign up for that and what was involved?**

Tape III  
00:25:00

RG: It took me years to be a facilitator. I resisted for a long time. I was sort of pushed into it. I did it because I felt that the group was getting – this was after several years of being there – very fractious. We were in Cooper Union, and we'd have people on one side of the room, people on the other side of the room.

**SS: What were the factions, tell us?**

RG: There was T&D. There was the Mark Harrington, Peter Staley, Charlie Franchino T&D group – Drugs into Bodies – that we were now on the inside. Let us tell you what we need to do. Though, sometimes they were right. A lot of the committees had gotten very large. Maxine was sort of emblematic of this other, much more action-oriented, People Movement people. And we always had a weird time clock in ACT UP, because there was the, "I need this now" – but where are we going to be in two years?

I'm not going to be here in two years, how can we be having this conversation? Once that card is thrown, there goes the conversation. Because you can't –

**SS: So would you say that the divide was people with AIDS and people not with AIDS?**

RG: Not necessarily. There was a time clock issue, which fed it. But, there were insiders, there were outsiders, there were people who were very much – I mean yes, Treatment and Data was certainly much more – it was a very concentrated group. It was mostly people who had HIV. There were certainly people with HIV who were not in that group, who were in the other group, or other groups. There was a lot of things going on. Certain committees were fighting their own agendas as well. There was a Hispanic action – I forget exactly what week – the Latino committee [Caucus], who were doing battle with the Latino leaders – including some people who we'd worked with previously – because they were not doing what this group wanted. There was a lot of power struggle going on. It was a very powerful group, at the time. And, I don't think any of it was meant – give or take the possible infiltrator – mean-spirited. People were really trying to come to grips with a lot of stuff that was going on. You have the AIDS crisis under one roof. What takes priority? But the group was splitting apart. There was a lot of battling, and I was one of the people who was able to get along with everybody. So part of it was, Amy Bauer, myself – it was the same people – David Robinson. Let's facilitate the meetings. There would be an agenda and you'd sort of try to keep it moving, but you'd let people try to express themselves. If you started to hear common things, you would try to bring votes to a head, or move things along – hopefully inject a bit of humor, a bit of spirit. So it was a three-hour performance to some extent, without trying to make it about

you. That was sort of the trick, too. And sometimes we were more successful than others. But the trick was to let what was going to play out, play out, but keep it within certain limits. Don't let name-calling go on. There would always be -- you know, we're fighting the same fight, the enemy is out there. Somebody would always get up and say that, whether or not you were in the front of the room. You could always count on someone reminding everybody that the enemy was outside of the room. We tried to keep things positive and moving.

**SS: Do you feel that – as emblematic figures – Maxine and Mark Harrington – do you feel that they wanted the split?**

RG: My own personal little psychological theory is they each of course, wanted what the other one had. Maxine wanted the access – as much as she talked about wanting to be “outside with the people,” Maxine wanted to be at that table so badly she could taste it, because there's a certain respect that comes with that. And I think that's just a personal issue there, and completely understandable. Mark – and particularly Peter [Staley], even more than Mark – Mark could be an arrogant intellectual, who turned out to be a Musical Theater Queen, but that's another story. But Peter just did not have the common touch. Peter was a media darling. Peter was really good at what he did, and I like Peter. He did a lot of good stuff for the group – but the personal stuff, the common touch – nowhere to be found. And he wanted – and Mark, too – why can't people follow me as a charismatic leader? Why can't I lead the troops through the barricades? So, they respected each other for a long time. They really respected each other, until it sort of just spun out.

Tape III  
00:30:00

**SS: So looking back, what do you think the real issue was that caused the split?**

RG: Between them? I think the guys who got inside – the TAG team – felt that they had the better road to make things happen. They were focused specifically on drugs. Get the drugs. What do we need to survive? And all this other stuff was getting in their way of doing that. It was confusing the issue. It wasn't allowing them to do what they needed to do. And to some extent they might very well have been right. But my thought was that there was still a lot room to use – if there was a way to harness both of that together, because there was still a use for an outside force. And ACT UP was dealing with a lot of other issues. But things had also gotten very diffuse within the group -- a lot of brain drain, a lot of people drain. It just got too exhausting, or they died, or things got too diffuse.

**SS: Well, you casually threw out the word “police informant” before – did you feel that there was police infiltration of ACT UP?**

RG: I used to joke, clearly – as much as we planned, there were things that were so random – that even if there were, they were hopeless. We always assumed there was. We always acted as if, sure. I had my suspicions about – I think there was something funny – we had a lot of money disappear. My partner Joe is very sensitive about– he was co-treasurer when a lot of it disappeared.

**SS: Oh, then we have to interview him.**

RG: Tie him down first. And a lot of money went out the door, unbeknownst, and it's still very painful for him.

**SS: Did you think that was the police?**

RG: My suspicion is there was something going on there, because there were a number of arrests and situations – because he just disappeared. The guy just – no one –

**SS: This is the guy who was Raquel Welch's assistant is that who you're talking about?**

RG: I don't know about that.

**SS: The guy who went to Texas. Scott Sawyer.**

RG: He was also a Mary for a while.

**SS: Other people have talked about this – this is record.**

RG: I don't know if something happened, because his sister got killed. He was held in prison in Texas, when he was down there for the convention. They were going to test him, and they were going to hold him because he had HIV. There was going to be a whole thing – so there was a lot of area for them to put some pressure on. The other money disappeared on drugs, on other things. Money disappeared out of that group quite a bit. In terms of actual infiltration – people talked about it, I didn't really concentrate on it because it was like, so what if there is? What can I do about it? We just do our work, and if they're half as confused as everyone else in the group, good luck to them.

**SS: Now what happened to your book? You've mentioned it a few times.**

RG: Oh, the book, the book! A couple of things. I think I was writing it as sort of a way to get my mind around the six, seven years I spent in the group – it changed everything, and I needed to kind of process that. Also, as I was writing it, I was not able to devote the time I needed alone to do it. It was being done in spare pieces, so that, as I was working through my own issues, my point of view kept changing. I'd done a couple of proposals. I actually did get an agent – Jed Mattes was actually working on it. It was

in that strange time after Clinton won election and Urvashi [Vaid] had her book, which tanked, and everybody had a book coming out which tanked – no one was reading it, nothing would cross over. And then I kind of re-worked it, actually using David Feinberg's book as sort of a strategy. How do you get the political issues that were going on? The personal stuff, which was very central because everybody experienced it. It was a very personal, political movement. Everybody had their own piece. Plus, everyone had their own friends dying, their own issues going on. And then also, bring in this third piece of – how to do a demonstration, how to do this, how to do that. And I finally was able to create this great structure, which I was really excited about, and what happened was – once I did the structure, well that's done. Well that's done, I don't know that I really need to write this. Given the time, given the money, I still think it's worthwhile, and I'd like to give it a stab. But I'm not a solitary person, and I really spent three years trying to make this happen, and I function much better in a group.

**SS: So, let's go to the romantic portion of this. So you met Joe in ACT UP – can you tell that story?**

RG: Yes. Sure. For the record, I had a number of boyfriends in ACT UP, though I was serially monogamous. It was an amazing place. Eric Rosenblatt, I met there. I fooled around with a number of people – Tony Malliaris. It's all faded – there was no one before my beloved! [LAUGHS] Other people I met through other people in ACT UP, too. There were a couple of other major relationships in there – Jason Neuenschwander – he was adorable. We held hands at the FDA demonstration. I used to think Washington was the gayest town in the world, because I was only there on demonstrations with thousands of my closest friends.

**SS: Was there ever an issue in ACT UP about who was positive, who was negative, when it came to dating and sex?**

RG: Not that I was aware of. I'm sure there was, among some people. But we were very much into safe sex. Another thing the group was really key on was – it was a very sexy group. A) just in terms of the people who were there, but also activism and passion – particularly about something like the good fight, and it's really important – is very sexy. There was an article that Maria Maggenti got blasted out of the room for – it was in the *Village Voice*, talking about, “The sex in that room.” But, it was. You were seeing these incredible parts of people. You were seeing great bravery. You were seeing something people really cared about, and that's very, very sexy, attractive. I don't know how well I knew people necessarily in ACT UP, but in some senses, I got a real essence of them, and it was very powerful. But, Joe –

**SS: What's Joe's last name?**

RG: Chiplock. I'd actually just broken up a long term relationship – about two years I think, and it was the summer. And there was an intern there whose name I don't remember, who told me about how he had studied about ACT UP in college. I thought, dear God, well that's fun. So I was the star fuck, so that was fun. And then Joe showed up. I was organizing buses for Kennebunkport. I was not part of the central planning, because that was really the Marys. I'd been stepping back a bit, but buses, transportation – okay, I'll take care of that, I've done that before. So I was looking for bus captains, and Joe showed up in this turquoise blue t-shirt and I thought, he's cute. We flirted a bit. And of course, he had just sort of come out again – having gone back in, and come out. And he just started showing up at ACT UP. And he was of course, attracted to David

Serko, which was the traditional route of things. He was interested, a bit, in both of us. And Joe was bus captain, and it turned out that he'd worked for the Bolshoi, organizing their buses. And it was like okay, you're with me. And we had one set of buses going up early in the evening, and then the most were going up at three in the morning or something.

**SS: You had buses leaving at three in the morning?**

RG: Yeah. We're about to run out of tape.

**SS: OK, let's switch tapes.**

Tape IV  
00:00:00

**SS: So you met this sexy bus captain? Why would a bus leave at three in the morning, can I ask that?**

RG: Y'know that's an excellent question. Why did that bus leave so early? Because it was a long schlep up there, and there were a couple of buses that wanted to get up there ahead of time. There were buses that left at eight, maybe. Maybe they were staying over. I don't know. Then, there were another set of buses that left at three in the morning.

**SS: It's very indicative, because it's like you didn't give the amount of time to entice people to get on them.**

RG: People were lining up for this one. People were showing up. We're going. There were 10 or 12 buses that went up.

**SS: This was?**

RG: It was Target Bush – this action was part of the Marys campaign. It was 30 days of action. It was Labor Day weekend. We were going up to Kennebunkport,

because that's where George Bush had his family and had their summer thing, and we were trying to get Bush. We had a plan, which we had on a long sheet of something or other – the plan to how to end the AIDS crisis, and what needed to be done. We were trying to get attention to that. And of course, Kennebunkport was in a frenzy. Bush was completely wiggled out – never mind the politics, back to my love life. Joe was just really cute, and he helped me get the first busload off and then okay, we'll meet later. And then one of the buses didn't show up and it was his bus. And I was going to David – who was my co-captain on the bus, David Serko again – “Get him, save him a seat on our bus!” And so we had the bus ride up, and it was David doing his IV drip, myself, Joe, and then – I can't believe I'm not going to come up with his name – who also was a friend of Joe's from the dance world. So we had these fairy godmothers there, and we spent some time talking and we spent the day. And Joe actually got extremely emotional while we were up there. I remember one time we went away from the demo, and off to this bluff overlooking the ocean. We joke – a small New England town, a lovely holiday weekend, several thousand of our closest friends, the AIDS crisis. What wasn't romantic? And by the bus ride down – it was long day – it was sort of like, if he's half as sweet as he seems, this might be worth pursuing. And we started dating from that point on, and that was 12 years ago.

Tape IV  
00:05:00

**SS: Do you think that there's something in having shared that experience that has kept you together?**

RG: Yeah. We were dealing with issues – very profound issues, at the beginning of our relationship. We were dealing with death. We had friends who were dying. David died a year later. When we moved into our apartment, David died that

weekend. We were dealing with gay identity, family acceptance. He had issues there. We were dealing with each other emotionally throughout that experience – not to mention politically. I can't imagine being in a relationship with someone on the other side of the political spectrum – I can't. Politics is too central to me. I could barely talk to them, let alone live with them. So there is certainly that aspect. ACT UP was a life-changing experience, and I think having that and having shared that – and even though I had many more years before that, and his experience is definitely different than mine – is very profound and it affects how we relate.

**SS: Can you show us this picture you have of your friends?**

RG: This was taken at the 1993 March on Washington – which was the Don't Ask, Don't Tell, almost Don't Bother. I mean I wasn't a big yes, the Army should be open to people who want to do it. I have my issues with the Army to begin with. But we went to the March. This is Gary Clare, and this is Bradley Ball. Actually I shared a house with Gary Clare on Fire Island – with him and his lover, David [E.] Kirschenbaum – the late David Kirschenbaum, who was one of the early treasurers in ACT UP. And then Bradley was a good friend, who was the original first secretary in ACT UP.

**SS: Is Gary still alive?**

RG: No, they're both dead. David died and then Gary started to have the same – it was a horrible story. Gary was the one who was positive. Supposedly, David was negative and David got sick, wasting away, dreadful, dreadful – became that horrible Auschwitz thin, long, drawn out death and finally passed away. Within months after that, Gary started to get the same symptoms and started to pass, and Gary opted to stop his treatments and then died over a period of about a month. Bradley got extremely sick, was

in ICU – I had three friends in the hospital at the same time, at one point. The one who was in the ICU was Bradley. He was the one who lived the longest. He came out and lived for another year. My friend who was the least sick, died within the week. And I think Gary was the middle child.

**SS: Who was the other friend?**

RG: Michael Irwin, who was not in ACT UP at all. And actually, in terms of his dealing with AIDS, it's really interesting. He was in complete fear. He didn't take his meds. He was terrified. He wound up in Bellevue. He was just terrified and couldn't deal with it at all. And I remember visiting him before an ACT UP meeting – he was in St. Vincent's. We were trying to just calm him down. He couldn't breathe, because he had the pneumonia – which at that point you “shouldn't have” got, because you were supposed to be taking your prophylaxis drugs. And I remember staying with him, and he was just freaking out because he couldn't breathe, and then he passed away the next day. And this was the thing – you'd visit your friend, and then you'd go to a meeting and you were supposed to have some sort of rational reaction to anything. So yeah, it was interesting, because Michael was clearly at the other end of the spectrum – didn't get involved, didn't want to know. The poor guy was just scared, scared, scared, which was hard.

**SS: Why did you leave ACT UP?**

RG: I was exhausted. The group had changed a lot. The people who I had originally been fighting for – and with – had moved on, one way or another. I did have the sense that I would not be able to save anybody who I was currently in the room with, which was just incredibly zapping. And then what also happened is – I became sort of

this eminence. I'd say something and people would go, I'd become one of those voices of God, "Oh, we did this," and blah, blah, blah. And everyone would go, "Oh, so we won't do that." And I'd be like, no, no, no! Yell at me, say I'm wrong, say I don't know what I'm talking about, argue with me! I'm at a point where I'm in a negative place; I've done a lot of this. It doesn't mean I'm right, but there wasn't that – that kind of dialogue was not going on at that point. So I also felt that along with being exhausted, I wasn't doing any good. I tried to pass some things on. We tried to organize some actions and pass some skills on – other things, but for me it just became a losing proposition. I felt that I couldn't really contribute anymore. And it was very painful. It was this huge, huge gap in my life. I came to the end of that and well, now what? What do I do? This has been so much about what I've been about and how I've defined myself.

**SS: So how long did it take to get over that?**

RG: Certainly a couple of years. It was also grieving – because who had time to grieve? We'd have a funeral, and you were out in the street. I mean we really didn't assimilate. That's why I put together this chronology, which sort of put together all these different pieces – who died that week? What was in the press? What we did at the meetings, what the demonstrations were. And you look at it, and it's like, no wonder we were crazy! Three deaths happened this week, you were in two different demonstrations, and then some heinous remark came out in one of the administrations, and you had to fight something else. Stephen Joseph cut the total numbers of people who were sick, by fiat. No wonder you were nuts. No wonder we were like –

**SS: How many pages is this chronology? Oh, you have it right here.**

RG: I have it right here – it's about 94 pages.

**SS: What should we do? Can we put it on the website, or should we ask Ron to read it? Let's start at the top, and let's just hear the first page and then we'll put it on the website. Is that a copy for us?**

RG: I can make a copy for you. There were two versions. I put my own events in, so I could see where my life was. I was still auditioning, there were still things going on. And then this one is really just much more ACT UP – starting with Larry Kramer at the Community Center.

**SS: Let's take it from the top.**

RG: That was March 10, 1987. March 12<sup>th</sup> was the first meeting of ACT UP. This was before I was there, before I got in the room. March 14<sup>th</sup> I believe Outreach and Strategy – which was the Education Committee – was formed. So I guess that was one of the first committees. ACT UP got its name on the 19<sup>th</sup>. They were looking for snappy names, and one guy had one – I have his name in my text somewhere – who said, “Act up. Why don't we use ACT UP? It can be Aids Coalition to Unleash Power. ACT UP.” Which Bradley hated – he thought it sounded like some sort of toothpaste. The Steering Committee was formed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, to look at specific demands and fashion an agenda. Policy Committee – which was re-named the Issues Committee – was April 7<sup>th</sup>. April 15<sup>th</sup> was the first Post Office demonstration – at the filing of the IRS. The 27<sup>th</sup> was the packed meeting, where the AIDS Bill of Rights proposal was presented. And there were people from a number of other organizations that came, to sort of pack the meeting to get us to read this AIDS Bill of Rights, which we later withdrew our support of.

Tape IV  
00:15:00

The Coordinating Committee proposal was also on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and the formation of the Media Committee with Frank O'Dowd – was also the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Coordinating

Committee was approved on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The 11<sup>th</sup> of May was the FDA 101 presentation. The 17<sup>th</sup> was the GMHC Walk-a-thon. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, at-large reps were elected – Eric Sawyer and Avram Finkelstein. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May was the NAPWA candlelight vigil, in DC. The AmFAR fundraiser with Reagan – where he says AIDS for the first time and gets booed. The 1<sup>st</sup> of June was the Washington, D.C. action – the White House CD, “Your gloves don’t match your shoes, you’ll see it on the news!” The 8<sup>th</sup> of June was Larry Kramer’s first farewell to ACT UP. [LAUGHS] We were going to hand it out with every meeting – his first farewell to the organization.

My first ACT UP meeting was the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, which was the fight over Pride and the concentration camp theme – which was the theme that year. The Reagan Executive Order, establishing the Presidential Commission on the HIV Committee was the 24<sup>th</sup> of June. Gay Pride was the 28<sup>th</sup>. June 30<sup>th</sup> was the rally and demonstration at Federal Plaza, which was my first demo. The Zap Committee came into life the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. I think my first Logistics Committee meeting was the 19<sup>th</sup> of July – the Sloan-Kettering demonstration.

**SS: That’s my first action.**

RG: Oh man, Sloan-Kettering. What an idiotic thing that was – the silent picket for three days, just to prove that we can! At Sloan Kettering, from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup>. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of July was, Reagan announces the AIDS Commission. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of August was a demo at St. Patrick’s, concerning O’Connor’s appointment to the AIDS Commission. The ACT UP March on Washington sub-committee was born with the Lady Miles – Michael Miles – on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. August 4<sup>th</sup> was the Northwest Orient zap, which was because there was something about throwing people with AIDS off the plane.

The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of August was the CDC Conference on AIDS and Minorities, where Maria Maggenti, Marty Robinson, Bill Bahlman attended. The 10<sup>th</sup> of August was the proposal for the town meeting which we were going to have. It passes unanimously. The 11<sup>th</sup> was the New York State Court public hearing on PWAs in court, and how they were to be treated when they were up. ACT UP New Jersey begins meetings on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August. The 17<sup>th</sup> was the court date for the Federal Plaza arrestees. The 24<sup>th</sup>, Logistics makes a proposal for the D.C. commission action. And it goes on.

**SS: Can you e-mail this to Jim [Hubbard]?**

RG: Only if I scan it in, because it's on an old computer. I have a scanner here, if I can figure out how to use it. If not, what I can do is Xerox this for you. There's some written stuff on here.

**SS: Because we should just put this on the website.**

RG: It's fine. It's kind of nuts. It really gets crazy in 1989. I realize that if I do another book proposal, I would just take 1989 as this year, because it has everything. It has a lot of deaths, it has some major, major actions. It has politics. It ends with St. Patrick's. Its sort of got the whole nine yards.

**SS: Well Ron, I have bad news for you. You're still in ACT UP, and your new assignment is to get us this, so we can make it available to everybody. Because it's really important work that no one else has done.**

RG: Sure. It's got the parties in here – strange stuff. Deaths. Lovely things.

**SS: So, to end – I don't know how to end with you.**

RG: [LAUGHS] The story goes on.

**SS: Thank you.**

RG: Thank you, it's important to get the word out. It was an amazing thing, and I hope other people can take it up as an example moving forward, because God knows there's enough to be angry about.

**SS: Okay, thank you Ron Goldberg.**

RG: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]