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Interviewee: **Elizabeth Meixell**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Elizabeth Meixell
September 30, 2010

SARAH SCHULMAN: So we start out if you could just tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

ELIZABETH MEIXELL: I'm Elizabeth Meixell, September 30, 2010, at Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan.

SS: How old are you?

EM: I'm sixty-five. I've lived here for about thirty-five years, taking some breaks.

SS: Where were you born?

EM: Fort Knox, Kentucky.

SS: Oh, you're kidding. I didn't realize that.

EM: Army.

SS: Oh, your father was in the army?

EM: That's right, yes, at the end of World War II.

SS: So was he the first person in your family to be military, career military?

EM: No, he wasn't career. It was just the Second World War, and everybody was in one branch of the service or another.

SS: Oh, I see.

EM: Yes, and it was the right thing to do at that time.

SS: So when he got out, where did they settle?

EM: New Jersey. North Bergen, New Jersey.

SS: What kind of business were your parents in?

EM: My father worked for Public Service Electric and Gas Company, and for a few years Margaret Meixell stayed home with the kids, there were seven of us, and then she had enough of that and “went to business,” as she said.

SS: She raised seven kids and then she had a career in business?

EM: Yes. She was a switchboard operator, first for the army and then for Public Service in New Jersey and then for the navy and then for the Census Bureau.

SS: And what was the ethnic background of your family?

EM: Northern European, Anglo.

SS: When did they come over?

EM: Two, three generations ago. We’re two parts German, one part Irish, and one part French.

SS: So what was North Bergen like right after the war?

EM: Well, we lived on Tonnelle Avenue in my father’s grandma’s basement. It was a truck route. It was sooty. And then my father’s mother, who had moved to Westwood with another family of hers, a new husband and two other sons, gave my father and mother a piece of property, and they started to build a house, they thought. They gave the builder \$10,000, but he dug a hole in the ground there and in a few other places until people realized he was just taking their money, and then eventually they built a bungalow for the nine of us.

SS: What was the community like? Were there a lot of people buying land on the G.I. Bill at that time?

EM: They were FHA properties.

SS: What does that mean?

EM: Federal Housing Administration. I don't know whether people were buying on the G.I. Bill or not. I don't know how that worked at the time, but there were commuters and people working in local businesses. People mostly worked.

SS: Were you raised with particular values about being a member of the community or social justice or any of the things that you've come to embody?

EM: Nothing. Nothing. I was a member of a family and that's where our loyalty lay, and I never heard anything else. My parents were, of course, working. My father at certain periods had two full-time jobs, and my mother was working, and the rest of us were doing our job going to school and taking jobs ourselves.

SS: So they didn't belong to any kind of church?

EM: Yes, yes. Of course the Roman Catholic Church.

SS: And how did you relate to the message of your local church?

EM: I didn't perceive a message. I took the other kids to Mass. They thought I was their mother, a lot of the people. I was once dressed up in a real nun's habit for the spring play, and I was asked to do a pitch for the school to raise money, and that was my first time on stage asking for money, also my first time as a nun.

SS: {LAUGHS} So you come by it honestly.

EM: I do. I do. But since then, it hasn't seemed so honest. More fun.

SS: Right. When did you first start becoming aware of social issues?

I guess the Rosenbergs were at that time. Joe McCarthy.

EM: That was just in the [*New York*] *Journal American*. It didn't affect me or my family at all. I think my parents removed articles about young women having gotten in trouble, but nothing else seemed out of the ordinary. We saw articles in *Time* magazine about "The Miracle of Life."

SS: So what was your plan for your life at that time?

EM: Well, I should be a secretary, a nurse, or a teacher. If, god forbid, my husband should become ill, I would have to take care of the family, so I became a secretary.

SS: You went to secretarial school?

EM: That's right.

SS: What was the name of the school?

EM: Katherine Gibbs School.

SS: Did you come into the city or was it in New Jersey?

EM: I came into 42nd Street to go to school.

SS: And what was the environment like at Katherine Gibbs at that time?

EM: We wore stockings and high heels, no wedges permitted. We didn't even know what that was. Hats, suits, nothing sleeveless, nothing formfitting, no sweaters, only nice blouses.

SS: And what about the other women who were there? This was a whole bunch of women starting to professionalize, so it was quite gifted people.

EM: Yes. A couple of the forty-five women in my classroom had been to college, but for some reason they didn't do well in college, and this was the alternative. We were white. We were considered girls. There were two married women in the class, and that was very unusual. We were not allowed to smoke on the street. Things have really changed. And I have been back at 200 Park on the same floor where our school was at the time, and the smoking room still smells like it.

SS: Was it a two-year program?

EM: No, it's a one-year class.

SS: So then did they place you in an office?

EM: No. I found a job through the Little League manager of one of my brothers. I worked for an engineering firm for about three years and then a brokerage house, which was pretty exciting, for another seven years or so.

SS: You were still living at home at that time?

EM: For a few years, and then I moved to Manhattan with my cousin Marianne, who had been in a convent for a while, but she was thrown out legitimately.

SS: Where did you move to?

EM: East 84th Street.

SS: And what was that like? It was a German neighborhood, right?

EM: Yes, at the time it was a German neighborhood. We did go to the restaurants. We did go to the single bars. We had a lot of fun.

SS: What year was this are we in now?

EM: Well, that was probably '72. In the meantime, I had lived with my family in North Jersey, and our second sister, Judy, and I entertained the boys, servicemen, at different bases in the area, Fort Wadsworth and Fort Hancock.

SS: What did you do? What was your show?

EM: Short skirts and long eyelashes. We were just friendly, but not too friendly. We could dance only so close.

SS: What was it you liked about soldiers?

EM: Oh, they were men and some of them were great dancers, and it was a social life in North Jersey. I didn't have a car. We went places a couple of times a week.

SS: So what happened during the sixties?

EM: Nothing really happened to me. I went to school at night, the New York Institute of Finance, Hunter College, Pace College, and I tried to have a college life while I was going to work in the daytime. I worked on the school newspaper at Pace, and somebody interviewed me, I think, and asked what I thought about the war. I think my quote was I really didn't know what was right.

At this time, the construction workers were attacking the new building on Park Row, and I think they broke the glass doors or something like that. It was an interesting time.

SS: Why were they doing that?

EM: Well, the construction workers said, "My country, right or wrong," and other people were saying, "My country, make it right," or something similar.

SS: So then you're in the seventies. You're going to singles bars. This is the disco era.

EM: Yes.

SS: Did you like to go dancing?

EM: Yes, yes, yes, had a lot of fun.

SS: So when did you first become aware of the gay community?

EM: Not until I joined WHAM!, Women's Health Action [and Mobilization].

SS: Oh, really? So it wasn't by being a disco queen?

EM: Oh, no, no.

SS: No, it was all separate?

EM: Yes, it was separate. Not until much later in '89.

SS: So between '72 and '89, you must have gone through an enormous transformation to have ended up in WHAM!

EM: Yes. Well, it was just my basic feeling. In the meantime, I went to college for a year. I went to SUNY Buffalo. I lived in the dorm with the kids. I had a great time. I played Scrabble. I took lots of courses. And, as you say, it was the time when women were going back to school, but just a little before, so that I was asked, "What are you doing here?" and I would say, "I'm on my way to psychology class." But the question really was, what was I doing there? At the time there were a lot more men in

school than women, on average, after the four years. Some of my girlfriends from high school got advanced degrees, but some had their children when they were still in college and did drop out.

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SS: So when you were in college, is that when you started to – ?

EM: I took a course, some kind of women's consciousness-raising class, and the young women in the class said to me – I was thirty years old at the time – “Why have you never had children?” And I really hadn't thought of it that way. I'd had some children, my brothers and sisters, to help raise, and I didn't think I was done for at the time, so I didn't have an answer to that question.

But I did take a class called “The History of Women in the Labor Movement and Women in Literature,” first-year classes. It was really fun. It was eye-opening. I didn't have any responsibilities. It was Buffalo, so I didn't have to wear high heels, I could dress for the weather. And I still have friends from those days, friends from the law school. When I came back to New York, I worked for law firms, and I sometimes ended up working for some of the young people that I'd gone to school with. It was fun.

SS: So when did you decide to become an activist?

EM: Well, I didn't decide to become an activist. I decided to travel a bit. I took a few years off and I just went to San Francisco and worked my way around there and then Hawaii, had a great time there, too, and then Melbourne, Australia, and then Alaska. I was pretty lucky.

Then when I came back to New York, I worked at the World Trade Center a bit, and I saw a flier on 14th Street about a demonstration about abortion rights, and the *Webster* decision on July 3, 1989, brought me together with a lot of women downtown, and we walked up Broadway to Union Square. In the group were all these cute little guys in spandex, pink spandex, and they laid down in 14th Street, which was shocking, and so did I. They had to help me up. I wore my pink polyester and patent leather shoes. Then these same young men came on bus trips with us to Washington [D.C.] for abortion rights, and they turned out to be young men from ACT UP.

I was working at a law firm near Rockefeller Center, and Karin Timour happened to be one of the other secretaries down the hall, and I ran into her on the way to another demonstration, and we were a little cool to each other, trying to figure out what was going on. Of course, she knew everything, and I was a little shy, but we were on the same side, and from that day on, I was a member of WHAM! and, of course, totally involved with ACT UP, the women's auxiliary of Women's Health Action and Mobilization.

SS: I want to go back a little bit and talk about *Webster* and all the events that led to that. So when you were growing up, abortion was illegal, your family was against abortion, your church was against abortion. When did you start to change your mind?

EM: Probably through some reading when I was around thirty. I thought Colette was the only author, and I read all of her books a couple of times, and I began to feel a little more responsible for what was going on, especially organizations,

unionization. I think it was about that time when I looked at the situation beyond my ability to get a job. That was the important thing.

SS: Were you following *Roe v. Wade* when that went to the Supreme Court?

EM: No, I wasn't. The people I work with now were on the other side of the aisle in Albany, but it turns out I have some friends from those days, which I met later, who were on our side.

SS: What about the Hyde Amendment in '79? You were following that when they took away Medicaid funding?

EM: I didn't realize it was happening, no. I didn't read the paper.

SS: But there was something about *Webster*. Do you want to explain what *Webster* was, just for the record?

EM: *Webster* turned back to the states some authority over women's lives. They could regulate how high the windows were in a procedures room, an operation facility, an operating room.

SS: So, what was it about *Webster* that made you put on your pink polyester and lie down on 14th Street?

EM: It wasn't – I just lay down in the street because the others did. I did not have a strong feeling about it, and I think that's something I should emphasize to you. I gained my feeling about what was going on over the past thirty years. It took quite some time. It was not my background. It was not my opinion. I had a general idea that

this was the right thing to do, and if I'm going to have anything to say about what goes on in life, I'd better participate. It's easy to participate.

SS: Did you get arrested on 14th Street?

EM: No. Those nice young men helped me up.

SS: Now let's talk about these nice young men for a minute. Did you socialize with gay people before that? Did you have gay male friends?

EM: No, no. After one of these demonstrations, I went to a classroom for a WHAM! meeting, and there was a woman there with pink triangles in her ears. I thought that took a lot of nerve, and that was *very* exciting. Of course, nobody else at the meeting would speak to me, but I thought that these women were pretty exciting and had a lot of nerve to show who they were. If that meeting had been at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, I never would have gone.

SS: Why?

EM: Because that would have been too outré, too out there.

SS: Can you tell us a little bit about WHAM!, how it was started and when it was started?

EM: Yes. It had been the Direct Action Committee of a reproductive rights group.

SS: Do you remember the name of the group?

EM: I will.

SS: I can't remember it either.

EM: But Julie Clark, this woman with the little pink triangles in her ears, and Diane Curtis and probably some others who were members of ACT UP were also a member of this women's group, this reproductive rights coalition, the reproductive rights coalition. The direct action group became WHAM!, Women's Health Action and Mobilization, a direct action group committed to demanding, securing, and defending absolute reproductive freedom and quality healthcare for all women.

SS: How many people were in WHAM! at that time?

EM: Well, there seemed to be about fifty people, about thirty people at meetings, and through the years there were a lot more people. And after a while, I was accepted, despite my patent leather shoes. The women were wearing spandex, like those loud young men in the street, and their hair was spiky, and they just spoke out. They knew what they were doing. It was never the kind of meeting where decisions about what should or should not be done were discussed. Everybody knew what to do, and I learned from them.

SS: How did you decide, in addition to WHAM!, to start going to ACT UP meetings?

EM: Well, I really hadn't thought I would, but two of those guys came to a meeting, I think in October. WHAM! had lots of demonstrations, at least one a week, and we worked closely together. The committees met a couple of times a week to get ready for each event or to present a report, and we were told, just like I discovered happens at ACT UP, that you decide what you want to do and get some other people to agree to the plan and get it all ready before you present it. Evidently, this had gone on

where WHAM! and ACT UP had agreed to do a demonstration together, and these two young men in pink outfits and bleached hair suggested something that was really outrageous. I could feel it inside. They suggested that we Stop the Church on a trinity of issues: AIDS education, homophobia, and abortion rights. I went along with it. At first I was really terrified. Stop the Church was my church, and we did it on December 10, 1989. We were in different affinity groups, and you've heard this story from all—

SS: Well, I want to ask you. Let's go back a little bit, because this story we've never heard. I had no idea that ACT UP came to WHAM! So you're saying it started in ACT UP and then they came to WHAM! and—

EM: I'm sure a decision had been made behind the scenes. Diane and Julie and perhaps others who were — and Dolly Meieran, a member of ACT UP also. Dolly was on the committee of people of two, I think, making arrangements for the whole event and were the face of what was going on.

SS: Had you ever thought about AIDS before that moment?

EM: Oh, sure.

SS: Did you know anyone —

EM: I really hadn't thought about it, but I could say something about it at a cocktail party. That's what I could do. I would say, "Oh, yes, that's what it is."

SS: Were you aware of the role of the Catholic Church in keeping condoms out of schools?

EM: Generally. Generally.

SS: So when they came and tried to put these issues together, did it feel like the issues fit together for you?

EM: I was a little dizzy. I really was. I didn't care whether the issues went together or not. It was proposed. I had been working with these women and a few men since July on abortion rights, about abusive teens who were at homeless shelters — that was big that year — and I realized it was pretty much the same issue. It was people having sex without permission, and I think that might have been mentioned as a way to tie things together.

SS: So was WHAM! totally ready to do this or was it very controversial inside WHAM!?

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EM: It was exciting. I don't recall. It was controversial inside me. I don't know how it was in the group. But we got onboard pretty quickly and we made plans. The women in WHAM! sat down in front of St. Patrick's, the men right in front. You know that day the street itself was cleared except for regular traffic by the police, and people were kept outside barricades on the sidewalk on both sides, and I'm sure Karin Timour was passing out leaflets that day. My official committee was something about the clowns, Operation Ridiculous. Operation Ridiculous. I can show you the videotape.

SS: Oh, good. Great.

EM: It was called "Like a Prayer," and that's the one that the women in WHAM! worked on.

SS: So your affinity group was—

EM: Operation Ridiculous.

SS: Right. And you did not go into the church?

EM: The committee did not go into the church. They had signs and little puppets, "Save the Babies." At a meeting, a man said that he wasn't a part of any of the affinity groups going inside, but he wants to see what's going on, and since he's a Jew, he was really afraid to do it. So I had a phony fur coat, and he put a wool coat, an overcoat, over his leather, and we went to Mass together.

SS: So you were inside.

EM: Yes, I was inside.

SS: So do you want to tell us what your experience was?

EM: Michael Petrelis stood on the pew and shouted, "You're killing us!" I think that was during the time that was supposed to be a sermon. Other men, and I don't remember women, were lying in the aisle facedown, which is a traditional way for priests to behave at certain moments. Others spoke in tongues, the kiss of peace, shaking hands, and so I said, with everybody I shook hands with, "Abortion is my right." They didn't express their disapproval, but scowled or pulled their hand away.

Then, since I was there, I joined another group. I don't know whether it was speaking in tongues or – when I got in line to receive communion and behaved with my posture as if I would receive communion, and instead of taking the host and placing it in my hand, I just said, "Abortion is my right," to the priest. And, of course, there was bedlam at the moment, and it was thrilling.

SS: Did you have doubts as you were doing this?

EM: No, I was there for a good time at that point. I was a little shaky, but it was easy to be there. Other people had made all the arrangements. I'd heard all the plans, and so it was easy to be there. The organ was really loud. When we were leaving, people were haranguing us. I joined my group on the street, and a bunch of clowns, and at that point I pulled a sign out of my phony fur coat that – oh, that was the day a no-fur group was demonstrating on Fifth Avenue, one of the major shopping days before Christmas, and my little sign said “Fake fur. Real woman.”

But I met up with my friends, including Coe Perkinson, who was a clown, Operation Ridiculous, and a videographer, one of those great people who have protected us all these years, suggested that since the street was closed and we really couldn't cross to St. Patrick's, that our group of clowns walk over to Sixth Avenue, got in a cab, and went up to 57th Street and back down Fifth Avenue and piled out of a couple of cabs like clowns, you know, out of little cars. The police were really literally chasing us down the street, but we had a lot of fun with that.

That's when the march to the East Village began with a giant banner, Cardinal O'Condom, a march organized by Fran Luck. I think it was toward one of the buildings that had been rescued by street people, and there are lots of stories about that too.

SS: How did you feel about the reaction to the —

EM: Well, the reaction lasted for over a week, and the reaction was on television and in the newspaper. Someone crumpled a host, which was the major furor. Others said that we shouldn't demonstrate inside someone's church where they've gone

to pray. Whose side would Jesus be on? What would Jesus say? So we had a lot of clever people on our side who were on television shows and who spoke through the press, as Ann Northrop has said to us often enough, not to the press, but through the press. And we had some very clever people on our side who were able to frame it correctly, and at that point I was very proud of having been involved and I think I still am.

SS: So then you became full-time in ACT UP, really, right?

EM: Well, full-time in WHAM!, but we were working together on a lot of issues; health care. I found out more about AIDS, and as a somewhat older woman than my colleagues in WHAM!, it was easy for me to speak to younger people about protection. In fact, Karen Ramspacher and I went to Love Spit Love, which was a gallery show, an art show, with a live sex act, and so we had an opportunity to speak outside to the thousands of people who came by, and hand out condoms. In those days, Coe Perkinson made earrings for us out of condoms. We didn't put the holes right through.

So I did feel comfortable speaking about what people could do to protect themselves, especially young people, and it was easy to start a conversation and speak up to people on the street as well as professional-level people who might be expected to know what they were doing.

JAMES WENTZY: We have to stop and change the tape.

SS: So then what was your next step after Stop the Church?

EM: Just continuing with all kinds of demonstrations. It all rolls together. We did several demonstrations a week. In ACT UP, I joined Action Tours, the affinity group that was everywhere and did everything, and James Wagner brought people

together then and now. All of us attending were meeting, and anyone who attended a meeting became a member. I had appeared at the meetings mostly asking for money, “Empty your wallet or take off your clothes.”

I had changed. I was an aggressive woman. Up until that point, up until about 1987, '88, one might have had on my tombstone, “She never caused a stir.” But luckily, I lived. People attended the meetings because they were personally worried about AIDS themselves, their friends, their families, and the people who knew about treatment spoke first and had to say what we were interested in.

But James said there were a lot of us there who might add something else to the mix, and the first trip was going to Albany as men in raincoats with briefcases, and I think they were from the Egg Council, but they were taken into the Governor’s Office, and then they stayed, among other things that were happening that day. That was Jamie Leo, the creative Jamie Leo, who always had something wonderful to say, and through the years, if we were together as a group and a cop would walk by, he would go into his tour leader spiel, telling us about this cathedral, how tall it was. But that was their first Action Tour, and I got involved later.

SS: First of all, tell us when you got involved, who was in Action Tours?

EM: Steve Quester. I’d heard him speaking at meetings. He had a ponytail and two earrings. And other people whose names I will bring up. I’ve got the list.

SS: Do you want to take a look?

EM: Yes. I think Karen Timor might have done some things, and Andy Buck and Jay Blotcher wrote the press releases and has since taught the rest of us how to write a press release. Naomi Braine, Ellen Bay. Now, I don't know if they were specifically in Action Tours, but I seem to recall their faces in Jim Wagner's living room, and people who've gone on to even greater things.

SS: So tell us about your first action with Action Tours.

EM: Well, you know, I can't remember my first action, but our goal was to do something newsworthy the day before an ACT UP event, like a march across the Brooklyn Bridge, about AIDS, to City Hall, and the day before, a banner was dropped from the roof of City Hall that said "AIDS Hall of Shame." That was on page B3 again as just a picture with a caption, which they sometimes changed during the day, different editions.

Going ahead to a demonstration in Garrison, New York, in [George] Pataki's front yard, the message was that we gathered about ADAP, AIDS Drug Assistance Program, and other AIDS issues that we had brought to Pataki's front door, and the caption was good, a picture of us all doing a die-in on Route 9D, right in front of his house. The next edition said, "These people were here and the Patakis weren't home." They just changed the focus entirely.

So Action Tours met once a week, every Sunday evening. People had gone through the papers to see what social events were happening or had happened. This group discovered that New York police were much harder to deal with physically than

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the Feds, because we went to dinners with President [George H.W.] Bush and President Bill Clinton at different times.

I'll tell you about Day of Desperation.

SS: Do you want to say what that was, first of all?

EM: No.

SS: You don't want to say what Day of Desperation was?

EM: It was – I don't know. I think it was an anniversary action?

SS: I think it was when the first Gulf War started.

EM: Oh, yes, of course. So that's my story, anyway. Action Tours organized into three buses, and one bus went to NBC as employees. We had our I.D. passes. And one bus went to CBS. We had two buses and the Marys had one bus, evidently, to PBS, *MacNeil-Lehrer [Report]*, and there was no group going to ABC because they produced their news program a half hour in advance, and it becomes like a cart and they just show it. This is what I figure. This was a while ago. We didn't have electronic cards to get us in and out of buildings. But my group was NBC.

SS: So tell us what happened. So what did you wear, most importantly?

EM: Oh, we took off our coats because we were employees and we were in the building. That was the important thing about Action Tours; we looked like we belong. Some people had to get clean shirts, white shirts. But we had a few people going into NBC, and we had some others who were successful in getting into CBS. One of the tourists there, a black man, was handled roughly, which we always expected, but a couple

of our people got in front of the camera and said, “Money for AIDS, not for war. Money for AIDS, not for war.” And they had a sign, which was easy to get in in those days.

The other news stations kept playing our show on all of the networks, so it was there that night live on the six o’clock news on CBS and on the eleven o’clock news on all the stations, and we were up late, jumping on James’ bed and screaming, because David Buckingham and maybe James Wentzy put together a show of all of these clips. And I think that’s one of the great things we learned from Action Tour, is how to work together personally. We got to know each other, who needed what size tape to be delivered where, and we did it.

Tape II
00:10:00

SS: It seems like one of the really brilliant things about Action Tours is they could outwit any bureaucracy.

EM: Oh, yes.

SS: Whether it was corporate, getting into City Hall, Saks Fifth Avenue.

EM: And even the smallest things. Before the first anniversary celebration of Stop the Church, it wasn’t Stop This Man O’Connor, it was Stop the Church, we had to hand out a letter from ACT UP and WHAM! about AIDS having touched all of us. I wrote these letters with James’s help, but also Gretchen Berger, who is hilarious. Get her to write for you anytime. She’s great.

So we had to get the foldovers that the church had in several languages at the back of the church that said “Welcome to St. Patrick’s.” So as a tourist, I, of course, would go in with my twenty-dollar bill and say, “Do I put this in the box here or do I put

it over there at that collection box in the middle of aisle?" so that I could get the different languages out of the box. So in very small ways, we were able to get away with a lot of stuff. So we would appear on this Sunday and several other Sundays dressed like churchgoers, and that wasn't easy to do with all the leather and stickers on our coats.

Do you remember when we all had stickers that we couldn't get off our coats for years? Of course, we know people are still wearing those coats, those jackets. So we had our letter inside with our logos inside, but the picture on the front was Welcome or Welcome to St. Patrick's, and we would hand them out as people would enter Mass. But we know they weren't paying attention to the Mass, because they were reading our message to them about what had happened on December 10, 1989, and what had occurred up until that year later when the Safer Sex Six had not even been tried. But that's another group.

SS: Yes. Who were the Safer Sex Six?

EM: The people who decided to stay within the system after they were arrested at Stop the Church, six or seven of them.

SS: When did you start creating your characters?

EM: Well, I'm afraid of everything. I really am. I'm nervous. I'm scared of a lot of things. So I didn't even use a real name, Elizabeth Meixell, in WHAM! I was Elizabeth Michaels, and I occasionally used a phony name, Yasha Bunchuk, when I – what?

SS: {LAUGHS}

EM: It's a real name.

SS: It's a man's name.

EM: Who knows? {LAUGHTER} Who knows?

Actually, I was interviewed by Channel 4 newspeople in Red Hook at a clinic defense activity where the men on the other side, the harassers, were also interviewed, and on the screen under this guy's face were the words "Yasha Bunchuk." So you're right, it must be a fellow.

SS: So that was your first. So after Elizabeth Michaels, Yasha Bunchuk was your first?

EM: Yes, that was easy when somebody came up with a microphone, because you can't say, "I'm not going to tell you my name." As an Action Tourist, you have to be ready to be authoritative and real all the time, and so that was our mission and I complied.

SS: Then where did you go with it?

EM: Well, Julie and Coe and I had been to Washington to help with some major clinic defense, where women were physically attacked on the way to their medical appointments, and we saw this group called the Church Ladies for Choice. These were the Washington Church Ladies. They had clean nails. They accessorized beautifully.

SS: But they were?

EM: They were actually men. They were all men, but they call themselves the Church Ladies for Choice. They had a few choice songs, and they were clever.

SS: This was not the ACT UP group?

EM: No.

SS: This was a Washington group. I didn't realize that.

EM: Yes, this was in Washington. And before that, there had evidently been a Pittsburgh group which was put down because Pittsburgh women thought it insulted them. Now that we have a New York City group called the Church Ladies for Choice, we like to say that the Church Ladies represent some of the everyday abuses that women must suffer, like we must wear lipstick and makeup and nail polish and sensible shoes, the Church Ladies for Choice in New York City say, "We wear floral print polyester frocks, sensible shoes, and earrings that pinch. That's what keeps us so angry." So our New York Church Ladies wear sensible shoes, for the most part.

SS: So did you start the New York Church Ladies after the Washington —

EM: Yes, yes, Coe and I did. Our first action was with two men from ACT UP, young men from ACT UP.

SS: Who were they?

EM: Whose names are in a cloud of history, but they will come back to me and you'll get them soon. They came with their girlfriends and Coe and me to Dobbs Ferry to make fun of the clinic attackers.

SS: I think we should explain a little bit about clinic defense, because it's usually such a tense, serious, and intense event, and then to have suddenly this series of performers or drag performers show up at clinic defenses.

EM: You never know who they are. They dress well. They are sometimes outrageous. But the goal of the New York Church Ladies is to break that tension, to interrupt an otherwise boring standoff. It's linked arms pressing up against another group who have linked arms. It's also to give the harassers a taste of their own medicine, like dangling a tampon that had been marked with a red pen. They just found that outrageous, and we thought it was so funny.

“Our children are here. Don't do that.”

“Don't bring your children when you're harassing women.”

And we would open condoms and crotch-watch as much as possible.

Some of us enjoyed that kind of behavior, but others did it just for fun.

SS: So did this become a weekly thing to do Church Ladies for Choice at clinic defense?

EM: The Church Ladies appeared at ACT UP events to help raise money or for fun. Our members are mostly men, mostly clever men, like Steve, Brian Griffin, Donald Grove. They can sing. Maybe they can dance. But they certainly are clever. And we have a book of hymns that you would absolutely love, and the songs are written for every occasion, depending on what's going on in the press and with the antis, the anti-women people.

SS: Can you sing one for us?

EM: Something that's more of an ACT UP song. And the requirement for becoming a Church Lady, a singing group, is to be able to accessorize well. {SINGS}
[to the tune of “I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy”] “I'm a homophobic leftist, homophobic

through and through, a real life nephew of my Uncle Karl, he was a homophobe, too. We will always crash your meetings, claim your issues as our own. ISO and RCP and New Alliance Party, I am a homophobic drone.” {LAUGHS}

And our anthem is – may I have an assistant?

SS: Sure. Luca?

EM: Kneel at my side. {LAUGHTER} {SINGS} [to the tune of “God Save the Queen”] “God is a lesbian. She is a lesbian. God is a dyke. La la la la la. Send her a Victoria, Mary, and Gloria, she’ll lick clit on the floor with ya, God is a dyke.”

Luca Torregiani: And then we open a fan, but we don’t have one.

EM: Snap the fan. Maybe there’s one up there. You can snap anytime, young man.

SS: Thank you.

EM: And we all have Church Lady names.

SS: What’s yours?

EM: It has been Madge, more often Sister Mary Cunnilingus.

Once Donald Grove and Coe and I took a bus at midnight from Port Authority down to do clinic defense at Roe Day in Washington, and when we got there, gathered in the dark and the cold, and they said, “Well, whatever you do, dress how you want, say what you want, but it must be in good taste.” So Sister Mary has been in good taste ever since.

So the New York Church Ladies are not all men as one might expect years later. We have Tad Loose, who happens to be genetically female and who has a son. She and her husband have a little boy who rolls with the Ladies, and his name is Demon Seed, and he appears at events trying to raise money for sometimes ACT UP, but also for Sylvia's Place at West 36th Street, and for New Alternatives at Middle Collegiate Church on Second Avenue and 7th Street. So that's what we do. We try to raise money. Or people press money into our hands, and if you folks want to know where your coins go, that's where it is.

SS: What was your last action with Action Tours?

EM: I don't remember the last action, but we've had some wonderful ones. The day after Thanksgiving at Macy's we were at the ACT UP workspace. We all dressed as Santa Claus. But Mark Woodley, whose job had been at Macy's as a Santa, didn't dress that day because Mark had HIV and Macy's would not rehire he. {SINGS} [to the tune of "Deck the Halls"] "Santa Claus has HIV, fa la la la la la la la. Macy's won't rehire he, fa la la la la la la la." This was another creation of Jon Winkleman, a Church Lady and a member of ACT UP. He arrived in New York on his twenty-second birthday and has been acting up ever since. He's fabulous, creative, good ideas.

So we went to Macy's and we sang the song and chained ourselves into an amoeba that moved around the store, but was stopped in Notions by the police. Coe and I had been handing out Christmas cards from Santa with our message about Mark Woodley having been fired from Macy's after having given so many years of delight to children and for the benefit of Macy's bottom line. Coe and I decided not to get in the amoeba to

get arrested, but a lot of people were, and a Santa being dragged out of Macy's appeared on the front page, the front page, a whole front page of the *Daily News*. And that's our goal, speak through the media.

SS: Did you have people who you were close to get very ill during this period?

EM: Well, three of the Church Ladies are on tour, and as Tourists and Church Ladies, we've learned to work together, so Rex Wasserman, the Jewish Church Lady, is now on tour, and we've lost Cliff Moseley and Darryl Smith.

SS: When they started to get sick and decline, were Church Ladies involved in their care groups?

EM: In Rex's group.

SS: What was that like for you?

EM: Every Saturday night we had dinner together. I learned to cook. We would go a lot of places together. Rex's particular friends in the Church Ladies would make sure there was somebody pushing him to eat a good meal all the time or spending time with him when he couldn't eat or when food just affected him badly.

SS: Was his family involved in his care or was it just his friends?

EM: His family was not in New York, although his stepmother was attentive, visited more often than anyone else, and Donald was at his side most of the time. So we do to this day organize to help anybody in our group. It's funny how things work out, from learning to do the phone for an activity and getting the press releases out and talking to people and running errands, we've learned to take care of each other too.

So that's how it started for us, dropping a banner in front of the pope from the store across the street. What is it?

SS: Saks Fifth Avenue.

EM: Saks Fifth Avenue, yes. That was not particularly – we call it the Pope Drop. We dropped a banner, and it happened to be just as the pope was arriving at St. Patrick's Cathedral. We had gone to Saks to have lunch in their eighth-floor dining room, sit near the windows, figure out how the windows open and figured out how to do a diversion. But this was also a lesson on what you can and can't do as a volunteer group, because this was a somewhat dangerous action, and a lot of people have participated in something that's dangerous just because there are police involved, and you can get hurt if you deal with the police.

Our goal was to have two people climb out the window onto a narrow parapet and drop this banner, so there was the height, there was a place where people weren't expected to hold on, and there were the long guns on all of the buildings around. So we had meetings, and one of the climbers didn't show up to the meetings anymore. We used our corporate donation of an office space on Fifth Avenue to drop a cloth to see how it would land, and we learned, and I guess now everybody knows, that the bottom third of a long narrow banner twists in the wind or just twists around.

So we dropped the banner on Fifth Avenue in the dark of night from somebody's office, and then the day of the event we had our family groups lined up. There was a father and a daughter who were going to have an argument at a table, and then a birthday party, and some people who couldn't speak English; we had a lot of those

Tape II
00:30:00

people. This was a great, easy diversion for our people to get involved in. You know, there are a lot of people without Green Cards or legitimate passes in New York, so this was one way for out-of-towners to get involved in the situation, to be a diversion in the dining room.

At the last minute, the people by the window, one of them changed his mind; he wasn't going to climb out the window. But Steve Quester, a skinhead, went out the window first, and Philip Paul of the Radical Fairies, whose name is Cypress, another skinhead, went out with him, and, of course, others were watching from the street. I was central that day on the phone and the fax machine.

Our people heard somebody in the crowd explaining to a kid, "Those are the bad people," a phrase which appeared in a Bridgeport newspaper. The Pope Drop happened when the pope arrived at St. Patrick's, and the long guns were trained on Steve and Cypress, and they got away with it. They did lose their Saks charge cards. They were held for a while in the cage with shoplifters.

But we, the background group, went into action, and James Wentzy explained where we took the film that was put together. You should know that after each of these events, successful or not, we have a special party. I usually make an apple pie, and after CBS, we had a Bus 1 pie and a Bus 2 pie, just for the fun of it. We started to realize at that point we could be hired to do this for anybody, because we were very good.

SS: It's amazing you were never infiltrated. Your security was so good.

EM: Well, before Stop the Church at the workspace, there were people we didn't recognize, and I don't know how many of us nice, sweet girls got so aggressive, but those of us who would ask people for money for one thing or another would just say, "Can I please see your wallet? What's your name?" And some of them left immediately. But what were they to hear? Infiltration in the big room might not make a difference at all, and in an affinity group, you're supposed to be friends. You're supposed to go to other people's homes and have dinner or sleep over.

Tape II
00:35:00

SS: Right. It's very intimate. Did you get arrested at any point?

EM: At Stop the Church, as we clowns were dancing down the street, once when Bush was in town and a New York policeman twisted my arm, and I've always been a delicate flower, and that hurt.

SS: Was that inside the hotel or was that on the street?

EM: That was on the street. Other people were lying down, and I didn't even lie down in the street; I just stayed there. And a few other times for other events. None of us got arrested at the Statue of Liberty, because we were tourists, we looked like Italian tourists, or we dressed as family groups. Some people had to carry cinderblocks in their purses and look casual about it, and there were a bunch of moms of a certain age and there were kids who took their nose rings out just for the event and were willing to wear pastel sweatsuits. Can you imagine somebody from ACT UP in a green sweatpants and a matching green sweatshirt saying "Chiefs" or something on it?

But we did look really like tourists and took the boat over, and after much study and practice, dropped a banner from the crown without breaking the windows.

Other groups have broken the windows. There's a key. You can buy the key at any hardware store. We figured out how to open the windows and drop the banner from the crown. "Abortion is healthcare. Healthcare is a right," was a 300-square-foot banner on the base of the Statue of Liberty. Then from the crown, the banner said "No choice, no liberty."

SS: And you didn't get arrested?

EM: None of us got arrested for that.

SS: Amazing.

EM: It was great. It was really great. They kept the banner, but we hope to see it soon.

When I was young, I seem to remember the Czechs doing this kind of thing or scaling the Statue of Liberty. I think we need our fact checker to look into that, okay? And others have since done the same kind of thing, but I'd just like to recommend that you open the window. It's real easy.

SS: How did the decline of ACT UP affect the work that you were doing, the split that took place?

EM: Tell me about the split. I don't know what the split was.

SS: When TAG left and when a lot of people stopped coming, how did that affect Action Tours? Did you discuss it or—

EM: No. Perhaps there were private discussions, but we didn't discuss the split. Action Tours was really impressed with the condom over someone's house. Who?

SS: Jesse Helms.

EM: Yes, Jesse Helms. Now, why couldn't we do that kind of thing? We were very impressed with that, and that was the only real discussion, how did they manage to do this or that? That was the important thing to Action Tours.

SS: Does Action Tours still exist?

EM: We keep a list of names. We follow James' blog.

SS: But you're not doing actions anymore?

EM: No, but I'd like to say that the Tourists have stayed in touch through the years, and people stopped coming to meetings, not because they stopped being involved in important things; they just expanded, did more, had more responsibilities in their personal lives.

Very few people raised their families, children, like Sharon Tramutola. I didn't work directly with her often, but I admired her so much for being a family woman and dealing with her family as well as speaking out with ACT UP and on pertinent occasions. She's fabulous. And just a few people were able to manage that. It's really hard to manage your job and your home and your life as well as this career in ACT UP, and for a lot of us that's what we did. We didn't get much sleep because we were out casing the joint. I ran into somebody in a stairwell at the Hyatt Hotel. I wasn't expecting to run into anybody, but it was somebody from Action Tours.

SS: You were doing recognizance.

EM: Oh, that's right, yes. {LAUGHS}

JW: We have to change the tape.

SS: OK.

Tape III
00:00:00

SS: Elizabeth, we want to hear about Faceless Bureaucrats.

EM: Oh, another Action Tourist group, the Faceless Bureaucrats, a shtick we used many times for many different purposes, and the first time that I recall doing it was at an anniversary action at [Mario] Cuomo's, outside Cuomo's office at the World Trade Center, Governor Cuomo. We wore our best beige raincoats and carried briefcases and wore our bureaucratic mask. We were probably corporate bureaucrats that day, but perhaps just faceless bureaucrats, and we let them know what we thought about why things were moving so slowly.

These are more recent interests of mine. Microbicides is one of my projects. It's the new way for receptive sex partners to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. They're not in production, but they are used as lubes, a foam, a cream, or a gel, and it's said that, say, a woman would use the microbicide and her sex partner would not be able to determine that she'd used any protection because some of the microbicides are not a spermicide and would allow her to become pregnant, which is her responsibility in her life.

So Faceless Bureaucrats got me a full centerfold in the *Daily News* again, although the *Post* has been good to us, and *The New York Times* allows us to appear. The *Daily News* let me appear fully, and I looked good. I really looked good.

SS: I want to ask you a conceptual question.

EM: Conception?

SS: Yes. {LAUGHTER}

EM: *au conception* is actually John Maynard.

SS: Oh. One of the things I'm interested in about ACT UP people, because ACT UP people come from every kind of background and every kind of experience, but they have something in common that's characterological. What is it that got you from Katherine Gibbs to singing "God is a Dyke"? What is it that brought you there when so many other people can't go there?

EM: Well, anything for a laugh. Some commitment to doing the right thing, a sense of obligation for doing something that needs to be done, somebody ought to organize a demonstration about that, and I find myself organizing Metro North to go to Garrison, New York, and lying in the street, in the road. It was a queer cruise, I mean a gay cruise, and I think WHAM! might have been a lesbian cruise as well. I think that might have been a major factor in bringing people together, because although Andy Velez has said, "There are a lot of people in ACT UP that I would cross the street to avoid, but until there's a cure, we're working together."

I don't have strong feelings about that. I learned something about organizing. Even though you can work well as a team at the office and everybody on the team must stay on the team and do her job and you can call on all of the members of the team, if somebody drops out at a particular moment from an Action Tours event, refuses to crawl out eight floors above Fifth Avenue, just doesn't show up for a few meetings, you can't call and say, "Where were you?" You can't say anything at all. That's an organizing factor that we've got to remind ourselves about, and we're pretty grateful for the people who stick with it, although we know why some people drop out. It's hard. You've got to keep your job, and it is pretty frightening to be in handcuffs, especially for

men and women of color, especially for the queer community, people who had any bad experience with police or harassment on the street, anything at all. It's very hard.

SS: Well, the strategy of bringing humor to a humorless system is a pretty tough strategy.

EM: It's easy. Ben Shepard and other friends of ours have written about the idea of lightening a situation so that the pressure is off. Like having your hands in those plastic pipes on a cold day in North Jersey, on a very cold day, and the pharmaceutical entryway of the corporate headquarters are blocked by you and your friends, and the humor can be a very small thing, like saying to somebody who is locked up with you, "They're serving doughnuts over there," and seeing the cops who are hanging over you just take off. That's a small thing, but you've got to take your fun where you can.

SS: I only have two more questions. Is there anything we haven't covered?

EM: Yes, there's some. For me, ACT UP is all of the wonderful people I worked with and with whom I interact today. I've taken some names from my new notebook. By the way, everybody carried a date book. Who knew? I guess college kids did that. I thought that was so exciting that everybody carried a date book, and when you lost your book, it was reported in TITA [Tell It To ACT UP]. So I met some wonderful people, and I really would like to make a point of mentioning some friends who are dealing with things today as they did when they first came to ACT UP.

Jonathan Berger and Kate Barnhart were thirteen when they, with Emily Barron, started doing activist activities with ACT UP and other groups. Kate is either doing herself in or taking care of the rest of us by dealing with another arrest situation, a re-arrest situation, and we've got to support people like her. I know so many others have been excluded from the arrest situation because they can't afford to health-wise or job-wise or life-wise to get arrested, which is one thing, but to keep appearing in court.

SS: What was she arrested for most recently?

EM: Our new issue, I guess our issue all along, was healthcare for all, and we just termed it an AIDS problem just because of the homophobia that affected the healthcare for all, and today that some of the homophobia has been overcome. The racism and classism which come to healthcare are the issues. Kate was arrested at one of the many arrest situations across the country at insurance companies, at the headquarters of insurance companies, and her case was dismissed with several others at the beginning of July, but they've come after her again. Kate has risked herself for years, and within the past few years was on trial and threatened with jail time with a few others, Staci Smith and Steve Quester.

Tape III
00:10:00

I really loved working with ACT UP. WHAM!'s first Dance Party Benefit was in a loft, and the men who arrived from ACT UP to dance the night away really did empty their pockets, and we made so much money, which we spent immediately in WHAM! But I was very grateful to them, and I always was. I would auction off a pie, and we would make a lot of money for an event, buses to Washington and other things.

But today the people who continue with ACT UP, John Riley, Bob Lederer, Nanette Kazaoka, Laurie Wen, and others, they're just phenomenal. Where do they get the energy? It's amazing. And there are several others who follow along and others who reappear when they're called upon. At Kate's first appearance on this re-arrest situation, there were over fifty people. Now, a first court appearance is brief and nothing's going to happen, but all of those old friends of Kate showed up. Kate's grown up now and she has devoted herself, and ACT UP is loyal to her.

I mentioned Andy Velez, who's nailed a statement on the cathedral door often enough, but he was teaching at the New School about activism, and I think that Jay Blotcher was talking about reporting on activism and some others were there. I had peeked in, I saw it was a really quiet class, and so I came the next week with signs and confetti and cowbells and broke up the class with a reminder of how easy it is just to let people know, to let the public know that there is something going on here. When I wasn't paying attention to the news, I didn't know either.

Now, we know in New York, especially after September 11th, that very few people risk themselves. Code Pink is outstanding. The women in Code Pink are just so courageous and they are literally manhandled by the police because of the terrorist problem.

I think it's important that we continue to act up. First, we have to recognize the situation. We have to ask and ask that it be corrected. We have to ask formally and then we have to bring it to the public. We have to stop traffic and let them know. We have to be more creative these days. But one thing is for sure, we have to

have our cameramen there to protect us. We've gone to court so many times with the tape that says we did it, and we're really lucky.

Tape III
00:15:00

I've done a few events with the Church Ladies and WHAM! and more recently it's with groups like FIERCE, the group of trannies. I never know whether the women are not getting a chance to speak up and the men have taken over. It's really hard to tell, which is a great thing. But young people of color are taking a stand, and they're organized, and young people coming along are going to make a difference too.

I've put my papers concerning activism at Tamiment, and others have put their tapes and papers at the New York Public Library, but other people still have them hanging around the house. Bring them in. The library, Tamiment, or the Public Library will pick them up. So whatever you've got that's on paper – they even took our first computer that looks like a toaster, and it had been an ACT UP computer, so it's got some good stuff on it. Maybe you can turn in your electronics too. I don't know what else to ask for. Show up at World AIDS Day all the time. We can still do easy things.

The best thing to know, that it is so easy to show up at an event. It's a lot harder to organize it. So why not go on your lunch hour or after work or when you've been excessed to spend some time doing activism? That's important for me to say. I really want to talk about some other things.

SS: Go ahead.

EM: In Garrison, visiting the governor, we were talking about ADAP and some other issues, AIDS Drug Assistance Program, a federal and state program which occasionally is cut. There's a formulary for the drugs and the vitamins and minerals that

has to be paid for by somebody, and these are one of the small things that we've got to push all the time, and that's what we did in Garrison and on street corners at the subway stops in town, saying, "Without A-D-A-P, we are D-E-A-D." I thought that was so clever, but it did make a difference for me standing on the corner.

Walter Armstrong, he and Heidi Dorow and a few others took me to Washington, and what happened with the capital police and the federal cops in Congress was pretty much a surprise to me. But Souter, this stealth candidate, was being interviewed by the Senate, and suddenly Walter, who's sitting next to me, stood up and started explaining the situation to everybody at hand. And I hadn't expected anything like that, but I did have a few hundred flyers with me, so I did disperse them to the gallery. That turned out to be more than just a trip to Washington. It was many trips to Washington. So I recommend to everybody seeing this tape, don't get arrested out of town.

We had some very clever ideas at the twentieth anniversary action. Jonathan Berger and Karen Ramspacher led us in making giant hands, which we saw all over the news. So that was a good thing, right? Some big hands.

Oh, one time when we were doing Welcome to St. Patrick's, there was another group handing out flyers there, too, and I said to them, "Hey, you want to see what we've got?"

They said, "No, that's all right." Turns out they were an anti-gay group advertising for a homophobic demonstration on 7th Street near Cooper Union.

So, we're smart. I said, "Listen, I'm going to Mass at five o'clock. Can I take your flyers?" I got them all, all, because they were tired of handing them out, and we did hand them out at the Monday night ACT UP meeting at Cooper Union, and we did go to their demonstration, a lot more of us than them. But it was a good photo opportunity.

Eileen Clancy has made news above the fold in *The New York Times*. Taking pictures on our cell phones has made a big difference, too, not just in actions but in taking pictures of cyclists who are being crowded out or knocked over by police.

SS: She exposed the illegal activities at the RNC by the government, yes.

EM: Yes. Isn't that fabulous?

SS: Yes, it's incredible.

EM: Well, she's done it in northern Ireland as well. I've got a lot to say, as you—

SS: Well, go for it.

EM: No, no. What do you want to hear about? Because—

SS: I want to hear whatever you want to tell us. We have all the time in the world.

EM: Microbicides.

SS: This was the big news at the Vienna conference this year.

EM: Tell me what was said.

SS: They have a 30% success rate with them in tests in Africa.

EM: Testing has always been a problem for me. How can you really test microbicides, which is supposed to help people? How can you tell them, “Just test this stuff”? Well, I understand the way they’re tested is people who are engaged in a study are told to use condoms every day all the time when having sex, and also use this other stuff. So what they report, hopefully they report well, is the way the study’s done. So it costs a lot more money. My goal is for people just to recognize the word “microbicides” and speak up when there’s an opportunity to have our government put some money into funding for testing.

Now, this 30% effectiveness is interesting in that if, say, condoms are used only 15% of the time when the person in charge is in charge, being a fellow, only uses it 15% of the time, but if microbicides are used all the time by, say, women, who must feed their families, stay alive for their children, considering that she might use it 100% of the time, a 30% effective rate is pretty good. So I’m still for microbicides.

The goal is to find a cure or an inoculation for prevention, but this is something we can push toward in the meantime, and working on microbicides through the years has been Anna Forbes and Bindya Patel, Talotta Reeves, and Susan Rodriguez, who runs SMART, SMART University, for women who are HIV-positive, including Anna, who used to go out with Walter Armstrong. I just want to make sure that everybody knows they were a happy couple at one point. Things have changed.

So the Church Ladies have special names. Felicity Bundt Cake, a few others. That’s another tape.

SS: Okay.

EM: Thank you very much for coming over.

SS: Sure. But I have two final questions for you.

EM: Does she always do this?

JH: Yes.

SS: Yes. Are you ready? You're sure. Looking back, what do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what would you say was its biggest disappointment?

Tape III
00:25:00

EM: No disappointments at all, but the greatest achievement, of course, was with the NIH [National Institutes of Health] allowing testing of drugs that may create some danger, but which offer hope for people who would otherwise die or become critically ill. We've done demonstrations down the street at NYU, all of the hospitals on Bedpan Alley, First Avenue, when ACT UP and WHAM! were first involved. We were able to say, "Rats have more opportunities to get AIDS drugs than women."

I don't see any disappointments. Falling off or moving on to healthcare for all, that's great, and people have moved on to other activities using the skills they learned in ACT UP on other projects.

SS: Okay, Yasha. Thank you, Elizabeth. Thank you so much.

EM: Thank you. Thank you. What a delight.

SS: See, you did great.