

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

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

Interviewee: **Brad Taylor**

Interview Number: **116**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **April 29, 2010**

**ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Brad Taylor
April 29, 2010**

SARAH SCHULMAN: So just start by saying your name, your age, today's date, and where we are.

BRAD TAYLOR: Brad Taylor; 53, I guess, whatever year this is. And uh, today's the 30th, I believe, the 29th or 30th, of April –

SS: 2010.

BT: – 2010.

SS: Where are we?

BT: And we are on the West Side, Midtown Manhattan, 47th Street, west.

SS: In your beautiful apartment.

BT: In my old apartment, that I've lived in for many years.

SS: Right.

BT: Since my brother had this lease – from about '78, 1978. And then I moved in here with him in '82.

SS: Let's start before that.

BT: Um hm.

SS: So you're from Texas.

BT: Yes.

SS: What part of Texas?

BT: West Texas; prairie country. It's called the Staked Plains, on geographic maps. Nobody says that down there, but – it's oil country. It's Bush – like Houston, CIA-mafia, oil-mafia country. The Bush clan satellited out there

from Connecticut in the late '50s, early '60s, to start – the elder Bush's, the elder presidential Bush's political career as a state congressperson from my home town, Midland, Texas.

SS: And how long has your family been there?

BT: A very long time. My grandfather, my great-grandfather, came there as a baby in a covered wagon, to Dallas County, in – some time in the late 1800s. So that's a very long time in Texas terms. And then his family, they were ranchers and they were mercantile people and bankers in a small Texas town. They were like a – aristocracy in this little bitty Texas town. He was the mayor for 30 years, or something. And my grandmother was also from west Texas. These are my maternal grandparents, with whom I grew up. We were blessed – my four, three brothers and myself were blessed to have the world's greatest grandparents to grow up with. We had two homes.

So we were a dyed-in-the-wool west Texas – city boys. We were not, like in our locale, in west Texas, you were either a cowboy or not. Or you were a cowboy or what we called Southsiders — which was often a combination of the two — or you weren't; which meant that you were kind of like into the Beach Boys, as opposed to all of the country stations on the dial, which pretty much dominated. There was one pop music station, so – so that was kind of our identity. We were at the swimming pool, instead of out working, like a lot of the country kids were.

SS: So what was the life that you were raised to have? What were your parents' expectations of who you would become?

BT: Hm – I don't – well, they thought that I would be a successful professional. My mother wanted that to happen. But we were never doped with that kind of heavy expectation for us career-wise. We were definitely seeded with the understanding that that's what she would like, and that we would please her, which was a very high priority for all four of us, always. We would please her if we — or I would, at least — if I was a lawyer, or something.

SS: Now what were your parents, as you were growing up in the '60s, and I'm sure you saw the '60s on TV, if you didn't see them –

BT: Mm, um-hm.

SS: – what kind of comments did your family make about what was happening in this country?

BT: Not too much. We were the same – everybody, from – you're a little younger than me. But everybody from that era remembers, Americans remember when the Beatles came. And like that was kind of the big cultural shock that trickled down to mid-America, because it was on your TV. Like when the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan, that was the beginning of something important – for us, because we didn't really know who Jack Kerouac was. We were in the Midwest, in a little town, so we were not well-educated in contemporary culture, really, probably, except our own.

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So I don't remember – so there were pros and cons about whether one should have long hair or not if one was a male, and that kind of thing. And then as the counterculture grew and expanded into the Midwest, that dialog probably intensified, or elaborated, or whatever.

But the only thing I remember, my mom – my mom, we were not a racist household. We didn't say the N-word in our household. Which was unusual in our locale, because it was a racist place, where we grew up – against black people and Latino people. There were a lot – many Mexican American people in my – those were the two minority groups, in other words. And not that many Mexican nationals at that time, or at least we didn't know of them very much, except that people employed Mexican nationals, probably.

So the only kind of cultural critique that I remember from that, besides the, like I say, the same thing that everybody grew up with; the only thing that sticks out in my memory is that when M.L. King was touring through the Midwest, and was to be speaking in some other small town — maybe it was Lubbock or somewhere — near us, and it was a big controversy in the papers, that Martin King was going to be coming through town, Martin Luther King was going to be in our locale. And of course, it was – scandalous. It was a bad thing that Martin Luther King was going to be around.

And so I remember us asking my mom, So who is Martin Luther King, and what's the big deal and stuff? And she explained that he was – that it

was kind of overgrown, all the controversy — it was a little bit inflated — but that he was basically a troublemaker, and that his presence would probably be troublesome. It wasn't as bad as people thought, but it wasn't necessarily a good thing.

SS: Right. And what about the war in Vietnam?

BT: It was unfortunate background. We experienced it on TV. We didn't know very many people who went. By the time — I remember Terry — I can't remember their names now, the other four boys that were older than us that lived across the street, and were all swimmers and divers. The eldest of them went to Vietnam, and came back totally druggy and totally crazy, like everybody did. But by that time, it was already late '70s, and we knew that everybody — that everybody was addicted to heroin in Vietnam, and that it wasn't — that there was nothing valiant about our country's presence in Southeast Asia, and stuff like that. We didn't — we were not as sophisticated — we were not people, we were not kids who were well-taught politically — we weren't sophisticated politically — but we knew, like most people knew, if we were honest with ourselves, if we weren't trying to hype a patriotic line, like people did, and still do; we knew that it was a mess, and that it was — that it wasn't — that John Wayne was totally wrong and that he was lying.

SS: So what kind of —

JIM HUBBARD: James, is the sound all right? I'm hearing a lot of noise.

{Conversation about noise}

SS: Do you remember your earliest messages about homosexuality?

BT: Well yes, I do. I couldn't think of any global messages, or out-in-the-world messages. But I totally remember our intra-family messages. Because my younger brother and I were both gay. I later came to, after, we went through the whole thing – we were both early feminists in a – arcane kind of way. We were feminists as kids, because he was – he read Graves's *White Goddess* when we were little kids, and stuff, and it influenced him deeply, and he became an esotericist at a very early age, and that influenced us both to be – lunar-oriented people and stuff, and feminists, early on. So that later, we said that we were pansexuals, and after the epidemic happened, we said, I said that I was a bisexual, or I came to say, that, or that's what I say now. But we eschewed all those terms as reductionistic, and we didn't like any of them.

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But – when we were – so that I was closeted as a kid; but he never was. He was closeted in a sense, in the sense of open communication with my mom, with our mother, until he died. He was never outwardly verbal – he wasn't verbally out; he wasn't statedly out, to any but our closest friends, for the most part as we grew up in that locale, and even after, when we would go back there,

which we did a lot. He was a very non-confrontational person. So he didn't, do out. I did out. Once he came out to me, then I was about sexual politics and stuff like that. But he never was.

But he was always very visibly queer when we were kids. He played with dolls, and he didn't want to play the sports that the rest of us were doing and stuff. He wanted to play with Theresa next door, his best friend. Wonderful Theresa Ulrich and he were best friends when they were four – three, four, five. And they played with Barbies and stuff. Which we were all mortified by, including me.

And I was mean to him about being gay. We didn't have that language, obviously. But – he was said by our father to be a sissy, and stuff like that. Or – no, my dad never reviled him, and never denigrated him – certainly not openly. But it was clear to us secretly, or on the side.

And we were all kind to each other, in the sense that it was against the family rules to ride Biff [Brian Taylor] for being different. But I did, anyway, because I was a mean kid, and because I wanted us all to be a really sharp family. I wanted him to get with the program. We were the Taylor boys, we needed to be sharp and stuff. And we had to be flash, and impressive.

So I couldn't deal with him not getting with the whole thing. He was totally on a different track. And he always was. He was the only one who had true — now that's a harsh thing to say about the other three of us — but he

was the one who had the most true identity. He had the most self-knowledge and the most self – he saw before he saw; he saw before he could analyze – he knew before he had thought, that he was in a difficult position, and he would have to be on his own side. And so he was. And we weren't, as much.

But my mom always loved him unconditionally, as people say. And we all loved each other very, very much. He was not under-loved by any of us, by any means, including me. We all were an intensely loving family, always.

But he was run around by me. Because I was angry and impatient that he didn't want to be cool and be sharp, like the rest of us.

SS: Now which came first for you; becoming politicized as a radical, or starting to think about the world as an artist?

BT: Radicalism.

SS: Was that at UT? You went to UT, right?

BT: Yeah, I went to UT. Well, I remember my early – people tell stories like this, like they remember the moment that things changed, and their politics took root. But I sort of do remember that. I kind of pretty much do.

I was already feeling anti-authoritarian and rebellious and stuff by the time I was in seventh or eighth grade, or something. As pubescent teens will. But seeing Chicago '68 on the TV, the cops beating the hippies, because we watched Hullabaloo on TV, and stuff like that, and those were our cool hippie dancing people on American Bandstand, we liked them. And we'd certainly

listen to the same music and stuff, and they were our cool people, we liked that.

And then there were the police really beating them down in the street. And that

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was very plainly not right.

So then I began to understand Vietnam. Then I – that’s when I started to actually get what Vietnam was – instead of just a big mess, that oh my god, here comes Walter Cronkite again, telling about all these deaths and stuff, on TV – which we barely paid much attention to. We were too young, I guess, but hadn’t paid that much attention to Vietnam until that time, and then I did. Then I realized what that was.

And then I pretty much – became incrementally radicalized, from then on. A trajectory began there, for me. But it was basically, my radicalism took the form of societal and cultural and psychological rebellion, mainly through drug use.

SS: When did you first participate in some kind of group political event or discussion?

BT: Anti-apartheid struggle at the University of Texas.

SS: It’s amazing how that was so emblematic for our generation, that movement.

BT: Absolutely. Yeah, that was our age, yeah.

SS: Yeah, how did you get –

BT: Because Vietnam – I went to – went to the University of Texas in the fall of 1974, as a freshman. And we were still in Vietnam. But it had very much – everybody knew that they were just, that it was a moment, a matter of time. There was very little campus activity about Vietnam, because it was almost over. Everybody thought that we were getting out. And they did, the next year. I guess it was not until the next summer, or something. I guess it was the summer of '75 that they actually got out. But by that summer, there wasn't that much activity at UT about Vietnam. It was considered – a dead letter, to an extent, in terms of antiwar activism, I guess.

But it had been. UT Austin had been one of the hotbed campuses of strong, staunch, strident political opposition to the war, and resistance to the war. But that movement wasn't really so much there by the time I arrived there. But there was considerable campus activism around South Africa, and around Nicaragua, which was also happening at the time, and then subsequently El Salvador.

SS: So what did you do? How involved were you?

BT: I joined the Communist Party, you know –

SS: The Communist Party? CPUSA?

BT: Yeah, CPU- rad-, uh –

SS: Oh, you're kidding.

BT: – RCP –

SS: Oh, the RCP – the Maoists?

BT: Y-, yes, yes –

SS: The Bob Avakian people?

BT: Yes, the, uh –

SS: Oh, Brad, I never knew that about you.

BT: Yeah. The, um – I just thought that they were the most communist people. They were like the most – I didn't really even get, understand – I did, I started studying philosophy, and I studied with this guy named Doug Keller and other radical professors at the University of Texas. And so – who were, all of the left-leaning professors — which had been substantial on the UT faculty — were all in the process of being purged. And the French and the Spanish and the English departments already had been, and the Philosophy Department hadn't been; the Government Department was being purged of all its left-leaning professors at the time. But there was a strong presence of Marxist professors in the Philosophy Department. So I took their classes and stuff.

And so I, it took me a while to catch up with who these people were, the Communist Youth Brigade. I just wanted to be down with someone that I thought was – being unequivocal about their stands.

SS: So that put you on the margins of the mainstream organizing, in a sense, right? Because you were from a sectarian party.

BT: Yes and no. No, they were kind of active. No, there would be a place for us, on the party. I once gave a speech at a rally — probably as a freshman or sophomore — miserable failure. Was a huge mistake. I totally went on mic unprepared, and was foolish and uninformative and not very good.

SS: But the thing that's interesting about that movement as a training ground is that it was successful. So we had that –

BT: Right, I met Dennis Brutus— there was a real connection – and because the University of Texas – don't think I can come up with her name, but the woman who was the chairman of the board of directors of – no, she was the president of UT Austin, and she was on the board of directors of Texaco; that's what it was. She was the president of UT Austin. Can't remember her name – [Lorene Lane] Rogers, I think was her name, but I'm not sure that's right. She was – there was a strong movement to – there was, the BDS movement was in full swing, and so the focus at UT Austin was to get her — because she was on the board of directors of Texaco — to divest. Texaco was majorly – invested in, operationally very present in South Africa, and we wanted them, UT, to divest from Texaco, and for Texaco to withdraw from South Africa. And because the president of the university was a key player in it, then that was the focus for us.

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SS: So you were – what year did you graduate from UT?

BT: '78, '9.

SS: And then what did you do after that?

BT: I just started working for a living. I just, I was an electrician. My grandfather's an electrician, so – I had like – declined to follow any professional track in college, because I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I wasn't going to tell myself that I did. I was stubborn about choosing a professional track, a career, a careerist track, one might say, because I didn't know what it would be, and there was nothing that I loved, there was nothing I wanted to do. So I just wouldn't do that. I decided that. It was a more, it fit in with my proletarian vision, to be a working person and just be an honest citizen-worker, involved politically, and perhaps artistically, but just basically working for a living. And that's what I've done.

SS: And having skills.

BT: And having skills.

SS: Which –

BT: And being able to make a living, which all my hippie and artist friends always never could, never did, for the most part.

SS: Now when did you first –

BT: So that was a value that I brought to the circle, always; that I was able to – there was food at my house, yeah. Yeah.

SS: When did you first hear about AIDS?

BT: Um – when I – well, when I first heard about it – well, I was in San Francisco in 1980. Ended up living there, by the spring, I guess, of 1980

or '81. So – GRID was already on the ma-, so to speak – Gay Related Immune Deficiency syndrome was already around by the – by '80, '81, '82, that was a word we heard. That's – people knew that in San Francisco. And by the time I came here, in '82 — at least as I remember it — GRID was already well known, and was already encroaching, and people were – and people were dying.

So by then – by '80, '81.

SS: Do you remember your first personal exposure to a person with AIDS?

BT: No, I don't know that I do. The first time it entered our community of close friends and brethren and sisterhood – our close friend Gordon Kurtti contracted HIV and progressed to AIDS rather quickly, as people did then.

SS: And so what happened? Like, did –

BT: And he got really sick, and –

SS: Did he call you, or did –

BT: No, he was very sick, and some of us who were running more closely with him at the time – won't say names, but people who were running closely with him – he wanted it – he was in denial about it. He wanted to deny it to himself, and he definitely didn't want to broadcast it to the – out. He didn't want to give it any weight, he didn't want to give it any strength. He wanted to try to – have it not be true, have it not be happening. In those days, we still figured that — at least some of us did; that's the way I remember it — we still

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thought that they didn't really know – was this thing really happening? Maybe it was all a buga-, maybe the doctors didn't really know. Like maybe it wasn't really such a thing. Maybe it was partly rumor, and it wasn't – we didn't want that to happen. So I think we all tried to deny it for awhile, and we – he tried to go macrobiotic, which was kind of disastrous and stuff, because he changed his diet radically from one day to the next, and – that made him sick, and stuff.

So there was all of this – terror – and fear and upset around, that he was getting so sick so fast.

SS: Now did you see him in the hospital?

BT: Very briefly.

SS: Do you remember what hospital he was in?

BT: St. Vincent's.

SS: And do you remember anything about the conditions that he was – under?

BT: He was in a room by himself. He was very sick. He was, I suppose, one would say — not that it matters, I guess – one would say he was rapidly dying of PCP already, at that point. But he – was – I don't remember the sequence all that well now, but basically, Iris, my daughter Iris, who is now 23; was born more than a month prematurely.

We were at the birthing center uptown, and we were going to do natural childbirth and stuff. But Susan's water broke very early. And so, one, we

were in birthing class. We were in Lamaze class and stuff one night, and we were in a special night where parents who had had their babies there came and told stories and stuff. And Susan went to the bathroom, and was acting a little uncomfortable, and didn't come back and so on and so forth. So then after a while, we gathered her up, and then – it's a long story.

But we ended up going to St. Vincent's that night, which was the backup for if you weren't able to successfully have natural childbirth, then St. Vincent's had a medical connection – the midwives had a doctor backup through St. Vincent's. So we went there.

And like I say, I can't recall quite, right this second, whether Gordon was already there, whether he came while we were there. But Iris was in the intensive care unit at St. Vincent's for three weeks when she was a baby, premature baby. And that was a very intense time for Susan and I, and Iris, of course. And we were going to the hospital all day, every day, and intermittently going to the hospital, to feed and hold Iris and stuff, to just be with Iris all day. And – I think it was, must have been that – that Gordon was admitted while we were at the hospital; that we were already there, and had been at St. Vincent's all day – day and night, for a period of days or weeks. And I think it must have been during that stint at St. Vincent's that we got the call that Gordon had been admitted and was in trouble.

SS: So when Gordon died, were you then in conversation with your gay friends about their lives, about safe sex – no.

{LONG PAUSE}

BT: And if I had been – I don't know how many people that do this are as emotional as this. But – it doesn't matter. But if I had been more cognizant, and had joined ACT UP right then, I would have known that the access to aerosolized pentamidine was the first key issue that ACT UP tackled with force, and with community cohesion, and with – the first real strong front that ACT UP successfully took on – and with CRI and other community initiatives.

I would have known about aerosolized pentamidine, and my brother would have known about aerosolized pentamidine, and when he got sick with PCP, or before he got sick with PCP – when he got an AIDS diagnosis in Texas, in the summer of, in the fall of – HIV diagnosis in the fall of – '88; Gordon got sick and died in '87. And if we had jumped more then, and gotten more – some of us did. Carl got involved with PWAC, and we started getting on the thing –

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SS: Right.

BT: – when Gordon got sick. But if I had gotten with ACT UP sooner, I would have known about aerosolized pentamidine, perhaps, and maybe – whatever. Maybe, maybe Biff would have accessed aerosolized pentamidine, and maybe he'd still be here.

SS: Do you think that when he was living in Texas — Brian, I'm talking about — that he would have thought, oh, I can't get infected; it's only in New York and San Francisco?

BT: No.

SS: No, he knew.

BT: Oh, well he was – he was living in Texas there after many years of us living together in New York. He lived in New York for a long time before me.

SS: Oh, okay –

BT: He moved to New York first. Yeah, this was like – many, many light years. This was like chapters and chapters of very intense life as artists and bohemians and downtown people together. And he'd already been here for several years, which is many light years, before I came. So he was – he was an inspired – deeply inspired and rambunctious young mind and spirit and artist in New York for a long time before I came, and then we continued to do that for some years thereafter. So he was all over the place, as a hotshot young gay man in New York.

SS: So was he dancing with Jack and Peter before –

BT: That's how we know –

SS: Oh, okay.

BT: – that’s how – that’s how Jack and I – in other words, Jack and Biff were best friends at Juilliard School.

SS: Oh, okay.

BT: That’s how we know, that’s how those two families overlap.

SS: And how – when did –

BT: So we’re not going to explain all this history of who’s who, and –

SS: Jack Waters and Peter Cramer –

BT: – and who’s, and who’s – Carl.

SS: Now, you just said it.

BT: Right.

SS: And Carl George. But were you the filmmaker first? Or did you guys start working together as filmmakers?

BT: No no. We all started doing – it basically came out of – it came as that whole climate of artists downtown embraced – or our crew, the people that we were among whom – Pyramid people, and stuff like that; like the crew downtown that we were simpatico with – not me, they all were, and I just moved in to the scene that was already happening before I got here. They embraced experimental film as a way. And this particular crew of people was exposed to that largely because of Aline and Jane and my involvement with them on the West Coast, because they came in to – it was through their show at ABC

No Rio that we all came to ABC No Rio, and we went to their show because I knew them and we all –

SS: Aline Mayer and –

BT: Aline Mayer and Raina Jane Sherry –

SS: Oh, okay.

BT: – and Bradley Eros and so on.

SS: Right. Erotic Psyche –

BT: Erotic Psyche came later – Erotic Psyche –

SS: Right.

BT: And very important and influential imagemakers downtown.

And I had been running with them on the West Coast for a year before. That's how I – I had been very deeply involved with them in a revolutionary, radical-feminist occult tirade over several, a number of months on the West Coast and elsewhere; running with them very intensely, like as a – it's a long story. But – then I wasn't with them by the time they came up here. And – but I was still connected with the, to them, whatever. And so they – but they knew Biff through me and then they, so they knew everybody through all of us and stuff. And so then they – because of these – Biff's circles and their circles overlapped, at the same time that I met them on the West Coast and stuff like that. So it was synchronous and – circles of people overlapping downtown and stuff. And I was

running with them in San Francisco, but then they met Biff, and so on and so forth. And so they met Carl and everybody else, and – so –

They did a show called – it might have been called Erotic Psyche.

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00:35:00 I don't remember what the name of their show at ABC No Rio was. But it was our first exposure to No Rio. And then we did a big art show, Carl and I curated a big art show there, called The Seven Days of Creation, in the spring of '83. And all of these circles coalesced, at least for us, for our close-knit group of friends, and stuff. And we were influenced by Bradley and Aline and Jane and others to make, to be working in film.

SS: So when Brian called you and said that he was HIV-positive, what did you guys decide to do?

BT: We said that we would – that he shouldn't worry; that it wasn't, it wasn't, there wasn't anything to that, necessarily. We would get on top of it, we would figure it out, what he should be doing and stuff. Which we didn't do quickly enough. And if we had, that fall – not that he could have accessed aerosolized pentamidine in Texas; but if he, maybe he could have come up here. We should have done something. We just said, don't worry, just we'll just like – we didn't know what to say, because we didn't know what it was, what to do. We didn't know – enough about it yet.

And – we just said we'd be together at Christmas in Texas. We always were, and stuff. And we had been very closely running in life together for

years before that, and would continue to. And – we said, I said I'd see him Christmas, and we'd think about it, we'd talk about it, we'd figure out what to do, and stuff. And not to worry, it's going to be okay and stuff, and –

But then after Ch-, and then when I – like we have pictures of him from that, summer before that, summer of '88, at the beach — Jones Beach, beautiful, beautiful; handsome; healthy — and then that sum-, that Christmas, he was thin. So we made like that wasn't a big deal, and we didn't – we tried to – not get excited, or something. And we just talked to each other and stuff.

It was kind of a – as soon as I saw him, actually, that summer – I mean, that Christmas — some of this is too private, kind of, too –

SS: That's okay.

BT: – yeah, some of it's too private to, to say.

SS: How did you get from Brian being sick into ACT UP?

BT: We didn't do anything at Christmas. And then in that ensuing winter months, he was taking speed and stuff to study through the night. He was running with his friends in – he was in a back, he was in a masters program at Texas Women's University at Denton, in dance. He was, he had gone to Texas to get out of New York and put everything, put – he had, there had been – unhappy history amongst us all. Creative differences and other issues. And he basically had soured on New York and stuff like that, and wanted to go back to, and he wanted to go back to Texas, and he want, and he – and he wanted to start his own

company. He wanted to go there, and – just not be in New York, not have it be such a – coarsely competitively situation, and to have, be – he wanted to be – he wanted fresh air. And he wanted open spaces, and he had a vision of starting a – a company, and have, and producing his work, and expand-, producing his choreography, and producing his, and producing dances, and having a company, and having there be money and having there be respect and having there be a matrix of real work and stuff.

So he was going to leave New York and go to Texas and make this all happen, and the first thing – well, at first, he, he actually had a professional gig with the little ballet company in our hometown. He worked as a ballet dancer for a while, and then he, just figuring out how to, what to do in Texas, and stuff, and then he started this masters program in fine art, dance, at Texas Women's University in Denton. And so then he hooked up and began to build this thing, which he did, and he did some fine work down there and stuff.

But in the course of his studies, he was running with people, and him and his friends and stuff were like having fun and stuff and smoking pot and – taking speed to study all night, but smoking pot and rapping instead of studying and stuff like that. And so he was living hard student life. He was, we were still kids, and he was – even though we were older than that, he was in a college mode, and so he was not taking care of himself and stuff, and studying-slash-not studying through the night, and not getting sleep and stuff like that.

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And then he started getting sick, and so he landed – he would go between this colleague and benefactor of his in Denton, and my mom’s house in west Texas, and here. He rotated between those three places.

So he’d been at my mom’s house for a week or two, and I knew that he was feeling very poorly.

SS: And she knew that he had AIDS.

BT: No. None of –

SS: No. She thought –

BT: No no. No. He hadn’t said that to her.

SS: She thought he had the flu, or something? Oh, we have to change tapes? We have to change tapes.

JAMES WENTZY: Hold that thought.

SS: Okay. So he was at your mom’s house, feeling sick.

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BT: Yeah. So he was – and – it was clear that he was feeling very badly – and we were scared. And by now, it’s like April or something.

And then we – and then my old girlfriend from Texas, who I had been – hooked up with all through our years at UT – Susan Hoser, Julie Jackson, who was a friend of Biff’s – she and her husband came through here and were visiting Susan and I, and Iris and I, in New York. They just would come through. That was – long – water under the bridge, and that had ended badly, and blah blah blah, all kinds of blood and travail had happened over the years and stuff.

But now – but she had always still remained friends with my mom and remained friends with Biff, because she was Biff’s friend originally.

And so she and her husband Trey happened to be here. And her mother always was a nurse, in Midland. And so they were here, and we were just enjoying each other as old friends, and we were having a really fun night. I think it was Friday night. We were going to go out together. They were coming into New York, and staying at our house, and stuff, and it was old friends seeing each other after many years.

And then the phone rang – my mom calling, that Biff was in trouble.

And – so we called – Julie’s mom. And hooked up with this doctor who had a clue. I think he already had a couple A-, I don’t see how he could have had AIDS patients, but – he knew something about the epidemic.

SS: What did your mother think? That Biff had the flu, or something?

BT: I don’t know how much they were talking about it. I don’t remember when he told her that he had AIDS.

SS: Okay.

BT: But it was – no, I – that’s not really, that can’t be – they should, they must have been talking about it, over the, at least the last days or something, before this crisis happened. I don’t remember. But it was probably

pretty much iced as a topic. They probably weren't – even though she's a sentient, caring, loving – but she's a deeply conservative person – she's a deeply traditional person, and she's – I hate to admit that she's a deeply conservative person, culturally and tradi- like personal-politically. Because I – don't love that. But she is. And then politically-politically, she's deeply conservative, as they all are out there, and always were, but became much worse out there later on.

But – yeah, because she couldn't deal with gay at all, and it was a problem when Biff died, between she and I, which I will always regret very deeply; that it came up, the obituary.

They called me – his best friend there in Midland called me, and said – Brad, I'm writing the obituary, and I'm just running it by you, kind of thing. And I was like, oh good. Well, thanks a lot, or something. We were grieving. But Jeannie was writing this thing for the local paper, the *Midland Reporter-Telegram*, that we'd all grown up with and stuff. So I was like, oh, we're good, thanks, thanks for taking care of that. And so she read it to me, and – and when it came to the part of, died of a long illness or something like that, I was like – no no, you have to say – I was like – well I like this, it's beautiful writing, Jeannie, great, great, thanks so much, great job, wonderful. And I would just say, he was actually born on so-and-so, or his eyes were actually so-and-so. And you should go ahead and say that he di-, of what – say how he died. And just tactfully change the part about long illness, or something.

And she was like, well, I kind of can't really do that.

And I was like, yeah. I was like, well yeah, you have to do that.

And she said, no, I can't do that. This is Midland, Brad. You can't do that.

And I was like, no, you have to do that. That would be wrong.

You have to do that.

And she said, no, I can't. Your mom will – that's a problem. I can't do that.

And I was like, Jeannie, you have to do that. Have Mom call me.

Tell Mom that Brad said, you have to say he died of AIDS.

And that was a problem.

SS: Did she run that he died of AIDS, ultimately? Was it in the paper?

BT: Yeah, it was in the paper.

SS: That he died of AIDS?

BT: Yeah.

SS: And what did your mother –

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00:05:00

BT: She did not, she was very angry with me about it. And we had – and then we fla-, and then we had a – a very, very regrettable and sad and painful – fight about – which had already happened before she left New York, when he died. Before – we'd already fought about the fact that he was, that he was gay, and that I'm gay, and that gay – is real and true and beautiful and not

wrong. And that we were gay, and that we always were, and that Biff was gay; yes, he was gay. And he was proudly gay, and he was – he would never have – closeted himself. He was way more sophisticated than that, he wouldn't have done that.

But that wasn't really true, because Biff was really – he was never closeted; so he never needed to come out –

SS: Right.

BT: And so he never did. Kind of.

SS: Now how did you get to ACT UP?

BT: I started calling. I just – instead of going out with Julie and Trey that night, I got on a plane, and rushed to Texas, and – and then as soon as I got there, I started calling New York, and calling Mark Harrington and whoever; calling I don't remember who – people that we knew in ACT UP – and trying to figure out what could be done. And they were like, aerosolized pentamidine. But it was way too late for that. So he was given IV pentamidine, which was, as you probably know, very poisonous.

And – so he nearly died, right then. And he just, he got to the very, very brink. Like, one night, in his, when he and I were – when I was laying in his room, and he was with the respirator and everything, and very nearly dead – and it was – it was clear between us that he was going to die that night. And – and somehow, I slept – anyway, or something. He was – he was way under, and stuff.

And when the – I don't know how long, but when I came back around, he was alive. And then we knew that he was going to – because as I say, that pentamidine that they gave him, I think did actually do, get to the lu-, to the pneumonia enough to keep him alive. They were able somehow – it was either that or whatever else they were giving him, that they – that doctor did.

So I was on that doctor – I don't think he knew about penta-, it might have been through my – I don't know if they had pentamidine in, I can't remember how he came to utilize pentamidine. I remember how the, what the whole story was about how they were treating him, but they weren't ready for HIV in that little hospital. Nobody was out there. There was a very light caseload at that point, in Texas. But this guy did have some exposure. I think he'd – I think there were cases out of Lubbock, or something like that, and he had been brought in, because he was an oncologist – and somehow, he knew some stuff. And he kept Biff alive, somehow. And other stuff kept Biff alive.

So he went right to the brink, and leaned way over and then – then when I woke up sometime that morning, he was still alive, and we knew that he was going to come back, and stuff. And so he did, and then we got to be together for three more years after that.

And then Tiananmen Square happened. And we were in his hospital bedroom. We were in the – on the TV at the hospital, watching Tiananmen Square happen.

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SS: So then he came back to New York with you, right?

BT: He continued to do his thing. He continued to – a lot of work happened in those three years. He made a lot of beautiful, he made beautiful work. And – continued with his masters program, and – further founded and extended his company. They had a, the Radke Dance Theater was a wonderful avant-gardist, modern dance and performance ensemble in north Texas. And he continued with his whole thing. And like I say, rotated between his friend there, in Denton, and my mom's house and here. So he would just go between the three places. He'd spend weeks or months in each place, and then go to the next phase. We rotated between those three homes for those three years.

SS: So when did you start really being in ACT UP?

BT: Then.

SS: Okay, what –

BT: As soon as I went home – as soon as I came back from – I stayed in Texas for, it seemed like weeks, but it couldn't have been — maybe two weeks — while he came back around, and it looked like he was going to be okay, for the time being. And – so I came back here to come back to work and stuff, and – and Susan and Iris and everything. And I went to ACT UP as soon as I got back.

SS: So how did you first plug in to ACT UP? Were you in a –

BT: I just went to a meeting.

SS: But did you join a committee, or were you in an affinity group, or –

BT: Uh, not at first. Later I joined the Spanish Translation Committee.

SS: Oh, do you speak Spanish?

BT: I speak – I speak pretty good Spanish.

SS: Oh, I didn't know that.

BT: I speak a little S-, I speak more than a little bit of Spanish.

SS: Can you tell us about that? Because we have nothing about the Spanish Translation Committee. Anything you can tell us would be great.

BT: César Carrasco and Gonzalo Aburto and Moisés Agosto and these wonderful – largely Puerto Rican, but – well no, they were from all over – Pedro Gonzalez, they were from all over. Mexican – César's Chilean – they were from all over. They were Latinos from all over. And they let me hang with them because I knew enough Spanish to make it passable that I would – they were just kind to me. And –

SS: What was the state of Spanish translation at that time? Were there any materials available in Spanish?

BT: No. No, we –

SS: Nothing.

BT: – we translated – I remember, I would be translating something. There was some important medical document for some hospital uptown or something. And of course, they would have to help me, and then it ended up that one of them would really do it, or something, though, because they spoke, they spoke Spanish as a first language. But yeah, we were translating, actively translating all kinds of stuff, all kinds of technical information –

SS: How could you –

BT: – as well as ACT UP's messaging.

SS: How did you find out –

BT: And we did – I'm sorry to interrupt you – we did start insisting early on – it was already pretty much in the cards, that – but when we formed as a committee, it was clear that we would translate all of ACT UP; that there wouldn't be, it wouldn't be okay for ACT UP messaging to go out without Spanish translation.

SS: Now I understand internally inside ACT UP, for our own literature. But how would you decide what –

BT: You haven't – gotten to anybody yet? Like –

SS: Yes, we did interview Gonzalo, but we didn't talk about this side of it. We got into other things.

BT: Uh huh. Uh huh.

SS: So like, would you guys – how would you decide that this medical document needs to be translated? Like how would you –

BT: People came to us for it. They –

SS: Oh, so patients, or doc-

BT: Doctor – I don't remember how – I didn't, I wasn't really responsible for it. I would just go to the meetings and try to pitch in, translating. Try to – they would say, there's a stack of stuff that needed to be done, and they'd say, do this one. Or there was an action coming up, and we were trying to translate whatever needed to be translated. There'd be a stack of work to be, to be done, and we'd all just be hanging together as friends, but working on trying to translate –

SS: But as late as 1989, things were not available in Spanish in New York City for people with AIDS. That's amazing.

BT: Oh yeah, absolutely. Oh, totally. There was, yeah. Absolutely. Well, I don't know, because I wasn't going to Montefiore or somewhere and really knowing what Latino HIV-people were going through. And so I'm sure that they must have had some stuff that we didn't necessarily know about. But no – very little, I think, was available, for the most part, in Spanish. I think most of the technical information was not available in Spanish. And because – in the Caribbean, there was just very little – I think, San Juan, they were very far behind New York and San Francisco, and even Miami, or whatever,

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in treatment. They hadn't really begun – treatment was still very backward at that point. There was so little treatment. Things were so elementary at that point, and people were still dying all over the place, because they couldn't keep people from dying of the most common OIs still.

SS: Right. So what else did you do in ACT UP?

JH: Before we get off the Spanish stuff – do you remember issues of cultural sensitivity as well as accurate translation?

BT: Totally. What do you mean?

JH: Well, I mean, like –

BT: Within ACT UP.

JH: Yeah, within –

BT: Big-time. Majorly.

JH: Can you talk about the discussions?

BT: I'm not really the person to ask about that. Because –

SS: Yeah, but other people are saying that, too.

BT: – huh?

SS: From your point of view.

BT: Yeah, yeah. Well – in the first place, there was just the obvious criticism from within our group, which later became known, I think, as the — by then I wasn't so active in the group anymore — but I think it later became termed the Latino Caucus.

SS: Right.

BT: But originally it was the Spanish Translation Committee, or Working Group. And there was just already – and these are, of course, very brilliant and very beautiful young Latino men; very turned on, very awake and very politically astute. And so they totally had a political viewpoint – as did I, actually. But this was a totally white group. And that it was – that as predominantly male, predominantly white — almost exclusively white — it was only in the year previous to that, to the establish of that committee that there had been that many Latino people entering the ranks of ACT UP. There were – before that, there was hardly any Latino people there. Black and Latino – who was Charles King's partner that –

SS: Keith [Cylar].

BT: Keith. Keith and like two or three people were the only black people there. And there were almost no Latino people, hardly. And so, once a few Latino people came, who were politically advanced, this was ACT UP, we were all strident people – we were all political people. And so they were like – Spanish translation, Spanish – Latino sensitivity – cultural sensitivity to patients, and so on. And cultural sensitivity to us within the process of ACT UP, at meetings and in actions and stuff like that. We need to – our voice needs to be more than just respected or tolerated. We need to come to the forefront. We want our issues to be recognized early, for every action.

So they had to make a place for themselves actively – and angrily, to an extent. I don't want to emphasize their anger. But they were very impatient, because it was an uphill battle with the rank and file of, with the white majority in ACT UP, because basically, people weren't interested in that. This was AIDS; this wasn't race politics. And we weren't about that. Couldn't we all just work together?

SS: Right.

BT: Same old dialog that we confront in political work all these years – in many – and that gay people have in the same way, or in ways very analogous to the way people of color have these same kind of so-called identity politics issues within mass mobilizations. We know how this plays out.

SS: Now you were in this special role, that a number of people in ACT UP were in, where they were there trying to get treatment information. In this case, for Biff. Plenty of people were there trying to get treatment information for themselves. How could you get it? What did you find out? Was it easy to get?

BT: Well, I didn't really, I wasn't really – pumping ACT UP – well I was, I was trying, but – I was, it was more just, I was certainly availing myself. In other words, I took it on myself to try to find what I could get for Biff. I was all about, at one point, trying to – because the next crisis he then he came – the next threat to his survival was MAI; Mycobacterium avium intracellulare.

MAI, as you probably remember, was one of the OIs that people got. But it wasn't all that common. It was a Mycobacterium along the lines of TB and leprosy. These were Mycobacterium – infections that – this is a bird germ. It came, transmitted through birds. And it caused wasting and intestinal disintegration and problems.

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So he got MAI. And that was bad. That was bad. because they didn't have anything for MAI. But they – but rifabutin was in the pipeline. And if I hadn't been connected with ACT UP, I wouldn't know that. So I began to pursue rifabutin, trying to get rifabutin for him, which Adria Laboratories had the, was do – they had trials going on, but I couldn't get him in them. So there was this long series that –

I'll tell an anecdote, if you want to hear it.

SS: Yeah.

BT: A painful, tragicomic episode, going into – the NIH action. I wanted to do something fresh and interesting. I just wanted to throw some – I wanted to do, I wanted us to have a lot of stuff going on; I wanted it to be a great action. So anyway, I had been, for weeks, pursuing, through, on the telephone, to different trials around the country and stuff like that, working and working and cajoling, and calling back, and haranguing somebody to get Biff this rifabutin drug that was supposedly in trials – which I never did succeed in doing.

I forget what his doctors — Joe Sonnabend was his doctor, and this guy Kotler — and they were handling it a different way, or something. But we never got the rifabutin for him, or not until later, or something; not until it was too late.

Anyway, there was this – we were getting ready to go to Washington for this big action, and I wanted to do this thing. I realized that there was this litany of the same old runaround; of me saying, yeah, well – they would say, well, yeah, we have a trial, but it's very, it's very hard to get in, and it's been booked up for – well what about if I come over here, and ask it from this point of view? Well, I'll call in tomorrow, and say I'm somebody else. Or I'll just – like I kept on trying to get in, one way or another. And there was this, and I would get the same voicemail after voicemail, and runaround after runaround, and kind, kind, caring, but negative responses, one after the other. And it was just this litany, this ongoing, never-ending telephone call about rifabutin.

So I started recording them. And I was going to – anyway, I don't know; this is a boring story.

SS: No, tell me. It's important.

BT: I was going to – I was going to – so I had started recording the conversations, so as to show other people how endless this was, how arduous and how maddening. I just wanted them to understand how maddening it was; how urgent, and how life and death. Yet these people were like, some of them were

nonchalant. Others were very concerned and very sincere and very real, but they still didn't get me in.

So I had recorded them badly, on just a telephone tap and stuff, with a little minicassette analog recorder. I was going to broadcast them, with like a loudspeaker out of a backpack. And I went to Central Park, and was practicing climbing with a rope and stuff. And I was going to go up in a tree, and broadcast this litany, so that people could hear this ongoing, I was going to make a loop and just have it be endless. And just stay up there, and have them not be able to get me down, and have this sound of this endless loop of non-progress towards getting this PWA this drug.

But when I got there – like you said one time, when the Oral History Project was newer; one evening, you mentioned in a gathering – y'all had an evening event, and you said that everybody who was in ACT UP all thought that they weren't cool enough, and everybody felt isolated and stuff like that, and everybody felt alone and paranoid and uncomfortable. Well, that's how I was. I was very isolated and very, not very successful with others in the crew and stuff. A lot of times I would be alone, a lot of the time.

So I was just this guy that nobody really knew all that well. Actually, I knew a lot of people in ACT UP, and I did a lot of work with a lot of different people, and people knew me and stuff like that. But I wasn't really down that much with any particular crew all that much. And that was a big

action; there were a lot of people there. So a lot of people didn't kind of necessarily know who I was.

So I had this really gravelly sound coming out of my backpack.

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And people were like, what's that? Which I would turn on once in a while, and sometimes at the wrong time, because we weren't really there yet or something. We were just approaching the action, we were walking there, or something, and I would turn this thing on, because I just thought it was good. But it was just really gravelly, you couldn't hear, and it was very garbled, and you couldn't – it was this caustic, ugly sound. And people were like, what is that, where is that coming from? Then, when they decided, realized it was coming from that guy's backpack; then they were like, oh, man, what an idiot. Why is he doing that?

So then, when I climbed up in the tree, and turned it up and stuff like that, they were like, oh, that's that guy with that thing in his backpack. Whatever. And, well, it didn't succeed that well.

SS: Now how come you couldn't get in? What was the problem, that he couldn't get into the –

BT: I don't remember. Just the trials were, because there was, because it was a new – people still weren't – MAI was a lesser-known OI. And so there weren't that many trials. And they were small trials, and –

SS: So it was that they were full.

BT: They were full.

SS: That was the problem.

BT: They were full.

SS: Okay.

BT: And I would, I tried and tried again to get – and there were a couple of people on the line to me who understood the urgency and were saying, we'll try to get you in, but we have a long waiting list. If we just put him on the end of the waiting list, that's not going to do you much good, because it's going to be a year or two before he's going to get in. But we'll see what we can do. There might be a way to move him up in the list, or something like that. I had some sensitive people who were trying; a couple of women who understood the urgency, for me, at least.

SS: Did you ever talk to anyone else in ACT UP who was also trying to get –

BT: I don't remember having very much dialog with others in ACT UP about it all that much. No. I'm sure that people helped me. I'm sure that I went to people, like Harrington, or others, and asked. That's probably how I got the first trials, or something. I don't remember very much. But everybody had urgent situations then. I don't remember having a particular connection to any of the TAG people or anything; that anybody was really helping me that much.

SS: So then what did he get, try any treatments for MAI?

BT: I don't really remember. Kotler was trying to, who was a – gut doctor or something abdominal – whatever. He was a very – I think he and Joe fell out later, and – there was – but at that point, he and Joe were –

SS: Joe Sonnabend.

BT: – Sonnabend, were close – or they were, there was a mutual relationship there professionally. And so Joe hooked Biff up with Kotler, who was supposed to have been a really solid connection, and Don Kotler would be able to do stuff for Biff, would be able to – if anybody could, Kotler could. And he was – he was accessing experimental treatments. But I don't think – I think he might have got – and maybe he did get rifabutin through Kotler. I don't remember.

SS: Well, the thing that's so amazing about what you're saying is that because of timing, Brian being sick, you were helpless. But when you're in ACT UP, you aren't really helpless. You were helpless for him. But you were no longer this helpless individual.

BT: Right. I did go to ACT UP in order – I guess it was half and half. I went into ACT UP so that maybe I could help him somehow –

SS: Right.

BT: – that there would be, that's where to go; that's where to go that maybe – just as a responsible family member, and as my brother's – Biff and I were very close. And so – I wouldn't have done anything else but that. I was

trying to access whatever we could do to try to keep him alive. But I also was politicized in that direction, finally – or whatever; at whatever point. I was also trying to just pitch in to the work of the epidemic, and feeling badly that I hadn't started sooner.

SS: But also, our friends who are alive today are alive today because of the work that was done in ACT UP.

BT: Totally.

SS: So it totally has had concrete consequences.

BT: Totally. And Jack and Peter got their diagnosis that same – I think they got their diagnosis the year Biff died, which was '92 – if I remember it right. And they're very much alive.

SS: Yes. Exactly. So after Brian died, in '92, did you stay in ACT UP, or were you out of it at that point?

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BT: I stayed for a couple more years. Unhappily.

SS: Right.

BT: I didn't want to keep going. I felt the responsibility to the work. And I kept on going for a while; maybe a year or something. I was tired and sick by then.

SS: But you have been an unceasing political activist. So –

BT: Pretty much. Not really. There was a time after that when I just got so involved with work that I, I was very embroiled with work for a few years in the '90s.

SS: But what about Out-FM? How long have you been doing that?

BT: Well, a while now. Yes, I've been deeply immersed in political activism since the American bombardment of Baghdad in 2003.

SS: Right.

BT: Seven years. But for a good – five years at least, before that, I wasn't.

SS: Because you started with South Africa, and then you went all the way into AIDS. But now you're in a really interesting, integrated politic, where you have queer presence at WBAI, but you're involved in Gaza politics, and you've managed to make it all cohere, in some way. I'm just wondering if you could explain a little bit –

BT: Well, I think that there is – there certainly are intersections between these areas of – of thinking and caring and acting. I like to – that's a nice thing to say, that I somehow am cohering these disparate fronts. But they're not really very disparate. I think that, as you were saying earlier tonight – gay people will eventually – that's what I always, that what I ever wanted to do with Out.fm, was – be on the side of the re-emergence of consciousness amongst gay people

that we are a people who have natural common cause with other oppressed peoples in the world; that being gay should mean a radical perspective, it should mean a liberationist perspective. That's what being gay is. Without – oppression, there's no problem with being gay. And that's true of all kinds of – identifying personality aspects, like color or gender.

SS: So when did you leave ACT UP?

BT: I didn't really leave. I might have thought to myself, that's the last action I'm going to do, or something. I don't remember.

Ninety-three or -four. I don't know. Biff died in '92, and – and I needed out of that. But it also just was probably, got eclipsed by my turning my attention to a career push, because I started having a lot of work, and having to be on top of it.

SS: Right. So I just have one last question, unless there's something that you think we haven't covered that you want to talk about.

BT: I can't remember if there was any – well there's one vainglorious –

SS: Oh, tell it.

BT: – anecdote. I don't know, I think it is kind of too, too – too much – too dramatic, or something.

No, there's just one thing that I remember that will always stay with me, as a very dramatic moment, that kind of cap-, in which things, they kind

of – sticks in my memory as having sort of – as being iconic of that work, or of my involvement with that work.

That we were doing the *Times* – the – Grand Central Station action, where we, which was a wonderful action. And we walked in.

We all – mob zaps, – na-na-na-na-na, like where everybody wandering around, like 2,000 white gay men all in the middle of walking around in circles in the middle of Grand Central Station, as if we weren't all there together for some purpose.

And then, on a signal – a bunch of people came in with a big balloon float, a huge balloon float. And the message was: Money for AIDS, Not War, if I remember it correctly. Because the elder Bush had begun the hideous first bombardment of Baghdad at that point.

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So anyway, we took over – Grand Central Station, and we surrounded the ticket station, and we stopped Grand Central Station at rush hour, and it was a very big and calamitous and exciting action. And – a bunch of, and so part of the action was that all the big staircases, the stone staircases that lead down into the big floor, there was the big – ticket booth, round ticket booth in the middle of the floor of the main part of Grand Central Station. And we blocked, we surrounded the ticket station, and wouldn't let people get to the ticket window, we stopped people's access to the ticket booth. And then we blocked those staircases, and wouldn't let people onto the floor, so that we basically stopped

Grand Central Station, we stopped egress through the facility, and we stopped – and we were blocking the egress to the various bus platforms and stuff like that. So it was a big, well-org-, another wonderful, well-organized ACT UP action.

So I had decided to throw down with the people who were going to block the staircase. So me and several other people linked arms and blocked, physically blocked the staircase. And people – and it's rush hour so people flood down the staircase, still – it's being blocked, but they don't care; they've got to get their train. And so there was a very dangerous crowd pressure situation building, they were, because they were all falling on top of each other, because they were – stampeding – other mammals, they, they – were pushing each other down the stairs. And we were prohibiting anybody from getting past us. And so there was a tussle at the bottom of the stairs, and there was pressure, and they were, and people were falling, and people were screaming, and people were furious, and –

And this – handsome, as I remember; and maybe inspired – very het guy, who was on his way to Brewster or somewhere,; but came lurching over the people in front of him. And he said, get out of my way! And he started, attack, he was in the full attack mode and he was screaming, he was in extremis, going at us. He was threatening us, or something, I don't know what he thought he was going to do, because we were firmly in – had our arms locked and stuff, and nobody was getting past us, and we were bearing up, people were coming

behind us and holding us up to stop the – the flow of people. Nobody was getting through us.

And he decided to take it upon himself to break this blockade, and he was, went, went at us. And I like went back in his face. And said – I love my brother more than you love your schedule. And – and – and this look came on his face – oh, shit. And – I know what he means, and – and – and I s-, I said, you don't love – you don't care where you're going compared to – and I just went on from there, and started, and screaming in his face, and then, and then I was like – just lost myself in the drama of screaming. I love my brother! I was screaming at him. Yelling – you don't know necessity. You think you gotta get home? And he definitely did – because I was – way more irate than him. And – totally not afraid of him right then, at least. And – so he backed off.

SS: Good. So here's my last question. And this is the one we ask everybody. This has to do with ACT UP specifically. So just looking back, what do you feel was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and what do you think was its biggest disappointment?

BT: I think its greatest achievement was – well, I'd probably have to say two or three things. I don't know if I can say one. Its couple of greatest achievements were actual treatment and drug access for people. It actually enabled, it actually pushed through – it beat the FDA at its stalling game, and forced the society to actually solve some of the immediate problems of people

with AIDS. It actually did what it set out to do. It won campaigns to get, to access people with the treatments they needed.

And it – dramatically and deeply altered the national discussion about AIDS, in a very, in a overwhelmingly successful way. Except that you still have a lot of the same problems.

Tape II
00:40:00

And I think as important to me is that it also reminded American society, or the American left, that direct action resistance was possible tactically; that campaigns could be won, that there was, that civil disobedience and intelligent, well-organized, inspired, consensus-based populist group action could actually – that that tactic was, that that tactology or that tactic, was viable; that campaigns could be won with nonviolent direct action. And we had forgotten that, as a culture. As you remember, in the '80s, toward the end of the '80s, toward the end of the Reagan era, people, there was so little – there were still people working in Central America, but there wasn't very much – the American left was moribund. There was, it was, things were very slow, and nobody was really doing much, as I remember it. People were drifting away from – from – a self-reliant action toward political agenda, toward a helpful, useful, positive political agenda. And ACT UP put it back on the map, that actually, things can be done...

Tape III
00:00:00

JH: As long as we have all this tape, and this is sort of apropos of your last question — you said that your last two years in ACT UP were

unhappy. And I was wondering, A) what made them unhappy; and B) why you stayed, even though you were unhappy.

BT: They were unhappy because I am sometimes unhappy. And – I can be particularly unhappy in a very engaging, very engaged and engaging group dynamic. I can be very isolated in a roomful of people. Especially in a political situation. But elsewhere too, sometimes. I can be very misanthropic and isolated. And sometimes I am. And I probably was then. And – so I wasn't probably very successful with people. And – so that would drive me crazy. But I would insist on doing the work anyway, because, out of a sense of responsibility, and – an insistence that it didn't matter whether – I still do that today – that it doesn't matter whether you're happy or not, because the work still needs to be done, and one should continue.

SS: Okay, so back to ACT UP's greatest disappointment.

BT: I think, in my own heretic, unhappy, crazy way that way – I think that ACT UP is not alone amongst populist social movements in needing to – be more inclusive, be more encouraging, be more supportive, and bring its members in, and endorse and validate the contributions of individuals, especially the ones who might not be so comfortable. I think that that's one reason why we, on the left, aren't as successful as we want, as we intend to be, and will hopefully be over time; is that we don't really understand group dynamic, we don't really understand movement-building yet. We don't understand – we think if it's

dynamic and everybody wants to join it, then it's happening. And that is true. And that is the most important truth. But what's also very important for sustaining that mobility and for sustaining it into the next front is – that we really need to pull people together, and keep people engaged, and try to keep people happy, and try to meet people's needs, and include people.

And certainly this plays out along the lines of race and gender and class. It's really important to make common cause with each other, and try to understand each other, and I do think that ACT UP didn't do that part of the work as well as we might have.

So that's probably my biggest criticism of ACT UP.

SS: Okay.

BT: That it was, that, along the lines of – those areas. Class, as well as race and gender. ACT UP – people – didn't smarten up as fast or as completely or as well as they might have.

SS: Okay, thanks, Brad.

BT: Yep.

SS: Thank you.

BT: I'm going to answer that –

SS: Be careful, you're plugged in –