

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

**A PROGRAM OF
MIX – THE NEW YORK LESBIAN &
GAY EXPERIMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Interviewee: Jason Heffner

Interview Number: 103

Interviewer: Sarah Schulman

Date of Interview: October 21, 2008

ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Jason Heffner
October 21, 2008

SARAH SCHULMAN: So the way we start is you just say your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

JASON HEFFNER: My name is Jason Heffner. I am fifty years of age. It is 21 October 2008, and I'm in New York City.

SS: You very kindly came down from Massachusetts?

JH: Western Massachusetts.

SS: Yes, thank you for doing that. So, where were you born?

JH: I was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

SS: You're kidding.

JH: Well, it doesn't usually get that response.

SS: Do you know Jeff Weiss?

JH: I do not.

SS: Oh, okay. He's a famous person from Allentown. We'll talk about that off camera.

JH: Yes, let's.

SS: How long was it before you escaped from there?

JH: Absolutely at the age of eighteen, as soon as I graduated from high school. Go back only for family affairs.

SS: What did your parents do in Allentown?

JH: My father worked for the telephone company, and my mother worked in an insurance office.

SS: Were they ever involved in any kind of community activity or political or neighborhood?

JH: Not political. Certainly community activities. My mother was the PTA president at our elementary school. My father was the treasurer of the Scout organization I worked in, those kind of all related to the family. Nothing beyond that.

SS: Did they ever express to you any overt ideology or value about intervening for other people?

JH: No, afraid not. I actually learned that, and, in fact, it was ACT UP. That's where I was taught what has now become my philosophy of I –

SS: So when you were high school, did you already know that you were gay?

JH: Did I already know I was gay? Yes. Did I acknowledge it? No.

SS: Were you aware of the fact that there was a gay movement somewhere else, or a gay culture? Did you see Anita Bryant on TV or anything like that?

JH: I did know. I frequently with my girlfriend had taken the family car and headed off to New York on many a schooldays, and it was there in the Village where both visually and picking up the periodicals that I began to develop an awareness.

SS: Do you remember anything in particular that you saw at that time?

JH: This would be the – well, I graduated from high school in 1976. No, not that I remember. But within the year, I was in my first semester in a pre-ministerial program in a southern college and came out in a rather dramatic way and was forced off

the campus of this Christian college, and so decided to pursue what my dream as opposed to my parents' interest in my career was, dance. So I moved to Philadelphia where I got into the School of the Pennsylvania Ballet, where I really learned at least an aspect of gay life, right from that point on.

SS: Let's get back to your religious background then. What church were you raised in?

JH: I was raised in the United Church of Christ.

SS: Why do you think you decided to become a minister?

JH: It was the budding sense of giving back, giving something, working on something bigger than myself. I have to say that. It wasn't deeply grounded in religious beliefs at all, and, in fact, they have all been shed by this point in my life. But it was a sense of – it seemed to me in my high school mindset that that was a way I could continue some of the work that I had done as the leader of service organizations in high school in a larger forum.

SS: What kind of service organizations?

JH: Well, I was the class of '76, so the Bicentennial was a big part of our focus and definition and personality of our class, and I was the chair of the countywide, which was an unusual organization of about twelve high schools, and we did various events, both of historical nature in preparation for the Bicentennial, leading up to that. I was the president of the Key Club at the school.

SS: So, did you know what your church's position was on homosexuality?

JH: I did not.

SS: So what happened?

JH: Well, subsequently, I think, the United Church of Christ is, of course, out there in front in terms of an opening and welcome church, and at the time I did not, and it was certainly not something that I spoke about with my minister.

SS: So did you get caught having sex with another man? Is that what happened?

JH: No. My first sexual encounter with a man was at college, and it was like at that point in time, at that moment from that experience, I never looked back. It became very clear as to who I was in that regard.

SS: So you voluntarily left the ministry?

JH: Yes. Well, yes. I probably could have transferred to another pre-ministerial program, but it was not going to happen at that school. They made it very clear that they wanted me off campus and were not pleased with how public I became in that.

SS: I see. So how do you just go to the School of the Pennsylvania Ballet from having been sent to be a minister? Were you taking ballet the whole time?

JH: In high school I did, with the help, again, of my dear girlfriend at the time and for my parents, who do not approve when I publicly stated that I wanted to do this. With her help, we pretended that we were going off to meetings, probably Bicentennial meetings or something of that nature that related to school. She had found a dance studio in our hometown of Allentown where I could go take private classes with this teacher. That's where my studies started.

It was a period of time of a few months between leaving the college in North Carolina, because it was on a quarter system at the time. So I left like in February, but by the summer I had auditioned at the School of Pennsylvania Ballet. I don't actually know what it's like today, but at that time, any male who walked through the door who was even in relatively good shape and had a certain degree of coordination was immediately accepted into their program.

SS: So in the mid seventies – was this the late seventies now, right?

JH: This was '77.

SS: What was the ballet world like? Was it another gay subculture?

JH: Oh, absolutely. Certainly at Pennsylvania Ballet. There was the fateful night where friends from the ballet company from the school, male friends, said there was a dance concert up at Temple University and that we should go to it. Up until that time, it was either ballet, Broadway dancing, or the June Taylor Dancers on the *Jackie Gleason Show* were my understanding of the forms of dance. They took me up to this which was a senior class final project type of a performance, and I remember watching it in this black box in the one building at Temple University, and I truly never looked back. Within days I had started taking classes there, talked to the professors, and as soon as they had an open audition, I was there. Of the hundred or so people in the room, there were two men, and as at the Pennsylvania school, they came in and said, "You and you, you're in," and I continued my training in modern there.

SS: When you say "modern," do you mean like contact improvisation or do you mean like old-fashioned modern dance like –

JH: More traditionally old.

SS: Like Martha Graham?

JH: Martha Graham technique, Erick Hawkins technique. I did take some jazz classes, but, yes.

SS: And then you transferred to Temple. So was it your goal to be a professional modern dancer, to the extent that that's possible?

JH: Yes, for those few years I fully expected to finish there and move to New York, which I subsequently did but under, as we'll get to, very different circumstances.

SS: So did you complete the – was it a BFA?

JH: I completed my degree in communication, which is what my B.A. was issued in, but if you look at my transcript, the vast majority of it is technique and composition and dance history.

SS: So can you help us understand a little bit the gay male dance world before AIDS to the extent that you experienced it? Because as an outsider, my impression is that it's kind of like gay liberation without the liberation, that it was just a place to be acknowledged to be gay without any kind of politics or relationship to the rest of the gay world. Is that accurate?

JH: I would say that's relatively accurate. It was certainly highly sexualized, as you can imagine. The fun we had in the dressing rooms was just that. {LAUGHS} Yes. Yes. I didn't know a straight man in the dance program at Temple.

SS: What were people's identities like as gay people?

JH: There was one other male student in my class at Temple, and he was much more out. He was certainly much more comfortable with his sexuality. He was

much more into the scene, the gay culture within the city, more than I was. I was really intent on my studies, partly because with the transfer from the one program into dance, my parents removed all financial support as their way of trying to get me back into my other program. So I was really struggling on my own to make ends meet and living in different friends' houses for a while and that kind of an experience. I was really somewhat forced to stay focused and near the campus, etc., where he was much more engaged in the downtown nightlife.

SS: So what happened? How did you get to New York from there?

JH: How did I get to New York? Well, I finished my undergraduate. It was actually my undergraduate and my first master's degree sort of just melded together because by the end, by what became the final year of my full-time dance study, my parents had started to make an effort to reconcile with me. The story there goes that they had elected, without telling me, to come to one of the student performances that I was in there. I was actually in a dance by one of our – again, it was a senior class final performance there, sort of capstone, if you will, performance, and it happened to be a dance danced naked. That was the performance my parents decided to surprise me and show up at. It was a black box that used to be the auditorium on the top floor of the main building of Temple University called Conwell Hall. So there were very little sidelines, and so you basically had to run around, go past the elevator in the back where you would come up to it to get into your dressing rooms. The dance had finished, and I had picked up everything and had it in my hands, and we were all sort of giggling and running around to the back to get there, and as we came to the back of the theater, there were my parents standing at the elevator, with my father pressing the down button more times than

he needed to. So it sort of set back our development, our reconciliation a little bit because it's a little weird having your parents in the audience that young in life watching you dance naked.

SS: Sure. Did you guys ever make up?

JH: Oh, yes, oh, completely and fully accepting of my partnership with John. Really nice. Oh, not overnight, but as most stories go in that regard, but yes.

SS: Thirty years later.

JH: Yes. {LAUGHS}

SS: How did you come to New York?

JH: Immediately – I don't remember the decision-making process. I do remember the emotions around it, and that was the anxiety of was I good enough to perform. I wanted to go to New York. Most people who study dance in an academic environment want to head to New York, and I had been up there to take short-term workshop classes, like at different studios. And I was familiar with New York because I used to sneak up there with my girlfriend for days, during the week, during class days, schooldays, and spend days there. But I don't remember the intellectual transition. But I decided to go on for a master's degree, and I think my thinking at the time was, "I'll do this. This master's degree is only going to take me a year, and if I need to fall back on it, I can." It was in instructional technology, and it was the early eighties, and the PC was just coming on the market, which was, of course, to revolutionize the computer world.

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In fact, I finished that degree and delayed my departure for New York because I suddenly, after living years in poverty and ending a relationship with my first boyfriend, got this incredibly well-paying job teaching CEOs and other high executives

in corporations how to use the PC, which was really just an effort to get them comfortable because everyone around them and all their secretaries were using this device that they were absolutely terrified of. It was the most amusing assignment that I ever had professionally, because I would go into these large offices and boot up what was then the Apple computer, which was about this big and had a separate monitor. About the first thing I would say was, “Now go ahead and bang anywhere you want on it. Just bang on the keys.” It was like really this infantile level of training, just to get these grown men comfortable with this. But it was incredibly not satisfactory, and I was on my own. I just sold that off, my piece of that business, and packed up and moved to New York and landed a position as the executive director of a dance foundation, which was the Erick Hawkins Dance Foundation. So I managed his school and his company and arranged their domestic and international tours.

SS: Oh, that must have been thrilling.

JH: It was, absolutely, and took classes at the same time. So it was living in the mid-eighties on fifty dollars a week. I still look, like many people do, I’m sure, back, and I can’t figure out how I did it, but it was some of the best years of my life.

SS: Where were you positioned in relation to the gay community at that point in your life? Again, you’re living in a gay bubble, right, of this dance subculture?

JH: Actually, it still – I wasn’t. Really, it does come to when we start talking about ACT UP. ACT UP was a curtain opener for me on so many levels.

SS: Did you go out? Did you go to gay bars or clubs or bathhouses?

JH: I really didn’t go to gay bars.

SS: Did you go to the baths?

JH: I did. Friends took me to the St. Mark's and then I experienced that. That was a great experience for a small-town kid. It was really into my time as the executive director of that foundation when we had one openly gay male dancer. It wasn't easy working with Eric Hawkins, and he got sick. In fact, it was before I left for New York. It was May of '83 when I first learned of – well, it was still called GRID at the time.

SS: What was his name?

JH: I don't remember the dancer's name. I'm sorry.

SS: That was the first person who you knew personally who had AIDS?

JH: Yes. Well, who was sick, and he had Kaposi's sarcoma, and so he visually manifested the disease, and that's –

SS: When you first heard about AIDS, you were still in Philadelphia?

JH: I was, actually. I can tell you, for someone whose memory has vast holes in it at this point in my life, it was in that time when I was doing the computer work. I had finished school and my graduate degree. My partner had already left. I would make it a habit of buying the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and going down into the historic section, if it was a summer day, and it was. It was May, and I would sit near Carpenters' Hall or something on a bench and get coffee and a bagel and read the paper. The *Inquirer's* magazine fell out, and the cover story was about this man who feared dying young because he had some kind of disease, and that was the article that introduced me, again, introduced me to the idea, but it felt very remote, and it got closer when I

moved to New York and the dancer got sick, and then in my circle when we started talking, it descended like – I don't think there's a metaphor I could use – but it descended very quickly.

SS: Did you equate AIDS with New York at first? Did you think it was not in your town?

JH: I didn't associate it with Philadelphia, no. No, not at all.

SS: So you're working for Erick and this dancer dies, did that start to change the way –

JH: Yes.

SS: Yes. What happened?

JH: Again, in my circle of friends, we were talking about this, and as I'm sure many people have said in these interviews, it was just a time of absolute terror. The more you learned about it, the more frightening it became. I heard about this organization that was forming, GMHC, and a friend introduced me to one of the earliest employees. When they found out that I had a graduate degree in education, they put me to work on helping to develop the city's funded first condom-use brochure, which we look back on, and I wish I could bring you a sample of it, because, of course, back then, in light of what we do today and how comfortable society in general is in talking about sex –let me just say we had numerous drafts that were directed by the city's Health Department as too graphic, and we ended up, as you probably know, using socks and cucumbers as the visuals on these brochures.

So I did initially, but I became aware that I could use my training and education, and so started as a volunteer doing various efforts in the Education

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Department, not just writing the brochure, but doing outreach, going to the bathhouses with the teams, wrapping ourselves, getting ourselves dressed in bathhouse attire and standing up and explaining the proper use of a condom.

SS: Let me ask you a couple of questions. When you were doing this, by the time GMHC was doing this, was there still opposition from the gay community to condoms, or had everyone accepted that this was reasonable?

JH: I understand why you're asking me the question, but, again, I was so into being at GMHC that I was traveling in a circle where I'd get in, I'd understand my assignment, where I was going. It was either a Harlem church to speak to the Women's Auxiliary Committee, or it was to go to the bathhouse. At least in my circle – well, there is one exception. In this period of time I moved in to help run an international youth hostel up in Harlem as a way of saving money, and two of the men, actually the two owners of the hostel, were very anti-condom. We would have really ugly fights over that.

SS: What was their position?

JH: That they were free to take the chance if it was mutually agreed to.

SS: Right. Who was the director of GMHC at this time?

JH: I think it was Richard Dunne. Yes, because evidently I had made inquiries to the Education Department about wanting to help. I wrote these letters, and I didn't get a response, so in frustration, I wrote a letter to him, which was then sent back to the Director of Education and said, "You need to use this person some way." So I got started.

SS: Now, which bathhouses were still open? Was this after, before they were shut down?

JH: Before they were shut down.

SS: So where were you? Which ones were you going to?

JH: I didn't expect this interview to be going in this direction, but I went to St. Mark's, but I did safer sex work up at the East Side.

SS: The East Side sauna is still open, isn't it?

JH: Still open.

SS: Yeah. But St. Mark's was shut down.

JH: But they now have a West Side one, I understand, too.

SS: I'm just asking this because I covered the closing of the baths for *New York Native*.

JH: Did you?

SS: So I have an interest in this. Did you feel at the time that St. Mark's being shut down was like a –

JH: Huge mistake.

SS: Huge mistake. Can you explain why?

JH: Because even though I didn't do it there, there was a very intense effort to educate in that forum. I thought it was a most appropriate place to do that kind of work. I thought the efforts by the city to intimidate, because they used to, as you probably know, park an ambulance right outside of the bathhouse, and when you would come out, they would jump out of the car and try to talk to you about the threat to your life, the threat to your health that was going on there.

SS: The Department of Health people?

JH: They used to park one right outside one.

SS: I remember Orthodox Jews handing out pamphlets in front of St. Mark's baths.

JH: Oh, really?

SS: I missed the Department of Health.

JH: I missed that one.

SS: Why do you think the City targeted St. Mark's Bath? Because obviously they left many other bathhouses untouched.

JH: I do not know. I really don't. I suspect it's who the owners knew.

SS: Did you know, what's his name, Bruce Mailman? Did you work with him, the owner of the St. Mark's bath?

JH: No.

SS: That was just like historical whatever. How did you feel about what was happening at GMHC as you were working there?

JH: I was working there, but I was also participating for my own benefit in the volunteer activities, and I was in a support group, and this relates to that comment I made about just the terror that we were living with that we would meet at one of their facilities. They grew and obviously had different offices around the city, and I can't remember which one it was we were at. But there would be ten of us or so that would meet, and basically it was a support group before we knew anything in terms of treatment, and it was literally like, "Well, I have this," and one of us would pull up our pants leg, and there was this purple mark here. What do people think about that? "Well,

you should go see a doctor.” The doctor I ended up with was – I regrettably forget his name, because he was a wonderful doctor, but it turns out the whole time he was caring for me, he was sick and had died soon thereafter.

SS: Did you really have Kaposi’s or did you –

JH: No, no.

SS: You thought you did.

JH: I’m not. I’m HIV–negative.

SS: So it was a panic.

JH: It was just panic. Anything that changed on your body was just –

SS: Did you do things like AL-721 and that kind of stuff? Did you take – no?

JH: No.

SS: You didn’t get involved in megavitamins or Louise Hay or –

JH: Definitely not Louise Hay. {LAUGHS}

SS: All right. You were both a service provider and a person receiving service.

JH: Yes, that’s correct. That’s correct. That was my relationship.

SS: Yes, inside GMHC.

JH: With GMHC. I did the volunteer training, which is – well, obviously, we all did before whatever activity you took on. I knew I couldn’t be a buddy. I just wasn’t emotionally prepared for that at that point in my life. I was too young and too immature to handle something like that. But I could do these other aspects that used my so-called training and education.

SS: Had you stepped away from dance at that point?

JH: I was pretty much – I had actually had much success at Erick. Erick had gone through a number of directors due to his personality, and for some reason, he and I hit it off. I had arranged their international tour, and the balance, there was just too much there to handle, and I had to make a choice, and I made the choice to leave the foundation because this felt more important and was closer and friends getting sick. I felt like I could use something that I had had, which was my educational background.

SS: Just one more dance question. Were you frustrated by the lack of response from the dance community to AIDS, given how many people were affected?

JH: Honestly, I really can't say. It probably speaks more to my still limited – again, this changes when I get to ACT UP, but my still limited perspective of community organizing, political organizing. It was really in my little corner of the world, I wanted to respond, and it was proven, or at least GMHC responded favorably. But even there, it was – I actually don't know how many years I was in the Education Department. But I don't want to rush this. But it was a very clear memory that I grew frustrated at just responding and growing more services, and the buddies program and then the food program and growing GMHC because the proper governmental agencies weren't doing what they were supposed to be doing, that there was a fateful night that I got to an ACT UP meeting. I don't know. I don't want to rush you in your questions.

SS: Let me ask you this transitional question that will take us there. When did you become aware that there was starting to be articulated a different strategy out there besides the GMHC strategy?

JH: Yes, that's also clear. It was up at the youth hostel. In fact, it was one of our guests who had been to the first meeting.

SS: Do you know who it was?

JH: I know he was African and he was a student at Columbia, and he came back, and we used to have communal dinners. So there used to be – well, depending on how many there were in the hostel and how many wanted to join us, sometimes there was six, sometimes there was twenty people around the table. And he spoke about it one night and turned to me and said, "In light of what you're doing, you should come with me next time."

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What happened, I did go. It was pretty overwhelming initial experience to walk into the Community Center and see all those people and that energy in that room. But what happened then is I had a contract to do some touring and some evaluation of some arts programs around the country, and so I left for many months, which is the '87 period. I came back and joined fully into ACT UP activities in '88.

SS: I know this is a terrible question, but can you articulate the difference in approach between GMHC and ACT UP in the same time period, let's say in '88 when you came back?

JH: Let me just take a minute before I rush into that challenging question. They were two entirely different populations, sub-segments of the gay community, and should we even get to that in light of where I am today, GMHC was the birth of the AIDS professional. It was pretty much born there. Part of that I don't criticize, because some of that was required, of course, as you play the funding game. You needed more credentials, and so they started looking for various trained professionals to run the

program. It was that increase, that line, that graph of where they moved away from more community organizing into specializing in various services, and that corresponded with the time that I grew disillusioned or wanted something else. Couldn't even articulate it at the beginning. As I said, I left, and when I came back and reentered the meetings at the center, that was where that voice inside of me said, "This is exactly where you need to be."

SS: I'm interested that you say that GMHC and ACT UP represented to different sectors of the gay community. Could you retell me what the two different sectors were?

JH: I'm not sure what you're driving at here, but –

SS: Because you had said, and then you described AIDS professionalism, but you didn't describe the other.

JH: Social activists, community activists.

SS: But what was it? Do you think that there was a difference in character? Was there a difference in experience? What made one person one and one person another?

JH: Having been both of them, that would be an interesting question.

{LAUGHS} I think I would begin the response of that by keeping in mind and keeping all of us reminded of the period in time, because, of course, we had incredible professionals in ACT UP. It's probably a microcosm of the larger so-called nonprofit sector today, in terms of people wanting a very stable place that they feel that they are making contribution to something, and GMHC really spoke to that in a community that

didn't have their own, at that point in time, many institutions in which they could live and thrive and contribute as we do today.

SS: When you came back into ACT UP in '88, what did you do?

What was the first thing you leapt into?

JH: I remember returning and sitting in on a number of meetings, and Bradley Ball—at that time he was called the secretary—was stepping down. He wasn't well. So the ACT UP working document was being developed at the time, and they had created this position of administrator, and I just made the decision that I was going to go for it, feeling like I had some background that might contribute to structuring our – responding to what the stated requirements and duties of that position were.

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SS: This was in '88?

JH: Yes. Yes.

SS: Can you just explain to us what the working document was, who wrote it?

JH: I have a copy of the working document.

SS: You have a copy. Amazing. You're the first person in 103 people to mention it.

JH: Oh, really? In fact, I used it. When I went on to Washington, I used it to help set up ACT UP Washington, and I actually used it as the primary document for the managing and governing the planning of the 1993 March on Washington. But that's getting ahead of ourselves here.

SS: Who wrote it?

JH: I don't know. I do not know who wrote it.

SS: Can you share some of it with us? Whatever you think is important.

JH: Sure. I wanted to review it before I got here. The highlights of it and the things that I have taken away and used as much as possible in the rest of my organizing life including when I was – I just returned from two years as the coordinator of the HIV/AIDS program at our embassy in Ethiopia, and it was an inner–agency program. I just mention this because it was radical to the Foreign Service officers there who engaged in this program, because I introduced a consensus model of decision–making, and that was a very tough process to win them over to, and that was what I learned. I actually didn't know consensus model decision–making until I got to ACT UP, and even though we used that in the Coordinating Committee, at least the time that I was there, we used it in a pure fashion. On the floor, it evolved and became what we called the modified form of consensus decision–making where you tried, you tried again, and if you couldn't reach consensus, then it did go up for a vote. But that was one of the things that is specifically defined.

SS: Can you give us an example of something in ACT UP that had to happen by majority vote because no consensus could be reached?

JH: In the end, and I served one full term, six months was the length of the administrator's position, and then I was reelected into a second term, but that was cut short due to my move to Washington, it increased over time, because '89, which is when I was administrator, for the most part, was an incredibly tense period. It was the City Hall action, a lot of work within the T&D Committee, a lot of documents being put out at that time, and oftentimes I would say that it would go to a vote mostly around money,

because part of the process was that expenses up to a thousand dollars could be approved by the Coordinating Committee, which was the at-large members that were also elected, myself, and the treasurer, who was Dan Baker. We were both elected at the same time. Then a representative from each of the standing committees, and I think the caucuses were included in that. A committee could bring an expense up to a thousand dollars to the Coordinating Committee. It was a way of trying to – as you’ve probably heard, our Monday night meetings would go on for hours, and part of the challenge that I had was to streamline them. So it was decided that they could approve up to a thousand dollars, the Coordinating Committee.

So to answer your question, the expenses that came in over a thousand could come to the Coordinating council for refinement or debate and even coaching. It’s like, “You might want to think about presenting it this way or you might want to take it to this committee,” which was always encouraged. Go through a committee to present your proposal, whether it was for an action or money for travel or money for a document to be produced, and then it would go back out to the floor. It was usually – I do certainly remember the votes. The voting came down on several occasions to spending money, allocation of funds.

SS: Let’s hear some more from the working document. Do we need to change the tapes? Okay, we’ll change tapes.

JH: Actually, I don’t know that there’s a date on here, but there are dates on the amendments, which were during my period of time as administrator.

SS: Can you continue to take us through that?

JH: It actually listed the committees that at the time of the writing were active, but that continually changed, as I think you've heard. There was an Action Committee, which evolved. There was a Fundraising Committee, an Issues Committee, Majority Action Committee, a Media Committee, the Outreach Committee, and, as I said, there were two at-large representatives to the Coordinating Council that were elected by the floor. The administrator and the treasurer were also elected, at least during that early period of time when we began to structure the organization.

SS: Was there any opposition to this, to creating a working document?

JH: I don't think there was any opposition to it. I think there was a general sense of a need for it. The opposition came with the proposal to create a Coordinating Council and actually take some of the decision-making authority from the general meeting into a smaller meeting. That's what generated a good deal of debate around this.

SS: Do you remember the names of people on the two different sides, any emblematic people whose names you recall?

JH: I do not. I would tell you. I just don't.

SS: That's fine. Tell us what else is in there.

JH: It goes into how the committee representatives are supposed to be prepared coming to the Coordinating Council. The Coordinating Council, at least, I think it changed in the later years, but in the '88-'89 period, we met Tuesday right after the Monday night meeting so that we could process the decisions that were made and start to allocate money and then also plan for the next Monday night meeting. But it was always

open, and sometimes it was just the Coordinating Council and sometimes we had people lining the room, because we used to meet upstairs in the Community Center for that committee before we then had a workspace where we met.

The administrator was responsible for facilitation of the Coordinating Committee meetings, recording and preparing the written minutes, which sounds simple, but they were pages upon pages upon pages, and handling all the correspondence. I used to go, and, in fact, after March of '88 when I met John, he used to come with me because we would go down to the mailbox which was on Hudson Street, two doors south of Christopher, which I think it's a frame gallery now or a frame shop. But they used to have these bags that we would then sort through, and I would arrange them by what committee they would go to. So every Monday night, I'd have a manila envelope full of mail that would be labeled for the chair of whatever committee I thought it was supposed to go to.

The phone tree, which I created, one of the most extensive phone trees in my organizing that I ever created, it was just pages and pages and pages.

SS: Can you just explain for contemporary viewers what a phone tree is?

JH: That's true. That's true. E-mail and voicemail, sort of, yes. It was a system by which people would sign up for the level that they wanted in a system by which we would basically start when a decision was made to mobilize under circumstances that the monthly meeting wouldn't allow. It usually was for some kind of emergency action. It could not be used for extra committee meetings. Committees couldn't use it for that type of basic operational purposes. But if a zap needed to happen,

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or people needed to attend a meeting that we didn't know about at the previous Monday night meeting, you could implement the phone tree, and it meant that somebody on the Coordinating Council had to make sure that it was cleared by a certain number of Coordinating Committee members. Then it was basically a pyramid. You started with – I can't remember the exact number, but for the sake of the discussion, six people, who would then, of course, call six other people, and each of those six people would call an additional set of people. That actually, even before I left, became an assignment for one volunteer, just for him to keep up, because phone numbers changed.

SS: How many people were on the phone tree?

JH: Hundreds. It was in a three-ring binder, and each page was a different part of the phone tree, and so each page had to be handed out to every single person on that portion of the phone tree. It was an intensive process of maintaining that to make it effective. Again, up until the time I left, it was used a number of times very effectively.

SS: Do you remember a specific action for which it was used?

JH: I know there was a zap that we used it for. In fact, if I remember correctly, it was Peter who called in. Peter Staley called in to activate the phone tree. I'm not sure, but I think the best my memory serves me is that there was a government meeting in town that we hadn't known about, and we wanted to get people there, and that's the kind of way we used it, if not for zaps.

SS: Okay, good. Let's keep going.

JH: Obviously, the administrator was responsible for maintaining and storing the pertinent ACT UP records. The next item is one that I've actually given some thought to coming here, because it simply says "planning the agenda of the general

meeting.” You might have heard that the general meeting, and, in fact, it’s in the document, was if you came thirty minutes before the meeting – I believe the meeting started at seven o’clock, so if you came at six–thirty, you could get another item on the agenda. Well, as these meetings grew, and I would sit up front, and these people would walk in and say, “I need this on the agenda,” there were categories. Certain types of announcements got bumped to the front if they were pressing for some reason. Then next on the agenda were the actions, discussions of the actions that were upcoming. Then the zaps would be discussed. Then committee reports. Then all the other announcements, from fundraisers that were happening to the International Socialist Party events that would be announced, everything else was done at the end. But this really grew complicated, that the Coordinating Committee at my request had to take on a better structure of this.

There was this form that I had developed, and it would be laid out on the front table in the front of the ground floor meeting room of the Center, and people would sign up their issue under whatever category it was, and then I would review it with the facilitators at the time, and we’d actually do a little editing. But we’d always inform that this particular issue was going to be moved to this category, so that we’d try to really keep the most pressing issues up front.

SS: Wasn’t lifesaving information was the first thing, right?

JH: Yeah, I think that was more – there was some separation of – there was announcements, but then there was this special category of announcements, and I think it also had to do with members, update on members that might be ill or in the hospital or something was always up front.

SS: What else have you got?

JH: Description of the treasurer, which was – I know you have asked me to talk about some of the financial aspects of it, and even in my time, it was a pretty big mystery where the account was. I think you would have to really speak to Dan Baker, who was treasurer, as I said, in my time, but even after I left, he maintained being treasurer.

We very quickly never hurt for money, and there was rarely an occasion where we turned down a committee's request for money, and I think you've heard about the sale of buttons, the sale of tee-shirts. The sale of the posters was a phenomenal source of income, and then we, of course, had larger events at clubs and bars. After I left, the auction occurred and that type of event that – and private donors giving us just thousands of dollars.

SS: That's what I was going to ask you.

JH: In cash, thousands. Because one of the things that happened during my time as administrator was that people wanted to know where this money was.

Tape II
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Somebody was using their personal banking account who that person could have gotten into serious trouble with the IRS. So this proposal was written as to what route we would take as a legal organization, and it was presented to the floor, and I think there were six options that you could – yes, here. Report on the Financial Status Subcommittee, and it was basically whether to incorporate, whether to seek tax status, and then the floor voted on this. I cannot say with certainty, but I do believe it was decided to incorporate. I'm not sure, but the debate was there, and that was what was important, and the whole group decided whatever direction the organization would take.

SS: Why did people donate money in cash? Was it because that we did not have a financial stature?

JH: Yeah, it was not. Yeah.

SS: It's not because they didn't want ACT UP on their checks?

JH: Oh, well, there was certainly. You probably know this from all the interviews than I do. There was certainly very high-level professionals in corporations who didn't dare write checks, married men who couldn't write checks to ACT UP, and would hand, myself included, envelopes of money that would get turned over to Dan.

SS: What about those bags of mail that you picked up every week? Did they have money in them?

JH: Oh, definitely had money, definitely had pleas for help. They were coming in from all over the country. Definitely had all the sorts of material you would expect to get from people in what we consider the Right Wing.

SS: How much would you say was brought in during your time, in terms of dollars?

JH: My time, you say my time, which was '88-'89, we were planning [Target] City Hall. We had no limitation in funding there. The FDA action, smaller actions like heading to South Carolina, which was a part of – we went out and immediately rented two vans, and there was never worry about that. Certainly, I think, after I left it became even a larger flow. The auction, as you probably know, down at the museum, I believe it was, in SoHo occurred, where they auctioned off Hockneys and all sorts of incredible pieces of art.

SS: So how much would you say came in during your –

JH: I don't know. Me, I don't know. From what I understand, it was certainly in the hundreds of thousands, if not, you know.

SS: Are you done with the working document? Because I'm really interested in that.

JH: Are you?

SS: Yeah.

JH: A few more highlights. It speaks to consensus model, although they call it the consensual model of decision-making, which I like, that would be the form of decision-making. But that, as I said, it would be for the Coordinating Committee, but it could be modified on the floor so that one person, of course, under a consensus model could block something, and it could actually block an action theoretically, so that there would be an effort to talk, take a straw vote, see where we were, talk some more in the general meeting, and ultimately the facilitator would make the decision, "We'll poll the group to see if we need to take this to a vote."

SS: Let me ask you a question about that. I remember from all my years in ACT UP, large numbers of people in the room coming to the understanding that they needed to move to a vote. How do you explain people being so in sync, such large numbers of people being so in sync that they knew when the moment of cooperation had ended and the moment of voting had begun?

JH: I don't know. I know what dynamic you're talking about, and sitting up front watching that, always being conscious of the time, and the only facilitator I remember working with, sadly – there were many, because there were always two on the floor, but Ann Northrop and I always had a good dynamic, and part of my job was to

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keep pushing her along because the agenda for the meeting was multi pages in front of me, and the recorder was sitting next to me trying to keep everything written up. But I don't know. I know exactly what you're referring to. Maybe it's probably a combination of the facilitator's skill and the work of the really experienced political organizers, the anti-war veterans who were key to the dynamic in the general meeting.

SS: Who are you thinking of when you say that?

JH: I am thinking – I can see them as clear as day. There's one gentleman that when I learned he was an anti-war activist, it became clear to me that his influence on the group was more of a mentor, because certainly people like me and many of us didn't have that political background, as I said at the beginning.

SS: Do you remember who it is?

JH: I don't.

SS: Is it Mark Rubin?

JH: Yes. It was. And who was his – there was someone else with him. But it was Mark Ruben, yes.

SS: Okay. Let's keep going.

JH: More?

SS: Yes.

JH: Here's an important point, the policy statement procedure. Oh, here it is. By the point this was written, which was 9/28/88, ACT UP was recognized and was an identity, as it says, with the public and the press, and so there was a process that needed to be designed to control the use of the ACT UP name in the press and on materials that were being sent out. So it was just a process of approval.

SS: What was the process?

JH: It had actually different levels to it. The wish was that it would all come to the general meeting through a committee report. But if the occasion didn't allow that, it could come to the Coordinating Committee, and if it was even needed faster than that, you'd go to a minimum of two Coordinating Committee members to get approval to get to be put out there and with the ACT UP name and the "Silence Equals Death" logo on it.

SS: Had there been any problems with misuses?

JH: I suspect there were, because I do remember Coordinating Committee meetings that, as you can imagine, were not always easy and were sometimes pretty much shouting matches over issues about what was being put out there.

SS: Because I'm wondering if this is about the conversation in ACT UP about taking positions on issues that were not AIDS-related.

JH: Yes. Yes.

SS: Is that what this is about?

JH: That came to the Coordinating Committee and as it spilled out onto the floor, but even one of the amendments that came that actually did get approved but it was from the Majority Action Committee, and it was that ACT UP would not hold benefits at clubs that do not have a first-come-first-serve-basis door policy. So it was growing into those areas and other social justice issues.

SS: Okay, great. Let's keep going. This is great.

JH: As I was just saying, printed materials which may require too quick a turnaround to be viewed by the Coordinating Committee as a group, such as fact sheets or

advertisements or press releases, must be approved by a representative of the committee and must come from the committee representative on the Coordinating Committee and must be approved by at least two, but preferably more representatives of the Coordinating Committee if possible, in person or by phone. Then the materials could go to print. Endorsements for events sponsored by other organizations would be submitted to the Coordinating Committee in writing for approval at least one week in advance. If the Coordinating Committee rejected the proposal, then it was brought before the full membership for approval.

Expenditure reports. And I have to say during the time I was administrator, we really did adhere to these, because this was the way we maintained what level of trust – it ebbed and flowed with the general meeting participants. There was always an underlying level, a certain degree of distrust of the Coordinating Council, understandably. Understandably.

But all proposed expenditures must be drafted through a committee, and even actually by the end of my tenure, that broke down. We had people coming as individuals saying, “We need this money for this event,” or this action, and we tried to hold them to taking it back to a committee, but there were factions in committees themselves. Then, as I said, expenditures of a thousand or less could be approved by the Coordinating Committee if it was by consensus. If not, then it went back out either to the committee for revision or to the full floor as part of the next meeting’s agenda.

Tape I
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Proposed committee expenditures of more than a thousand were brought to the Coordinating Committee by the representative before approval goes to the membership. The Coordinating Committee could recommend, discourage, or suggest a

modification of the proposed expenditure. However, the Coordinating Committee could not approve or deny the proposed expenditure without discussion and vote by the membership, which means, of course, the Monday night meeting. If a proposed expenditure of any amount is made by the membership at large, outside of the existing committee structure, after limited discussion, the membership must vote on which committee should claim the proposed expenditure. So there's always a relatively formal structure by which to account for the money. If after limited discussion by the membership, the proposed expenditure cannot be claimed by an existing committee, it would not deserve consideration. That's the language here as it would not fit under ACT UP's agenda.

Then there were some meeting procedures, discussing the role of the facilitators and how they were just facilitators, and they really had to work to keep their opinions out.

SS: Right. You set the agenda. They didn't set it. At the beginning, they set the agenda, right?

JH: That's correct. That's correct. There was no separation at the time in the beginning.

SS: Was there a reason that that changed?

JH: I think because, with all due and loving respect, I think some of the facilitators started to insert in the facilitation their priorities.

SS: Can you think of any examples? We are making record here.

JH: I realize that. It's also a long time ago. No, I can't remember, but I do know that the floor called the facilitators on it oftentimes, and, in fact, I believe you

might know, if I read one of the transcripts correctly – well, yeah, I don't know if names are appropriate, but there wasn't a facilitator who was not reelected, who was felt that he was inserting too much of his own opinion.

SS: Yeah, I'm not aware of that.

JH: The agenda for the general meetings would be planned by the administrator and the facilitators. We would come early, a half hour before the general meeting, and that became a huge process, a complex process, that ultimately resulted in people being upset because their issue didn't necessarily get in the top of the agenda, and these meetings, as you know, they'd start by seven, and they were still running by ten, if not eleven o'clock. Sometimes it would result in someone standing up on the floor and complaining about that, but I think overall, the process worked. People recognized that there was some kind of effort made to structure what was the most important thing to be put up at the top of the agenda, because the announcements were everything, were just anything that people wanted to make, and that's why we kept those to the end.

It describes briefly how the committee representatives should prepare their agenda. There should be comprehensive summations of current activities and all of the subcommittees. We had, as you know, committees that had numerous subcommittees, and our committee structure grew very rapidly, which, of course, made for a larger and larger Coordinating Council meeting.

Then it was the phone tree. The final part of the working document was basically that there would be a phone tree, but that how and when it would be activated, and it was not to include committee meetings, poster parties, letter writing or petition campaigns, organized occasions, e.g., fundraiser events. It was really for actions and for

actions with at least forty–eight–hour lead time, and it would be strongly recommended that it would be activated no more frequently than once a week, which oftentimes it was, if not more.

SS: How did seven hundred people debate this document? Did people just say okay, or was it really like this huge –

JH: This happened on 9/28. I wasn't actually there yet. That's when I was back out on the fields. I can't imagine.

Tape II
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SS: Then you became administrator. You were the first administrator. No. Tom Cunningham.

JH: No, Tom Cunningham followed me. Bradley was the secretary, who was sort of the prototype, and then they formalized it, and they made it an elected position. So I had to go before them.

SS: Was there any objection to creating the position of administrator?

JH: Mm–hmm. Mm–hmm.

SS: What was the objection?

JH: Again, there was concern of over–organizing, if you will, over–structuring ACT UP.

SS: Do you remember anyone's name who held that position, who opposed having an administrator?

JH: I don't remember names. I remember I probably actually provoked it because when I came in, as I said to you, it was really ACT UP where I learned so much, both in terms of organizing in terms of nonviolence activism and actually how to structure movement organization, because I went on from there to a number of other

things, including the march on Washington. But I came in, I don't know, to the organization, not your typical sort of, at the time, ACT UP member. I wasn't. I lived actually in Queens at the time because I was broke, and Peter Staley told me years later that by pursuing this position, they thought I was an infiltrator, because I had a 718 area code home phone number. And I stood up in front of the group when I had to make my speech as to why I wanted this position, and I was not – I don't want to go too far into this, because it is humorous but also a little bit painful. But I was completely not dressed like anyone else in ACT UP.

SS: What were you wearing?

JH: I was wearing bleached-out jeans and white sneakers, and I don't remember the shirt, but I truly stood out. I do remember the time that Victor Mendolia, who I met in ACT UP, took me down to the Army-Navy store in the West Village and bought me my first leather jacket and black jeans and tee-shirts and my Doc Martens. I really felt like I had made a step up in my political activism life.

SS: Were you wearing one of those pink shirts with the little alligator on it? {LAUGHTER}

JH: Oh, god, no, I did not have. No, I did not. I didn't own Izod shirts, but it was probably relatively close to that fashion statement.

SS: But it's interesting to come into an organization and want to be the administrator. That's just like a big leap.

JH: It is. It is.

SS: And since you didn't have a lot of history in ACT UP, what made you think that that would be a good idea?

JH: It is actually a question that I've asked myself often, because it led me many places, that experience, and how to do what we did in ACT UP was something, as I said at the beginning or close to the beginning, I even carried as far as when I worked at the embassy in Ethiopia.

The other point I'll make where I realized that it was unique was when I went back to graduate school for my second degree, I actually took organizational development classes, and it was one of times in my life, few times in my life, where I had that moment of, "Oh, this is what I do. This is what I love doing." It has a name. It has a feel. It has theory behind it. I didn't know it. I was just all – it was learned by experience, not by study and theoretical analysis.

SS: Who did you run against?

JH: The first time?

SS: Mm-hmm.

JH: I think it was Mickey Mouse. I'm not sure.

SS: Mickey Mouse?

JH: I didn't have a contender the first time. Nobody wanted the administrator's position. The second time, I did. The second time I had actually had two, but you can ask me the names and I apologize, but I do not remember.

SS: You do not remember who you ran against. Okay. So now we're at the point where you're now administrator. So tell us some of the high points of your experience in that role.

JH: First of all, it completely took over my life.

SS: Did you still have a job?

JH: I was under contract. This is what a lot of my ACT UP colleagues don't know, except the Coordinating Committee. I was under contract. Because of my educational background and training, I was hired by the training department at a major corporation in New York City and used all of their facilities. I mean the entire workspace, all of its office supplies were provided by a major corporation here in New York. I would mail out the Coordinating Committee minutes on a Wednesday in corporate envelope, and evidently I typed a wrong address one time and it came back and they opened it. They saw the ACT UP logo on the minutes, and it was bumped up to the vice president's office, and within a few hours I was called in and my contract was ended.

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SS: Oh, wow.

JH: But for a vast majority of the time that I was administrator, that kind of support was from a major corporation in midtown where I was doing some training consulting work. And I think that upped the communication flow, which I think was very helpful to the organization because getting just minutes out was erratic up until that point, and we just actually had people who would report back to me in a sense of they'd mail typed minutes of the general meeting to me, and I prepared them, look over them, edit them, prepare them, and we'd have them every week out on the table. You've probably heard about the information table that was always in the back of the room, and we even had regulations around – "regulation" is probably a bit too strong. We had the encouragement was that when you walked into the Community Center first room, the first documents on the table would be the agenda and minutes and other ACT UP materials and –

SS: TITA [Tell It To ACT UP].

JH: Sorry?

SS: Other ACT UP materials, i.e., TITA.

JH: Mm-hmm. I remember all the materials around that I have for like the City Hall action, and there were big documents that were written, and, of course, all of the nonviolent training materials would be put out, and the marshalling materials, how to be a marshal materials would be put out, and then you could put other materials out. It's like it started with one eight-foot, six-foot table, and then there was another six-foot table. So there was a lot of material, and we would produce them. We would produce all of our materials. There was a copy shop over on East Twelfth Street between Fifth Avenue and University Place, and we'd even have it set up that there would be – it was just wonderful how these people would take even these smallest responsibilities. There was one member who would go every week, because I'd get all the materials in there hours before, they'd copy it, and he'd go over in his car because the box would be stacked this high. He'd pick them up and drive them over a few blocks to the Community Center.

I remember getting a call up in my office the one day saying he wasn't going to be able to make it, and I couldn't find somebody with a car to go over and get it, and there I was walking towards Fifth Avenue with a load of boxes up to here, and somebody, somebody just stopped and said, "Can I help you?" I to this day don't know who that was that drove me over to the Community Center with all these materials, the agenda, etc.

SS: What were the major actions when you were administrator?

JH: Definitely City Hall.

SS: What was your role in that?

JH: That, I was a part of an affinity group, I was part of the Candelabras, and our job, our responsibility, was each affinity group had its own action, which we didn't all necessarily know the other group's action. We were actually deployed into the action, because the cops were all over us. They were always a step ahead of us in that action. We were deployed around the west side of City Hall to come around and try to get – because our purpose was to get into City Hall to speak to the mayor. So we circled around and stood there and tried to get in, and as I joked at the beginning, in terms of meeting my partner, we got all riled up and got a little past where we should have been emotionally and were trying to push through the barricades. The cops at that action, as you've probably heard, had all of their numbers covered with black electrical tape. John was our legal observer, because he had been arrested at Wall Street, and he was a graduate student at Columbia and couldn't afford another arrest at that time. As we pushed, the cops just then came over to us and took up the riot fences and pushed us to the ground and then arrested all of us, and we were off to jail. So I really was just part of an affinity group.

My challenge, personally, was there was so much to do as administrator that I didn't actually get to really enjoy the process of building actions or planning zaps. When some tensions arose in the organization, I took it upon myself to actually start visiting all of the committee meetings. So every night of the week, I was either at Majority Actions or Treatment and Data, which I totally didn't understand, but would go there to see if there were things they needed me to know as administrator.

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SS: Can you give an example of a specific tension that you pursued?

JH: The one that I mentioned. There were some tensions in Majority Action Committee.

SS: What were they?

JH: Just leadership issues and –

SS: You mean like who was leadership of Majority Action Committee?

JH: Yeah, and there was some unfortunate issues about how Majority Action was using money and where it was going.

SS: Who raised those issues?

JH: Members of the Majority Action Committee.

SS: Oh, I see. It was an internal conflict.

JH: It was eventually brought to the Coordinating Committee, and it eventually became an issue of money missing. But the actual resolution of that happened after – or the exposure of that happened after I left and was in Washington.

SS: This is not the Dan Williams thing?

JH: It is the Dan Williams thing.

SS: Oh, okay. Okay.

JH: It was happening early on.

SS: Oh, okay. So first it was brought by Majority Action to you?

JH: Oh, there was a good deal. There was a good deal –

SS: Could you actually just tell us, just tell me the story?

JH: At the time, I didn't know. What emerged was that Dan was taking money to support his habit.

SS: Right, but how did it come to the surface?

JH: Well, because when committees would come and get approval for money, they had to report with providing receipts, etc. The dynamics and the political correctness of it is that Majority Action sometimes got off without submitting receipts. We didn't demand it of them.

SS: Who was the Majority Action representative to the Coordinating Council?

JH: Dan Williams.

SS: He was the rep?

JH: For a while, yeah.

SS: I see. Okay.

JH: Natural things that I've come to learn happen in these types of movement organizations.

SS: What about political conflicts and disagreements in the organization? How did they affect you as administrator?

JH: I think the most painful one was around the emergence of the split within the Treatment and Data Committee. That was hard.

SS: How would you characterize that?

JH: It generates a lot of sadness in me. I think it really spoke to the fundamental character of ACT UP and who were the members of ACT UP and how, as you know, since you said you were part of it, we drew all sorts, across class, not so much across ethnic groups, but certainly straight people were there. But T&D became very focused on drugs into the body and really weren't interested in the larger socio-political

issues that were contributing to this matter. That was hard, particularly with those of us whose political consciousness was growing as we were working in this organization.

SS: Did you have political discussions with people inside T&D? Did you argue about this?

JH: Did I?

SS: Yeah.

JH: No. I wasn't well-versed in the issues. But the general issue of what was more important, getting down to an FDA meeting and spending the money and the resources to get them down to testify, or was it more important to protest, and sometimes those sort of secondary methods of decision-making were used in order to get people down, even though I would suspect the vast majority in general meeting would have opposed sitting down with the insiders at that point in time.

SS: So you feel like in some ways T&D violated the intention of the working document?

JH: I think they pushed it to the limit, to be diplomatic about it, yes.

SS: How come they got away with that?

JH: I don't know. They did.

SS: Here's my big question. Let me just say that many, many people have talked to us about this.

JH: Have they?

SS: So it's not like there's no secret information that you have that we don't have. All I want to know is what you think and what you've experienced. But the question I'm asking you is why is it that for a long time ACT UP was able to be

all these different points of view simultaneously and all these different direction of action, and at one point that was no longer possible?

JH: Right. Well, then you know, privileged white boys.

SS: What?

JH: Privileged white boys.

SS: That's not what everyone – everyone has a different view on this.

JH: Really?

SS: Oh, sure. Why? They just didn't want –

JH: They didn't want – you know some of the players, and I don't – my opinion is that they didn't eventually adhere as deeply to the values and principles of ACT UP, and I want to inject that I understand that most of T&D was made up of people who were HIV-positive. So, unlike people like me who wanted to manage a larger organization, but was not – I was HIV-negative, so I didn't have that level of passion, of fear, and everything that drove them to do that, to get drugs into the bodies that they did. So, again, I recognize that I was coming at it from a different place and also from a place of trying to preserve the overall organization.

SS: But there were –

JAMES WENTZY: We have to change tapes.

SS: First you talked about the issue of entitlement as being a factor in the split, and then you brought the issue of being HIV-positive. But weren't there HIV-positive people on both sides of the split?

JH: Mm-hmm, oh, yeah.

SS: So it's not really just about being HIV – then let me ask you this.

JH: No, it wasn't. Of course there was a combination of factors, but I think if one would go back—I want to speak carefully here—and look at how it split, and I think you would see in general those who stayed with the group and had the feeling like it should stay part of the group were coming from a different political understanding of how the group could work and how it could be effective. Then you had the ones who weren't so much interested in ACT UP going into a healthcare activist group, which started even to develop when I was there in the early days, but really wanted to focus on this one particular issue and getting the government to do it right or do it. Do it and do it right.

SS: Who were the people who stayed in ACT UP from T&D after the split?

JH: The reason I don't know is the split occurred after I left.

SS: Oh, okay, so this is before.

JH: Yes, because I left in August of '89 to go to Washington.

SS: Let me ask you this, since you were so deeply inside the administration of the organization. I understand that there were people who felt that what they were doing was so important and perhaps that they themselves were so important, not sure about the second, but definitely the first, that certain rules should not apply to them because they had necessity defense in some way. Do you feel that if they had actually sat down with the group and said this is our full agenda, we want to be able to participate in these committees, we want to be insiders in the government, this is what we think is going to work, that ACT UP would have said no?

JH: Looking back, I think I see your point, and I think if enough patience could have been mustered that it could have been maintained as part of the organization and we wouldn't have had TAG.

SS: This is something I'm starting to think about, because the way we think about this changes after every interview, and I'm wondering if it was the duplicity that was the thing that caused the split, not really the politics, because there was such divergent politics in ACT UP all those years.

JH: Lots of differences lived in that meeting every Monday night.

SS: So maybe it's the method.

JH: Yeah, the way it came about is, I think, a very important point to note.

SS: It's interesting you raise that ACT UP was on its way to becoming more of a healthcare organization. Can you explain what you mean by that?

JH: I look at the list, the contact sheet that had all of the committees and who you could contact if you wanted to, and then their subcommittees. We had Insurance and Access. We had INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] issues. We had prison issues. We had pediatrics issues. The committees grew, and then we had the Healthcare is a Right T-shirt as part of ACT UP's repertoire of fashion attire.

SS: But did you see an organizational trend in that direction?

JH: No, because, as I said at the beginning, I feel like – this might be my own mythologizing, but '89 was an incredible intensive time of actions. I remember sitting in the meeting for the FDA action where I believe it was Michael Nesline and several others had gone down with a hidden camera to get us prepped to show us how we were going to get into the building and where we could – there are lots of stories about

what happened down there and how some of it was just pure chaos. Then in that year, the Women's Caucus came up with the Women and AIDS handbook. That happened. That was published in March of '89. You're smiling. Were you part of this?

SS: No.

JH: Maxine [Wolfe], of course, Maria Maggenti, Heidi Dorow, goodness gracious, these names I haven't thought about in years. This is the planning document for the City Hall action. This was what media did for outreach.

SS: Who saw that planning document?

JH: That was distributed, and this is the kind of thing I would take over to – or they would take over to, I didn't necessarily take all of these over, but they would take over to the copy center. We kept that copy center in business for years.

SS: But then you say the police were always on top of us.

JH: Right.

SS: They just came and picked up the planning document at the meeting.

JH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, we opened up every meeting, as I'm sure you know, because Ann always would say, "If there are any members of the New York City Police Department, you're required to identify yourself now." And we'd all wait and look around, and, of course, nothing would ever happen.

1989 was the year of the international conference in Montreal, which we had a major participation in that.

SS: Did you go to that?

JH: I did go to that. We also had that year one of the first – Jim Eigo didn't leave. Jim Eigo is one of the ones who stayed behind and really stayed with the organization, to many of us, just a mythological, just an amazing man.

SS: Our hero.

JH: Oh, my god. Inspiring. And he, with several others, released the document that had this description that we could understand about certain drug processes and names even. This was the research agenda that we took up to Montreal, and then the media immediately put together all of the coverage that we got, and, as I'm sure you know, the conference occurred when a half a dozen major world events – Tiananmen Square occurred, and yet we still were like third or fourth in the national media.

SS: Can we just observe how primitive that media kit is.

JH: This is not the media kit. This is the compilation of the coverage we got that was then distributed at a meeting afterwards, like in the different newspapers around the U.S. even though it was we had contingents from various countries there.

SS: What page did the *Times* story appear on?

JH: That's a good question. It just says that it was mentioned by *New York Times*, but what's this? *Newsday*.

SS: Right. But they had that, what's her name, who covered everything for – Laurie Garrett.

JH: No, this was Cathy Woodward, [Catherine] Woodard. No, but you're right. Laurie was there. Here, this looks like – yeah, the *New York Times*, a photograph of Stephen Joseph holding up a document, which was a gentleman who was a constant source of our rage.

SS: So the *Times* managed not to mention us –.

JH: Let's see what it says. Montreal, June 5, they did say that we were just mentioned so we're clearly not the story.

“Members of an advocacy group, the AIDS coalition to unleash power” – this is the second-to-the-last paragraph – “criticized Dr. Joseph's plan at the meeting. They cited concerns about the ability of the health department to protect the confidentiality of names on the list, because, of course, he was advocating mandatory testing.”

SS: But actually, ACT UP took over the stage and screamed, “No more business as usual.”

JH: Oh, yes. We were all in the back.

SS: They don't mention that.

JH: Right. No, no, no, They don't. New York, that was where we're all waiting.

SS: It's amazing how distorted that *Times* coverage is.

JH: Yeah. And the housing, you must have heard a lot about how housing works grew out of ACT UP.

SS: Mm-hmm.

JH: August 30th [1989?] was their publication of their first handbook on homelessness and AIDS, so this was all happening in this one.

SS: What's the broadside there?

JH: This was about Montreal. This was the post newspaper that we put out.

SS: The ACT UP reports? Mm-hmm.

JH: Post event. Then this is one of those documents that represent how some people were just taking it a little bit, but this is a hidden history of queer activism.

SS: Who put that together?

JH: It's a project of ACT UP. I suspect there are names in here somewhere. Walter Armstrong, Heidi Dorow, David Douglas, Peter Fleming, Robert Garcia, Ron Goldberg, of course, Jon Nalley, Polly Thistlethwaite Macky Alston. Gosh, these names. I hadn't thought about some of these people in a long time. Yes, and it goes back. There's a chronology in that, yeah. One of the major things, if I may?

SS: Go, go.

JH: This is completely off of – I just brought this to represent, which is not even all of it, just the work that was being done by the committees. Because we grew so large and so quickly, and we had no central place to do work, committees, of course, were meeting in homes unless if they were too large, they would rent a space that we'd pay for at the center. But there was a call for, and the floor approved, the search for a workspace, and our workspace was – I was on that search committee, as was Maxine Wolfe, and we ended up, as you might know, renting space in the southwest corner on the second floor of that huge building on Eighth. It fronted Eighth Avenue, but our office was on the Ninth Avenue side. But at night in order to get to it, you had to go up the Eighth Avenue side to like the seventh floor so that you bypassed all of the truck parking areas and loading docks, and then you would walk all the way down the block and go back down to the second floor. Then they moved to something further up north, which was, I think, a workspace they had for a number of years.

SS: I just want to ask you a little bit about our relationships with others – I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

JH: No, go ahead. I was just looking at my notes, too.

SS: With other chapters of ACT UP during your time that you were administrator, how did that work?

JH: Yes, that's when it started. That was fascinating. They were, as you probably know, growing every week, and the event, the ACT NOW [the AIDS Coalition to Network, Organize and Win] also occurred after I was in Washington and actually helped form ACT UP/D.C. But this is the list, and I meant to count, but let me, and I can do this quickly, because there's ten per page, like seventy chapters around the world. Let's see if I can find out two humorous ones.

SS: Yes, tell us some of them.

JH: ACT UP/Anchorage. ACT UP/Central Illinois. I think all of our major cities are represented here. ACT UP/Idaho. I don't know quite how they – but anyway. Two ACT UP/Long Islands. ACT UP/Little Rock. ACT UP/Montreal. ACT UP/Maine. ACT UP/Mendocino. Milwaukee. Minnesota. Monroe. Monroe, what is that? Louisiana. Miami. Orange County. Oklahoma City. Oberlin. St. Louis. Puerto Rico. Look at that. There's one in western Massachusetts headquartered at Hampshire College. Victoria, British Columbia. Yeah. I'm trying to look. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Hartford, Connecticut. Hawaii. Sonoma County, that might have been a fun meeting to go to. Orlando.

SS: How about the international ones?

JH: Yeah. They're not – I think this is the early one. I did have another list here that I think carried –

SS: What was their relationship with us? Were we accountable to them, were they accountable to us, or did we just sell them tee-shirts? What was the political relationship?

JH: Again, this just started while I was there. I think it really blossomed. There was an ACT NOW, which was supposed to be the national coordinating body that each organization was to send a representative to. Before we actually designated a representative, it was me, and I would get the information and then disseminate it at the Monday meetings. But we actually had someone who was elected to represent us at their meetings and on their conference calls.

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SS: Who was that?

JH: Yeah, that's what I'm trying to look for here. I saw it on here before I came. Boy. We also had a committee by the name of So You Want To Do An Action. {LAUGHS} I don't see it. Maybe if I –

SS: It's okay. Take your time. I'd like to know.

JH: Oh, okay. I saw it on here. This is just astonishing when I pull these out what this brings back. I'm sorry. I don't see it. ACT UP/Moscow. We had a representative here who was in touch with ACT UP/Moscow. I'm going to find it as soon as I leave here. Again, how we started to move out, to go back to that one question, we had groups like ACT UP Against the New World Order. That was actually after my time. Boy, I'm really sorry, I don't.

SS: That's okay. Would you email it to me? Because I'd really like to know who that person is.

JH: Sure.

JAMES WENTZY: Can you show the contact sheet?

JH: This is, this is truly a representative of how complex they were.

SS: Yeah. Thanks.

JH: The front would always be a monthly calendar of meetings for the upcoming week, and one person, at least for, during the time I was administrator, and I can see him as clear as day. He was a corporate type. In fact, he worked on Wall Street and he would come. It was immaculate. There was never a typo in this. He would bring it, and he would bring it an hour before so we could run it over to the copy center. That was all he did. That's not all he did for ACT UP, but that was his weekly responsibility. It just fascinated me.

SS: Who was it?

JH: I just saw him. I don't think he did it after I left, but there was a contact sheet on one of these. I'm sorry.

SS: That's okay.

JH: Contact sheet, this one is Chris Frieman, but this is older. This is after.

SS: Oh, I know him. Yeah.

JH: But I can't remember who the one was while I was administrator.

SS: Is there anything that we haven't mentioned that you feel is important?

JH: I'm here, of course – the facilitator was a different role. I didn't organize actions. I helped facilitate them. I made sure that Dan and I were in constant communication about money and the planning events. No, I think we've covered it.

SS: We've covered it. Jim?

JIM HUBBARD: Yeah. I'm still wondering if there's more information about how the ACT UP chapters came to be and what kind of relationship there was between ACT UP/New York and the others.

JH: Yeah. I just mentioned, what, what did I say, forty, fifty, sixty?

SS: Seventy, you said.

JH: Seventy chapters. Now, we worked a lot with the ACT UP/LA Chapter, but I don't even know if it was called ACT UP. Yes, it was called ACT UP, but they had a different slogan. Ours was Silence Equals Death. Theirs was Action Equals Life.

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And San Francisco, which I'm sure you've heard, because I've noticed some of the people you've interviewed, the whole story about what happened out there between ACT UP/San Francisco and ACT UP/Golden Gate. I actually, once I went to Washington to the National Commission on AIDS as a policy analyst, actually maintained contact with several of them. ACT UP/Dallas because we did a hearing in Dallas, and we worked with them. They testified. Then when I started to do international work, ACT UP/Paris was a very important contact. But I think ACT UP/Atlanta was used because there was a CDC action in, I think, 1990, which was again, I left in August of '89.

SS: Did they have to agree to anything politically to be an ACT UP chapter? They just had to say they were ACT UP?

JH: Yeah, and, in fact, that was – now that you say that, I do remember that as a floor discussion, as people concerned about other groups forming to use our name, and is there some way we need to control that.

SS: Right, because ACT UP/San Francisco didn't believe in HIV.

JH: You're right.

JW: Yeah, after a couple years.

SS: Pardon me? Yeah, after a couple years. Yeah.

JH: Yeah, that did come up, but it was felt at least in the time that I was there, that it was more important to get the chapter and the organizing going.

SS: What do you do now?

JH: Now I'm actually a research associate at a higher education institution, because, as I said, I just came back from being posted to our embassy in Ethiopia to run the HIV/AIDS program there, prior to which I was at USAID headquarters running all of the community-based centrally funded programs, meaning all the contracts to organizations that were supposed to support indigenous organizations because of what they thought was my background and my expertise. I was in charge of them.

I actually just came from a meeting up at Columbia to – I'm pretty disgusted by the way we do international development and looking to develop a coalition of folks who were going to write a complementary model that does, in fact, engages communities both in developing countries more closely with communities in developing countries that alters the dynamic of the power of our implementing partners, those large

international NGOs that get the multimillion-dollar contracts from the U.S. government to run health and education programs, and we talk about sustainability. But the very nature of the way the system works, the business works, they're in and out of countries very quickly.

SS: What failures in global AIDS can be traced back to disagreements with inside ACT UP or reflect certain kind of factionalization within AIDS in general?

JH: Oh, my. Oh, great. I don't know. That's an interesting – I actually think ACT UP has made a major contribution to the development of international AIDS. I don't mean just the issues of bringing attention to our political leaders, but I mean the actual transference of some of the ways that projects get developed, the engagement of community leaders in that. That's not done nearly enough, but I think that's part of the contribution.

SS: But what about this thing that we were discussing earlier, in different terms but a disagreement within ACT UP about the primary importance of access? Isn't that really what's at the root of the global AIDS crisis, that there's not a commitment to access?

JH: No, I would have to disagree with you as I –

SS: Okay, good. Go ahead.

JH: —understand your question, because the emergency plan that was launched by this administration that says that the initial five years had thirty billion, and I think they just reauthorized it. I don't think they actually have appropriated any money for it yet, which under the current circumstances we're living financially, I'm

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disheartened that we will not actually get the proper level of funding for that. But we have opened up access in fifteen-plus countries, but access also opened up a dozen other issues that are even more complicated than just getting the drugs into the bodies in those countries. I think it speaks to how we were somewhat naïve in trying to transfer the models we had into countries so rapidly that didn't have the infrastructure.

My work in Ethiopia was – we had plenty of drugs in country that we could use. We had no distribution mechanism, because all the health clinics in the northern regions had no docs, and so we were making it up as we went, trying to figure out new levels of healthcare workers that could fill in and be trained just to do monitoring of people on medication.

SS: I only have one question left. Do you guys have anything else?

Okay. So looking back, what would you say – this is a classic question I ask everybody.

JH: Yeah, and I forgot to prepare for this one. {LAUGHS}

SS: That's okay. What do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what was its biggest disappointment?

JH: Yeah, I would say its achievement was not just the pressure it put on the U.S. government, but at a time when there didn't seem to be much activity in the arena of the political organizing that had gone on years before around the Vietnam War, etc., it brought a new level of awareness that you see, as I just showed you, in those seventy-plus chapters, that while I would suspect fifty-some if not sixty-some no longer exist, people like myself walked away from that with an entirely new outlook on social justice, on role of government, on the role of community organizations, and I'd like to

think that a lot of us have continued in doing that work, at least from what I learned in ACT UP.

Its biggest disappointment? I would have to say that its biggest disappointment is that it followed a typical route of an organization of that nature, that it couldn't rise above – and maybe I have to look at – now that you asked me the question, I'm going to answer it this way. The role of how you set up the structures to maintain the organization and how they affected the spontaneity and the principles of everyone had a voice on the floor and how, in order to manage that more, we had to develop systems that on the edges started to, by virtue of the design of the system, not allow everybody by virtue of the argument of not enough time or that we never prioritized what our issues were and so there was this sort of growth of committees that represented all of the issues that were related to ACT UP that both in the domestic arena are there in the international arena as well in terms of pediatrics issues and in terms of nutritional issues. They were there here, and they're there now.

So I think the biggest disappointment is that we really don't have a functional ACT UP when we have just found out finally, and I suspect it's even greater than 40 percent, that the government finally released its statistics on prevalence rates in the States, and suddenly we're finding this massive increase.

SS: And there's no one to respond.

JH: Right, there's no committee, because it's been – we have the GMHCs all over the country, and we have had, although we don't right now, a very effective lobbying organization in Washington to pressure, because most people think – I'll take that comment back. I'll just leave it at that.

SS: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. It's very helpful to us, really. It's a lot of information I didn't have before.