

**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: **Drew Hopkins**

Interview Number: **167**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **March 11, 2014**

**SARAH SCHULMAN: Okay, great, so you just look at me.**

DREW HOPKINS: Okay.

**SS: And we start, you just tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.**

DH: Okay. My real age?

**SS: Yeah, your real age. Everyone – we're all up there.**

DH: Yeah. My name's Drew Hopkins. I'm 52. And we're in my apartment, in Washington Heights. And it is the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2014.

**SS: And like many ACT UPpers, you were, or are, at your heart, a downtown person. You have another apartment on Elizabeth Street.**

DH: Yeah, for 25 years, I lived on Elizabeth Street between Prince and Houston. And that's still my home. I mean, I'm enjoying living in Washington Heights, because I have a dog, and there are lots of parks. But every time I get out of the subway at Broadway-Lafayette, I'm overwhelmed by the feeling; ah, that I'm home.

**SS: And your landlord has put you here temporarily –**

DH: Yeah. I'm one of — it's — ours is one of hundreds and hundreds of buildings in the city that the city owns. Right? During the bankruptcies of the '70s, and in part due to rent-control laws, landlords, in droves, went bankrupt. So when a landlord went bankrupt, somebody had to take care of the tenants; you couldn't just put them out in the street. So buildings then were taken over by the city.

So our building — and this is something I usually don't share with New Yorkers, because you don't talk about really good deals, heh, on apartments — but a lot of people have this deal, where our building downtown, like this building, is owned by

the city. The city doesn't want these properties; they want to divest themselves of these properties. So the way they do that is they implemented programs whereby tenants manage the buildings, in preparation for taking over full ownership, and for converting the buildings into coops. Actually, HDSCs, which is Housing and Development – something.

So every tenant in the building downtown has been moved out. And the city, with federal funds and matching funds all over the place, is completely renovating that building. Once the renovations are complete, which will be in the fall of this year, everybody moves back; we pay a – you know, shockingly nominal fee to purchase the building, to purchase shares in the building; and then we become homeowners, and we manage the building henceforth.

**SS: A happy story.**

DH: Yeah.

**SS: Amazing.**

DH: Yeah. If it weren't for the series of coincidences and felicitous conjunctures that landed me in the building on Elizabeth Street, I would never have been able to pursue a Ph.D.; I would never have had the liberty to pursue my own interests. I would always have been caught up in that vicious cycle that grips so many New Yorkers, of having my choices limited by the very real constraints of eight- or nine-thousand-dollar-a-month rents.

**SS: Right. And we should introduce your dog here.**

DH: Yes. Olivia, come here.

**SS: Olivia, who I can see is going to be part of this experience.**

DH: Yeah. Olivia, come here. Come here, baby. This is Olivia; the love of my life.

**SS: Hi, Olivia. So –**

DH: Who's a very popular dog in the neighborhood.

**SS: I'm sure.**

DH: Everybody knows Olivia.

**SS: James, can you still hear Drew?**

**JAMES WENTZY: Yes.**

DH: Am I okay? Sound? Is sound okay?

00:05:00

**JW: The mic, if you could bend it away from the shirt.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: So it doesn't touch the cloth.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: Okay, there you go.**

DH: How's that?

**SS: Great, so where did you grow up? Where were you born?**

DH: I was born in Virginia, in southwest Virginia; Roanoke, Virginia.

Usually I say I'm from Charlottesville, because my parents later moved to Charlottesville. But I grew up in Roanoke, which is the armpit of the Chesapeake – yeah, not the Chesapeake, of the Shenandoah Valley.

It's a town that rose up as a coal town. It was originally called Big Lick. And then, because it's right at the juncture between the Shenandoah Valley and the coal

fields of southwest Virginia and Kentucky, and West Virginia – so it was, it became basically a railroad town, for the transfer of coal.

**SS: And are you from coal people?**

DH: No, no.

**SS: No.**

DH: Well, I don't know. No, in fact, I wasn't. I know something now. I was adopted. I was born before Roe. And what I subsequently found out, in my thirties, after asking my entire life, finally my mother revealed — Olivia, cut it out. We're going to have to crate you. We're going to have to crate you.

I subsequently discovered that a good deal more was known about my birth parents than had been revealed. So my mother was a teenager, 15 or 16; and she had an older boyfriend. And I was born in May, which means I was conceived in August, which was when he was going off to college. This is – the actual sequence is something that I just infer from the evidence that I know. She was younger; she was going to be staying in Roanoke. He was going up to Charlottesville to go to UVA. So we know that he had a little bit of money, he was a good WASP.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: You go – and I've gone to the alumni center, and looked through the yearbooks from that period. Nothing but WASPs. Not a single black face, not a single person who did not appear – okay. Okay, Olivia; you're going to go in your crate. Unless you can settle down. There you go.

Anyway – should I put her into the crate? It'll – she'll quiet down.

**SS: Well I think if you give her those treats – put them out of sight, is my suggestion.**

DH: She'll tear the box apart, and that'll occupy her.

**SS: Oh, okay. Go tear the box apart.**

DH: Yeah. So my mother was – I'm going to put her in her crate.

**SS: Okay. Careful. Remember that you're plugged in here.**

**JIM HUBBARD: Do you want me to unplug you?**

DH: Olivia, come here. Come here, sweet pea, you have to go in your crate. You have to go in your crate. There you go. That will keep her occupied. Sorry, she's a spoiled dog, but that's what makes her sweet.

**SS: So you were born in '61.**

DH: I was born in '61, May '61, in Roanoke, Virginia, which is not a – it's still not a good place to be gay. But it was then a horrible place to be gay. It's like being born in the worst areas of Texas now, gay. And of course, that was an era when –

**SS: So how did that manifest itself?**

00:10:00 DH: It manifested itself by internalizing self-loathing; and resisting, in every way, acknowledging my homosexuality; and in fighting it tooth and nail. Which is, you know, it's the story of my generation of gays, really, everywhere. I have a nephew who is gay, and who grew up in – because my brother stayed in Roanoke. He loved Roanoke. And he got appointments in New York and elsewhere, but he always wanted to return to Roanoke, and he seized the first opportunity to do so. And that's where he's raised his family. And one of his sons is gay, and it's like – I had a gay uncle when I was growing up. And he said that from the time that he first met me, when I was five, he said,

oh, this kid's queer, you know. Because he could recognize, you can recognize it. But Graham, my nephew, grew up, even in Roanoke, there's enough support and enough acknowledgment that homosexuality is simply a natural variance of sexual identity that he was able to come out fully in high school. Which was unthinkable, utterly unthinkable, in my – and the media images at the time – the only media images at the time were Al Pacino, the crazy gay; or Looking For Mr. Goodbar, right?

**SS: Now you have a Ph.D., and you're a Columbia professor.**

DH: Yes.

**SS: Were your parents educated?**

DH: Yeah. My dad – I come from a long line of educators, in fact. Not my immediate parents, my adopted parents, but my father's father, whose named Guy Fox, which is really cool; right, it's F-O-X — he had a Ph.D., I think. But he was high in the administration of the Denver school system, which is where my father grew up. And my eldest uncle was a very prominent professor of education at Ann Arbor. He's since died.

So education was very much a part of life. But my father was an electrical – is an electrical engineer, and spent his life working at GE, building the nuclear navy, which is, heh – it's very – I really enjoy, I love my grandfather. He was a remarkable person; incredibly brilliant, and with ethics that were piercing and unrelenting. And he was very progressive. So he joined all these organizations. Immediately after college, I worked as a political advocate for various organizations. And every single organization I worked for — at this point, my grandfather was in his nineties — he was a donor. I would find him on the database, right?

**SS: So what kind of politics – you got involved in politics before gay politics?**

DH: Yes. Yes. It's in fact – I resisted affirming or acknowledging my homosexuality in every way possible until I moved to New York, which is immediately after completing my undergrad, which I did in Colorado. The day of graduation, I moved to New York. And it was, at the first gay pride parade, which is almost immediately afterwards, that I finally felt at home in a community. But this is the Reagan era, and so being gay was always already politicized, it was a political act to come out. And the extraordinarily dynamic kind of political culture in the gay community is what enabled me to find a juncture by which to construct a positive gay identity – just because of the ability to participate in political movements that I was able to make peace with and affirm my gay identity.

**SS: So what kinds of organizations did you work with?**

00:15:00 DH: Well, before ACT UP, I was working with other general political organizations, like the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, and other kind of anti-Reagan, military-anti, anti-nuclear organizations – Greenpeace. But then ACT UP came along. Prior to ACT UP, I'd been working with GMHC –

**SS: Well, let's go back a little bit –**

DH: Okay.

**SS: – before GMHC. So when did –**

DH: Okay. Olivia, you're going to have to –

**SS: You're going in the crate.**

DH: You're going to go in your crate. I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry, sweet pea. I know, I know. You gotta be quiet. You gotta be quiet. Because she's just going to sit there and whine. Come on, baby dear, I know, I know, I know. Usually, you like your crate. But today, I bet you're not going to.

That's okay, baby, you just stay in there. And sausage.

Oooh, what a good girl. You just stay there. What a good girl.

**SS: Okay, thanks, Drew.**

DH: Sure.

**SS: So let's go back to before GMHC.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: So you come to New York; and when did you first become aware of AIDS?**

DH: I first became aware of AIDS earlier, when I was living in Colorado. I put myself through school. My parents were willing to support a four-year education, but only one that would culminate in a degree that would guarantee me a livelihood. Right? And I went out to school, and I discovered language and literature, and art history. And they're like, we don't see where this is going, and we're only committed to supporting an education that will end up with a business degree or engineering; something that after four years will provide you with a secure career.

And I said, okay, then don't support me. And so I dropped out. And went to France, and bummed around Europe for awhile. Went actually back to France – I'd been there earlier. And then I came back to the States, and moved back to Colorado, thinking that I'd be able to have in-state status, because the only place in the States I'd

lived was Colorado. But because I'd been abroad – anyway, I had to spend a year in Colorado in order to get in-state status. So that year I spent in Denver, working as a waiter. And during that time — and this is now January of 1984 — my appendix ruptured. Prior to that, though – I should note that I had already – my initial coming out – I actually, like, fell in love with my first, and really, the most head-over-heels love in my life. But he was kind of a club guy, which never interested me. But I went out clubbing. Had sex, like, twice; both times got crabs. And then, in January of 1984, my appendix ruptured. And I went to the public hospital there, because – this is before all emergency rooms were required to treat patients who presented, right? That was a law that came into effect somewhat later. So I had to go to the public hospital.

It was in the elevators of that public hospital that they were announcing — because it was a teaching hospital — they were announcing conferences on this new phenomenon, then called SIDS - right? SIDS, SIDS – yeah.

**SS: GRID?**

DH: Huh?

**SS: GRID?**

DH: No, it wasn't called GRID.

**SS: It was called SIDS?**

DH: Yeah –

**SS: Okay.**

DH: It was called –

**SS: Compromise –**

DH: Immune deficiency syndrome – yeah. Uh – and, you know, particularly affecting homosexual men. And so this old discourse just started reverberating in my head. I said, okay: two bouts of crabs; and, and now I'm, you know, I'm very ill; and it just seemed like – it seemed like a sign from the cosmos that in fact, it was fundamentally immoral to practice, to act, on homosexual urges. So I went back into the closet, right? So that was – so I was aware of AIDS before it was even AIDS. And that compelled me back into the closet, which –

**SS: But did you test positive at that time?**

DH: No.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: No. I'm still negative.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

00:20:00 DH: By – you know, some miracle. Because, you know, I'm – I engaged in risky behavior, and I'm a bottom, which are, bottoms are more, you know, are more prone to get it. So – but, as of, you know, the last test, which is a couple months ago, I'm still negative. I don't know how.

**SS: You have a genetic predisposition or something.**

DH: I don't know. Yeah – to the degree that – anyway. Yes. So I suppressed my homosexuality from thence. And turned, in fact – I have a really good aptitude for languages, right? Which I learned when I spent some time in my late teens in France and like that became fluent. And then I started studying German. And I wanted a language that could – becoming fluent in another language – in itself, at this point in my personal development, which is my late teens and early twenties — a time when, in this

culture, everything is focused on building kind of the edifice of a durable identity, right? And through becoming completely immersed in another culture, I found, again, kind of critical purchase on so much bullshit that had been ingrained in me that I thought: I need to learn more languages, because then I'll be able to get rid of more and more bullshit, and eventually, I'll get down to this core, this fictive core that is not my transcendent self, in which to ground my identity. I don't believe in any of this stuff anymore, but –

So I thought, I'm going to, I need to study the language, study a language that is utterly unlike anything that I've studied. And that will give me the real critical purchase. And that's when I decided to study Chinese. When I was in France – if you want all this background – France had always had better relationships with China, and cultural exchanges with China. If you look at news coverage of China — and I have done that — in Great Britain and the United States, throughout the Maoist period and immediate post-Mao period, it's all, like, realpolitik, and it's all political machinations, and trying to divine the will of the Communist Party. In France, they were talking about art, the art scenes, and music. So while I was in France, I read these extensive pieces on this exploding art culture in this immediate post-Mao period – so the early 1980s. And something clicked, and I said, China is going to be the future. And things are really happening there.

And what better way to get completely outside of myself, and gain a completely different vantage on myself, than to study Chinese? Right? So I started studying Chinese, which is, you know, it has nothing to do with my activism – or my activism in terms of ACT UP or AIDS. But it has, it's – my biography can't be understood without China, because China is a major part of that.

But at that point, I also saw China, and the study of Chinese, as a refuge from this anxious, consuming struggle with sexuality and desires that I wanted to expunge.

So China is also tied up with my rejection of my gay identity. Eventually, it ceased being that, thank god. Anyway – so – yes.

00:25:00 So I then went off to China. I went off to Taiwan and China to study. And now we're in '85, '84-'85, right? And '86. And then I came back; finished my studies at Colorado; moved to New York in May of 1986; and it was that, the following June, that Gay Pride Day, that I had, like many people who come from the provinces, who see the celebration of gay identity on Gay Pride Day — Gay Pride Day; now, it's not as significant in that regard, although it still has that role — but at that point, it was this blessed island of affirmation in a sea of repulsion and negation. And that really enabled me to make that hurdle, and say, my god, it's fine to be gay. And I'm gay, and I've always been gay.

So at this point, I was already doing political work, but not related to AIDS. But immediately after that, I started looking for ways to engage politically in the gay movement. And again, then, I'd always been political. I grew up in a house where political discourse was always ongoing. My mother was a dedicated — she's a suburban — she's from New York. Neither of my parents were from Virginia. My father's from Denver, my mother's from New York. And she found herself in the South, which was still profoundly racist. And she was committed to the civil rights movement. She didn't go march in, heh. But, you know, with money, and every social instance when she could express her displeasure at — you're in line at a grocery store; then, it was, if there was a

black woman in line, a white woman just assumed that she could walk in front of her.

And my mother would intervene, which is, you know, a big act for –

**SS: So when you made this big decision –**

DH: Yeah.

**SS: – when did you first go to ACT UP?**

DH: I first went to ACT UP – uh – the – second or third meeting. The first – I think it was the second meeting, if not the first, where it was held at the Center.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: It was very early. And they needed leadership, and particularly they needed a media director. Right? Yeah. In the meantime, as part of my work in the gay community, I had become involved in a gay TV news show.

**SS: Which one is that?**

DH: It's called Out in the '80s.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: And it was cable access, because that's the only place where you could talk about – that's the only venue. And so I was like the serious – there was a host, who did cultural stuff –

**SS: Who was the host?**

DH: Uh – his name will come to me in the course – Steve – it'll come to me in a second. And then I can look him up, and I wanted to do that before you came, but – and I was the one who went out in the field, and covered events, and did interviews – a lot of them related to AIDS science. So I was already doing that when I started participating in ACT UP. And at that point — and his name will come to me — had been

acting provisionally as the media director. And ACT UP had only existed for no more than a month – no more than five or six weeks. They'd done a couple of actions. So they needed a new media director. And I was nominated — somebody recognized me from the show — and then became the media director – actually, the media coordinator.

Which put me on the Coordinating Committee, with all the really early founders, like Avram Finkelstein and all those – Avram Finkelstein, who designed the ACT UP logo.

And this was the most interesting and rewarding part of that work.

I'd send out press releases to everybody, whenever there was going to be an action. Right? We'd design an action on the floor. And those were great meetings. I loved those meetings so much. That's – I walked into those meetings, and I was at home. And all the bickering and all the Robert's Rules became, like, deeply structured my consciousness, and I knew all the Robert's Rules, and, point of order! You know, and so it was – those were raucous meetings, that were, where you really see, you know, if you've ever been involved in any kind of grassroots activism, you see similar patterns to all that, you know, where everybody needs to be – it just becomes a cat-fight, on one level; but, ultimately, stuff gets done. And actions would be agreed upon.

00:30:00

And it was my job then to alert the press. Right? And I'd send out press releases to everybody. Nobody came. And we'd do these, like, spectacular actions, that were extraordinarily well choreographed. If gay people know how to do anything, it's how to put on a show. That was a stereotypes, but they were good shows – and very photogenic. But nobody would come.

**SS: So what's an example of an action that nobody covered?**

DH: Oh, you need a specific example – I have to think of specific examples. You know, protest against a pharmaceutical company that was blocking releases of promising drugs. And there were many, and I can go back.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: Actually, all my – because most of my stuff is in storage — unfortunately, all my ACT UP stuff, and all the videotapes from this period, and from the show, and the raw footage; which I have, and I think I'm the only person who has it — are all in storage. I can't get access to it until I move back to my apartment.

**SS: Okay. Well then, let's keep going.**

DH: Yeah. But nobody would cover it. But, I was doing a TV show. And my cameraman – there was a team – camera and sound — they were a couple. This big huge cameraman, and his boyfriend, who was like, you know, half his size, who did sound. So what we'd do is we'd cover the events. And he was a professional; he's not union. And this is a time when there were a lot of strikes. And so he had contacts with various news agencies. So we'd shoot the footage; I'd edit what would go on our show; and then he'd take the footage, and go around to the various news outlets — particularly NBC, because that's where his contacts were best.

**SS: Remember the name of the cameraman?**

DH: I will be able to find it. I'm really sorry.

**SS: That's all right.**

DH: Usually I'm good with names, but it'll come to me. It'll come to me, like, six o' clock tonight.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: And I would be surprised if he's still around –

**SS: Um hm.**

DH: – because in addition to – well, maybe I shouldn't say this. I don't want to say it on the record.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: So this is off the record. In addition to doing camera work, he and his boyfriend also dealt a lot of coke.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: And did a lot of coke. And he was like – 350 pounds, and so, and I'd be surprised if you'd be able to find him, frankly. But he was great. So he'd go around, and peddle this footage. And once they saw the footage, which was professionally shot, because he's a professional cameraman, they'd grab it. And so the first ACT UP actions that actually got coverage in the news — this coverage should be in the archives of WNBC — was the footage that we went out and shot. So as media coordinator, we actually provided the footage.

**SS: Do you remember what any of those actions were?**

DH: I can –

**SS: Okay.**

DH: I'll be able to find them.

**SS: No, I mean just, you could just say yes or no.**

DH: Not off the top of my head. They were good actions, though. There were some on Wall Street, there were some – pharmaceutical companies were principal

targets at that point, because this of course is the point when there was – one of the principal issues was access to experimental drugs.

**SS: Right.**

DH: I mean, Dallas Buyers Club. I haven't seen Dallas Buyers Club, because I can't watch it, because it's just too much of my past. But what I assume – AL-721, it was still AL-721 was – this was before AZT. AZT came online while I was the media coordinator, toward the end. But of course, the Reagan administration, in every way, because any opportunity to lash out at the Reagan administration – the man who spent, who oversaw the advent and explosion of the AIDS epidemic, yet never once said the word “AIDS” –

**SS: Right.**

DH: – in public.

**SS: Now, who were the media people who started to respond to you?**

**Like, who did you build relationships with in the media?**

00:35:00

DH: Ultimately, I didn't have immediate contact with the people in the media. I just suddenly noticed that people started to show up. Right? It was really kind of one-sided. I continued to send out press releases, and then people started showing up.

**SS: Do you remember who showed up?**

DH: Local news, at first; WABC, WNBC. And then eventually, CNN. And then after – it was really a pretty narrow window of time — within the space of no more than six weeks — that ACT UP was on the map. And then an ACT UP event was an event that everybody needed to cover. That was my experience. My experiences — and I wish I could respond more directly to the position of ACT UP in the world — but

my position was somewhat myopic, in that I was focused on ACT UP, the organization, and the organicity of the organization. The major event in my week was the ACT UP meeting, right? And then I would follow on that. And in terms of my followup, in addition to sending out press releases, I was concerned with developing my own stories for the television show that I was doing.

**SS: I just have a couple questions.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: Who else was on the Media Committee with you?**

DH: There was no Media Committee! I was the Media Coordinator.

There was no Media Committee at that point.

**SS: And so was anyone allowed to talk to the media, or were only –**

DH: Yeah, no, anybody could talk to the media. This is –

**SS: So how did you make sure that people were informed enough to talk to the media?**

DH: We take care of that at the meetings. The meetings were prolonged and open discussion of every single aspect, and we'd – things would always get out of hand. But they were actually extremely well-ordered. Anybody – it was a testament to democratic process. Anybody could have a voice. There were no restrictions as to who could speak to the media. Anybody could speak to the media. But whenever an action was going to be upcoming, once the body of ACT UP — the 300 or so people who would show up at every meeting, at least — agreed on an action, there would be a detailed discussion of precisely the purpose of the action – so that the position of ACT UP, by the end of the meeting, would be pretty clearly enunciated.

I was at ACT UP from the point where it was just this very grassroots organization of people who were – many of whom were HIV-positive, and were struggling; and who were desperate for – so it was out of desperation that they went to ACT UP; many of whom were, like myself, just outraged at the inaction – but it was not yet cool. By the end of — and I was media director, I was reelected media director, but I had to step down because of – I mean, I – when I moved to New York, I was doing political activism; I was – at first, I got a job as a waiter, and working in a bookstore, but I gave those up. And basically, I was spending all my time doing work for which I was not getting paid. And I had no money. And I was financially cut off from my parents, by choice, so I had no support. And in the meantime, I decided on journalism as a career, so I started the graduate program at NYU, for which I got some – I got fellowship support, and I was working as a TA. But in the midst of that, after my first year there – you know who Chuck Ortleb is?

**SS: Yeah, sure, I used to work for them.**

DH: Oh really, really. When?

**SS: I worked for the *Native*.**

DH: Oh, really. Yeah. So he – when?

00:40:00

**SS: I covered the bathhouse closings for the *Native*.**

DH: Really.

**SS: Yeah.**

DH: Uh huh; okay. Okay.

**SS: So tell us, I'm interested.**

DH: Yeah. So – yeah, so, and here’s where kind of the internal politics of AIDS, at that point, and AIDS science, comes into play. I was convinced that there was, you know, that the alternative ideological account, explanation, of AIDS was at least as plausible as the single-factor argument that was championed by the NIH, and that everybody immediately glommed onto. Right? And so I was like a Duesbergian. So I at least wanted to give them voice, because their voices, their arguments seemed legitimate. So that’s what brought me onto Chuck Ortleb’s radar. And the show I was doing, I’d bring Joe Sonnabend, Michael Callen, and Peter Duesberg together for a prolonged discussion of the various ways to account for pathogenesis in AIDS. And Duesberg, of course, is very eloquent in his argument that a retrovirus is incapable of acting as an etiological agent, and virus load was never significant enough to – anyway.

So I did not, I was not, like, a whole-hog, this is the answer; but I thought that it needed to be part of the discussion – particularly in recognition of the overwhelming power of the institutional apparatuses of orthodox science to foreclose on any debate once a profitable means of generating revenues had been formulated. Once you have identified an etiological agent, which makes heroes of the people who identified it, who claim to have identified it; then the floodgates of funding open. And those who are served by those floodgates very quickly gather to protect those floodgates.

So it was evident that alternative theories were being systematically closed up. So my interest was not — although it seemed compelling that a single factor, based on the science. When I started in my undergrad, what I wanted to do was become a doctor, become a psychiatrist. Then I thought, oh my god, how can I, if my parents are only going to pay for four years, even I’d done that – how in the hell am I going to pay

for an additional 12 years, to become a psychiatrist? Nine years, at least. So I gave that up. At the same time, you know, I fell in love with language and literature, and art history, so I plunged into that. I became one of those horrendous – I would roll my eyes so much if I met myself now, when I was 19. You know, wearing a hat, and chain-smoking cigarettes, and talking about Camus and Sartre, and you know existential angst. Or would only go to independent movies that were very dark.

**SS: I'm still like that.**

DH: So –

**SS: So –**

DH: So I was in that – I supported that camp. Which immediately brought me to the attention of –

**SS: Chuck.**

DH: – of Chuck. And in the spring of my first year at NYU, in the journalism program, he approached me, and said, look, I'm starting a new publication, called *City Week*. And – ah, no light of recognition.

**SS: No, I know what it –**

DH: Oh, really.

**SS: Oh, sure.**

DH: *City Week*. Well, I wrote just about all of *City Week*.

**SS: Oh, okay. Okay.**

DH: And so he said, you know, you want to come onboard? And I had – so I had the prospects of this – it seemed like a waste of time to be going to courses, when I was doing journalism in the real world. And now, suddenly, somebody was going

to pay me to do it. So he hired me as managing editor. Which basically meant that I did everything. I mean, I went around, I did all of the listings; and I went personally to all the clubs. And then I wrote, every issue, I wrote two to three five- to eight-thousand-word –

**SS: This is while you were in ACT UP.**

DH: Yes! I was still in ACT UP. But this – it was that point that I started to withdraw. Right? So this was – this was 1983. No, 1984. It was 1984.

**SS: No.**

DH: No, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. It was 1987.

**SS: Yeah.**

DH: It was 1987. I started – so I started working on *City Week* in the final weeks of the semester, the spring semester. And spent like three or four months, most of the summer, developing *City Week*. And then the launch, I think, was in August. I think the first issue came out in August.

**SS: Now why did he need *City Week*? He already had the *Native*.**

**What was the point?**

DH: The point of *City Week* –

**SS: And he also had Christopher Street at the time.**

DH: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

DH: The point of *City Week* was his deep-seated hatred of the *Voice*. *City Week* was not a gay tabloid, right? It was devised so as to provide an alternative voice to the *Voice* — right? — which he hated.

**SS: So Richard Goldstein.**

DH: Yeah, Richard Goldstein as the —

**SS: Right.**

DH: Yeah. And so he wanted to have an alternative out there.

**SS: Now where did his money come from — Chuck Ortleb?**

DH: I never discerned that. I have a feeling that somehow, Neenya Ostrum had something to do —

**SS: And who was she? That's what I remember. She had a byline.**

DH: Yeah. She had a byline, and she was also a — do I have any *City Weeks* here? Because I have all of them. I think they're all in storage.

**SS: But who was she?**

DH: She was active in every single executive decision. Right? She was —

**SS: But she came out of —**

DH: She was basically his partner. And —

**SS: She was a straight woman, right?**

DH: Yeah, a straight woman.

**SS: Business partner. Okay.**

DH: A business partner. And I think she was the source of the funding. And she continued to kind of like, haunt that world, at least until — the last time I saw Neenya was in 1996, in — in 1996 or early 1997; spring of 1997, when I was — at that

point, I was doing advanced kind of studies in classical Chinese and Chinese philosophy at National Taiwan University. Bob Guccione, Jr., was facing a civil lawsuit for sexual harassment – which was a spurious lawsuit. It was – people think because his name is Bob Guccione that of course he was sexually, that he's guilty.

**SS: Right, innocent.**

DH: But he wasn't. He wasn't. I was brought back from Taiwan to testify for the defense. And he defeated the claim, or the charge. And it was after that — because of course, as a witness, I wasn't able to have contact with him before the trial. But it was after that, at this restaurant, which was in celebration, Neenya suddenly was there. Where did Neenya come from? And so – but she was always an enigmatic figure. Bellicose –

**SS: Because Ortleb thought that AIDS was airborne, at one point?**

DH: He had various –

**SS: And he blamed it on penguins –**

DH: – he had various.

**SS: Monkey flu –**

DH: Monkey flu.

**SS: Sharks.**

**JH: Sharks.**

DH: Yeah. Shark –

**SS: What was his thing?**

DH: African swine –

**SS: Is he –**

DH: – African swine flu –

**SS: That's right –**

DH: – was the, was the –

**SS: – African swine flu.**

DH: – ma-, was the principal one. He would support, really, any theory.

00:50:00 And it, but it became a – his, you know – to the degree that I covered AIDS at *City Week* — my primary beat at *City Week* was environment — and I actually did some really good reporting on the environment. That was that summer when medical waste was washing up on the shores –

**SS: Right.**

DH: – of New Jersey; and I did some actually really interesting –

**SS: Where is he now, Ortleb?**

DH: I don't know. I wanted to look that up before we met –

**SS: Is he still alive? We don't know.**

DH: I don't know.

**SS: Don't look it up –**

DH: Okay. We'll look it up after we're done. But –

**SS: So did you leave –**

DH: – anyway –

**SS: – ACT UP at that point?**

DH: By that – I was – just because of the demands of work. I mean, it was, you know – *City Week*; I was running that, running the tabloid. There was a staff of like, there were three people responsible for the whole thing.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: And I was working 90 hours a week, you know.

**SS: So then let's go back to the time —**

DH: So I, I had to leave ACT UP, just because of the demands on time.

**SS: So I just want to go back to your time as media coordinator.**

DH: Yeah.

**SS: Now there was a group of men in ACT UP who were media professionals. There was Bob Rafsky, who had been an advertising executive; there was Mike Signorile, who had worked —**

DH: Mike Signorile.

**SS: — for *People* magazine.**

DH: Yeah, was he already working for *People* magazine? Because he pretty much succeeded me.

**SS: Before he came to ACT UP.**

DH: — succeeded me —

**SS: Okay.**

DH: — as media coordinator.

**SS: So they had a different thing than you. Because you were a community-based gay journalist —**

DH: Yeah.

**SS: — and these people were from mainstream.**

DH: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: So what was —**

DH: And they took it, they just took it in a different direction.

**SS: Yeah.**

DH: And they – while I was media coordinator, they would do their own thing, to try to draw in the mainstream. Everybody contributed as they could, and –

**SS: Right.**

DH: – there was no, like, there were no turf wars.

**SS: Right. So you're saying it was a simultaneous strategy.**

DH: Yeah, it was simultaneous.

**SS: – okay.**

DH: But that also brought Michael Signorile to the fore –

**SS: Right.**

DH: – subsequently. And the other guy; Michael – Michael – his name will come to me, too. Because he then interviewed to be my replacement. He, I think, immediately succeeded me. Because I basically had to resign. Because I just didn't have time anymore. And also, in terms of – I was concerned because I had become convinced, really, that the toxicity of AZT really outweighed any of its benefits, and I was wary of throwing full-scale community support into the promotion of AZT.

**SS: Well now, ACT UP never took a position on AZT.**

DH: No, they didn't, but on the floor, a lot of – AZT was very much in discussion, and I wanted kind of to separate myself from that discussion. I guess, if I – I guess because I wanted to remain neutral. And at that point, as I was projecting a career as a journalist, I wanted to become more neutral, but still maintain ties. Right? And so

this – at the same time, I continued at the – when was the big march in Washington? The gay march in Washington? Was that in '87 or '88?

JH: Eighty-seven.

DH: Eighty-seven. Okay. So '87, I was still at *City Week*. *City Week* came to a close when – yeah – right around then, when the *Voice* went free, when it converted to a free publication.

**SS: I see.**

DH: And Chuck had been – in terms of advertising revenues, they were nil. He was basically giving advertising to the advertisers who already were paying advertisers in his other publications. And the sales of ad space were negligible. So he came out and said, you know, it was September or October, I could check my CV –

**SS: That's okay.**

DH: – and find out. Where he came out and said, look, I'm sorry we're not going to be able to continue *City Week*; you can come to work at the *Native*, you can work at any of the publications – you can work at any other publication –

**SS: He had *Theater Week* also.**

DH: Yeah, *Theater Week*.

**SS: Right.**

DH: Yeah, *Theater Week*, yeah. Yeah. Which meant that everybody – I don't know if it was like that then, but you had to know, by heart — and I still do — “All About Eve.” Because “All About Eve” was like, everything was a reference to “All About Eve.” Every gesture, every line.

**SS: And did you ever go back to ACT UP?**

DH: Yeah, I went back to ACT UP, but just participated in the meetings.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: Yeah. And I'd speak, because it's almost impossible for me, whenever I'm in — and it's the same when I go to conferences — there's always something that, like, puts a bug in my ear, and I just have to stand up and say, you know —

**SS: But you didn't take another leadership position.**

00:55:00

DH: No, I did not take another leadership —

**SS: Now what happens to your views about HIV? Did they change?**

DH: Uh — I remain unconvinced of the awesome power of HIV in itself to cause disease. I think — and — you know — in my experience, and in — of the scores of people that I've known who have died, a multifactorial theory is completely consistent with their —

**SS: Well, you're the proof of it.**

DH: Hm?

**SS: You're the proof of it.**

DH: Yeah —

**SS: That exposure is not enough.**

DH: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

DH: Exposure is not enough.

**SS: Right.**

DH: I've definitely been exposed.

**SS: Right.**

DH: Yeah. I think in a couple instances. Boy, was the sex good, though.

**SS: So when did you stop going to meetings?**

DH: I stopped going to meetings after – okay, so Chuck said, we’re not going to continue the publication. And I was considering, at that point — because I was doing a lot of environmental reporting, and I loved doing that. I thought, I don’t want to become ghettoized in just doing gay reporting; I really want to do environmental reporting. And this was now – it must have been 1988. It was 1988.

In the meantime, I’d done one, one of the cover stories at *City Week* was a profile of Bob Guccione, Jr., right – which was the first really mainstream magazine, mainstream monthly, to devote a column every single month to the coverage of AIDS, and particularly AIDS science – with my dear friend Celia Farber doing a lot of the work. And so Bob became aware of me. And he – either the same day or just the day before, Chuck announced that he was folding the magazine. Bob had called me and said, look, I need a managing editor; are you available? And in fact, I remember –

**SS: At which magazine?**

DH: *Spin*

**SS: At *Spin*, okay.**

DH: Yeah, at *Spin*. And I said to him, look, I’m really devoted to Chuck, I am devoted to *City Week*; I can’t – because if I had left, *City Week* would have collapsed, because literally, I wrote the whole thing. I wonder if I have a copy here somewhere, because you can see, it’s like, there’d be at least two or three major investigative stories in each one. I was like, the most – I loved that period, I loved that period. I mean, I was

smoking four packs of cigarettes a day, and working around the clock. But I loved that period.

Then, Chuck came — it was like the next day — and said, we're going to have to fold the magazine. And so I called Bob back, and said, I am available, and it would be interesting. So I went to *Spin* as a managing editor — where I very quickly realized that being a managing editor at a monthly is something completely different from being a managing editor at a weekly. Right? And the managing editor at a monthly is the guy who makes sure that all the vendors are taken care of, that the schedules are met, and who's like the cop who goes around whacks everybody on the knuckles to make sure that they're getting things out on time. And then my big event of the month is to go to Milwaukee or to Chicago to authorize the color balance on the print run. With absolutely no time at all to pursue my own reporting. I wrote some editorials there, and I did a lot of editing, of the non-music stuff. *Spin* is a music magazine, and pop culture, but primarily rock music — which I hate. And all I know about — I don't even know any of the musicians from that period is I knew by virtue of — you know, I just know by the text, because I was the final read.

**SS: But Celia Farber's reporting for *Spin* was very important.**

DH: Was very important. And Celia and I worked really closely together, and I did — I edited most of her pieces.

**SS: What do you think was her most important revelation or idea about AIDS?**

01:00:00

DH: What sticks out in mind is her really deep-felt conviction that AZT was poison; and something that she never relented, in that regard. But her reporting in

general was pretty so-, was, you know, was sound, it was sound. She's not a scientist, and I – it was, I had enough of a sci-, she had no scientific background. And I had enough science, from high school, right? I went to a really good high school, and lots of AP stuff, and anatomy and physiology, and I took a bunch of biology in anticipation of med school. And I could read a scientific journal. But she had trouble with the science, which made her vulnerable to false claims. And so a lot of what we did is I'd try to, like, rein that in. And she has — and I love Celia, I love Celia — but she has, she grew up primarily in Sweden, during a period of pronounced kind of socialism in Sweden. And she has a characteristic kind of knee-jerk response to anything that seems like institutionalized power, that I've witnessed in a lot of people from the former Soviet states. There's just this kind of –

**SS: Yeah, but Sweden wasn't a former Soviet state.**

DH: No, it wasn't. Wasn't. But her –

**SS: It's a happily capitalist state, yeah.**

DH: Her experience of Sweden was as the grips of –

**SS: Too conformist.**

DH: Yeah. Was in the grips of, as this dark place. And so this accounts for her affinity for Ayn Rand.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: Which, you know –

**SS: So our focus is on ACT UP.**

DH: Yeah, yeah. Our focus is on ACT UP.

**SS: So is there anything else –**

DH: She had a pretty difficult relationship with ACT UP. And people there saw her as a destructive voice. And she continued, despite the fact that she faced, like, a lot of animosity in the gay community and the people she was covering, which is –

**SS: But about you, though. Did you have anything else in ACT UP that you did?**

DH: I, once, you know, I, I continued going to the meetings as I could. But no, I just didn't have time.

**SS: Right.**

DH: I just didn't have time. And then, in terms of AIDS in general; I mean, I continued at *Spin*, dealing with the AIDS column. I wrote a couple of them, and edited a lot of them. And then I went on to *Interview*. And at *Interview*, I brought, as much as possible, AIDS coverage into *Interview*. In the meantime, I tried to develop a book on Joe Sonnabend, which, you know, I had an agent, and they thought it was going to someplace, but it didn't. But in the meantime — so now, we're in 1992; 1991, 1992 — the toll of deaths of people who were close to me was mounting up. And I looked at Celia — who had become just completely enclosed within this, this darkness of a struggle without end — and I saw around me people dropping, and it just got closer and closer. And Michael Callen was a penultimate straw. And then the last straw was my best friend

–

**SS: Who was that?**

DH: Scott Bradford. Whof's right there.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

DH: Best friend from Colora — his ashes are right behind that.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

DH: In salsa jars. Which his mother gave them to me in salsa jars –

**SS: You're not the only person we've interviewed with ashes in their apartment. Yeah.**

01:05:00 DH: And that was really, really, really devastating. Michael was less devastating, because I spent a – by that point – anyway – I was just exhausted with death, and exhausted with AIDS. And it's in the point where Scott was in his decline, and his decline entailed a period of, like, really out-of-control mania – when he suddenly — he'd lived in Denver — but he suddenly just showed up on my door, in advanced stage of AIDS, in New York; and was living out this fantasy of the New York gay scene that was a fantasy from like the '70s. He went out in chaps and was walking around on Eighth and Ninth Avenue, and he got gay-bashed. He couldn't sleep; he was up – and I eventually had to send him home. And then he went into hospice care shortly after that, and I went out there every couple of weeks. And it was just, that was just, it was the – I just couldn't deal with any more death.

In the meantime, I'd been reawakened to that moment in my undergrad, in my earlier life, where I had turned to China, and saw – and embraced Chinese culture. And meanwhile, the Tiananmen Square movement happened, in 1989, and I'd become really involved and very familiar with a lot of the student leaders. And an opportunity arose. And at this point, I was managing editor at *Interview*. Which is a great job, and I love Ingrid Sischy, and it was a great job, and like, two blocks from my apartment, too, huh. But I learned, through an ex — well, he wasn't an ex then — who is a producer at HBO, that Michael Apted, who did *Gorillas in the Mist* and the *Up* series — *7 Up*, *14*

*Up, 21 Up* — and most recently, I think, was *Narnia*, one of the *Narnia* films; *Coal Miner's Daughter*, of course — that he was interested, that he was doing a film on the aftermath of Tiananmen Square, what's happening in China. So I wrote to him, and said, I have a background in China, and I know all these students. And so I was hired away from *Interview* to work on that film, which is produced by Trudie Styler, who is Sting's wife.

**SS: And that's your picture right there, with Trudie Styler.**

DH: Well yeah, yeah yeah. And Michael Apted.

**SS: Right.**

DH: And my dearest friend, Susanne Rostock, who's the editor. And Maryse Alberti. And Scott Rendel, who's sound, and you'll see, you'll see he pops up on, he does a lot of TV, he did, he was always on — I don't know if they still have SVU — you know, the *Law & Order SVU* — but he does, like, *Elementary*, which is a really good, like, Holmes adaptation. And yeah. Hence also, you'll see, like, Christmas cards from Sting occasionally around the apartment.

**SS: So did you ever come back to AIDS after that?**

DH: I didn't. I came back, though, to gay, really, politicized gay — action while I was living in Taiwan. And thank god for like this two- to three-year sojourn in Taiwan, which enabled me to get beyond the tension that was always there in relation to Chinese culture, which I associated initially with chastity and asceticism. Because I plunged myself into the gay community in Taiwan, which is a really fun community. And so in terms of AIDS, I have not continued to do anything.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: And it's hard for me to really look at –

**SS: I totally understand.**

DH: Like I don't know if I'll, I have *Dallas Buyers Club*, but you know, I don't know if I'm ever going to watch it.

**SS: It's not worth the time, believe me.**

DH: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: So I just, since our focus is on ACT UP –**

DH: Yeah, of course.

**SS: – I just have one more question to ask you.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: So looking back, what do you think, overall, was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you think was its biggest disappointment?**

01:10:00 DH: ACT UP's greatest achievement – was in articulating a, a, articulating a broad-spread rage in the gay community making really public the presence of people with AIDS, and that it was a pressing issue – at a time when the media really were not taking it seriously, and the administration was utterly silent. But in terms of gay rights – I think its significance is even greater. Because it was the turn from gays still hovering in the shadows and in the closets — and I know, you know, drag queens and Stonewall were very important events — but it was ACT UP who really inspired people, and made it cool, even, to get in people's faces. And that was incredibly empowering for gay people. And I don't think that the most recent advances in gay rights, which have been mind-blowing, and which I never anticipated — I thought I'd die before there was a general acceptance of gay marriage in this country. And yet, DOMA's been overturned.

I think ACT UP has a lot to do with that.

**SS: And what –**

DH: Because nobody else in the gay community was that in the face. The Human Rights Campaign is like, you know, they wheel and deal at big dinners with people in power. But ACT UP was just unrelenting – in its best moments.

**SS: And what about its biggest disappointment?**

DH: Uh – its biggest disappointment is, is when it got too cool.

**SS: Hm.**

DH: You know, when it became trendy, and that also – so – which is also something that troubles gay identity now. Right? It's like cool now, to be gay. I think ultimately we'll get beyond that — I mean, I hope — where – yeah – the construction of gender will just be, people will just construct their own gender – and it won't be cool or not cool. But there is that moment in the – I mean, ACT UP now, if you go to a Gay Pride parade — and I happened upon the Gay Pride parade, the most recent one, just because I was out on my bike, and found myself downtown — the ACT UP contingent is pretty minuscule. But 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992; when the ACT UP contingent – hundreds of people, just this block-long sea of black T-shirts –

**SS: Right.**

DH: You know. And that was – it was empowering, and yet it was also at that point that I thought, that I started to think: anything that becomes trendy, I become wary of.

**SS: Okay.**

DH: So –

**SS: Let's end on that.**

DH: Okay.

**SS: Thank you, Drew.**

DH: Sure.

**SS: Thanks a lot.**

DH: And I'm happy to get names that we mentioned.

**SS: Sure.**

DH: If you want to.

**SS: I'm fascinated that nobody knows where Chuck Ortleb is.**

**Fascinated. I'm like – is he in prison, is he dead?**

DH: He can't be. I don't think he's dead.