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Interviewee: **Dean Lance**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Dean Lance
June 7, 2012

SARAH SCHULMAN: We'll just start by you telling us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

Dean Lance: Okay. My name is Dean Lance. It's June 7, 2012. I just turned fifty-five. And we are in glorious Park Slope, Brooklyn.

SS: That's right, in your beautiful new apartment. Dean, where did you grow up?

DL: I grew up in Brooklyn, so I lived my whole life either in Brooklyn or back and forth between Brooklyn and Manhattan, depending on which illegal sublease worked out.

SS: So Lance is a changed name, right?

DL: Yes, my father changed it. I mean, it's my legal name. It's on my birth certificate. But the story with that was his father died when he was two. He was born Herbert Weiss. His stepfather was named Grosser, so he went through life as Herbert Grosser, but as it turned out—and these are only the things you find out after everyone's dead—his stepfather never adopted him, so when he and my mother got married, before they got married—and I think he was at one point attempting to pursue a career in opera, so I don't know where he got Lance, but that's my legal name. When people would ask him, "Is that your middle name?" he goes, "No, no, we were too poor for middle names."

SS: That's a good line.

DL: So, yes, so I've used that.

SS: So he was an artist. He was a singer.

DL: Well, he got married and ended up getting out of that, but he was a trained tenor, and I think he eventually was doing something with insurance, but it's kind of a strange story. Coming back from my parents' honeymoon from Vermont, they were driving and he got creamed by a drunk driver, was in a hospital for a year, had a plate in his head. I never found this out till I was an adult. I thought he was a little spaced out. He worked a job thirty-five years at the same company. I never realized it actually left him a little deficient, and when his mother was dying, his younger brother would say, "Oh, if you knew your father before the accident." So these are things, again, you find out.

SS: And they were both born in this country?

DL: Yes, my father was born in Brooklyn. His mother came over from Russia when she was about five. My mother was born in Denver, Colorado.

SS: What neighborhood did you grow up in?

DL: I was born in Midwood and grew up in the Flatlands section.

SS: And you went to Midwood High School?

DL: No, I went to South Shore, which was Canarsie. It was actually at the time the state-of-the-art high school, and it was brand new with these fancy gyms and these walls that moved so that they could turn the auditorium from a small into a big one, and with the fancy artwork in the rotunda. I think they just closed it, because it actually became, a couple years ago, one of the worst high schools in the city, as things go.

SS: Now, were your parents politically or community involved in any way?

DL: Yes, they were always involved with the neighborhood, they were even officers in the civic association. They were involved with some of the politics. They grew up Jewish progressive in Brooklyn, so they weren't necessarily active like we're active, but they were aware. I guess I was educated. I was always reading the paper. We discussed it. Again, I guess some of where I got political—and we're talking when I was listening to Alex Bennett when I was twelve years old, and he would have Abbie Hoffman on the radio. I think I actually bought it. I don't think I stole *Steal this Book*, but I was walking around junior high school reading *Revolution for the Hell of It*. I got turned on to people like Paul Krassner, so I got radicalized very early.

SS: And when did you start realizing you were an artist?

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DL: Well, actually, this is funny, because I remember literally I was in kindergarten. I was five years old. I drew a picture of a devil and an angel. Now, this was from cartoons. I didn't have any theological background about heaven and hell, devils and angels. It was like your conscience on one shoulder and temptation on the other one. And I remember the teacher freaking out—this is in Brooklyn—running around showing this drawing to everybody on the floor. So at that point I realized I was an artist, and anytime someone would need some artwork done, whether or not I wanted to do it, I got volunteered.

SS: Now, were you involved in any political stuff in high school?

DL: Early on, because that was the time, I had gone to some anti-war rallies. So it was more the tail end of that, so I was really too young to be doing that when those were first happening, but I did remember going to a couple of marches at Washington Square Park that had to do with Vietnam.

SS: And did you make art at all that was about the war or about the era?

DL: I remember doing something—I think I actually stole this from The Firesign Theater. But I took an economics class, and you had to take it, and I did “The Founders of Communism.” This was just something that I was inspired to do, and Marx and Lenin, so, of course, I drew Groucho Marx and John Lennon, which, again, I think I copped from a Firesign Theater album cover. I was thinking that way at the time.

SS: When did you first become aware that there was a gay political movement?

DL: It’s hard to say, because my memory might be from all the stuff we’ve been exposed to over the years. How many documentaries have we seen and been involved in? So, I can’t say I remember reading about Stonewall. Again, I was too young. It’s really hard to say. I can’t say when I was exposed to that.

SS: Well, do you remember seeing gay people?

DL: I remember someone made a crack about someone, and I don’t think they made it in a vituperative way. They were just commenting on someone, the way they walked. I must have been thirteen or fourteen, and they referred to this person as having something to do with the Gay Liberation Movement, which is probably the first time I actually had heard of that.

SS: So what did you do after high school?

DL: After high school? I went to Brooklyn College for a couple of years, and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do, and then once I realized what a crappy Art Department they had, I started—at the time they didn’t have a film major. You had

to major in that with something else, but I got turned on to animation, and I dropped out, frankly, because in the third year when they first started charging tuition. The amazing thing about City College for over a hundred years was the tuition was free. Now they have free tuition when Saddam Hussein was in power. If you were a member of the Ba'ath Party, you got free college tuition. If only students could do that now.

So I dropped out, kind of to feel out what I wanted to do. I remember my grandmother almost wanted to disown me, because it's like, "Dropping out of college? What are you going to do?"

I was kind of independent, so I was able to do that. But I put together a portfolio and I went to SVA [School of Visual Arts] and had an interview, just to see what I needed to do, and I was like, "Oh, my god. I don't have stuff together." They said you could have submitted a sketchpad at the time. I ended up applying and submitting—putting together a portfolio that I didn't even realize I really had. A high school art teacher helped me put that together. And they accepted me and they actually gave me, I think, three drawing credits based on the art. It was interesting. As a transfer student, there's no biology in art school. Yoga is a humanities. But all my film history courses transferred as art history, so a lot of those requirements were taken care of. I think I took a couple humanities courses. I did get to take a great course I had to take. You know Fred Tuten?

00:10:00

SS: Yes.

DL: I took a course with him, which totally inspired me, called Civilization and Its Discontents, so the premise was based on Freud's book, his essay, and then we were reading stuff like *Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Jude the Obscure*, *Heart*

of Darkness, and it was just perspective I never looked at in terms of literature, and he's a great writer. I remember just recently talking with Marvin Taylor about Fred, and he really liked me because I think I got the Freud stuff, so when I had to write on it, he said some really nice things. It was a well-rounded—I didn't need biology that I took at Brooklyn College.

SS: And you graduated from SVA?

DL: I got a bachelor of fine arts degree. I guess it would be in media arts, but I studied animation, so I wasn't a film student, because you didn't have to study film to do animation. You had to draw what you were filming.

SS: So what was the film community like at that point when you came out of school?

DL: It's funny, because when I speak with people who actually teach there, and it's probably not unlike people who think they're filmmakers at NYU, and then a lot of the film instructors were saying that—they're pooh-poohing, and this was earlier. Now every idiot with an iPhone is a filmmaker. They weren't looking down, but students would think, oh, they're all going to be the next Scorsese, and they looked down on what people had to do beyond teaching to make a living.

The thing about SVA, as you probably know, is it's not like tenure track. When you're taking an advertising course, your teacher owns the agency. He's taking time off from clients to come and teach you, but it's a great—it was the smartest thing I ever did, was getting my education there, because I was dealing with artists— still stuff that I learned that comes to mind that I've actually taught other people.

SS: Okay, so you graduated from SVA, and now where did you end up? Were you in the film community? Did you start going into the gay community? Did you get politically involved? Where were you after that?

DL: I was doing kind of political stuff. You had to do early art assignment, one of the first things that I had to do in a media communications class, we had to do a visual letter, so it started off like, okay, I wanted to say something about abortion. I did something, and I took this course with Marshall Arisman, who's a great illustrator who runs now their master's media program, so I had a two-week crash course. I took nineteen credits over a summer, because I was a transfer student. So I did something like a baby in a basket on someone's doorstep, and he was going, "Come on. Really bring it out."

So I said, "Let me take it to another level." I was picturing something out of *The Godfather*, like some woman with blood dripping down her leg, and she's about to throw the baby in the furnace.

He goes, "Find someplace in between."

Then I was having my ongoing feud with the phone company, so I ended up satisfying the assignment by taking the phone bill and those IBM cards and doing it about three times the size of what it should have been, which, in itself, would have been a statement. This is where you learn less is more, but I actually drew someone on their knees being crushed by a giant receiver. That was political.

There was a point where I think—it's not inertia. It was inert. I think some of my politics—I always followed it. I've always been a news addict, but I wasn't doing the activism. I remember writing a letter. Robert Garcia did some—and I guess he

was getting really ill, and did this amazing kind of Bob Rafsky-type diatribe, like what people have to do, kind of like Larry Kramer, angry, but with the charisma that Robert had.

00:15:00 I was already involved with ACT UP at that point and Robert and I had gotten friendly, but I was inspired to—I went to a yoga class across the street from the center, and I went and I think I had actually drafted a letter, and I just wanted to write him to say how much he had inspired me and gotten me out of this apolitical space I had been. What I said was it had lay dormant for a little too long. And it was really a heartfelt, sincere thing. I knew Robert well enough. We were friendly. It wasn't just in passing. And it's something that you don't necessarily get around to telling people, much less committing to writing, and just something I had to do.

I saw him the following Monday and asked him, "Did you get my letter?"

And he said, "Yes, and thank you," and I thought we would continue the conversation.

It wasn't over the top. It wasn't saying, "Oh, I'm in love with you." It was strictly about how he had inspired me. And I hung out with Robert a lot afterwards.

It wasn't until after he died and Karen Ramspacher went through his stuff and told me, "I saw your letter and I had read it, and it was an amazing letter," and I was just flattered that he had saved it all those years.

SS: So let's break it down to separate things. So when you got out of graduate school, you started working as an artist. When did you start getting into video?

DL: Well, what had happened was I was always into the animation and I was trying to do my own animated film. I actually had the chairman of the film department getting the school, as I was graduating, to—they loaned me equipment and to finance analyzing a sound track, which is where you need for animation—often you need to know where the continents are so you can draw them. What I had done in my last year, I wrote this script and I had storyboarded it, and I started doing the layouts, and I had a friend who was at the Berklee School of Music and I needed certain pieces of music.

Incidental, he composed something for me, like this fusion stuff. But it's funny, *Dark Shadows* just came out. I had him do this eerie version of Quentin's theme, and I wrote a parody of *Sweet Transvestite*. It was a vampire film called *Fangs for the Memories*, which has since been used, and the joke was—this ended up in *National Lampoon*. I thought of it first, where the maid and the butler are trying to seduce the vampire for a reward, and he hypnotizes the maid, and they do this spaced-out hypnotic waltz or a tango, then a waltz. Then he leaves his fang dentures in her neck, and then the whole thing turns out to be a commercial. "Use Fang Grip!"

So my friend at Berklee wrote this stuff. I went up there; I flew up there. He had faculty record this stuff for me. We had horns and synthesizers, and it was kind of wild, but then I got to a certain point where I just couldn't follow through on it. I was taking some advertising, which I also did well. People I had taken it with at SVA said, "No, no, you really should pursue this. You have something."

I had three offers, too, and two of them were from former teachers who worked at big agencies like Wells Rich Greene and Y&R, but started their own agencies.

But they said, “We love your stuff. We want to hire you,” but at the time, art directors had to do mechanicals, which is now archaic. It’s an anachronism. And I didn’t do mechanicals, and they said, “We need you to do that.”

So I stopped with that. I took some alumni workshops doing video. We’re talking in the mid eighties, and I never liked video because I thought it was kind of lazy, until I started doing it. And then I started doing stuff like that, and I realized that I didn’t know that— if I stayed in advertising, I would have been making a lot of money. I might have been retired, because the people who would have hired me said I was really good. But I got into the not-for-profit art thing, not realizing that “starving artist” isn’t a metaphor.

SS: So what groups were you working with, or you were just working independently?

DL: I was doing independent stuff. I probably got really into it, like producing my own stuff, with DIVA-TV. I had been working on—

SS: Let’s wait till we get there. So maybe we should start with when you first became aware of the AIDS crisis. Do you remember when that was?

00:20:00

DL: I can say what first got me involved with ACT UP. I was looking at some of the other histories, and I’m thinking—and again, I don’t know if I’m being apocryphal about this, but I believe I had read about GRID, before they actually named AIDS, and I followed it in the news, but it didn’t really affect me as it had, and again, it’s kind of an age thing. The people I knew, I wasn’t really traveling in circles where it was an issue at the time, but it was something I was sympathetic to. I guess this, again, was where I wasn’t really involved. I didn’t even know anybody was doing anything about it

outside of what I read, and I was, I guess, somewhat disaffected because I didn't know anybody who was getting sick or who was doing the things that we subsequently found out were making people sick.

SS: So when did it first enter into your world?

DL: Well, I had—and this gets into how I got involved in ACT UP.

SS: Okay, tell us.

DL: I was working a regular job. I think I was working at the Design Center in Midtown, and I called a friend of mine on a Monday afternoon, said, “What are you doing tonight?”

And she says, “Well, Mickey and I,” that was her husband, “we’re going to an ACT UP meeting.”

I says, “ACT UP? What’s that?”

“AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power,” and she kind of said that to me kind of incredulously. It was funny.

SS: Who was this?

DL: Her name was Shelly Imberman. I don't think you would know, because they didn't stay there long, but they got involved because friends of theirs who I knew, a gay couple, who I also got very friendly with, who got them involved, one of them—and I still tell people this story about, we don't know—AIDS is a crapshoot. Peter Staley talks about the first time he ever had gay sex he got infected. This couple was together—they would have been married if you could have done it back then. So they were together for four years in that type of monogamous relationship, having normal relations that people in that situation would be, and one of the partners didn't know he

was HIV-positive, I hate to say miraculously, but I guess it's a good thing. So he got AIDS, but his partner never became infected. And again, it's a crapshoot. We still don't know how exactly it happens. So because I liked these people a lot, and they told me—she probably gave me what's on the back of the DIVA pass, “United in anger.”

“So you want to come to the meeting?”

She was talking about direct action, and I liked the idea of that. I said, “Sure.”

So this was March 1989. It was the pre-action meeting before Target City Hall, and at that point I was hooked. I was at City Hall at seven in the morning marching, not even with the people who I knew. I remember seeing Larry Kramer. I remember seeing Keith Haring march, and I knew Keith because we went to SVA at the same time. I still went to my office at nine o'clock. And it was one of the most energizing, invigorating things I ever experienced. So I don't know if it was at that meeting, but—so I signed up for the Outreach Committee. I was on it with Robert Garcia. I don't know if it was that same weekend, but I remember I was doing a ten-to-twelve shift tabling at Union Square, and I stayed till six o'clock. It was a beautiful day, and I just couldn't leave.

I went to my first DIVA-TV meeting that Friday night, because Shelly and Mickey were involved with DIVA, and what happened was—I wasn't really doing video. Again, all the stuff I was doing was filming, drawing on a giant animation stand that was my background. I had done some video, but this is pre-camcorder. The cameras back then were like this. So I really wanted to get involved, and I wanted to get more involved with video and that aspect of it.

00:25:00

I also loved the idea of how DIVA was an affinity group but it wasn't about archiving or documenting what was happening. It wasn't that narcissistic. I love the idea that it was set up—and those were amazing people, who I got very close with a lot of them—to do countersurveillance. I have actually lectured at places like MNN [Manhattan Neighborhood Network] and Film/Video Arts and Paper Tiger and DC-TV about people—there was something, like one of those global—I don't even know what they call them, like one of these things in Vancouver or Seattle.

Paper Tiger was kind of promoting people doing things that were putting themselves at risk and risking other people, and it was dangerous. Like Ann Northrop said, we never lost a single person. We always had marshals. We had legal observers. People had civil disobedience training. And I liked the idea that—and I, again, lectured about when you have ten or fifteen people shouting a cop's badge number into a rolling video camera, they're less likely to deprive you of your civil rights or your brains, and it was a brilliant tactic, and shortly thereafter, the cops stole that idea from us.

Now, what I thought was amazing was—I guess it was a couple years later, that when the Rodney King thing happened, *Newsweek* did a cover story called *Video Vigilantes*, and they gave two paragraphs to DIVA-TV, Damned Interfering Video Activists. They explained, I think, what—I don't know if they were talking about countersurveillance, but they said we were documenting people risking arrest by performing acts of civil disobedience, and they credited us for starting the whole concept of video activism. This is a *Newsweek* cover story, so I said, “Yay us.”

SS: Can you explain why there was a need for somebody to do countersurveillance?

DL: Well, let me just go back, and then—yes, absolutely. It's really important, and it's something that resonates and is still needed even now, and now it's more accessible. That Friday at the DIVA meeting I volunteered—Simon Watson, who was always very good, and he threw a party, was kind of an inside party, but hundreds of people showed up that Sunday. We're eating popcorn and wine, and we were just showing all the raw footage that DIVA shot in celebration of our triumph at City Hall.

I volunteered to do a poster, and I spent sixteen hours on it. My friend Shelly just didn't get it. She said, "Why did it take so long?" As you certainly would know, anything that looks like it was easy to do took a long time.

I remember showing up, and Robert I saw in the loft—that was the loft on Warren Street—and I thought, "Oh—." I remembered him from the meeting, and he introduced himself, but he wasn't part of DIVA. He was just hanging around because he lived there. So as soon as I walked in, he saw me and gave me a big hug and a sloppy wet kiss on the mouth, and it's, "I belong. This is where I want to be."

I remember Ellen Spiro, who was not at the meeting, but she came up to me and said, "I love the poster," and we've been close friends since.

SS: So who were the founders of DIVA-TV?

DL: Well, the people who were there, because they had formed the affinity group before it got involved—and then I want to answer your question about the need for countersurveillance. So it was Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz, Ray Navarro, Catherine Saalfield, now Gund, other people I remember. But then there were people like George Plagianos with this little camera with this—what was it called? C—

JAMES WENTZY: VHS

DL: Yes, it was a weird format. But George would show up at everything and shoot everything, and this footage of him we used because he would get so involved. We would be confronting Ed Koch about, “What about housing, Ed? What about housing?” He’d be jumping up and down with the camera because he’d be so enthusiastic, so instead of giving you vertigo, it became exponentially part of the story. So it wasn’t just people. It wasn’t all those Whitney [Independent Study Program] people like Ellen Spiro. It was also people who just were there.

00:30:00 When they explained countersurveillance to me, think of the Republican Convention, that guy, that cop who got fired because someone had footage of him being pushed off the bicycle by a cop. What would happen was if you trip over a cop, you can get arrested for felony assault on a police officer. There were enough cases that people had charges dropped, felony assault charges, because someone had footage of what happened.

SS: Can you give us a specific example?

DL: I don’t know. Well, the one at the Republican Convention. There were quite a few. What comes to mind—and I can’t say if this was for the reason—there probably was video of this, but we remember there was a meeting where there was some police brutality thing, and we decided to end the meeting at the center, and four hundred people marched to the police.

JW: Chris Hennelly.

DL: Yes, yes. Exactly. It was a spontaneous thing, and Chris got arrested. This was how he got his head beaten in. I think he still has brain damage. I’ll go into the outcome of the case, which was just very good. But I don’t know if it was the media or

the cops put out that they arrested Chris for resisting arrest for, I think, assaulting a police officer. Someone said he was HIV-positive. I don't know if they claimed he tried to bite a cop. There was footage of him literally crawling into the police station on his hands and knees on his own power. He wasn't going limp and being dragged in. Now, the thing is, first of all, you can't go telling the media that someone's HIV-positive. That's quite illegal, and as it happens, Chris was not. So this is the kind of scumbag tactics they were doing.

Now, I remember I was with Frank Smithson in Washington. I think we went down because Michael Petrelis—it could have been some other trip, but this is still a good story. We were supposed to shoot him and some other people invading Jesse Helms' office, and they were supposed to do it at one o'clock, but they got antsy, and I think they went in before we got there at twenty after twelve, so the whole thing was over by the time we got there. It might have been a different trip to Washington. I remember, just like one of the women's things in D.C., and I was doing interviews as James Wentzy was shooting, and it was great, because there were people from all over the country.

But I remember Frank, who was a bigger news addict than me, he picked up the paper. I think he had a copy of *The New York Times*. And not only was Chris cleared, but the judge, I never saw such a virulent chastisement of the assistant district attorney for what they had done, and Chris ended up getting a fairly sizeable settlement, as he well deserved. Unfortunately, he did suffer, not permanent, but I do think debilitating brain damage.

JW: I think it's on the video of the cop hitting him.

DL: Yes. But I think actually remember seeing him crawling into the police station. That's not resisting arrest.

SS: Did you ever shoot anything that was used in a court case?

DL: I don't know if the stuff—I'm sure I referred people. I know I had stuff—I don't know if it was used in a court case, but I know I have lots of stuff of Ann Northrop getting arrested. What was fun was I made arrangements during Ann's trial, the ACT UP trial—

SS: For what? Which trial?

DL: For St. Patrick's. Yes, that could have been any number of them with Ann. I remember somehow when Court TV was around, they got in touch with me for some footage, and I got them—Suzanne Wright had the best footage of the die-in at St. Patrick's that existed, and I made arrangements to get them some background stuff, for them to use that, and they traded me their footage of the trial, of the ACT UP trial, so that was a good deal.

What was also interesting about that, I remember making arrangements, before the big AIDS conference in San Francisco in 1990, KQED, the PBS station out there, wanted to do something on ACT UP, and I think they spoke to Bill Bahlman for some footage, and he wanted money, and they weren't going to pay him anything. So I said, "I know where the best stuff is that's available," and the person that I was dealing with some—he was totally behind what we were doing. He was some queen and I was unemployed, and I'm running up \$17 phone bills. It didn't occur to me to call them collect.

00:35:00

But I got off the plane. I didn't even go to the hotel. Or maybe we got to the hotel, but I didn't even check in. I went directly, because it was walking distance, to KQED, where we were, gave them the footage. They dubbed it. Again, this is where you learn. I didn't sign a release, but I insisted that they credit DIVA-TV and Suzanne Wright, and that never happened, but even then, if they're using footage to talk about us, let it be the footage we want seen. And they put that up, and I was very pleased to be able to facilitate that.

JAMES WENTZY: they labeled it as "Amateur Video".

DL: Oh, that's what they put on there? Yes, those—and I wrote it down. I insisted they credit DIVA-TV and Suzanne Wright as the cameraman. They yes'd me, "Yes, yes, yes."

SS: Now, how did DIVA work exactly? Would you decide in advance who was going to be shooting a demo, or would people just show up?

DL: It depends. We would coordinate. If it's someone like the NIH, we would coordinate, or certain actions out of town. There were some people who—like I said, George was great, because he showed up at everything. I don't think we really came up with a strategy. What it came down to was sometimes people would associate themselves with certain affinity groups, like Day of Desperation. There was actions all over the place.

I remember there was something, and I was at the demonstration the morning. I wasn't in Grand Central, but I remember someone, maybe it was Ferrer's office in the Bronx—I think it was—the Bronx borough president, they invaded. Ellen was doing that, and I think that's when she was following Marina Alvarez for the piece

that I worked on with her. It was part of the Fear of Disclosure Project that Phil Zwickler initiated with David Wojnarowicz. David had since died. She called it *(In)visible Women*. I think I even helped her with title, and “In” was in parentheses, so by putting these women’s—because we know women don’t get AIDS, they just die from it, so by putting “In” in parentheses, they became visible women. It was a really powerful piece.

SS: So either you would be assigned or you would show up and you’d shoot, and then how would you put it together? Would you meet right after the demo?

DL: Well, what started out—and this is something that when James got involved, and god bless him for doing this. When I admitted to him I was totally wrong about this, he saw all these Whitney people who wanted to put together these pieces, I think this is even for—we were also connected with Jean and Gregg at GMHC, and these people had editing skills, so they wanted to do complete pieces and Target City Hall, which I’ve shown to classes, and even years later, it still held up. And then *Pride*, which was also a really good piece, and again, it held up.

I remember back at the time—and I’ll get to your question, but, see, this is what we were doing at the time. We wanted to do kind of finished pieces and get them out there, and at a certain point we bought time on Deep Dish TV to put up what was really a failed piece and became *Like A Prayer* on Deep Dish TV, but it got out to several hundred public access stations around the country. I think we did fundraisers, and I think we even got ACT UP to kick in some money. I remember we went to look over the—

JW: You had to buy time?

DL: Yes, with Deep Dish. So we were into doing that, and when James got involved, he wanted to do the weekly public access show. I was in support of public access, but I didn't think it could be done, because I was from an animation background. I'd sit and draw each frame, so I didn't think that—what was beautiful is the spontaneity, that we could shoot a demo on Tuesday and it could get up on the air on Thursday. But originally it was about discussing finished pieces.

00:40:00 We had a really good collective at one time. It could have been our Stop the Church. We had people like Jean and Bob Beck doing Catholic perspective and Jocelyn Taylor and I and some other people did that narrative, "In the beginning, there was an evil sorcerer." And I started cutting it, and I actually had written it up. I had logged and transcribed every bit of footage that existed of that. When the cardinal made his entrance, it was like *Night on Bald Mountain*.

And we also did—I wrote this parody to "Oh Come, All Ye Faithful" that we got people to stand in front of Rockefeller Center to sing about ACT UP. That became another part of it. Unfortunately, the energy kind of dissipated, and a certain point people commandeered, "Well, you had enough time to do it, so we're going to finish it." It was not the piece it really could have been, because it started off—and it got so far, and it could have been a brilliant piece.

So we were really into doing finished stuff. These were filmmakers, so they weren't into showing raw footage, which, John-Fredrick Williams was putting up his Rosamelida stuff. You know what was also great is like when James—now, James had been in New York, and we had just met. I was working with DCTV, and we arranged to have a film party and to just show all this stuff, and I was going to curate, and I didn't

realize, okay, I was up all night. I was trying to transfer everything, not as a loop, but different formats onto one tape and curate it.

We got to the center and the projector that we got from Asian CineVision that they donated just wouldn't work. We had beer and we had popcorn, and I'm sweating and nothing's happening, and then people are chanting, "We die, they show nothing! We die, they show nothing!" It was very embarrassing.

So I remember we dispatched George to Testing the Limits, who had their office—I guess it was on 20th Street—to get the cable we needed. So we had four different decks, and James brought his Hi8 deck, and it ended up working out more or less. I had something in there that people booed. There was a performance artist who I loved. I got involved with the whole NEA censorship thing. His name was Les Cargot, and I thought this was really funny. It was kind of a goof on Jesse Helms. I brought the tape of his performance to give him, and people started booing, and I remember I'm getting chills from the look on his face when I handed him the tape after that.

I also made the mistake of—because we had to be out of there by eleven, so I cut Stop the Church to show—and I said "Let's end this with a cartoon", and I showed a Tex Avery cartoon. This is a hypersensitive politically correct crowd, and there were some things that weren't necessarily racist. I wouldn't have shown something like that, but people just didn't want to buy that this was a 1935 cartoon, so it ended up like, "Oh, well. We tried."

But what was great is that—and this probably—I don't know if it fomented James' idea to do a weekly show, but he had just gotten involved with ACT UP and he had shot an action in Kansas City, and we got to show it for the first time. It was

great that this happened then. Who the hell can get to Kansas City, you know? So we got to show—and there were two hundred people there who got to see what other ACT UP people were doing around the country, and that was a great thing. So I think that might have led to—I remember shooting with James and going across the Brooklyn Bridge with Giuliani, and filling out the labels on the tape and the box and handing them to him and, “Do what you will,” and they’d be up on the air. So people got to see it, and people watched the show.

SS: Now, were you guys competing with Testing the Limits?

DL: No, we were never competing with them, because some of the people in Testing the Limits were in—like Jean and Gregg were part of DIVA-TV, so we were working in conjunction with each other. If they needed something—Ellen Spiro in San Francisco taught me how to use a camcorder, and I remember it was a Saturday afternoon, and she and I are on a third-story scaffold shooting—there were many marches. And there were these San Francisco cops, real fascists. NBC reporters were getting beat in the head. So they were literally trying to push us off the third-story scaffold, but I ended up getting some great stuff of that great action against Louis Sullivan that ended up in Testing the Limits.

00:45:00

What was yet another interesting thing, I remember returning a call—I was doing some work for Ellen, and Cara Mertes, who was the producer of *Independent Focus* at the time, I was calling her up for Ellen, who was out of town, was the project administrator, because she wanted to show *(In)visible Women*. So I said my name, and I didn’t know Cara at the time. We have since become very friendly. She says, “No, it’s funny that you’re calling me about Ellen’s piece, because I was about to call you about

your piece, *A Hard Reign's Gonna Fall*,” but she also showed a piece by Steve Zehentner, and *Testing the Limits* was also part of that series that she had curated. She said, “I can’t believe how many credits you have in stuff I’m putting up there,” because they used my footage, I did some research for them, they used some artwork, so I had five credits in their piece. So we were never competing.

SS: Did ACT UP fund you?

DL: We were really into guerilla stuff. Now, we had access to GMHC. They did fund us, because when people had no money, Aldyn McKean would get up and say, “Well, I can’t work. I have to get disability, because it’s my job to be an AIDS activist. I can’t have a job.” Not that that was my excuse per se. But I remember going to the treasury meeting. Marvin—what was his name?

SS: Shulman?

DL: Marvin Shulman, and people would go to be reimbursed for phone bills, and I would never do that, even though I could have and I couldn’t pay my phone bill. But when it got to the point where I just needed to be reimbursed for tape stock—and they knew who we were, and if we went to them with a bill, “Should we approve it? Yes.” So we were funded, but we did a lot—and the same thing, like guerilla Xeroxing. When I had a job, I worked for—after hours they were gone, let me print up a thousand posters on their toner and using their paper.

SS: Did ACT UP ever object to anything that DIVA-TV did?

DL: No. I can think of so few things that ACT UP—I remember telling researchers in San Francisco when they asked—there was an action that I was peripherally involved in and it backfired, and then some researcher came to me, I was

tabling at the Marriott. I was explaining to this researcher what had happened was some pharmaceutical company was having a panel, and it was Aldyn and Tony Malliaris and whoever else was involved, and they got Ellen to shoot it. They were going to disrupt the Q&A, and they managed to do that, but it kind of backfired, and this researcher came to me and he was really upset about that, but I was explaining to him how ACT UP worked. And I said, "Well, this wasn't ACT UP per se." I explained to him about affinity groups. We will vote on an action and have the membership, the floor, approve it. We might fund it. We would discuss it, but that isn't to say we didn't encourage the act of individuals or individual affinity groups from doing their own thing, which didn't require floor approval.

He wasn't just upset, because the researchers were all on our side anyway. He said, "Well, I have a vested interest in that. I had some serious questions I wanted to ask them, this particular panel, not as a researcher, but my wife has ARC."

Now, ARC, I imagine it's been mentioned, but at the time it was a designation in between being HIV-positive and having AIDS, and it related to certain symptoms, but if you didn't have AIDS, which was defined—well, you couldn't have cervical cancer or women's stuff at the time, that you weren't eligible for certain benefits if you didn't have three different things. Your T-cell count had to be below a certain level. You had to have certain opportunistic infections. They have since disbanded that.

00:50:00

So I was explaining to him how ACT UP worked. People would come up to him and said, "You have to be HIV-positive to be in ACT UP."

And I said, "No, no, not at all."

That was what was so egalitarian. If you came to the floor with a good idea, we'd say, "Do it. We will encourage you. We will help you." You'd end up with ten volunteers.

SS: Okay, I think we should take just a few-minute break.

SS: So how much did DIVA-TV cost?

DL: We really did it—we had access. We were doing stuff at DCTV when Maria Beatty was there, and we'd sometimes stay all night. We would sometimes just get footage—not footage, but tape stock that we didn't have to pay for. So it was really—I can't even say shoestring. Outside of getting tape stock, we really didn't spend money on anything.

SS: Did you ever film an action that you didn't agree with or you didn't understand the reason for it?

DL: No, because—well, yes, not exactly as you're phrasing the question, but I also got involved with YELL.

SS: Can you say what YELL was?

DL: Well, they changed the name. It was Youth Education Life Line. So this was about giving condoms out at high schools, and it was a great action. The kids loved it. I was not only involved with that. I would go to the Board of Ed hearings and stuff, so it wasn't just as a DIVA person, I was involved with YELL, but when they would do that kind of action at seven-thirty in the morning, going to high schools or maybe even junior high schools, and there was one time—and not that I disagreed with it, but I'm looking at it as like, oh, such great stuff that we could have had and we didn't get. It was the first time we ever went to give out condoms at a Catholic school, and it was all

these Catholic boys in their little uniforms, and they were totally intrigued. I don't know if they took the condoms. They may have taken the literature. They were really interested, but their priests or schoolmasters were there. And it was just great that we were doing that.

Someone—I don't want to say it was Steve Quester. It might not have been him. But the headmaster came out to talk to us. I'm thinking, "What a coup."

He wasn't saying, "Get away. I'm calling the cops." He was very rational. He was very down-to-earth, and he wanted to have a conversation with us on camera.

I said, "This is great."

I have lost it at City Council meetings and stuff, and I walked out before they had to throw me out, so I could understand that, but he started yelling at this—it was the headmaster of the school, "What about gay priests?" What about this and that? And that had nothing to do with why we were there. Instead of asking some questions that I would love to hear a Catholic schoolmaster, who was willing to answer our questions, respond to. I disagreed with the way that went. But I can't say there was anything—if I was there, it's because I wanted to be there, and we blew some things. We took our lumps.

James remembers when people—I think it was someone from TAG who, in retrospect, made some comment, and maybe it was out of context, but they said something to the effect that our St. Patrick's action was a mistake. And I listed every reason why it wasn't and it was one of the most brilliant things we ever did, if not ever. I don't understand why someone would second-guess, outside of their agenda changing,

00:55:00 because in retrospect, I think at the time we knew we were going to take some lumps for it. Ed Koch, who was bitter because it was somewhat because of us that he lost that primary to David Dinkins, so, of course, he had to come out. Of course, he had to show up at Mass, Edward Irving Koch, our Jewish mayor, just to, like—everybody in New York knew this was happening.

SS: He was at mass at Stop the Church?

DL: Yes.

SS: I didn't know that.

DL: There's probably footage of him. So of course he says the whole thing with Tom Keane, which I'll explain, and Tom Keane said he was going to do that, and he wasn't the only one who did it. But Tom Keane, isn't he now working for the government or is some elected official?

SS: I don't know.

DL: I'm not sure what his title is. Anyway, he said, "I went to Catholic schools my whole life. I sat in choirs. My mother's a Catholic schoolteacher now. I am so disgusted with the way they're talking about gay people." He supposedly went for communion and threw down the wafer, the alleged desecration of the host, and someone actually did it afterwards.

So Koch, of course, gets up, he says, "The desecration of the host, that's as bad as burning a Torah."

I'm saying, "I don't know. What do those wafers go for, like five cents for a thousand? Symbolically, okay, but this is a secular society. You want to buy a Torah, it's handwritten, it's \$15,000." One thing had nothing to do with the other, and

that was an individual action. If it's something that a group said they might have wanted to do, it probably wouldn't have gone through. That wasn't our intention, but we were very angry. Of course, we had the great Gran Fury stuff, "Know your scumbags." So we had an open condom not in the wrapper and Cardinal O'Connor with the miter, the vicious miter.

JW: That was Richard Deagle.

DL: Oh, yes, Richard Deagle. "This one saves lives." But we had these quotes, and it irks me that this son of a bitch got away with saying things. Cardinal O'Connor—and this is a verbatim quote—"When people live a morally reprehensible lifestyle, it should not be surprising that they become the objects of physical violence." But this son of a bitch, he was so arrogant. It was a matter of where do you get off sticking the tax-exempt nose into matters of public health policy, public education, AIDS education? Of course the Catholic Church had that clout for two centuries in politics, but he was encouraged by our friend Ronald Reagan, who, yesterday was the anniversary of his death. Phooey!

SS: Thank you.

DL: I had this dream, waiting for him to croak, I wanted to organize bus trips to go to the cemetery to his burial site for people to go and spit on his grave. I'm sure that would have done very well. We could have done it for charity. So we all know that—

SS: Like the czar.

DL: It was seven years before AIDS ever got mentioned, as people were dropping dead like flies. But I can't even say to his credit, he did appoint a National

Commission on AIDS, which was supposed to make recommendations to the three branches of government, and they covered everything, civil liberties, funding, research, legislation. So who does he appoint to this panel, this board, to advise on how we should deal with a fatal sexually transmitted disease but a bigoted, pompous, celibate clergyman, Cardinal John O'Connor.

SS: I want to go to a different arena. So first of all, how did your friends who were not in ACT UP feel about ACT UP?

DL: People supported what we were doing. I think I told you about my dentist friend who passed away. We were at Costa Pappas' house. It was like a DIVA—not a meeting, party, when Jean and Gregg were broadcasting for the first time Target City Hall. My closest friend, who, unfortunately, was murdered a few months ago, came to the meeting to see the tape being broadcast, and we mentioned—I really didn't follow this, because I can't remember the names and I wasn't on any of these things, but we mentioned certain pharmaceutical companies that we were fighting against or boycotting, and we gave him a list. He saw it, "Well, I won't use their products anymore."

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So I think people were generally—I used to get in trouble at work for stuff, calling D'Amato's office and things like that. But people were generally very supportive, and not gay people. They got it, which was very good. I don't know if it would have detracted me. Maybe it would have even pushed me further, if that was even possible, but people were totally supportive, ACT UP, in the same way that, for the most part—I did a couple GMHC walks. Some people were like, "I can't afford the lousy ten dollars," or someone said, "Well, I'll give you five."

I said, "Well, really? You've got to give ten."

But otherwise, people were very supportive of the cause and supported the actions.

SS: Now, you've mentioned a couple of people that you were close to, Costa, Robert Garcia, who died of AIDS. How did that affect you when you were inside the organization and people you were working with started to get sick?

DL: Well, first of all, Costa I got to know, again, in Target City Hall. Going from one VCR to another, a piece that I still get chills, and when I hear the Melanie song, it was "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)," and there's kind of a stop motion thing of, I think, people being arrested or doing a die-in, and this was at City Hall. And the lyrics, "We were so close, there was no room. We bled inside each other's wounds. We all had caught the same disease and we all sang the songs of peace, and lay down, lay—." I can't think of anything other than those images when I hear that song, and it's a great song.

I remember when Ray Navarro got sick, and I remember seeing him, visiting him in the hospital, and he was already blind at this point, but he still had that energy. He was getting, okay, not skeletal, but he just had a lot of things going on. But his activism was still there, his energy was still there. It's funny, when I lost someone, and two weeks afterward Nan Goldin did this slide presentation, I think with music at The Kitchen, of people who she shot after they were dead, and she talked about, "I can't do this. This is creepy."

But the people, their loved ones, their lovers, the families, they said, "No, you must do this. This is important. We need you to do this not just because it needs to be documented, but you're Nan Goldin, and to have you do this will mean a lot."

They were mesmerizing pieces, and she was really glad we did it. I didn't know her before that, but I went up to her afterwards and I said, "I just suffered a loss."

But she mentioned something, and I still quote her. She said, "The vanity is the last thing to go," and I remember Ray, who couldn't see, but was worried about how his hair looked, and he had lost a lot of it at that point.

I remember when my boyfriend was dying, and he was saying, almost as a whine, but not really, because this is—he said, "Will you still love me after I lose my hair?"

I quoted—okay, this isn't AIDS. To my friend whose mother was ninety-five, but before she became bedridden and out of it, a Jewish lady from Brooklyn, as long as she still wanted to go out and get her hair done, that's a good thing. So I always remembered that. That's kind of an interesting gauge. Vanity is the last thing to go.

SS: Who was your boyfriend, Dean?

DL: His name was Robert Mann. It's really complicated. It sounds like a Facebook thing. He was someone who had a lot of problems. He was a drug addict and had AIDS, and he was hustling at a very young age when his alcoholic parents would disappear for three days, or else he would shoplift to feed his younger sisters. When I write the play, I want to tell his story. He had—at the time it was multiple personality disorder, because sometimes he would talk about himself—we were living together, and he would talk about himself in the third person, and I thought this was just some affectation like they've done on *Seinfeld*. It wasn't until one day they all came out and introduced themselves to me. It was very scary. This was because, he actually at times had reenacted, relived some of the abuse that he had taken sexually from that.

01:05:00

SS: Was he still alive when you joined ACT UP?

DL: Yes.

SS: And did you try to find treatment information through ACT UP for him?

DL: I had helped him out. Okay. He was on methadone maintenance and just wanted to get off of it, and said, “The hell with it,” and he was diagnosed with TB. So when he would go get the methadone at Coney Island Hospital, he would also get his TB medicine, and one day he said, “Fuck it. I’m just going to cold-turkey this. I don’t want to be like this anymore.” So, of course, when he didn’t come to get his TB medicine, they came looking for him.

So he was really scared, so I went down with him to whatever office in the Department of Health, because we had to respond to that. I walk in, and the first person I see is Todd Wiese, and he said, “What are you doing here?” And I explained to him the situation, and Bobby was very relieved that just, “Okay, I feel good that here’s someone who is helping me out.”

I didn’t help him with treatment. I helped him with other things, like social services type things, that he needed. I remember I was at the hospital. It wasn’t like trying to get him on clinical trials. I don’t know if there was anything much happening. What was crazy about that whole thing is we ended up leaving there, taking the ambulance directly to—I think it was what used to be Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, because we thought they were good, and I went away. It was Fourth of July. I came back. He was doing great.

As it happens, it was never TB to begin with, and I spoke with this woman from the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force who was helping us, because I'm going to go into the horrible social workers, because I thought it was going to help him out. I got in touch with the ombudsman—is that the right word?—from GMHC, because there was a dentist who wouldn't treat him at one point. I said, "This is not good." So it ended up it wasn't TB, and I thought, "Well, we could sue them for misdiagnosis," but it's not unusual. It was a respiratory thing, and he had been improving.

But in the meanwhile, I remember being at my parents' house when they still lived out in Brooklyn. I was visiting them. I was staying over. And I'm thinking that—the Entenmann's crumb cakes, how you go like [demonstrates] to eat the last bit of the crumbs, and I put it back in the refrigerator. I'm going, "Oh, my god." My father, who was having respiratory problems, he's going to get infected with TB. It was four in the morning. I'm lying in bed. I'm imagining myself having trouble breathing. I said, "Wait a second. This is crazy." A very close friend of mine was a respiratory therapist at Mt. Sinai. I said, "Let me call him up."

I told him the circumstances, and he just laughed. He said, "Not only had you not reached the incubation period where you could be infected, but you certainly couldn't be contagious to anybody else." But this is how things spun out of control, which is kind of a metaphor for what happened early on with AIDS.

SS: When Bobby got sick, did people from ACT UP, were they involved with him? Did they help you?

DL: He would sometimes wait outside because he didn't want to come to a meeting. I'm trying to think in what role –

SS: No, but I mean, did they help you? Your friends in ACT UP, did they know what you—

DL: I always had access to people who I would ask who knew, whoever that might have been, about certain things, even about—

SS: But I mean emotionally.

DL: They were supportive. There were people I knew—

SS: They knew that your boyfriend was dying?

DL: Well, before even he was dying they had met him. He wanted to be on the sidelines. He was very proud of what I was doing with ACT UP. He had followed it, but he had enough going on. He couldn't get involved. But I remember as he was— here's this horrible story. It's almost Dickensian. We were going to Thanksgiving, where they would let you have four God's Love We Deliver turkey dinners, which actually weren't bad, and we spent Thanksgiving together that year. Two days before, he ended up going into the hospital. He was having a really bad stomach problem. It ended up he had a tumor in his stomach that they removed part of.

01:10:00

I remember getting a call from the surgeon. I actually had the medical proxy, but he wouldn't do the surgery until I told him it was okay, but by the time I was able to get back to the doctor, he had already agreed to do that. It was on Christmas Eve he told me, "Well, you know, the tumor I had they only got part of is lymphoma, and I have two weeks to live." And he fooled them. He died after a week.

But I remember in that last week—and he was lucid up until the end, because I spent the entire Christmas Day, and it was just great. He was doing fine, even if that was going to be it, and it was very eerie, because they gave out these little dishes

of candy to the patients, and you had hospital people running around with the Santa hats singing Christmas carols, so it was very surreal, but it was nice to get to spend the entire Christmas Day with him. He was, again, pretty much lucid, even if he couldn't get off the bed at this point, till the very end.

But I remember this horrible social worker who—There were other incidents, and we've heard all the horror stories in hospitals, but this is a social worker. It makes me think if you're such a misanthrope, if you hate people, to be this—this may sound racist. I think some of these people resented white men being in the hospital getting Medicaid and benefits. This was the attitude I would sense. Maybe I'm reading into it. I'm not that paranoid. I'm certainly not racist, but I think the way some of these people treated him—but this woman was like—this one day he was totally out of it, and she gives him a clipboard and is handing him a pen and trying to get him to sign himself not only out of the hospital and give up his apartment, which he had hoped to get back to and we knew he wasn't going to, but to sign himself into Goldwater.

Now, we know Goldwater was one of two facilities, and Goldwater was the better of the two, and it was horrible. It was probably, okay, not as bad as Willowbrook in the seventies, but not much better. One of the first things we heard, what a horrible, horrible place—and it was a hospice—Goldwater was. But Goldwater was also where they would quarantine people who would not take their TB medicine. It was horrible. And I said, “No, he's not signing himself out.”

And she's yelling at me, “Oh, you're going to make sure he takes his medicine?”

So when I told the advocate who was from Brooklyn AIDS Task Force that, she says, “Over my dead body is any client of mine going to end up in Goldwater.” Then she also told me—and this is, you think, it’s a social worker’s job—he was entitled, should he have made it home, to ’round-the-clock in-house care.

SS: Right. Home care, yes.

DL: Right. That’s why they call it an entitlement. But even then at Coney Island Hospital—and I can’t say he got horrible treatment there, but even the counselor at the methadone clinic, he would go—he lived on Washington Avenue by the back of the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, and he would have to walk almost a mile to get to the train, and then from the train on Ocean Parkway to get to Coney Island Avenue was almost another mile. This is someone with AIDS. Nobody bothered to tell him, “You’re entitled to Access-A-Ride.” Not that it would have prolonged his life. And then you think of something like lymphoma, if they couldn’t help Louis Malle or Jackie Onassis, what were they going to do for him? Fortunately, it was not what we saw other people suffer through. It was quick, and I don’t think he suffered too badly.

JW: Did you videotape him?

DL: No, and I regret that, because I was doing stuff at that time for a piece I put aside, but I actually wanted to incorporate his story into it, like actually it would be from—I got this idea from Beth B. I would write just all the stories, but it would be as if other people were telling them. I wasn’t going to say, “Well, this is me talking about him or us.” And I wanted to incorporate that into a much larger, more elaborate piece, which is why I created that artwork. I got the artwork out of it, but I don’t think I’m going to do that piece. It was called *And God Bless Us, Everyone*, and it came out of St. Patrick’s.

01:15:00

I wanted to do a piece, just a little segment, to the Reverend Gary Davis blues song “Death Don’t Have No Mercy in This Land,” and that would have been the Catholic Church. So it expanded into how religious a nation we are. This was with the whole NEA thing and all those lunatics, and then I was kind of going to visually and conceptually and politically reinterpret lines of scripture. And then it became, “Well, I’m going to define what is God.”

Then after September 11th, well, God took on a whole different meaning, but I still want to write his story out, whether I do it as a video or even a spoken piece or written piece, because it’s a story that was real unique, even just some of the stuff that I had told that I think warrants saying so. I think I can tell it, to answer James’ questions, and he would have spoken before the camera, and I regret that it didn’t occur to me to document that. If you didn’t get on videotape, it didn’t happen, like articles where that—

JW: Not even through pictures.

DL: Yes, I wish I had done some artwork with him too. I don’t even know if I could do this, but I remember as they were moving him from a gurney back to the bed, and he was really, really thin—this was the last week, and he was reaching out for this nurse to help him. And she says, “Every time I touch you, you scream.” I don’t know. I don’t think it was because she was fearful because he had AIDS. Just the way he was reaching, it was like the creation of Adam from the Sistine Chapel. So I wanted to draw him or some proxy of him with those skinny, skinny legs and the skinny arms and the hospital gown reaching out as Adam did to God. It was an image I couldn’t get out of my head. Maybe one day I’ll get around to drawing it.

SS: So many people in ACT UP had lovers who died of AIDS. Did you talk to other people about it? Did people talk about that experience with each other inside ACT UP?

DL: People would come out on the floor and talk to that. It was, I found, a little disillusioning, because I didn't necessarily anticipate that. I remember after cleaning out his apartment, I had all these cases of Ensure, which was quite expensive at the time and you had to get a prescription, that I wanted to give away, and I think they ended up going to someplace in Puerto Rico. Someone did it. But I went and gave my little spiel just to explain what I had to about him, and I remember people going up when someone died, and just the big hugs, and I walked off into a staircase and I'm like—and I didn't get any reaction, and that kind of threw me off. It's not like I wasn't known or known to a lot of people. I'm not putting anything on that, but it kind of flabbergasted me at the time.

Okay, this gets into another thing about ACT UP. I remember Kimberly Bergalis, and unfortunately—do I need to explain?

SS: Yes, explain.

DL: Kimberly Bergalis was—she was probably, what, about eleven years old?

SS: No, she was an adult woman.

DL: Well, I thought she was a teenager.

Jim Hubbard: She was twenty-one.

DL: Okay, well, yes, that's just past a teenager. She caught AIDS and died, from basically, as it turned out, from the slovenly dental practices of the HIV-

infected dentist who treated her and who was not adhering to just standard universal precautions that any healthcare person would do, I mean his office and his instruments. Unfortunately, she ended up, because she was justifiably bitter, under the wings of people like Dana Rohrbacher and William Dannemeyer, and they were trying to pass all this legislation that I don't think went through about having healthcare workers tested.

01:20:00 We were making—I know I participated in the same thing. We were making Kimberly Bergalis jokes, and it was more about the politics of it. But this is not someone who did anything, and we, if anything, hated that whole—even when people like Jesse [Helms] — “Oh, those innocent victims, those poor children, they didn't do anything to get AIDS. We should care about them. But those drug addicts, those people who were fucking in glory holes, they deserve what they get.”

So she was someone who really got screwed and died real quick, and it wasn't pleasant, and it occurred to me, well, as an organization, aren't we supposed to care about everybody with AIDS? We never questioned how someone got it.

I remember Bobby, actually, he insisted I get tested and came with me and sat for not only when I did it, but when my results came back, was very relieved when I was negative. I remember he felt dirty and guilty, which was natural, and the counselor was great, was saying, “Listen, we start our life today. It doesn't matter how you got to where you are.”

And it always bothered me, and her parents actually produced a play that actually kind of gave both sides, because they weren't blaming anyone, and the one who was to blame was this doctor who should have lost his medical license.

As I mentioned, my dentist friend, we had a friend—it's funny, because his parents had lots of money. He had AIDS and gave a million dollars to start the AIDS Center at Montefiore Hospital. My friend was very upset, because he was screwing some woman without telling her his HIV status, but when this came out—okay, even before—this might have been before I got involved with ACT UP. It might have been before ACT UP, even, but I remember him showing me literature he was getting that they were trying to sell these hazmat suits to dentists. There was that crazy fear that was going on, and then even medical people, doctors who just didn't know what the fuck they were talking about.

But he explained to me that this guy, was a friend of ours, was a patient. His name was Barney, and he said—I think the bill was supposed to protect medical workers potentially from an HIV-positive patient. I think that's what they were trying to do. If you have a compromised immune system, you're more at risk for being in a dentist office, no matter what precautions you take, because there's blood and pieces of tooth and bacteria flying all over the place. You can't avoid that, so that person, that patient, who has a compromised immune system is more at risk than the healthcare worker. This is using just biological and medical logic.

SS: Now, I want to get back to the thing about you not getting the support on the floor, because I think that's—

DL: This was just that one incident. I got a lot of support, and I don't know to what extent—maybe I'm blocking it out. If there was anything I needed, and that was—

SS: Well, what about the other DIVA people? Did they hang out with you, call you up, or—

DL: Yes, well, there were people I was closer with. Ellen was one of my closer friends. There were people who I wasn't necessarily involved with personally or socially. Jean and Gregg I was close with. Also, we had gone through it, because with people like Ray or Costa. So I did have that support. I can't give examples. Just that they were there and sympathetic. And certainly Ellen and Kate Horsfield, who we were having meetings in her house, or someone who you wouldn't necessarily associate with DIVA, but was an important part, Branda Miller. She had a roommate who was this artist named Bob Smith, who was—

SS: I knew Bob.

01:25:00

DL: Bob was great, who I met at a party, and we just hit it off immediately. She was actually his caretaker, and when her landlord was kicking her out of that loft, she was going to go to court. If she did and won the case, she could have set a precedent by actually—which eventually the state did not necessarily in this context, but extending the definition of family, so that she could have been considered legally family and had a right of succession to the loft. That's something that they did extend the definition of family to group homes and things like that. So, people like that.

SS: What happened to DIVA-TV?

DL: It was funny. It got kind of with the *Like A Prayer* thing. Ellen was away doing one of her road things, and she came to a meeting and said, "Wow. I can't believe how cliquish DIVA got." I don't want to say it was like the cool kids and the not-cool kids, but there was a—and also people who were kind of in the middle that kept it

together, were, to some extent, the glue, because it didn't start out that way, like Jean and Gregg, were off doing other things.

So there was almost an elitism that kind of fractured it, and then I think what killed it is when they said, "You took too long to finish this," when it was finally rolling and we were doing this at Testing the Limits. They said, "Bring us all the tapes and we're going to finish it," and that kind of was it.

SS: Did you ever make up with those people?

JH: Who were they?

DL: Oh, you want me to drop names?

JH: Yes.

DL: Okay. It was Catherine and Craig Paull and Bob Beck —no, I was friendly with Craig and Bob, but they just ended up—it was Jocelyn Taylor, she was talking about some people were going to speak in Massachusetts at some university, and she said, "The cute boys," and then she said—that was like a faux pas. So there were people like me and George and Durwood Wiggins, who was working a lot with Testing the Limits, and who was also shooting everything, and it was quite accomplished and a good editor. It became like, "Well, this is our thing." It was unnecessarily dismissive not only of other people who were there, but of people's efforts and what they had, what they could do, what they were doing, and all that they had done previously, which was unfortunate, like Peter Bowen. I don't know if I've mentioned him. It was this kind of Ivy League type arrogance, like this has nothing to do with your bullshit academic.

I remember Catherine, when we presented the parody of “Oh Come, All Ye Faithful” that we had shot, and she loved it. She says, “It’s like the anti-aesthetic of documentary realism.”

I said, “Cut the bullshit. I went to film school too. What the fuck does that mean?”

But this is kind of, I guess, where it veered off, which was unfortunate. There was a little bit of personality, but there was also a level of burnout, and then people were also moving on, like people who were actually doing good stuff. I don’t want to be doing just gay stuff or AIDS stuff. I’ve said all I had—like Gregg’s *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. How much more could he have said? It’s not that they didn’t want to be associated with doing that. Like Jocelyn Taylor once complained to me, “They’re always sticking me in these black lesbian programs.”

I’m saying, “Well, you’re making films about being a black lesbian. Where do you expect it to go?”

SS: Are you still in touch with her?

DL: Someone just asked me. I think Kate Horsfield asked me about her. I don’t know what happened to her. I think she may be abroad. I don’t know.

SS: So after DIVA-TV fell apart, how much longer did you stay in ACT UP?

DL: Well, at this point it kind of migrated to AIDS Community Television, which was still DIVA-TV. So at that point it was Tony Arena and David Buckingham. So it kind of evolved.

SS: Where was AIDS Community Television based?

DL: In 12 Wooster Street. And thank you for that and for James just having the wherewithal to keep it together. It was important. I remember when we had our million dollars and stuff—

SS: Wait, I don't know about this. When did you get a million dollars?

DL: Not us.

SS: Oh, ACT UP.

DL: The art auction.

SS: Oh, the 650,000, yes.

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DL: And James put a proposal to AIDS Community Television, to have us fund it, and again, I was not seeing—and I had been involved with public access TV. But I was kind of not supportive of it in the beginning, and I ended up voting in favor of it, but I had told James, “In retrospect, I was wrong. I was mistaken. Thank you for doing this. It was something that was really important.” That’s why I can say I’m always right, because I have no problem admitting when I’m wrong, and that’s often enough.

JW: Eventually.

SS: So when did you leave ACT UP?

DL: Well, we were still doing stuff—I was still shooting well into the mid-nineties, I think, '96, certainly through Giuliani. I don't think I left ACT UP per se. I think ACT UP kind of was fizzling out. I think a lot of it had to do with people were—I don't want to say complacent, but they were on the medications and doing better, so it wasn't as desperate as it was in '88, '89, well into the nineties. I don't think you ever

really left ACT UP. I'll run into people I may have never said hello to at a meeting who we'll—and you're thrilled to see them on the street.

SS: Do you guys have anything you want to ask?

JH: No.

DL: I do have a quickie. I remember a friend of mine who was quite wealthy, and when you're in that position, you have to give a certain amount of money to charity, otherwise it goes to the government. So she called me up and she was like—she had some of my original drawings from *Hard Reign* on the wall, and she said, "I have \$10,000 I need to give away. Who should I give it to, amfAR or ACT UP?" This is when we had the workspace. I was just envisioning whoever was opening the mail at the time. opening up that envelope with a \$10,000 check.

SS: It's interesting, because we just interviewed Charles Hovland.

Two days ago we interviewed Charles Hovland from the Fundraising Committee, and we asked him if rich gay men were ever giving money to ACT UP, and he said, "No, the largest donation we ever got was \$10,000," and there it is from a woman. He didn't know that, yes. That's interesting. That's great.

So I only have one last question. So just looking back, what would you say was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you think was its biggest disappointment?

DL: Oh, that's a big question. The greatest achievement, I think—and my answer's inspired by Jean Carlomusto's piece, *Sex in an Epidemic*, which was amazing, and we watched it together when it finally premiered, and I had seen earlier cuts. There were a couple of things. She showed Michael Callen talking about how when no one

knew what was going on, they came up with the idea of safe sex. Now, kids these days, they never grow up in an age where sex, which is unfortunate, wasn't potentially fatal. And I remember Jean showed an earlier cut—she had been working on this for ten years—at some yoga center, and some twenty-year-old gay kid during the Q&A, he got up, he was in tears, saying, “I can't believe. I had no idea what you people went through.” And that's why it's great that there's—thank goodness we got *United in Anger*, which I love. I haven't seen David France's piece, which is a little different, or Jean's piece or David Weissman's brilliant piece.

I think that probably the greatest achievement was that the stigma was taken away. Also, one of the things that—I don't know if it's the greatest achievement, it's a biggie, was the coalition-building, which started—and I have to bring up Emily Gordon, who was our resident non-medical expert on pediatric AIDS as a fieldworker, a caseworker. She was the one who got us involved with those people and the protests at Harlem Hospital. Or the Kings County demonstration. I remember meeting with those people, and it was just great, because that's where we got, “We're fired up, won't take it no more!”

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And I remember doing outreach in that neighborhood. A couple weeks before the demonstration, it's pretty much African American, and I know that neighborhood. It's Church Avenue. I ride my bike there still. But you see these white people handing out flyers, and nobody wants to take a flyer, no matter what you're giving out. As soon as they heard about a protest against the abuses at Kings County, “Let me see that!” And when we did the demonstration, we started out with a couple hundred people, and people were hanging out of windows. When they saw this was a protest

about Kings County Hospital, and everybody we encountered, if not personally, but most of them personally, but everybody at least knew someone or had a relative who had some horrible experience at Kings County Hospital, and two hundred people started that demonstration. There were a thousand by the end, and that, I think, is a great thing.

Another thing on that same level, now, at the beginning, before you were talking about the term—I guess it existed, but the down-low or before these communities, which came later, slightly later, became devastated by AIDS, the African American community, the Latino community, it was like they didn't want to deal with AIDS. "Faggots get AIDS. Those queens in the community we don't even want to talk to."

I remember marching—and this, again, Robert Garcia got me to march in the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and it was one of the most invigorating things I ever did, and, of course, they stuck us in the back with the AIDS groups and the gay groups. We were singing. I'm singing these songs in Spanish, and I don't speak Spanish, so Spanish, a lot of the syllables slurred together, so I was always five syllables behind by the end of the verse.

The thing was that that first year there were people who—I don't remember his last name. There was a tall thin guy named David who had a little moustache, and you definitely know who he was. Anyway, our contingent—it wasn't ACT UP; they lumped us all together—was leading this, wearing these little, little shorts and these red pumps, camping it up. Surprisingly, 70 percent of the people were either in favor—there was no cat calls. Some people booed or did a thumbs-down, but nothing, no "Maricón," no, "You deserve AIDS."

What is incredible is a year later when that community had really become devastated, I marched again. I'm carrying signs about La SIDA, and these Puerto Rican grandmothers were coming up to us and saying, "God bless you." What was a great example of that, I went to shoot a Spanish teach-in that Marina Alvarez did, and again, I don't speak Spanish, so people are going—and pardon me, I don't mean this to sound as singsong, but I don't know any other way to convey it. People were going, "[rapid gibberish]." "aerosolized pentamidine." So this is stuff that people obviously learned being at the bedside of their loved ones at that point.

Then with the Brooklyn Bridge action that brought all the Housing Works people together, and it's nice that it got diverse. So it went beyond just gay men or rich gay men or drug addicts, and I think the fact that it's now just—I don't want to say it's—I will never believe AIDS is a manageable condition, but that stigma is often something we have to deal with, and that people do.

Now, you were asking what are the greatest failures.

SS: Disappointments.

DL: I think probably one of the disappointments is that we got complacent. Okay, we're having a twenty-fifth anniversary. Well, what happened to those years in between? We're the reason why there is AIDS education. We're still finding things, but we know things like abstinence education actually works less well than good AIDS education, and that we didn't follow that up, that we let some people—the crap that we gave Cuomo. It's funny. I saw *The Best Man*, and we ran into Mario Cuomo. I was with a friend of mine who was in the press pool who used to shoot him, was following him around in L.A. at one point, and he was not really an enemy. We

01:40:00

were fighting about funding. And look at the lunatics out there. I wish that energy was still available to fight—that we couldn't carry it through to fight this lunatic personhood legislation. We're moving back to the fifties with what they're trying to do with women or letting the Catholic Church, even though they kind of dug their own grave, but they're still getting away with this stuff.

So I don't know. If I had to say a failure—and there's very little I can say—I think the failure is that we weren't able to follow through with that same energy, and maybe that's because of the lack of desperation that we had in the beginning. I think the passion was still there, and if I had to say what I'm disappointed about, it would have to be that.

But what I'm pleased is that not just for the archival purposes, that legacy—this is like what Penny Arcade and Jayne County say. You have to know your history, and I'm glad that a lot of it got documented, even vis-à-vis countersurveillance in the beginning, for Jim shooting for ten years to be able to put together even—albeit it's a fraction of that history, but people get it, that audience at that opening, and you've seen the other audiences. This wasn't preaching to the converted. This is what I'm saying about DIVA-TV. The stuff we did at one point, because people thought it was so inside, this is one of the criticisms we got. It was preaching to the converted. And then when I would show this stuff to a class years later, it'd still hold up, and that criticism was not valid. I'd hate people to say that about *United in Anger*, because they can't.

SS: No, we showed it in Palestine and people really liked it, so I don't think that that's the criticism, but I'm glad that the work has held up.

Let me just ask you one more thing. What are you working on now?

DL: Now that I've finally got this setup, I really want to get back to that documentary that—you even saw that first little clip when we did that panel at NYU about Jayne County, because when that was really going to be put together as, it was one main interview and one performance, it expanded to a history of underground New York, because we got people like Mary Woronov, Billy Name, Danny Fields and Taylor Mead and Jonas Mekas, and it went on and on, and Holly Woodlawn and Mary Woronov. It's this amazing story that I'm immersed in, and I want to tell it, and I know I can tell it in ways that it hasn't been done before.

I also want to get back to—I have been on this hiatus about drawing, and I want to do it again, but I want to move away from—well, this is horrible. I had maybe six hundred Polaroids of all the ACT UP stuff that got discarded that, in itself, could have been a gallery thing. I would take the Polaroids, using them as either a composite or I'd consider it the first draft of the drawing, like through the viewfinder. So I want to just alter the style and the content, because I think I've done enough of that, and I'm going in other directions with that, but it's because that was inspired.

I'm just amazed that—*A Hard Reign's Gonna Fall*, I thought nobody beyond ACT UP would see it, and it played on Cuban government television and MoMA and in places where—and PBS, and it's in the permanent museum, in the Goethe Museum in Tokyo and Zagreb and Budapest, and people who didn't even understand English got what we were doing. And I have to post it at this point, but—so it's nice that people got to see our message—it's not an insular thing—people who weren't even interested. I'm just watching people in the audience at MoMA at a certain point, where

the line is, “I met one man who was wounded in love,” and just seeing tears go down people’s eyes.

01:45:00 They got it, so it was nice to at least have made that contribution to enlightening people about not just AIDS in general, but what we did, because the whole description was “as seen through the eyes of young AIDS activists.” What’s interesting is I wanted to do it as a live-action piece, and the character I used was—do you remember Tim Whitcomb?

SS: No.

DL: You would, because he was the guy—I drew this, and it’s in your film in the Box Tops, that cute red-haired kid who they drag off at City Hall getting arrested.

SS: Jim?

JH: I’m not sure.

DL: Yes, I remembered seeing it. It’s funny, because a lot of the images that I drew were images that ended up in it. I presented this to DIVA to do it. It was like the human storyboard that became, as I wanted to have us do it as a DIVA production, as a live-action thing, and Ray Navarro said, “No, use the drawings, and you should be in it,” and then it just went on to the New Festival. But it’s funny, because I used him as the model, and I asked him—and I barely knew him just from the meeting, but he said, “Sure, I’ll shoot it.”

SS: Well, I hope you post it.

DL: Well, you must have a version of that somewhere. I have a bad copy here, meaning not a digital version, but a data copy, and I just played it and it needs to be

redone. So I want to just post it to the—which is the one? Not the ACT UP website.

Why am I spacing out? The ACT UP alumni site.

JW: Facebook?

DL: The ACT UP alumni.

SS: Okay, great. Thank you, Dean.

DL: Thank you.