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Interviewee: **Benjamin Heim Shepard**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Benjamin Heim Shepard
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SARAH SCHULMAN: So we usually start, you tell us your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

BENJAMIN HEIM SHEPARD: Okay. I'm Benjamin Shepard. I was born in 1969, so I guess that makes me forty-five, and we're here in the Gowanus neighborhood here in Brooklyn.

SS: Where did you grow up? Oh, wait, today's date.

BHS: Today's date is April 23rd? Is it April 23rd? Okay. April 23rd, 2015.

SS: All right.

BHS: I grew up between Atlanta and Princeton, New Jersey, and Atlanta and then Dallas. And that's why I lost my southern accent, because I spent a few years in Princeton before the university fired my dad. And so – but the first fifteen of my first twenty years of my life were in the South, loved it, and then stumbled off to Los Angeles and San Francisco and Italy, and finally found my way back to New York City in 1997, and I've been here since then.

SS: Were both your parents academics?

BHS: Yes, both Medievalists.

SS: Oh, wow.

BHS: Dad studied Robert Greene, and Mom, who's still teaching at Pratt today, studies manuscripts, San Anselm's manuscripts. She would have studied Iranian art, but that unpleasantness in 1979, maybe she thought, "I won't go to Iran and study art."

SS: And what kind of families do they come from? What are their backgrounds?

BHS: Well, let's see. My dad's side of the family were southern farmers and doctors, lineage of people that went to Harvard. Here's the Hall of Tyrants, all the Harvard—you know, my granddad, who beat my dad up, and all the rest of the Harvards—

SS: Wow.

BHS: —and one West Point. Then my mom grew up in Columbus, Georgia, and old southern family that I think bought Coke when it was really low in share, when the cost was very low at that point. And there are dubious accounts of how they got the money, but anyway.

SS: And we have to note that Columbus, Georgia, is Carson McCuller's birthplace.

BHS: Yeah, absolutely, a family friend, family friend of Mom's growing up, band of her best friend Dion Smith growing up.

SS: Wait. Is that true?

BHS: Yeah. Dion knew Carson. Yeah, we corresponded about that.

SS: I know we corresponded, but I don't remember that part of it.

BHS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, anyway. So Dad was in Thomasville, Georgia, and Mom was in Columbus, and I was the Yankee because I was from Atlanta, and they still have the flags up. And, you know, when you're from the South, there's a lot of messy history that you carry with you. So, like a lot of good southerners, I left the

South, and I'm glad to live in New York, and I can reflect on the South from being in New York. I love Texas, I love the Southwest, but, you know, the Southeast is a tough place, very conservative.

SS: Now, you're a highly politicized person. Was your family politically active in any way?

BHS: Well, my dad more, in the fifties, Dad and his best friend both dropped out of Harvard and became Beat poets and went out to San Francisco and L.A., and that was their political awakening, realizing this isn't really going to—this whole thing, the American Dream of going to Harvard and whatever, wasn't all that it was set out to be. So they came back, though, and traveled around the world, “Make Friends, Not War” kind of thing, merry pranksters, adventurers through the Middle East in the mid-sixties. But they became conservative at some point. They came back from the trip to the Middle East in 1965 and felt like the cultural revolution, the students—they couldn't relate to the students anymore, and they became conservative. Dad eventually voted for Reagan and Mom voted for Carter, and they had differences, and that was sort of the beginning of lots of differences.

So there was never really politics. Dad would pull out Pete Seeger records in the eighties. It's the first time I even knew he had politics, so listening to Pete Seeger records with him. But, so my finding my own voice was very much the product of being in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and—

SS: At what age did you start becoming politically aware?

00:05:00 BHS: I traveled to, in my junior year abroad in 1990, and it was the period when the Wall was coming down, and so there was the Velvet revolution. I'd seen history being something that happened out there, something far away. And then I lived in Los Angeles, and the whole time—so I'm graduating from school in Los Angeles, and the whole time I'd lived there, there's this conversation about South Central L.A., "Don't go to South Central L.A." We would drive by it when we were going to parties and things like that.

So, to, and then there was the Rodney King video. I think anybody that lived in Los Angeles thought, "Well, here's a video of the police beating him hundreds of thousands—" I don't know how many times this guy gets beaten up face down, can't move. But the trial went on for a while, I remember that, and I remember that spring, trial was still going on, and I think they moved it to Simi Valley. They moved it outside of the neighborhood where it had taken place. And then I remember—I will never forget the day that we heard about the verdict, and being in Southern California, it's the similar view that I had with the Twin Towers from 14th Street, you see the smoke coming up in the sky, well, I remember looking at downtown Los Angeles and seeing the smoke coming up in the sky, with the city burning, with Los Angeles burning.

So, to me, it was my first awakening to racism. I mean, I'd seen racism as a kid in the South, black friends, riding my bike around the South, and my black friend gets pulled over. And it's like, "What are you doing?" And they called him "boy," and they said, "What are you doing riding around this neighborhood?" Well, here's my

friend. I go to school with him. So I'd seen that, but to really feel it in Los Angeles like that, that was the beginning.

And then, at the same time, my dad's best friend, who he'd flunked out of college to go be a beatnik with and flunked out of graduate school with and then got academic jobs and then got fired from academic jobs with, he got sick, he got AIDS, and he's the first person that I watched. And he lived with us for a period in the late eighties, and I watched him lose his mind. And to watch somebody that you love who's been a part of your family for decades, your mom and dad's best friend, lose their mind, that was—I didn't know what to do with those feelings.

So then I got to San Francisco and saw ACT UP, and there was something you could do with those feelings, but I didn't know what to do with those feelings. You just sit with them and you know there's something terribly wrong, but you don't know—you had to get drug from the veterans—from the veterinarian. So I think it's something that's really messy, and I didn't know what to do with that feeling. So going to ACT UP was a way.

And my first demonstration with ACT UP Golden Gate was to go to Sacramento and take ashes of bodies, people who'd died, take them to the State House, and it was something that was this incredible bundle of emotion to be on. And G'dali [Braverman] from ACT UP in New York was there and was very sweet, and I'm like any of the other campus protests in college, where there was sort of the competing oppressions discussions about who had had more bad things happen to them. In ACT UP, it was like a high school football game, like going on the bus. Like, it was just fun, it

was festive, everybody sharing stories, but also something very serious, but it was really fun and nobody cared where you were from, at least my feeling on that bus, because we knew we were getting into something heavy but at the same time, it was a bunch of storytelling on the bus, and it was incredibly fun and then incredibly powerful to be there and spread ashes and watched horses ran over one of the guys throwing the ashes out and—you know, I mean, it was—

SS: What year was that?

BHS: That was 1993 in San Francisco, and we went to Sacramento. That was my first ACT UP demo. And there was a guy in drag and, you know, with this sign “Looks Don’t Kill, But Pete Wilson’s Vetoes Do.” I mean, you know, so there was the sartorial splendor of the whole thing, and I just remember I was like, “Wow! This is something you can do with all these feelings you have.” I mean, I was working in an AIDS housing program in San Francisco, the Shanti Project, and ’93, ’94, and ’95 were rough years as far as AIDS deaths, I mean, and there was this whole underground in San Francisco of people taking care of each other, a whole network of people. But it was bleak, you know. It was really bleak.

So ACT UP, by saying—and the narrative growing up around activism was, “You can’t do that. Abby Hoffman’s an idiot. Don’t do this.” It was sort of the Fox News view, like, “Why would you do protest? That’s useless. It’s like Tiny Tim; it’s gone out with the sixties.”

So ACT UP said, “But you can still act.” And this isn’t the peak years of ACT UP, from, you know, after ’93, but I think it’s something incredible was—they still

00:10:00 pointed out that you could act. And even if you weren't always changing the external environment by you acting, you felt like you could be alive and you could transgress, and you were in good company with people transgressing, and you weren't supposed to be polite. It wasn't supposed to be like prep school, where you're supposed to be kind to authorities who were doing terrible things. No. You were supposed to challenge that and question that.

And we went out dancing after the protests. We got back to San Francisco and you go dancing late at night, and we—it was incredible. Then I remember dancing and “It’s Raining Men” came on, you know, and it was still like this great, fantastic moment in San Francisco, and San Francisco was just—“Dancing Queen” came on, and, you know, everybody took their shirts off, and lots of women, shirts—I mean, it was just a great joyous moment. And that was –

So ACT UP opened up this whole tragicomic experience of being alive, but it mostly said there’s another city you can take part in. So that’s sort of that’s where my politics opened up. But it also opened up such a range of feelings, because then I remember getting home later after the first demo and sitting at home in my room, and the epidemic is still going on and there’s no cure. And so you thought for a minute this is going to be over, like, you’re ending AIDS in this big protest moment, and then you come home and, you know, your people that you know are still dying. And that just went on and on and on. So anyway, that was the beginning of ACT UP for me.

SS: When did you come to New York?

BHS: 1997, after two years in Chicago.

SS: Was Golden Gate still going the whole time you were in San Francisco?

BHS: I didn't have – the split had happened, the ACT UP San Francisco. And ACT UP San Francisco were nice folks, but it was definitely like, hey, they were regarded in San Francisco as wingnuts. They really were.

SS: Well, they were HIV denialists, right?

BHS: Yeah, yeah. They were very much like—people were very clear. There was a real distance. And they had meetings, and they were very small, and I went to one of them, and it literally was—and I'm not going to knock anybody having a small meeting, but it was the tiniest thing, so maybe three people.

SS: Do you have any insight with hindsight into the psychology of HIV denialism?

BHS: Well, I think it's the same thing with Holocaust denialism. I also think there are other people that have complicated sort of readings on science. And I think the beauty of ACT UP is we're all citizen scientists, but some are better than others. Let's put it that way, I think. I think that it's a really terrible reading, so I don't—

SS: What is the wish for HIV to not be—what is that about?

BHS: Honestly, I've heard the arguments over and over and over again, and it just doesn't—I can't really—honestly, I can't wrap my mind around that. It's too much.

SS: And when did Golden Gate fold?

BHS: Well, I was in New York, and I remember that G'dali—I mean, I was interviewing G'dali, and he was talking about—there was a push at some point where he said, “There’s so much to do at ACT UP, and we don’t have enough money, we don’t have enough resources to do everything we want to do, so should we become a nonprofit?”

And I remember then there was a floor vote, and it was like, “No, we’re not going to—I don’t think we’re going to become a nonprofit.” And I think that that was a discouraging moment.

It really wasn’t—by the time I left in ’95, I didn’t hear about it much. I really didn’t—by the time I got to New York, the urgency of it was so powerful because there was also the Andrew Sullivans of the world saying AIDS was over, and it was so morally reprehensible, that to have ACT UP still going felt very, very powerful.

SS: Why do you think he said that?

BHS: Because he doesn’t care about poor people. I don’t know. I mean, he’s Tory. I think to say after we have gay marriage and despite the irresponsibilities of ACT UP, you know, I mean, Gay Movement has done some really great things, but ACT UP gave you the meds that saved your life, young man. So I think he hates poor people, and I think he’s also—there’s a P.T. Barnum school of publicity, say something outrageous so people pay attention to you. But at some point you’re saying things that are stupid, you know. Like, so do you want the publicity for saying something that’s outrageous? I’m not really sure whether – why he would say that, but I think he got on the magazine, *The New York Times* magazine, and people took him very—“Well, here,

00:15:00

look, this is a sensible young man. We should pay attention to this guy.” And it was a real way of consigning the poor to the margins.

And I think AIDS is—I mean, Lazarus Syndrome was very powerful. I mean, and that was, to me—I mean, I will never forget going back to San Francisco the summer of ’96 and seeing people that I’d—you know, after losing hundreds of people that I knew, to see people that I’d seen in wheelchairs, to see people who had KS lesions walking down the street again, and just there was this incredible optimism. The day that the last obituary came out, and there was no obituary in the *Bay Area Reporter*, I think, it was some day—it was the spring of ’97 or something, and it was like this incredible moment. So, but it didn’t mean it was over. It had changed. And I don’t think people quite knew how wrap their heads around what that.

SS: Let me ask you something. Those people, the Lazarus people, the ones you’re still in touch with, how are they doing? Like, are you seeing a lot of rates of depression, drug abuse?

BHS: It was hard. It was never quite over, and I think that’s what my friends would always point out, is it’s never—we were never really done with it. You know, you could think AIDS is over, but they would point out they were never—it was never quite—nobody’s life—you know, and having to live with this thing isn’t always that easy, and there was survival guilt. So, not easy, not easy.

SS: So when you came to New York, how did you get plugged in?

BHS: Well, I went to the Center immediately. I mean, there was an article in *Lingua Franca* about Sex Panic!, and I was really—I was very—to me, the thing that

was really moving to me and incredibly frustrating to me was when people would scold people for the complexities of their sex life. And everybody's sex lives are messy, so to tell everybody you always have to wear a condom or you always have to blah, blah, blah, blah, or listen to the lesbians, they're going to tell you—Larry Kramer, "Listen to the lesbians, because they're going to tell you to have one." I don't know any lesbians that tell anybody what kind of love life they're supposed to have. But these ridiculous statements that would come out, Gabriel Rotello and the *Sexual Ecology* crap. It was just like—

SS: What's wrong with his theory?

BHS: Well, I would say more it's the delivery of saying, you know—you know, you're using the mainstream media as a gay man to use mainstream media to criticize other gay men, other queers, was really, really, really dangerous, I thought, and I think it's just a way of creating the old "good gays-bad gays" divide that has always been there, and I think it's really dangerous. And I think it's what happened at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, "Oh, well, you know, I got it when I didn't know, but she got it because she's a slut." And it was just this very, very hateful divide that started to happen, instead of recognizing that people are complicated, and if you want to do real HIV prevention, let's go to where people are having sex and help them have tools, you know, and talk about allowing people to make complicated decisions and reduce the harms around these behaviors.

I just think that what to me was attractive about ACT UP in this moment and Sex Panic! in this conversation was just this idea of rejecting the dangers of

prohibition, the dangerous logic of prohibition, which is part of the war on drugs, it's part of why prohibition didn't work in this country. I mean, it doesn't work when you tell people to stop doing something. It doesn't work. You have to work with them.

So, to me, prevention activism, Jim Eigo's point, was really, really important. It felt really exciting also because I was coming to New York, and for years New York, to me, was something where I would get off the train, 34th Street, and I felt, like, sexual energy in the air in New York City, just walking down Eighth Avenue to see you could make a new friend, you could be at Show World, you could be at any number of places, and it was so incredible, the amount of energy. So between going—I would go to the Met or I would go to the Modern Museum or I would go to someplace on 42nd Street and take care of that. So there was always the high and the low of New York that was so exciting to me.

And the idea that Giuliani was trying to take away the low—without the low, you don't get the high. You don't get the pulse of New York. So it felt like it was HIV prevention, but then there was this attack on public sexual culture and then attack on the public commons by very extension, and, all of a sudden, what is great about New York City, which is the messy street life, we're losing that. And I think, quickly, people like Jennifer Flynn with *Fed Up Queers* pointed out, I think, we always understood the triple-X zoning law was just a way to push the poor out of New York City and sanitize New York City.

00:20:00 So all of these things combined brought me into almost daily activism from '97 till—you know, for a decade, and now it's a few days a week for me, but it's

still some of the same battles around what could New York City look like. And ACT UP was always on the forefront of a conversation about what is a smart New York going to look like.

SS: So what are some campaigns that you've participated in?

BHS: Well, for me with ACT UP, my first campaigns were around names reporting and obviously also the triple-X zoning law stuff with Sex Panic!, which is, I guess, an affinity group. I mean, it came out of the ACT UP family and—

SS: It was actually in response to people like Gabriel and Mike [Signorile], who were ACT UP, so actually it was kind of a reaction to thatn discourse.

BHS: But I don't think there was an official position from ACT UP to say, "We're endorsing the turds –

SS: No, no not at all.

BHS: this hateful position." So I worked around names reporting.

SS: What was the issue?

BHS: Well, the issue was that the Department of Health, I think the Centers for Disease Control, wanted to have state report names of all people with HIV, and then so you had to, you had to have contact tracing like if you're doing social—I was a social worker, so if you were going to have a counseling session with somebody, you need to talk with them first about all their sexual partners and then call their sexual partners. And as a social worker, I've been asked many times in many jobs to violate my code of ethics, but our code of ethics basically means self-determination is the first thing

and relationship-building. You want to, (a), build a relationship with somebody you're working with; and (b), respect their self-determination. And so asking somebody about who they're having sex with isn't really a great way to get started with a conversation with somebody that just needs to get housing. You know, that's really the only reason usually they're seeing a social worker, or to get their entitlements turned on. So I couldn't do it, and it really felt offensive to me.

SS: Can you explain why it's wrong?

BHS: Well, why it's wrong was that it would get in the way of me being able to meet the person where they're at, which is, again, another expression we have in social work, but it's that meet the person with what their needs are when they walk in the door. And if they're here to get entitlements or they're here to get housing or they're here to have a counselor, you talk with them about what is their issue that they need on the front end, and they guide the agenda, and you build a relationship and you tell a story together there. And a good way to shut down a story is to ask somebody who you first meet to, "Tell me about your partners, because I'm going to call them." Sorry, I don't know anybody—and it's a common sense thing. If I asked any of you guys, "Tell me about your last partners. I'm going to call them now," that's not really a great way to build a relationship.

But it was also—I think it was dangerous for HIV prevention, because not a lot of people would want to report. You're not going to want to disclose if you know that—you're not going to want to get tested if you're going to find out that your name is going to get on a registry. That's just so—you know. We've always had this principle

with testing that your name is going to be safe. You're going to be able to get treatment you need if you get tested. And if all of a sudden your name is going to be sent to a registry, it was sort of the beginning of the panopticon that we sort of live in. And people talked about Foucault at the time with this. They talked about the sort of invasion of the body with the state's approach to HIV. When the state becomes paternalistic, the state says you need to do this in order to get these services, then people don't engage in the services.

And we have terrible HIV prevention in New York City anyway. We've always had terrible HIV prevention. Go to Brazil and there's signs all over the place about wearing condoms, and it's explicit. And you can also have treatment on demand in Brazil. They've taken control of the means of production, and you have treatment on demand. So your HIV rates are much smaller than they are here. So, you know, thank you, Health Gap, for your good work, you know.

So you had this big problem, and I think you saw this sort of state moving in, in this Bush era. This was the Clinton administration, but it was the beginning of some policies that the Bush era would do with the Centers for Disease Control, moving away from science toward a more controlling logic. And it was really dangerous. So a lot of us got involved with that.

And then GMHC was the first group that said, "Okay, we'll do it. For the CDC money, we'll do it." And we said, "There's no business like AIDS business." "Gay men helping the CDC" is what we said. We called them that. And I think a lot of people, it was a real split, because a lot of people are still loyal to GMHC, but it felt like AIDS,

00:25:00 Inc. I, as a social worker, worked in AIDS, Inc. for a while. I mean, Brian Weil's syringe exchange group, CitiWide Harm Reduction, is a group I worked in for four years as a deputy director there, and it was incredibly powerful direct action-based, science-based, harm-reduction organization. It was terrific, and I'm really proud of the work I did with that. But I also was very aware of the difficulties of nonprofit work.

I worked in coalition with Housing Works for several years, for several of those actions in the early nineties—no, the early 2000s. And especially after 9/11, Housing Works is one of the few groups that would still go to Albany and take a busload of people and go get arrested in Albany and say, "You know, we still need AIDS services. We still need programs for the poor." I was always excited to see that Housing Works was always out there to say, "AIDS isn't over till it's over for everybody."

And so these groups, there was always this moral conscience of ACT UP, and people like Keith Cylar and Charles King and Eustacia Smith and Jennifer Flynn and so many of these great activists that kept on, that kept it going, that always kept it—

SS: Now you're talking about an ideological difference.

BHS: Yeah.

SS: Right? Because someone who's for harm reduction holds a certain view of human beings, and someone who's against contact tracing holds the same view of human beings, but can you articulate what those values are?

BHS: Well, I think harm reduction is something that grows. I mean, I read Bertram Cohler, University of Chicago, and I've read a lot of Freud, and in *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through*, there's this point that the patient isn't

cured because they remember—they aren't cured because of what they remember, they're cured because they can remember. So if you engage with somebody in a way in which you trust them to talk about their desires, their messy thoughts, then they're going to take care of themselves if you create that space for them to think about what they need in their desires. If you tell them, "You should have worn a condom. That was stupid," you shut down that conversation and that person isn't able to think about why they did what they did, why they moved against their self and their own self-interests."

For me, in San Francisco, it was one of those moments, at least that I experienced, which is when I was looking at patients dying, I sometimes acted against my own self-interest and put myself at risk, because there's so much pain. And it was something that I had to really reflect on. I think anybody dealing with AIDS for a long period of time watches their sex life overlap with Thanatos. You get Eros and Thanatos, and if you're trying to tell people to try to shut down that conversation, you're going to shut down a very vital part of who they are as they work through their grief.

And so, for me, harm reduction is a very humane approach to saying, "Let's have a conversation. Let's let me get to know you, and tell me about your desires, tell me about your needs, and by remembering, you're going to be safer." By creating options, if you give—I've worked with many homeless people who were drug users, and I've never seen a single one say, "I would rather use a dirty syringe than a clean syringe." You give people options, they're going to use those options. You give people lube, you give people condoms, you give people risk-reduction options, people are going to find a safe way to take care of themselves, and I think they do.

So, to me, it was this—you've got this criminalization model, "I want to take your name down and send it to the state and track you," or you've got this model that says, "I respect you to make healthy choices with your bodies. Here's some options." That's what harm reduction was all about, and harm reduction is just a humanitarian approach to working with folks, with people, and it takes you away from the big lie. If you're in social work, there's the big lie in the room. I mean, people used to even do it at CitiWide. We would ask people on an assessment sheet, "Tell me about your drug of choice," and people would say, "I don't have a drug of choice." Well, you know, we're in the South Bronx and this a syringe-exchange program, so chances are you might have had a history with drug use. But people don't tell. People tell stories within a context of power, and if they know that you're going to condemn them and punish them for talking about their drug use, they're not going to talk about it. But if you create a safe place where you can talk about your drug use or your desires, then they're going to talk about it and they're going to figure out safe ways to manage and negotiate that. At least that's my belief. And I don't want to scold people. I don't want to be in a fight. I don't want to be in a power struggle. I think that harm reduction is contrary to this idea of the war on drugs, which is the other side of the way you work with drug users, which is you lock them up. And I don't think that there's any data that shows that that works. The war on drugs has not really been a glorious success, and yet we kept on funding it because people make money off the prison industrial complex.

SS: So what happened to the campaign around contact tracing?

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BHS: I think we lost. I think that some of the – I think that by GMHC saying—I think that was the split. I think if GMHC had taken a hard line that we're not going to take the money, and all the AIDS organizations had said no, I think it wouldn't have gone anywhere. But I think we lost. I think it happened in New York State. These were moments where the Planning Council even—we had close votes, you know, but we didn't win that.

But the thing, for me, what happened with ACT UP after this, that I found just really inspiring, is so there's ACT UP ten, the first ten years of ACT UP. Everybody knows that story. But then there's the ACT UP ten to fifteen, where some really interesting little things happened, and then fifteen to twenty, some other really interesting things happened, and they kept going. And I eventually got out of AIDS, Inc., and I was really happy to not be working around—with the Center for Disease Control the way it was in the 2000s, with the Bush reelection, it was really hard to feel like government money was—it wasn't—there were conditions attached.

But ACT UP had lots of little leadership moments through these years. I remember there's a moment September 19th, 2002, there was a Chinese doctor, Dr. Wan [Yanhai]. I can't pronounce his first name. But I think he'd gotten in trouble for—James, you were there. I think you were there. But he'd gotten in trouble because I guess he said the supply of blood has HIV in it, and China was like, "Okay, well, we're going to lock you up for saying that." So, you know, a group of us show up with a picket line, and I don't even remember where the picket line was. It might have been the consulate. I'm really not—it was somewhere on the West Side.

JW: Consulate.

BHS: Yeah. And we made a stink. I mean, like, it was just a simple message, and, again, it's the ACT UP message, "You Take Action. Action Equals Life." Here's a guy in jail because he's telling the truth, and so let's get this guy out.

SS: And what happened to him?

BHS: And the next day they released him.

SS: Oh, wow.

BHS: You know, so September 20th, he got let out of jail. So it was this—so ACT UP continued to have these little leadership moments.

I mean, the war broke out and there was waves of antiwar activism before a troop had hit the ground. But then I remember—and there were waves and waves and waves of protests. I remember, though, a moment at Rockefeller Center where we'd had protests, protests, mass protests in the streets in Washington, and the February 15th incredible antiwar protest. Around the world there were people having these protests in their cities before Colin Powell went to the U.N. and lied about weapons of mass destruction.

So a few days later—I think it was March, but we had a protest at Rockefeller Center, and I remember so we were doing the usual "No Blood for Oil," extreme—you know, chanting, and a lot of energy. It was the before-work crowd, and it was really energetic. I remember Mark Milano blowing a horn and, like, then everybody stepped over the police lines, and ACT UP did a die-in. And nobody expected that, you know. And it was, like, to see people, you know, saying, "People are dying there." It

was after the war had started, so doing a die-in in New York City, it just still gives me chills to remember that little moment.

SS: Yeah, but I'm going to challenge you, because there's a fundamental difference. When nobody cared about AIDS and there were no treatments and there were no institutions, grassroots activism had one meaning. Now we're in the age of global pharma, so, really, how do you address global pharma as an activist?

BHS: Yeah, that's the million-dollar question. And I think ACT UP has—look, we're in capitalism. We're all sullied by capitalism. We all have our—anybody that even gets a paycheck, there's some messy parts of where that money comes from. But I think you can be critical of Big Pharma and also appreciate that we need drugs, and I think these are two complicated things. There's a messy relationship we have with these things, these medications that may save our lives. I mean, I take a statin, you know, and I take a generic, but Pfizer made a lot of money with it, you know, with one of the statins that I took—I take. So we have a messy relationship with corporations, and that's why the Global Justice Movement has been, I think—and ACT UP took part in that for a lot of years. And that's the interesting thing with ACT UP stories, to watch ACT UP dovetail with the movements of our era.

I think, you know, the proudest moment, the next campaign I was involved in with ACT UP was the “Gore's Greed Kills” campaign when we went to Al Gore's campaign and talked about Al Gore. Al Gore had recently bragged, before he started his campaign, that he was going to get tough on Nelson Mandela and South Africa

00:35:00 because they were planning to break patents to release AIDS drugs for the people. And Al Gore had said, “The United States is going to get tough on these guys,” and he sure did not like it when we showed up at his campaign events with “Gore’s Greed Kills” signs.

And, again, it’s one of the ACT UP skills. You don’t have to have a lot of people, but if you see all the cameras and you see there’s a speaker and there’s a camera, ACT UP knows even if you have ten people, if I get between the camera and the person speaking, you’re going to have a sign that says “Gore’s Greed Kills,” and if you’re bird-dogging and you’re going to every campaign event—Gore recognized later the activists were right. He later said that. So ACT UP, this—

SS: Then what did the U.S. do in South Africa?

BHS: U.S. backed off. We backed off on suing Nelson Mandela, which is, I think, a good—I think it’s kind of a tacky move to sue Nelson Mandela. It’s not going to be a PR win for anybody.

But ACT UP points out this fundamental humanity. This challenge is people versus profits, and so the Big Pharma question. Obviously, you’re going to hear anybody—I go to dinner at my mom’s house in Princeton, and there’ll be people from Big Pharma to come to, from Squibb, that come to dinner, and they have a very different relationship with ACT UP people. They respect them. You know, they were there when ACT UP protested them, but they have a different logic of why it’s important.

SS: What’s the relationship now between ACT UP and Squibb or TAG, whatever?

BHS: Team Action Group, I mean—I went to a TAG fundraiser a couple of years ago, and I've only gone to one, because I—and, you know, you have the whiff of Big Pharma when you walk in the room, you know. Stephen Gendin talked about that in his last blog before he died, was just we used to be activists and now we're messy. We're in bed with these guys. We're in bed with Pharma. And I'm not going to condemn TAG. I think TAG is—I think they've done some really, really great work, but we're all sullied with it.

And I think the challenge is now, it's going to kill our healthcare system if we continue to—I mean, I think a couple of years ago, during the national healthcare discussions when ACT UP was having—went up to Charlie Rangel's office with “Your Butt's Showing,” or, like, “You're not covered,” so we all had fake butts. I think some people could have taken their pants off and it would have been a better picture. But Eric Sawyer pulled out the bills for his AIDS medications, and he said, “It's \$100,000 a year for my—I have good insurance, so they'll pay for this, but it's not sustainable to continue to have drugs cost this much.” So that somebody who has good insurance, it's going to cost \$100,000 to pay for this. And if you're on Medicare, you're going to bankrupt the program.

I mean, it's much cheaper in Canada and much cheaper in Europe to get AIDS drugs. In the United States, AIDS drugs are prohibitively expensive, and we don't see a push for a cure because who would want to give up—you know? A thousand Eric Sawyers, a million Eric Sawyers, \$100,000 a year, year after year, and it's keeping them

alive, so you want to use these meds. So, yeah, for-profit medicine is a tough one, and ACT UP has really done a good job of pushing that.

And another great ACT UP moment, 2009, when Mark Milano—again, I keep talking about Mark Milano’s protests, but his meds—I think Aetna turned down his request for treatment—for medication, and Mark Milano, being an ACT UP member, said, “Okay. Well, I don’t know if you know who I am, but I’ve got this group of friends called ACT UP,” and we had a protest in front of the Aetna offices.

And I think before we even got to the protest in 2009, Aetna had backed down and said, “Okay, maybe we will honor your request for this medication.” But we still had the zap, we still had the protest, and it was fun. And I think one of the members of the Rude Mechanical Orchestra had her saxophone and played the Death Star theme.

So to me, it’s just ACT UP, with all these messy, complicated stories, is still out there as a conscience, forcing us to think through these messy questions, and I think they’ve generally been on the right side of history.

SS: How many people are going to ACT UP meetings these days?

JW: Hold that question.

BHS: Can you hear me?

JW: And your chin.

BHS: Okay. Can I get a glass of water quickly? Can I take this off for just a –

SS: Sure. Let us unplug you.

BHS: Oh, okay.

SS: Go right ahead.

BHS: Okay.

SS: Just take that with you.

BHS: Okay. Take this with me.

JH: Do you see the condom there?

JW: I don't, but we'll, oh I do. I don't.

00:40:00

SS: Okay so how many people are at – oh wait, James is in the way here.

JW: Just slightly.

BHS: Okay.

JW: Oh [water spills]

SS: Oh.

BHS: It's okay. It's okay. It's not a big deal.

SS: Those are all your notes for next book.

BHS: No, no, no. It's okay. It's all good. Let me just get a napkin. Two seconds.

SS: Okay, two seconds.

BHS: We're good to go.

SS: No rush.

BHS: My notes haven't – they've had water pured on them before so it's okay. Is this the way off? Two seconds.

JW: Sloppy elbows. Have any questions for me?

SS: I do. Do you want to be interviewed?

JW: No.

SS: Okay, then I'm not going to ask you any questions.

JW: Okay.

SS: Okay that would have been your Pulitzer Prize-winning poem.

BHS: You know, it's all pretty good. There we go. Okay.

SS: And since you're not going to be become Freud, it's okay. Adam Phillips, out of the water whatever.

BHS: It's okay.

JW: There's some water on top here.

BHS: Okay. Let's do it. Let's get started.

SS: Alright.

BHS: Let's do it. I didn't want that water anyway. I was going to go without. Yeah, thank you.

JW: I'm so sorry.

BHS: No problem. I to to more – how many people to ACT UP protests now? ACT UP meetings?

SS: Wait, we're still adjusting your mic.

JW: So far so good.

BHS: There's a good core group of people that are going to ACT UP now, a really good core of people, Michael Tkili and Jim Eigo and Reginald [Brown]. It's a really good group of people that are back. I mean, watching Jim Eigo come back to ACT

UP was really inspiring, because for ten years he wasn't in the group, you know. So, not to say he wasn't in the group, I mean, but '97, I got to Sex Panic! the day that he left—that he left.

[interruption]

BHS: So I really like the people I see.

SS: Let me ask you something about Sex Panic! So Michael Warner was the founder. Did they ever do activism or did they mostly do critique?

BHS: I think that the sense was that if I can have a good session at the Center, then that's activism. But, no, Michael Warner, Greg Gonsalves, Bill Dobbs, you know, there were good people pouring through there for a while. There were really good conversations. I mean, Dean, Dean Spade, was in ACT UP—I mean was in Sex Panic! Eve Pendleton. There were some really, really smart people that were asking great questions. And I think, you know, we battled with each other. We really, really, really battled, and there was a generational battle, almost an Oedipal battle that started to happen there.

SS: What was that about?

BHS: Well, I think young activists, we all were getting sick of Larry Kramer's, you know, Old Testament prophet argument, worked really well for a while there. Then it got old. So some of us were united in being angry about the Turds and Gabriel Rotello and Michelangelo Signorile and the rest of them. Then we turned on each other, and I think, you know, Keith Cylar, the late great Keith Cylar—I've got a Keith Cylar ACT UP sign over there. He said, "You can't fuel a movement on anger."

So we were really turning on each other, and I think when Jim left, a lot of the energy left.

But we had done protests. I mean, Sylvia Rivera did a protest on the West Side Highway, and I remember Michael Warner, his arms were crossed, he was like watching the little people protest. But Jim Eigo, I mean a lot—I think Michael Warner goes to the drag marches now. We see Michael Warner a little bit.

But there was a huge split. For me, it was also that moment in Queer Theory where Queer Theory was speaking to academics instead of being—for a long time there, Queer Theory was a reflection of ACT UP and reflection of theory in action, you know, in a queer activist practice. And then at some point after, you know, the papers—after Sex Panic!, Queer Theory seemed to stop being reflective of activism, and for a little while there in ACT UP, I mean, and in Sex Panic! it felt like the two overlapped in a nice—in a thoughtful way. We were challenging—we’re not saying, like, Pierre Bourdieu says you can’t make complicated things into sound bites, you know. And HIV-prevention activism was always trying to use sound bites, but it doesn’t always work, because, like, we’re messier than that, and I think Sex Panic! understood. So I think, yeah, it was a really great moment, and they did street activism, but there were fights. I remember Bill Dobbs and Dean—and Dean wasn’t Dean at this point, but Dean wanted to go out and put street signs all over, like “Don’t Fall Into the—,” like, heteronormative, like the GAP signs, but saying “Heteronormativity: Don’t Fall Into the Trap,” like the old GAP ad, like just doing wheatpasting and just going out and doing direct action.

00:45:00

And I think Bill Dobbs, like, blocked, and it was like, “Really, Bill Dobbs, you’re blocking these people? These queer activists want to go out there and just put some signs up.” So there was that split, and people got sick of Bill Dobbs, you know. That’s it. I mean, I hate to say it. Bill Dobbs is a really tough guy to work with after a while.

SS: But was Sex Panic!, were they about HIV prevention?

BHS: HIV prevention was a big—

SS: They were?

BHS: —part of that, yeah, a big part of the group.

SS: So, given your experience as an activist and as a service provider, what do you think is the most effective mode for HIV prevention?

BHS: Obviously, I think it’s the Brazil model, which is that explicit, explicit, explicit information about how to stop the spread of HIV with syringes and condoms and all that good stuff, so giving people—but talking about rates of—I mean, and routes of transmission. So you have this constant information on TV and bus ads, in subways, in subways all over, and then having people go out and distributing this material, getting it out there, get the syringes out there, getting the condoms out there, and then having treatment on demand. So you have these two pieces that would work together, and you’re going to reduce the spread of HIV.

SS: So our refusal as a culture to talk about or to override stigma, AIDS stigma, and talk openly.

BHS: God bless you.

SS: Excuse me, do you think that's cultural?

BHS: Yes, yes, I think we—when I was in Sex Panic!, one of the things I started thinking about is why are—and doing syringe exchange for all these years—is why we're such prudes, you know, and yet it really goes back to the Puritans, and we got a lot of the wackos that came to this country. And I think that we have a deep, deep, deep Puritanical streak, and it fuels the war on drugs. It fuels this sense that you've got to—it will really work if you tell somebody just to, "Have a stern upper lip and bear with the pain. You're going to be fine. You can pull yourself up out of being poor." I mean, it's Cotton Mather, right? We've got this deep, deep, deep streak of Puritanical thinking, and it does not help.

SS: Oh, it's interesting because it's counterindicated to profit, that actually we would save money if we had HIV prevention.

BHS: Absolutely, absolutely.

SS: So there is something that's bigger than money.

BHS: Well, and Robin Hood Foundation and Michael Bloomberg all understood. I mean, I remember we were at a Robin Hood Foundation fundraiser, I mean event for CitiWide, and there was Harvey Weinstein right there, like, they all understood. If you're paying for a syringe that costs one penny, and you're going prevent the spread of one person testing HIV-positive and cost the City of New York—and this was ten years ago numbers around \$100,000, that's a pretty good cost-benefit analysis.

And it's the same thing, the same argument that Housing Works has always used with permanent housing versus shelters. It's much cheaper to house

somebody permanently than to keep on putting them in an SRO hotel, which is much more expensive than regular rent. And yet there's money, people are making money to house people in SRO hotels instead of permanently funding housing. And then Thomas Frieden refused to acknowledge that. I have a friend that wrote Thomas Frieden—I mean wrote the head of the New York—I forget his name—asking him, “Why do you charge people to live in these SROs? Why don't you permanently house people?” We can double-check the guy's name. But it's a real problem in New York.

SS: But I'm asking you, like, a big question, and I don't expect you to have the answer, but earlier you said we live in capitalism and all our paychecks are sullied. However, there are certain things in this culture that override capitalism, that override moneymaking, and some of them are the desire to punish, repression of speaking truthfully about experience. What is that?

00:50:00 BHS: It's Victorian, really. I mean, you know, there's, there's repression is a big part of—is a huge part of our culture, and I think that's the other—Calvinism. Calvinism overlaps with capitalism in a nice way, because you reward the financially well-off, and you say they're righteous for that. So I think it overlaps, and I think that this sort of Christian capitalism, that's the model we live in. And yet, and yet, we're also in New York where, you know, the Dutch East India Company, you know, like, Jews were able to survive in New York because of capitalism, you know. People are like, “Oh, there's business here, so let's let everybody come here and thrive.” So, New York—we're in the United States but we're also in New York, and by being in New York, it's pure capitalism. So we're supposed to be less prohibitive, and yet over the last fifteen

years, we're no longer a sexual mecca. We are no longer a place that people can walk off the bus on 42nd Street and find something, public sexual culture. You have to be on the invite list. You have to be—I mean, you have to have a good phone to make connections, but it's not public in the same way it used to be.

SS: So that gentrification has a kind of sexual conservatism that comes along with it.

BHS: Yeah, absolutely. It's just there's a restriction on who has access, who's invited where, who has access to the technology, as opposed to the art of cruising, the art of also knowing—being able to walk into a spot and knowing, you know, there's a back room that you can just walk down Eighth Avenue and find.

SS: Well, the spot is your phone.

BHS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. So it's a different world.

SS: Okay. I want to talk about your book. So what year was your book published?

BHS: Which one?

SS: The first one, *From ACT UP to the WTO*.

BHS: That was my second book. My first book was the San Francisco oral history book, *White Knights and Ascending Shadows: An Oral History of the San Francisco AIDS Epidemic*. *ACT UP to the WTO* was published in 2002. It would have been published in 2001, but—

SS: So who published your first book?

BHS: Castle Press.

SS: So, what – if you don't mind summarizing, and I know, like, I hate summarizing my own books because it took you three hundred pages to make the argument, but can you summarize what you understand to be the impact of ACT UP on subsequent movements?

BHS: Well, I will say when the battle of Seattle happened in 1999, it was sort of the people's – it was really, really an incredible moment. And a few days before the battle of Seattle, activists with ACT UP Philly, ACT UP New York, and Fed Up Queers went into Charlene Barshefsky's office, who was the U.S. Trade Representative, and locked themselves into their office said, "You know, you're going to have to make sure that people can get access to medication."

So ACT UP, in some ways, to me, that little moment where ACT UP was ahead of the WTO protests but part of those WTO protests, literally it's the same week that this is all happening. ACT UP had done this genius thing of overlapping with multiple movements, and ACT UP came out of multiple movements from the Women's Movement and Gay Liberation, and SDS members are part of ACT UP. And ACT UP, of course, there was Vito Russo and there were some of the amazing Gay Liberation activists. So you had this direct action tradition that even comes out of civil disobedience, of the Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Civil Rights Movement, and then you have—so ACT UP has been doing this work, and it was in some ways being forgotten by 1999, and, and – but it had changed for a generation of people being able to realize you can have fun and you can do direct action and you get something done. It isn't about guilt; it's about success and results. And it's not about

moral purity, you know. It wasn't anti-capitalist. Sometimes it was, but it wasn't always anti-capitalists. So, complicated relationship with drug companies. But ACT UP was a part of a radical renewal, I think, and I think ACT UP helped a generation of people see that through defiant direct action, through a burlesque of DYI direct action, you can get incredible things done.

And it can also be delicious. It can also be—I mean, when I got to New York and heard the term “demo diva,” hearing people talk about going to demos is something—you know, and making fun of people that were media whores, you know. It's like understanding media was part of the conversation. ACT UP opened up a whole new way of creating activism, even including the DIVA TV media, self-made media, not expecting the corporate media to cover your protests. You could talk through the corporate media, but you'd also have your own videos and your own films and your own footage that you could give them, and they might show it. But that anticipated the indie media revolution.

00:55:00 So ACT UP dovetails through these multiple movements, and I think what happens—and I think it's one of my critiques. Debbie Gould wrote a book a couple of years ago called, about the end of AIDS activism, and I remember the day I got the book in the mail, I was at a protest in Midtown with, organized by Voices of Community Activists & Leaders and ACT UP, and I think Larry Kramer actually even came. But it was this moment where people of color led part of—the AIDS direct action movement is moving and you've got somebody saying AIDS activism is dead.

And I think that what ACT UP sort of has been able —the genius of ACT UP is its coalition partners it's been able to work with, to deal with, coping with HIV as it's raged, even when there are people within our own movement that want to deny that we are still doing this work, deny that direct action is still happening. And Debbie Gould, I think her book really points to—in the same way of Andrew Sullivan saying AIDS is over. To say AIDS activism is over, because you're not involved in it is really a smarmy argument.

So I think ACT UP has just been able to adapt to multiple movements from—and in my lifetime I've watched ACT UP bring so much to the Global Justice Movement, the Antiwar Movement, from the first Gulf War, which I watched, and I watched ACT UP be involved in some of the protests around that, to the recent ACT UP war—I mean not ACT UP war, the recent Iraq War, to watch ACT UP continue to influence these movements was so powerful. And I think it slowed down with Occupy. I don't think it was as strong of a relationship, but you still see people coming out of Occupy now that are in ACT UP.

And so this is a movement where the body of the group was the leader, not the top. I know the media likes to say that Larry Kramer's the leader, but I don't think he's been to a meeting for fifteen years. I don't want to knock him, but, you know, I think the body of the group is always the people, whoever was going to be the facilitator on Monday, whoever was doing the meeting notes, whoever was organizing the prop-making party. And that's the genius of ACT UP is that that continues. And that's not about one person; that's about a movement and an ethos and Monday night meetings that

are transparent and people can participate in those. And it doesn't mean it didn't have difficult times. You know, when you're dealing with people dying, you're going to have difficult times. And there are going to be fights about power, but it's still going. So it's a very, very smart group.

SS: Do you guys have any questions? Is there anything that you want discuss that we haven't discussed? Because I only have one more question.

BHS: Okay. Well, this pretty much covers it. I mean, I think it's Thomas Frieden from the Center of Disease Control—I just want to make sure I don't sound like a fool with mispronouncing the guy's name, because I—you know. But anyway, so I'm good.

JH: Can we just go back briefly to the first book?

BHS: Yeah.

JH: Because I wonder, actually, why you decided to do oral histories of San Francisco.

BHS: Well, to me, the San Francisco movement was in that period '93, '94, '95, it felt like Vietnam. It really, to me, it felt like Vietnam. It felt like that there was this war that was going on and on and on, and people weren't acknowledging that this war is going on and people are dying, like, dropping like flies. And I saw these amazing people that I knew in San Francisco, my clients and my friends, that had great stories about coming to San Francisco in the late seventies or the late sixties after, you know, the Vietnam War, taking part, and they came to San Francisco and they had a story. And I saw those stories dying, and it was just, you know—whatever you think of

Randy Shilts, but, like, when Randy Shilts died, and I remember Fred Phelps showed up, and San Francisco being San Francisco, everybody pelted him with eggs. There was no, like, nonviolence. It was like, “We’re going to pelt this person with eggs.” And he had to run away, and the cops didn’t even protect this person, you know, didn’t even protect Phelps’ crew.

So, to me, the power was looking at all those stories that were disappearing. There’s a whole literature about AIDS, but I still felt like the oral histories of people and the lives they lived when they’d come to San Francisco and created gay liberation—not just created, but created a really important branch in the story of gay liberation, was really, really powerful. And I did feel like it was disappearing, so that’s why I wanted to write that story, and I’m really proud. I’m really proud of that story.

But we saw AIDS, Inc. at the end of that story even then, so, you know, it’s tough. ACT UP, the genius of ACT UP, I mean, it’s a paradox because ACT UP didn’t want to be part of AIDS, Inc., and yet you had some of the other big organizations that grew out of ACT UP and were able to sustain themselves in ways. So I think it’s a real challenge, is how do you maintain a direct action group. And the life course of affinity groups is a year, is maybe two or three years. To keep on going for thirty years is—and we’re on the verge of thirty years, twenty-five to thirty years is pretty powerful.

01:00:00

So, I mean, to me, the most important thing about it is just that it gave a generation of people a chance to engage and laugh and enjoy social Eros. I mean, this community of friends, that’s always the feeling. For me, ACT UP is just—when I see ACT UP, it’s a group of friends, and so they are people that I’ve known for sometimes

twenty years. And it's really still very powerful to see what we've gone through and to see we're still fighting this thing. And, yeah, I can't think of a better way of dealing with this horrible epidemic than what ACT UP has done. But I hope we can—as Vito Russo says, you know, “After I kick the shit out of this disease, I want to be around to kick the shit out of the system that's created this.” And I think that's the challenge that ACT UP always faces the wall is when it faces capitalism, and it hits capitalism.

But what I love about ACT UP is it was never purist to say, “If it isn't an anti-systematic critique, then I'm not going to do it,” because ACT UP needed and demanded results, because people were dying. So, like, you can have your Marxist conversation on the side, that's fine, but we still need to get results right now, and we're going to get results. And so by not being pure, but saying, “Let's do this now,” I think it changed history, and I'm really—it's been amazing to watch.

SS: So, final question. With hindsight, what do you think was ACT UP's greatest achievement and what do you think was its biggest disappointment?

BHS: National health insurance is obviously the biggest disappointment, and I would say within that is the cure, the AIDS Cure Act and stuff. There was an AIDS Cure Bill I think Ron Dellums introduced, with the support of ACT UP East Bay in 1994, and Congress changed, and I don't think it ever moved. But I think the AIDS Cure Act, really—I think we needed to have a Manhattan Project-style push for cure, still think that, and national health insurance.

ACT UP's greatest success is the moral argument that healthcare is a right, and within that, ACT UP took the message of gay liberation, that we're human beings.

As Cleve Jones talks about the AIDS quilt brought AIDS out of the closet, but it also brought homosexuality out of the closet and queerness out of the closet. And so you have this human-rights discourse that opens up, but we hit a wall. And I think that now seeing two presidents that were going to push for national healthcare insurance, and we have this thing we've sort of become a little complacent once you get the—oh, now, we're going to become—Mark Harrington who said, after Bill Clinton was elected, we felt like, oh, we're going to have a European style, you know, healthcare system, and it doesn't happen. So, for-profit medicine is really smarmy. But you can't say ACT UP hasn't tried.

So ACT UP's greatest success to me is, I mean, at FDA, FDA approval stuff, and then all of the—so the pills-into-bodies argument was incredible, but then all the affinity groups. I think the Women's Caucus, I think the syringe exchange groups, those are the ones—it's those incredible stories that need to get told, and they're told in the oral histories, but there's not movies about the affinity groups that did direct action for medical necessity around syringe exchange in New York City and won the necessity argument so that we could sort of reduce the spread of HIV among injection drug users.

I mean, in 1990, the rate was 60 percent of injection drug users were HIV-positive. And now, because of those activists, they had to use direct action in New York. In San Francisco, the police turned the other cheek and let them do syringe exchange. But in New York, the activists had to get arrested and go to court and make the medical-necessity argument, and they successfully made it, and the Department of Health supports those programs, those interventions, so that's another, I think, one of the great successes.

I think the other one is just the discourse, the discursive success, of just saying, you know, movements need people in the streets. They need direct action. For every Martin, you need a Malcolm. You need to have somebody out there using direct action, because I think direct action has gotten the goods with ACT UP, and without it, I don't think things are going to change. So –

SS: Thank you, Ben Shepard.

BHS: Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you, guys.

SS: Thank you.

BHS: I'm a little scared. Usually for interviews I try to look at the transcript. But I don't think –

SS: No this is it.

BHS: This is it. Oh no. Oh no. I got it. You can knock stuff over guys. You want to knock some books over, James?

JW: It's fun. I got a few tapes for you.

BHS: Okay, it's all good man. Thank you guys so much.

SS: I'm going to go. Nice to see you.

BHS: Thank you so much.