

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

JAMIE BAUER

Interviewer: Michelle Esther O'Brien

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Michelle Esther O'Brien: Hello, my name is Michelle O'Brien and I will be having a conversation with Jamie Bauer for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is June 5th, 2017 and this is being recorded with the NYU Department of Sociology. Hello.

Jamie Bauer: Hi.

O'Brien: So, let's start off, tell me about where you were born and where you grew up.

Bauer: So I was born in New York City, I grew up in Stuyvesant Town, which is a small, middle-class housing development on the East Side of Manhattan.

O'Brien: Or a large housing development. [laughter]

Bauer: Yeah, okay, it's a large housing development [laughter]. I grew up there, I went to PS 40, the public school there. And then I went to Hunter High School.

O'Brien: Okay, and what were your dynamics with your family like?

Bauer: So, my family is Jewish but very secular, they just wanted a nice Jewish girl. And I popped out of the womb as a tomboy. There were a lot of bad dynamics about that.

O'Brien: Tell me about some of them.

Bauer: So um, lots and lots of early, two, three, four, five-year old discussions about dresses, and what I would wear and what I wouldn't wear. And I have an older brother who's two years older than me and I was always stealing his stuff and always trying to go out in it. And always tearing up whatever my parents got me, to destroy it so that I couldn't wear it. So a lot of that kind of very typical, I think, young child stuff. And my family pretty much got what was going on and didn't like it, and really just tried to force me to act like a girl. And I just rebelled, rebelled against it.

O'Brien: What were your parents like outside of home. Do you know the kind of work they did and what their lives were like?

Bauer: So my mom was a homemaker and my dad worked for a very—a firm that made brass plaques, he was like a salesman. And he was active in our local synagogue, again secular, with the youth group and stuff, not very religious. And my mom took care of me and my brother and was very sort of narcissistically attached to having us be good kids. And had a real problem with my nonconformities.

O'Brien: What was Sty Town like in the '60s?

Bauer: It was a little piece of suburbia plunked down in Manhattan. So it was first of all, racially segregated, so it was only white people and the only people who were not white were African diplomats from the UN. And it was very straight, and people lived there because they wanted to live in Manhattan but not have all of the difficulties of living in the city. So it had its own little police force, and a lot of rules and regulations about what you could do and couldn't do there. So it was a very regulated part of the city compared to the rest of the city.

O'Brien: Sty Town's also in the middle of the what's now the East Village, what was the Lower East Side, then?

Bauer: Yeah, it was beginning to be the East Village. And one of the issues in Sty Town was which public school district you were in. Because if you were in PS 40 and junior high school 104, that was very white. If you were a little further East, and a little further South, then you had to go to the regular East Village schools which were considered much more mixed and therefore less desirable.

O'Brien: Do you remember in your childhood being around the East Village, what that was like?

Bauer: I do remember being around it, I was much more interested in it when I hit like 12 or 13 [laughter]. But I remember as a kid that my parents would go into the more central Village and drop us off in Washington Square Park and tell us what time to meet them back at the fountain in Washington Square Park. And we were allowed to roam for 2 or 3 hours by ourselves.

O'Brien: Oh wow, was that common?

Bauer: I think, yeah, I think it was common to let 8, 10, 12-year old kids do their thing.

O'Brien: And what was Washington Square Park like?

Bauer: It was a lot of fun because there were performers and hippies and different kinds of people. We weren't allowed to leave the park, but there was plenty to amuse one's self with their as well as playgrounds. It was just very interesting and happening.

O'Brien: When you were a teenager you started engaging around the East Village a little bit more? Can you tell us some early memories with that?

Bauer: Yeah, a little bit more. Uh, going to listen to music. At the time, in the 70's nobody carded anybody and as long as you had the money, people were happy to let you into bars and happy to let you buy beer and happy to have you listen to music. You know, the whole Central to West Village was very accommodating.

O'Brien: What were your friendships like?

Bauer: So I went to Hunter High School, which at the time my year was still all girls, and very intense. And for me as a not-at-that-point-out queer kid but definitely being the way I am now, was the way I was then in a lot of ways. It allowed me to skip the entire dating and boys issues. I had friends and I hung out and I had friends from all over the city and went to every neighborhood and you know, it was a really nice time to live in New York.

O'Brien: So you won the fight with your parents around gender presentation?

Bauer: You know I would say that it was a constant battle without much giving in. And you know the thing that changed everything was in 1968, the city of New York changed the rules that girls did not have to wear dresses to school. And from that point on, I never wore a dress to school. Before that every day was a battle. But once they changed the rules so that girls could wear pants to school, it was pretty clear I was never putting a dress on again. And so I would only wear a dress for what I called state occasions and I haven't worn one since 1975.

O'Brien: Congratulations. So, Hunter High School, how did you spend your free time in high school?

Bauer: Listening to folks' music and smoking pot [laughter]. Uh, reading. Hunter was very pretentiously intellectually oriented, so we pretentiously went to foreign films and museums and read books we didn't understand and tried to act like we were part of the New York intellectual.

O'Brien: So you had some exposure to what sounds like a hippie counterculture?

Bauer: There was like a hippie counter culture, there was a lot of like anti-war stuff and particularly at Hunter it was sort of the tail end of the Vietnam War and so we went to demonstrations.

O'Brien: And were there, did you develop many relationships in the movement or the scene?

Bauer: No, I was, you know I think prior to—I came out the moment I left home to go to college.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Bauer: And that allowed me to make more connections to people.

O'Brien: So, before you came out you were a little more socially isolated? Had some friends, but?

Bauer: I had some friends, I had a girlfriend. We were like best friends, but we were in love. And she ended up self-identifying as straight but always sleeping with women on the side, still to this day. I think you know for me sort of in 1975 discovering sort-of butch culture gave me a way to place myself in society other than just being eccentric—that there were words for it and that was sort of liberating.

O'Brien: Tell me what's your first memory of encountering butch culture?

Bauer: Well, definitely the first was at Bonnie and Clyde's in New York. You walked in and half of them looked like me, and the other half were really attractive [laughter]. That was on West 3rd street in the Village, and I went there a couple of times while I was still in high school and seriously underage.

O'Brien: Tell us a little bit about it for those who might not know.

Bauer: It was a bar, it was sort of a working class very racially mixed bar, with a lot of butch women and a pool table and beer. And I wouldn't say it was really friendly, but it was there. And it was a place where a 16-year old or 17-year old kid could go and have a beer and relax and watch and just being able to watch was really important. And just to see other people. I did run into one of my gym teachers there. Who knew I was underage so we both swore each other to secrecy, which was fine.

O'Brien: And did you have a sense for what the broader landscape of butch/femme communities were like?

Bauer: Not until, when I really came out, and then I went to school in Boston, and I really sort of came out more fully there. And there was a bar called the Saint which was a really famous dyke bar and I went there a lot. Went to demonstrations and sort of got more, felt like I was more a part of a community.

O'Brien: What kind of demonstrations?

Bauer: So there were— so like in the mid '70's, talking like '67, '68, '69, there were the Anita Bryant demonstrations, there were gay rights demonstrations, I mean like even though people had come out, there was no rights, there was no legal protection. For anything bars were raided, I was in a bar when it got raided. You know so people had the sense of liberation but no rights. So there were a lot of demonstrations just for very basic things.

O'Brien: So these are gay rights organizations?

Bauer: Yeah, gay rights.

O'Brien: So that brought together both gay men and— what word did you use for the community of women at that time?

Bauer: Yeah, I probably identified as gay, because I always had that problem of identifying as female or a lesbian and I never really embraced that as comfortably as I thought I was going to. So you know I identified as gay, I identified as butch.

O'Brien: And did you have a sense of this gay rights movement context in the late '70's?

Bauer: Yeah.

O'Brien: Did you have a sense of what its relationship was to other movements at the time?

Bauer: You know I was aware of all the splits, because you know there were sectarian left, there were lesbian separatists, I was not really interested in lesbian separatists.

O'Brien: In the Northeast they were quite ambivalent about butch/femme.

Bauer: Yeah right, yeah and I wasn't too into the sectarian left. I actually was most comfortable with the liberation end of the gay liberation as opposed to the assimilation. There was still the same thing we have now between the assimilation and queerness. So I sort of ended up even though it wasn't called queer, it was more liberation oriented vs rights oriented.

O'Brien: Tell me about how you all thought about the liberation, what the politics of that were at that time?

Bauer: So I think it was about freedom of expression and freedom to be a freak, freedom to be visible, freedom to flaunt it. Which was very appealing after having been told one's whole life to like conform, conform, conform. You know so there's was part of the movement that was like no, we're just like everybody else, and part of the movement we are just not like everybody else. We are our own thing and that was much more appealing.

O'Brien: How did people decide which side they were on? Like what led people to one half or the other?

Bauer: I think if you really did want to conform, if you really just wanted to get like married and move to the suburbs and have kids, all of that rights stuff, was really important because you couldn't do it. And absolutely people certainly have the right to do all that, that was not what I was interested in. And you know there was a tremendous amount of discrimination and you know people couldn't adopt, women who had been married and had kids were having their kids taken away from them, so you know the rights stuff was really important. i\It just wasn't where I was emotionally.

O'Brien: Were there butch women, butch people on the rights end of it? People were on both sides?

Bauer: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

O'Brien: Was each side class diverse?

Bauer: You know I don't think I paid a lot of attention at class at the time. You know I would say overall, every aspect of the movement had issues with race and class. And Boston was a very segregated city because they just had the Boston Busing rights in '75. So the movement was almost exclusively white. It was probably somewhat class diverse but definitely very— you know because Boston is such a university city and it was very student and people who graduated from those universities dominant, so I think it was not as class diverse as it could have been.

O'Brien: And were you ever exposed to African American gay community politics at any point?

Bauer: Only by reading.

O'Brien: What did you read?

Bauer: Well, I forget when *This Bridge Called My Back* came out but it was really classic.

O'Brien: Yeah, 1983.

Bauer: Yeah so that was a little later. You know I had read Audre Lorde and you know, so I read it but it wasn't...

O'Brien: It wasn't your day-to-day life.

Bauer: And it was a little weird because having come from New York, where you know as segregated as New York is, my high school was not as socially segregated, so I always had black friends, I had Puerto Rican friends, Asian friends, and you know. Boston was much more difficult and I did have Black friends in college and like in New York I never though like what movie theatre are we going to, what restaurant are we going to, is it safe? And in Boston we really had to think about, if we were going into Boston what neighborhood, and was it safe.

O'Brien: Because of homophobic violence?

Bauer: Homophobic violence and racial violence.

O'Brien: Oh, interesting. Wow.

Bauer: There were areas that were fine, like Copley Square was fine but there were other areas that were just like we knew not to go there.

O'Brien: And you mentioned Anita Bryant stuff, so give us an outline of what that was about and your involvement.

Bauer: Anita Bryant was the spokesperson for Florida Orange Juice and was also a real homophobe and very anti-gay and spoke quite a lot about being anti-gay. And so people organized orange juice boycotts and demonstrations and there was a boycott to get Florida

Orange Juice out of all the gay bars and all the gay bars were— it wasn't so easy. And to get Florida Orange Juice out of all the campuses and that was not so easy and if we couldn't get it out, to not drink it. And that was the organizing.

O'Brien: Was she—I've heard about her but I don't know a lot. Was she also an elected official or business person?

Bauer: She was a business person; I don't think she was an elected official. She had been— I want to say she had been in Miss America or something but that may be completely wrong. She was a prominently known person who was slightly a has-been by that time. And was the voice of Florida Orange Juice, that was her gig.

O'Brien: Like in advertising?

Bauer: Right, right. So she was very visible to people and separate from that she was doing this whole anti-gay crusade.

O'Brien: And targeted political boycotts, that has a history in the 60's around grapes and the UFW [United Farm Workers] and Coors Beer, around apartheid in the 80's and do you— was that a tactic you had heard about before?

Bauer: It was a tactic I had heard about before, what I didn't realize was how long lasting it is. I mean I still don't drink Florida Orange Juice.

O'Brien: Yeah. [laughter]

Bauer: Once you get that into your system it's really hard, you know I just gave up orange juice.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Bauer: You know as a kid who grew up drinking Tropicana every day, you know when it came to that point I was just like, well do it. You know I still, it's like a carton of orange juice hasn't come in my house in 40 years.

O'Brien: And what was your involvement in the organizing, were you at meetings?

**Bauer: I went to demonstrations and there was a little gay group on our campus but it was really a social group, not a political group and it was all men so it wasn't...

O'Brien: And were you dating in college?

Bauer: I dated a little bit but not very seriously it wasn't— so I was at MIT and MIT when I was there was about 12% women.

O'Brien: Wow.

Bauer: So there wasn't a lot to date and although I went out into the community I've never been the kind of person who can pick people up. I've always only dated people I met socially and got to know.

O'Brien: What was your personality like, how do you think others—

Bauer: I was shy and serious and very chill. And not out— I was shy so I wasn't really outgoing. I have a partner now who I met when I was 24, so we've been together for 34 years. It worked, eventually.

O'Brien: So MIT, going to occasional demonstrations, it sounds a little painful.

Bauer: Yeah.

O'Brien: And then what did you do after that?

Bauer: And so I moved back to New York.

O'Brien: What year?

Bauer: So that would have been '81 when I moved back to New York. I got a job working at New York City Transit as a— I was a Civil Engineer Urban Planning major so I got a job working there as a planner. And New York City Transit, then and now, does not really plan anything so after a couple years in the Planning Department, I jumped to the Subway Scheduling Department which is where I spent most of my career.

O'Brien: So this is a white collar job? At the MTA?

Bauer: It was a— it was sort of, as much as office jobs and MTA are white collar, it was a white collar job. But it was—one really nice thing about the MTA/New York City Transit was that not that it's so accepting, but if you are a hard worker people will look past almost anything weird about you. So as queer as I was and out as I was, as open about my politics as I was, the way I dressed, as long as I was willing to do more work than anyone else people were really happy to have me in their office. So I sort of settled in there.

O'Brien: Were you a union member? Or management?

Bauer: I was a union member to start with and at a certain point they changed the structure and took away our supervisory— you know there's like TW [Transport Workers] Union, Supervisory Union. And they took a whole bunch of Supervisory Union jobs and made them quote on quote management— and I got caught up in that and so I became management even though I didn't manage anybody at the time, so that they could take us out of the union. But mostly we worked

with people in the operating departments, most of the people we worked with had come up through the ranks.

O'Brien: What was the Supervisory Union?

Bauer: So it still exists, it's the Subway Supervisors Association and it was like dispatchers, train service supervisors, and originally the scheduling departments. The people came in as conductors or train operators and became supervisors. And then the supervisors, a lot of supervisors were in office jobs. So basically what they did they took the office jobs out of the union.

O'Brien: And so people were respectful of you, your gender, to some extent?

Bauer: There were comments and things said behind my back and occasionally things said to my face but mostly I would say fairly accepting of my being there.

O'Brien: Did you know other gay people?

Bauer: Yeah, because you can pick them out a mile away, because it was such a straight environment that you'd walk into the lobby and see them and it'd just be like, you would just know.

O'Brien: Would you all avoid each other or connect, or?

Bauer: No, no we would all, there was a little underground— so there was a guy there named Sal Cotta who wrote, I forget the name of the book he wrote. He was in like the Industrial Engineering Unit and Sal picked me out the second week I was there and tracked me down and introduced himself so...

O'Brien: Was there ever any, I don't know, mutual support or organizing or any effort to—

Bauer: No, there was you know individual support but there wasn't really any organizing and there never felt— people didn't socialize that much, so you know you came in, you did your job, and you left and you had your outside life.

O'Brien: Right. And it sounds like an environment where you all didn't experience super active discrimination that organizing against it would be necessary.

Bauer: No, you know the only, we fought to get domestic partnership health benefits so there was a little organizing around that.

O'Brien: Do you remember when that happened?

Bauer: That was in like the mid-90's, early 90's. And that wasn't a lot of active organizing either, it was a lot of, when we had these employee meetings with the president and people get to stand up and asks questions and we always made sure that all of us asked that question.

O'Brien: Wow. I haven't heard about that, that's very interesting. Okay, so you're living in New York, you get the job at transit, then how are you spending your time outside work?

Bauer: So then I joined Women's Pentagon Action which provided me with all the demonstrations I wanted to go to, all the women I wanted to meet, and that was a lot of fun.

O'Brien: So this is in the early 80's, there's some big anti-nuclear, anti-Cold War.

Bauer: Anti-intervention in Central America.

O'Brien: Right, war in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Bauer: Women's Pentagon Action— although it was all women, people in age that ranged from early 20's to mid-60's.

O'Brien: Intergenerational.

Bauer: Yeah and mixed straight and gay and really interesting people in it.

O'Brien: And were you going to meetings every week?

Bauer: Yeah weekly meetings and demonstrations and organizing and thinking about things and really starting to think about— it was before intersectionality was a word, but the basis of Women's Pentagon Action was everything is connected. So military violence, patriarchy, capitalism, you know made all the connections, and like I said I met a lot of interesting people including my partner there.

O'Brien: When did you guys meet?

Bauer: So we met at right at the beginning and we circled around each other, because Donna is 26 years older than I am. And so we circled and circled and I was attracted and she was attracted to me, sort of both knew we were attracted but we also thought you don't want to like mess up a friendship and it's not going to work and it's really not going to work and we really shouldn't do this. And after about a year, it was like okay, let's just like sleep together and get it out of our system and here we are. And that was, then it took us like 7 years to move in together because we each had rent stabilized apartments. Even then it was very complicated to give up two apartments to move in together.

O'Brien: So Women's Pentagon Action was it a civil disobedience group?

Bauer: So they did civil disobedience, it also did what we would now call direct action of demonstrating and also showing up at other people's demonstrations with our own signs and things.

O'Brien: How big was the group?

Bauer: I would say there were between 30 and 50 people who came to organize the meetings, and we could get anywhere from 300-500 people at a demonstration.

O'Brien: And were there significant internal debates?

Bauer: There were significant internal debates like every other organization, we were predominantly not-exclusively white, we were not a separatist group but we were a women-only group so. And our actions were supposed to be women only, so it was really awkward when men showed up at them, particularly the male partners of women in the group. That was an issue. You know a lot of discussion about, you know, what I think what you have in every group about how much do you try to change the existing system versus how much do you have to start from a completely, you know, revolution versus change. For which there is never any good answer. There was a lot of discussion about it, there were a number of artists and writers in the group. So Grace Paley, the poet, was in the group.

O'Brien: Oh wow.

Bauer: And Verne Williams, who is a children's author was in the group, and then there were some young people so Flanders, the writer.

O'Brien: The current Laura Flanders, radio talk show host, I didn't know she had that background.

Bauer: The current Laura Flanders was in the group, right exactly, so she had that background. There were quite a few really good thinking people there.

O'Brien: And how many people would you say sort of came out of the new left, the anti-capitalist movement, the sort of the left and how many people had a different point of— [inaudible]

Bauer: I think it was generational so I think the older women there came out of the anti-war movement and they had gone through the women are supposed to just like operate the mimeograph machine and make coffee and sleep with us and they were like we're not doing that. And the younger women came out of the campus organization, there were a lot of Barnard students, like Laura Flanders was student at Barnard at the time. Some of them came out of the anti-apartheid movement, came out I should say they brought that with them, and a lot of anti-intervention in Central America stuff.

O'Brien: So being the Trans Oral History Project, I want to ask some about dynamics around trans people. So you know, in the early 70's there were quite a few trends— women involved in

feminist organizing, and then the late 70's, there was this very acute and aggressive turn against trans women and some of that sort of language and experience of the anti-war feminist movement included assertions about sort of women's biological nature being linked to peace in a way that was quite turned against—weaponized against trans women.

Bauer: That was not so much an issue in our group, we did not have trans women active in the group, and they probably would, for good reason— probably not have been comfortable there. I don't know whether they would have been viewed as women or not, they probably would not have been.

O'Brien: Do you remember any exposure to the trans debates in feminism at the time?

Bauer: You know because Women's Pentagon Action was not a, it was feminist but it wasn't...

O'Brien: Yeah, it was orienting more towards antiwar.

Bauer: And there wasn't sort of active TERF-iness [Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists] the way there is now. So it really, it was more— what I'd say was more of an issue in the group and what we talked about was internalized homophobia and whether as a mix of lesbians and straight women, did the lesbians feel like they had to not push their lesbianism in order to keep peace and order in the group. So there was really no trans issue discussion that I can remember.

O'Brien: So what did pushing lesbianism in the group look like?

**Bauer: So I think because we were a women's group and not a lesbian group, although we marched in the Gay Pride Parade, what would it have looked like, I think it would have been we are signs if we brought signs were more women and didn't have the words lesbian in it because that would have created some sort of split. You know visibly we were there and it was sort of because it wasn't a lesbian group the lesbian issues weren't as prominent.

O'Brien: So how long did you organize with Women's Pentagon Action?

Bauer: That was maybe three years but it was three very intense years, including going up to— there was a women's peace camp in upstate New York, Seneca Falls. So we went up and spent a week under the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment.

O'Brien: How long was that there?

Bauer: It was active for one whole summer. I want to say '83 and it continued for a little while after that but it was a real organizing thing with the women from Greenham Common, England, and it was a part of a women's peace thing at the time that was very—

O'Brien: And was there a nuclear weapons facility there? Military base?

Bauer: In Greenham, there was an American military base, in Seneca there was a military base also.

O'Brien: And the historic Seneca Falls, for a women's convention, interesting. Yeah, I went to a camp like that in Scotland in the '90's. And so that and outside of political work and your job did you have other things going on? Just focusing on the politics?

Bauer: No, just job and politics, mostly.

O'Brien: And how did you, were your own politics, was it generally the same as the rest of the group or were they being shaped in other ways as well?

Bauer: So, I was struggling, you know I preferred to be in queer-er groups, you know and at the time queer wasn't really as— but I preferred gay mixed groups to women's mixed groups. But I liked the peace politics and the nonviolence politics and nonsectarian politics in Women's Pentagon Action a lot and there weren't like that many groups in New York to pick and choose from. So you know my dream group has never really existed. And even now I would prefer a queer-er group than— I mean Rise & Resistance is queer but it's not queer-queer. And there are a lot of straight people in it which is fine but it doesn't have the queer liberation dynamic or trans liberation dynamic to it that I would really like to see. And to the best of my knowledge that still doesn't exist in New York. If you know of one let me know.

O'Brien: So what came after Women's Pentagon Action?

Bauer: So after that came after a quick hybrid into GLAAD [Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] and then into ACT UP [the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power].

O'Brien: So what was GLAAD like in— what year is this?

Bauer: So this is '85, '86, and I got pulled into GLAAD— GLAAD had a bunch of Gay Activists Alliance people who reformed around the AIDS crisis and around the homophobia and anti-gay backlash from AIDS. And they started out doing some street activism, but they had a really bad— not management structure, but organizational structure with like steering committee that was self-appointed, and only their friends, and they wanted other people to do the work and there was an action committee that did a lot of the action work and that's who I worked with but it wasn't really it wasn't a good activist model. And that group also had a lot of writers in it.

O'Brien: A lot of what?

Bauer: Writers, in it. So Jewelle Gomez was a part of it, Darrell Yates Rist, Marcia Paley, Vido Russo, so it had some really good people in it but the structure never ... so I always had one foot in it, one foot out the door. So when ACT UP formed, I was very happy to jump ship into ACT UP.

O'Brien: So tell me about your first exposure to ACT UP.

Bauer: So my first exposure was being asked by the War Resisters League to go do a civil disobedience training for their first action, which was like maybe the second meeting of the group. And so I went and I talked to the 20 people who were thinking about getting arrested and explained it to them and went to the demonstration, and—

O'Brien: What was that demonstration?

Bauer: So the demonstration was at Wall Street, it was in front of, I think it was Trinity Church, and 20 people just sat down in the street and got arrested. It was actually the only active demonstration that was orchestrated with the police, where they gave the police a list of names of people who were going to get— it was before ACT UP got wild. Because they really had just formed and they didn't know what they were doing. And then I just stayed. And brought with me my organizing skills from other things, which they really needed because not that many people involved with the beginning of ACT UP knew how to— what was legal, what wasn't legal, how to do a demo, what you have to tell the police, what you don't have to tell the police, what you need a permit for, what you don't need a permit for.

O'Brien: So very concrete organizing skills.

Bauer: Yeah, very concrete organizing

O'Brien: Protests skills.

Bauer: So I knew that from my experience and I brought that with me.

O'Brien: So how many other people in the group had previous organizing movement work in the way that you did.

Bauer: About half of the women and 1/20th of the men.

O'Brien: Yeah. And what movements did people come out of?

Bauer: So you know, I would say sort of the general LGBT movement, and some anti-war people, a few people who had been in GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] but were very upset doing service provision because they wanted to be out on the street. And then there were, before ACT UP, there was a group that coexisted with us called the PWA Collective [Persons with AIDS Collective] and the guys from the PWA Collective had a lot of skills.

O'Brien: And what were the demographics of ACT UP in those times, '87, '88?

Bauer: So it skewed young, it was skewed male. It was not as demographically diverse as New York is but it was not all white either. So there were some people of color, African American, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, not as widespread as New York City as a whole, but not

as white as most groups in New York tend to be. And I would say that the bigger split in the group was between people who were HIV positive and people who were not, or people who knew their status and people who didn't, or people who were sick and people who were not.

O'Brien: And what was that dynamic like?

Bauer: Well, you know I think you also ceded the floor with people who self-identified as people with AIDS. And if there was discussion about what needed to be done, you ceded the discussion to them, so that they could speak. And their needs and issues and voices had priority over everybody else's.

O'Brien: What are some of the actions that stand out for you during the '80's, those years you were...

Bauer: We did stop the church, which was at St. Patrick's, which was a difficult but really good action. Lots of anti-Reagan stuff, going to the Center for Disease Control, going to the National Institute of Health. When Bush I [George H.W. Bush] was president, we went to Kennebunkport when he was on vacation, which really upset him, but that was a really good demonstration because it made him confront the issue. There were a lot of very good, very large—I mean not very large by Women's March standards, but large by ACT UP standards, which was like a thousand people.

O'Brien: What were relationships like with other movements at the time?

Bauer: ACT UP was not used to working in coalition except with some of the other people with AIDS groups. So, and also a number of groups sort of came out of ACT UP and then worked in coalition with us. So like Housing Works started out as a working group within ACT UP so we always worked in coalition with Housing Works once they split off. We worked with People with AIDS Coalition, we did not work a lot with GMHC because they were always accusing us of potentially screwing up their funding. So there was a divide there. There were, not in the late '80's, early '90's, there weren't a lot of AIDS service groups, those sort of burgeoned in the '90's. So there wasn't like there were a lot of other groups to affiliate with. But mostly we did our own and invited people to join us, but we didn't do a lot of coalition building.

O'Brien: And was your relationship to gender in the group, so you're a butch gay woman at this time, and was that a common experience in the group or did people relate to that at all?

Bauer: Yeah, people were fine with that, there were never a lot of women in ACT UP. Almost all of them were lesbians, and sort of split between butch and not butch, it was fine. I felt listened to and I didn't feel anybody had any issues with it. Surprisingly— I don't know if I should say surprisingly in ACT UP, there were also, there was very little connection to the trans community and there really should have been in retrospect. But there really was not an active connection between ACT UP and trans women.

O'Brien: Do you have any sense of why that might have been?

Bauer: You know, I think because early in the crisis, people could have come into the group if they were comfortable. But the organizing, I mean it was a survival issue for people. And once people got sick— it took, you either had to have a really good support network to do ACT UP, it took a particular kind of person to do that. And I don't think the support would have been there for trans women necessarily.

O'Brien: Because of greater social isolation.

Bauer: There was a very particular kind of gay man with AIDS who came to ACT UP. Of anger, and you know I used to say it was because it was the first time gay white male, that their white male privilege wasn't working for them and they were just furious. And they had never faced that kind of powerlessness before. And I think for other people they had faced plenty of that lack of privilege and so it didn't come as much as a shock and so they didn't have the same anger. I don't know if that's a good analysis or not. But, you know the type of people who came into ACT UP were really a very small subset of people with HIV.

O'Brien: And what were some of their characteristics that were most common in this subset?

Bauer: Well I would say, like I said anger, and an intention to try to make the system work for them. And some of those people were able to make connections to other people and say okay it's not just me that I have to worry about. You know whatever we get I have to make sure it gets to everybody with HIV and AIDS. But you know most people came there because they wanted the information, they wanted the drugs, they wanted to survive and they were furious that this was happening to them.

O'Brien: Do you have a sense of what their lives were like before becoming HIV positive, before the HIV crisis?

Bauer: You know it was mixed, there were a few wealthy, connected guys. I think a lot of them were just guys who had been having a good time and all of a sudden this thing happened to them out of nowhere and they were young and this wasn't supposed to happen. And they were unprepared for it and they were in shock. And so for them it was like being caught up in a war, and they were going to fight.

O'Brien: Yeah. So there have been a lot of accounts. We started off before starting the recorder about the ACT UP Oral History archive, about just the incredible range of actions and vibrancy and dynamism of the movement. What are some of the things that really touched you most deeply and what excited you most about being in ACT UP?

Bauer: I think, so I couldn't walk away from it, I mean I really couldn't walk away from it. And I knew too many people there who were HIV+ and I was particularly— during the Reagan era we were just like, the civil rights issues including tremendous homophobia, talk about locking people

up, talking about taking away their rights of people who were HIV positive— so for me the sort of civil rights issues and the solidarity were really, really important.

O'Brien: You all cared about each other.

Bauer: yeah. And there you know, it felt like being in a war zone and it was a war zone that no one else saw, yet we saw it. But if you weren't in it, no one— you know that was one of the most infuriating things about being in New York and doing such disruptive actions because we were in this war and no one gave a fuck. People just did not care about it at all unless they were in it. And it was just infuriating. You know you'd be at a demonstration and someone would walk by and say "I hope you all die of AIDS."

O'Brien: So you were in the group from '87 to '95?

Bauer: Yeah, '94, '95.

O'Brien: Did the kind of actions y'all do change over that arc?

Bauer: Towards the— they changed a little but not that much. I think what really changed things was starting to get better drugs so there was a point where people stopped dying or at least they stopped dying really quickly.

O'Brien: And that was right at the end?

Bauer: That was when I was involved, like '94, '95. No, ACT UP has continued.

O'Brien: So how did that change things?

Bauer: Well because it felt like things had shifted to where— the work you know, even though we had always said "Drugs Into Bodies", things were really changing and it was clear that medications were working. They were getting distributed and people had much more access to them, and that there wasn't the need for sort of sounding the alarm and haranguing people at the same level that it needed to shift

O'Brien: So people started getting access to medications, living longer.

Bauer: Right, and that changed the group because that was what, people stopped going to meetings because they had gotten their meds. And so the group sort of really dwindled down and I needed to take a break as well. And so at a certain point it was like, I just like lost my connection to the group and there was also a number of groups that had spun off by that point so I felt like the circle of people who I had really worked with was sort of dissipating.

O'Brien: So how big were the meetings you were at, like at their peak?

Bauer: 500 people, so big that we couldn't fit in the center.

O'Brien: That's incredible.

Bauer: So that was like 300 people could probably pack into the room at the center and then we moved to Cooper Union, which was not a great place to meet but it was larger. And we were probably peaking at 500 people once a week.

O'Brien: And as it dwindled what was—

Bauer: It got down to like 75 people and it was just— it was not, it didn't have the same feel to it and I don't want to say it started to be special interest but the people who were left were not doing the same sort of stuff that I was interested in.

O'Brien: How so?

Bauer: They were more into like, alternative and holistic and they were still doing a lot of needle exchange stuff and housing stuff. And I just felt like I need to take a break, it was much more diffuse and much less central issues.

O'Brien: And do you have a sense of who left versus who stayed in the kind of early and mid '90's?

Bauer: So I mean first of all in the '91, '92, '93 we lost a tremendous number of people because people who dying. That was our grief, grief was really hard to deal with. And then when, I don't want to say it was all of a sudden but you would notice like a week went by and then two weeks went by and we weren't announcing deaths the same way and so it was really noticeable when things changed.

O'Brien: So I think of the big wave of heart and protease inhibitors had been '95, '96 but there were some drugs available earlier?

Bauer: Right, yeah. And you could really see the differences in how people survived on them.

O'Brien: How was Clinton's presidential campaign and election, how did you all engage then, how did that affect the work?

Bauer: So we had a big thing called Campaign '92, that was when we went down to Kennebunkport because the sole function of a summer campaign was to get them to talk about AIDS during the debates. If you can believe that one would spend their entire summer trying to convince people to say the word "AIDS" at a debate. But even in '92 it was not seen as a national enough issue to have that discussion. And so every time any of the candidates came to town during the Spring for primaries, we harangued them and protested their fundraisers and then Clinton kept coming to New York because the money was in New York, so every time Clinton

came to New York we would go to a fundraiser or stand outside the fundraiser. And then Bush didn't come to New York so we went to Kennebunkport and the Bush family has a compound in Kennebunkport, and we marched up to the compound and demanded it. And they actually in the long run did very briefly talk about AIDS during the debates.

O'Brien: And Clinton ended up making some promises about investing in a cure.

Bauer: And compared to four years of Bush and 8 years of Reagan, Clinton was a much better president, certainly still anti-gay— not anti-gay but not pro-gay. And not speaking out the way he should of and not being sex positive. I mean when you talk about what really should have been done. You needed to be sex-positive, you needed to be pro-gay, you needed to be “Drugs Into Bodies”, you needed to talk about condoms, you know it's like the whole. But it was still better than “Just Say No.”

O'Brien: And I've heard that some people from ACT UP went to work for the federal government and some things after Clinton's election?

Bauer: So it was, it's natural for people to take jobs in the movement, and they have to support themselves

O'Brien: Of course, right, right.

Bauer: You know as long as they don't switch sides, I really can't blame people for taking jobs in the movement. The big issue in ACT UP came when our Treatment and Data Committee split off to form the Treatment Action Group as its own organization and then they took money from Burroughs Wellcome. And taking money from the makers of AZT seemed really problematic and conflict of interest.

O'Brien: What year was that did they split off?

Bauer: Later than '92 but not that much later. But that was problematic.

O'Brien: Do you remember arguments about it?

Bauer: It was very problematic for the group, but it wasn't so much arguments it just happened. And some people tried to do both but it was very difficult.

O'Brien: And you mentioned syringe exchanges and Housing Works and how did, where were poor people in this mix?

Bauer: So there were poor people in ACT UP and even if you didn't start out poor HIV will make you poor. And we had a small group of people, you know I would say it was assumed, not really talked about, that a vast majority of people got seroconverted through sex but some through drug use. IV drug users in general are not the easiest group of people to organize, nor would one

expect them in organizing. There was a group in ACT UP that did needle exchange and eventually founded not-for-profit needle exchange things, which was really good. And it sort of got needle exchange and the concept of needle exchange out there. Same thing, you know you had people who had HIV and became homeless because they had lost their jobs and they lost their apartments and you had people who were already homeless who seroconverted. I would say the people in ACT UP more started with the Bailey House, we need housing for people with AIDS rather than there are homeless people who are also HIV positive who need assistance. Housing Works deals with both and they started out as a working group within ACT UP. But in order to really do it you have to become a not-for-profit and get your act together, so that's what they did.

O'Brien: So on the one hand the service groups are spinning off, on the other hand TAG [Treatment Action Group] is spinning off—

Bauer: Right and what's left, there's not center left.

O'Brien: Right. And how did people, was it acrimonious between these three groups or was there—

Bauer: No, you know, I think most activist groups don't last for 7 years, most activist groups last for 2 or 3 years, if you're lucky, so they don't have to go through all of this morphing. Nor do most of their members die during the process of creating the group so there was also that issue. You know, I think ACT UP, I don't want to say it had dysfunction, because it still exists but it outlived its original form.

O'Brien: Yeah, how so?

Bauer: Because you can't sustain that level of activism forever, particularly while people are dying. And because AIDS— although it's a single issue in many ways, it's not a single issue so you did need drugs into bodies, you needed needle exchange, you needed housing, you needed education, you needed education for kids you know it's like you needed all those things and it just stretched the group very thin. Once it stopped just being "Drugs Into Bodies."

O'Brien: So in '95 you needed a break, had you, were you going to things every day during the years of ACT UP, or a few times a week?

Bauer: So when I was in ACT UP I had an agreement with Donna, my partner, no more than two meetings a week but I could go to as many actions as I wanted to. [laughter]

O'Brien: Yeah. [laughter]

Bauer: And it wasn't, even though we had a sense of immediacy, so little was happening it wasn't like there was multiple actions every week but we did organize both for several large actions

during the course of the year and I went to almost all the actions because that's what you do when you're in a group.

O'Brien: What was your favorite one?

Bauer: So I really liked having anything to do with Wall Street, because AIDS profiteering, so we did a couple different actions down at Wall Street.

O'Brien: So those were targeting drug companies that were charging high profits?

Bauer: Yeah, profiteering. Because it was an easy way to connect all the dots and very photogenic.

O'Brien: Were there a lot of actions charging drug companies on Wall Street?

Bauer: Yeah, not so many on Wall Street, we did one out at Pfizer, New Jersey. Hoffman Rush, it was in New Jersey. It was a great action to be— totally blockaded their plant but then we were arrested in New Jersey which was not much fun. We understood getting arrested in New York or Washington better.

O'Brien: Yeah. Do you know how many times you were arrested?

Bauer: No, I'm going to say at least 50. But you know it was not, it was over the course of 7 years.

O'Brien: And did, were the arrests ever really consequential for people's lives? Did people, I don't know, go to jail for periods of times?

Bauer: They were disruptive, and we got put through the system a couple of times but never, a little bit of community service here and there, but never— one of the good things about working at New York City Transit was they were very tolerant of my arrests and we have really good time off so I got like four weeks of vacation a year plus compensatory overtime so I was using them for demonstrating. So I was always taking time off to demonstrate.

O'Brien: That's great. So what did you do after?

Bauer: Small things, nothing, I didn't do a lot of active, a little bit of stuff with the War Resisters League still because I kept my connections to people in the peace movement. After September 11th, more against the war in Iraq but not heavy duty because I couldn't find a group I could tolerate working with

O'Brien: What were your frustrations with the groups you found?

Bauer: Oh, straight male left sectarians. And also sort of very uninteresting and repetitive demonstrations that didn't feel like they were doing any good or going anywhere or even direct at the target you should be. So it was very frustrating.

O'Brien: Okay. And when did your gender identity start shifting?

Bauer: In '89, I pretty much understood that I was trans. And I tried to talk to my therapist at the time about it, who tried to talk me out of it. And I ended up leaving the therapist and finding another therapist who I tried to talk to about it, who also tried to talk me out of it. And at that time I decided I was coping well enough as it was, that I would not transition. So this was like '89 and '90 so it was very— there weren't a lot of resources out there.

O'Brien: What had been your exposure to trans people and trans men up to this point, or gender nonconforming people?

Bauer: I knew two people who had transitioned, female to male, and I knew, I had done some reading, and there was really very little going, I mean it was pre-internet for one thing.

O'Brien: Did you know them in politic scenes or in like gay women's scene?

Bauer: I knew them, I knew one from ACT UP, and one from sort of prior queer stuff. And so when I talked to my therapist I said, "Listen, I know I'm really a boy." And she was like, "No, you're a tomboy." And I was like, "No, you know, I'm really a boy." And she was like, "No, no, blah, blah, you're butch and you're doing so well and you have a relationship and a job and you're coping blah, blah. You know transitioning is really— you know you're going to have to give up everything." And I didn't talk to my partner about it. And so I sort of put it to sleep until about five years ago.

O'Brien: Wow, so from '89 to 2012, you just knew it deep down and tried not to think about it.

Bauer: Right and tried not to deal with it. And sort of watch everything else change and I had sort of felt like I had made my peace with it. And I made my peace with it by also telling myself, which is probably true at the time, that most people who were trans don't transition.

O'Brien: And the world's changed a lot during that time for trans people. What was that like to see, the sort of explosion and development in the trans movement? Transmasculine communities and—

Bauer: Exactly. So envy, I remember I was at one dyke march, and there was this person there, that I didn't know, but I could tell that they had had top surgery and I can remember just feeling this wave of envy just [makes whooshing sound]. And just thinking I'm never going to do that. Because there's no way. You know at this point, I'm still with the same partner, different therapist. Still with the same partner. And you know then, so one day in 2011, 2012, I'm sitting in my therapist's office and we're talking and she said something that gendered me female and I just was like [slams table] "I'm not a girl, you just have to—" And she's like, "I know you're always uncomfortable when I say that." And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm really uncomfortable when you say that. I am not a girl; can we just stop this charade right now." And then we started to talk and I realized that I didn't know what kind of transition I wanted to have but that I couldn't just go on

pretending that I resolved it or that things were okay the way they were. Things were definitely not okay the way they were and I really needed to let my transness out of the box and see what happened. So I talked to my partner, who totally flipped out because I basically told her truth which meant I had been hiding it from her since 1989 which didn't go over really well. And that it also freaked her out because I was honestly didn't know where I was going with it. And I didn't know if I wanted to do a binary transition or what kind of transition I wanted to do or what I didn't, but I just had to let it out so that was really hard. And we have struggled together a lot about negotiating name change, so I changed my name legally, I changed my name when I was still working and I went through that with everybody. I had top surgery which was really important to me. I pretty much dressed the way I always dressed but now I do it without, I can own it a little more and somewhere sitting at home is a box of AndroGel testosterone that I haven't opened yet and I still don't know whether I'm going to open it or not. But it's there and it hasn't expired yet and it's an option.

O'Brien: When did you have top surgery?

Bauer: So I had top surgery in December 2014.

O'Brien: And what was the dynamic with your partner like?

Bauer: So even claiming to be trans, I did not want to go through what I call transition 1-2-3 which is testosterone for a year, name change, top surgery, and that I did not see myself as a straight white guy. And that I wanted to hold onto my queerness and I wasn't sure how to balance the— since I'm attracted to women, the queerness with the transness, with the not wanting to have a woman's body, but still feeling more boy than man necessarily. And not feeling like I wanted to do, you know that owning my gender is different than a sex change. And most people when you tell them you're trans they just assume you're going to do a straight binary and that was not necessarily what I wanted. I didn't really identify with the term genderqueer because I really experienced the masculine end of the— transmasculine seems like a better fit than genderqueer for me. I like nonbinary so I'll use nonbinary. But I didn't— what I decided was I'm just doing what I feel like doing and what felt comfortable and reject what doesn't feel comfortable. Top surgery is a little hard because once you do it, there's really no going back easily. But I also was pretty sure that top surgery was going to be a no brainer.

O'Brien: It felt right.

Bauer: It felt totally right and it was sort of like getting back my pre-puberty body, which was really nice. Sort of like getting back my boy body. So I never had any doubts after the surgery. But my partner was really freaked out because it's a big thing to have your partner start shifting gears publicly. And I'm not a very private person in that she knew that I would be— she was like, "Is it okay with you if I talk to other people about this?" and I was like, "Fine. I don't care if you out me to the whole world if you need to talk to people." Which was great for her but it became confusing for me because she talked to people before I did so no one knew what pronouns to

use for me or what kind of transition I was doing. So it got a little complicated; it's still complicated for people.

O'Brien: So I think 20-something trans people these days, there being a lot of nonbinary identities, and people your age nonbinary identities being less common. Certainly using the word for example is a lot less common. How do you, sort of how do you think of yourself with respect to this kind of community of non-binary identifying and experimentation with language and non-traditional transitions?

Bauer: I think most people of my generation who transition, transition binary. Or they don't transition at all. And I think there are some people, there's a group called Trans Men Over 40 on Facebook, that is fairly large and there are a number of people on there who fall somewhere in the middle between not transitioning and fully transitioning and who are sort of in the same category as I'm in. So, there are some. I think it is unusual and I don't think people talk about it. I was sort of surprised because it turned out I have two friends who I'm pretty good friends with who are in almost the exact same place that I am but won't talk to anybody about it. You know and they're both people who don't go by female names and they're both people who bind and let people assume that they're butch lesbians but really feel quite far out on the transmasculine spectrum, in some cases further than me. But they don't want to deal with having to talk with everyone about it.

O'Brien: What do you think is challenging for folks of your generation to do what you have, pursuing a non-binary path?

Bauer: Well I think saying that you're trans at all, there are a lot of people who think that you're a traitor to womanhood and a traitor to lesbians and some have that you're buying into some kind of weird male privilege. By transitioning and that you're sort of jumping ship. And I have lost one good friend over that.

O'Brien: Another form of TERFism.

Bauer: Yeah, they're sort of unaffiliated TERFs. But that's sort of where they're coming from. But I think the challenge for most people is that, you know so much has changed for me internally, and I'm so much more comfortable with myself and more talkative, physically more comfortable. And they see that and my partner, who was really not with the program for a while was like, "I keep seeing how much more comfortable you are and how much more easier you are to live with and how much more pleasant you are." She's like, "Not that you were all that bad before." But she could see the positive changes in me had really helped her deal with what we so called my transition. And—

O'Brien: My so called transition. [laughter]

Bauer: She was most upset before the surgery about my having the top surgery but the next week she was like, well after all the drains came out so maybe it was a couple weeks later, she was like, "I have to tell you that it looks really natural."

O'Brien: Wow, how interesting, what an interesting word to use.

Bauer: Yeah, she was like, "You really look like you and I can see that you really look like you. And it's okay, it's going to be okay." Which I was like, "thank God." Because she sort of had one foot out the door, during the whole negotiation of it, and it took a while for her to, you know her fear was she was going to lose me and she will now say that she got more of me. Which is good.

O'Brien: Wow, that's beautiful.

Bauer: And she knows I have the testosterone sitting in the drawer and she's like, "You do whatever you want, don't pin it on me that you're not using it." And I'm like, okay. It's my decision.

O'Brien: Yeah. What's it like trying to figure out whether or not to use the testosterone?

Bauer: There's a part of me that would like to use just so I could say I'm on T because it gives you a lot more credibility as someone who is transgender to be on hormone.

O'Brien: Credibility with who?

Bauer: With other trans people. So I feel like, even as someone who identifies as non-binary, you have sort of more trans street cred if you're on testosterone I think than if you're not. Which is a crappy reason to go on it, and I talked myself out of it and I would say at least once a week I go through the should I, shouldn't I, do I want to do this, do I not want to do this, what do I want to get out of it, what do I don't, you know. And my dysphoria is so much less than it used to be, between changing my name, I use they pronouns, so changing my pronouns, and having top surgery, that I don't necessarily feel like I need hormones for dysphoria. I would really like the voice change, I would really like a little bit of the facial shift. I'm not so sure that, I'm not keen, I feel like chemically, my chemical hormone balance is okay internally the way I feel, so I don't feel like I need testosterone to internally feel like myself. Which would be probably the best reason to go on it, and maybe that's because I'm in menopause and I have no estrogen left in my system probably.

O'Brien: How long have you been in menopause?

Bauer: That's a good question. So I had, before I reclaimed transness, I had a hysterectomy because I had fibroids and that should've been a hint to me how much better I felt as soon as my uterus was gone. And my periods stopped because that was like another form of like horrible dysphoria.

O'Brien: What year was that?

Bauer: That would've been like 2007, so that should've been an indication but it really wasn't. My internally feeling for my gender right now is very comfortable and part of me doesn't want to muck it up by throwing— I'm a person who doesn't like to take drugs. So there's one part of me that would really like to try testosterone just to see what it feels like and see if I feel more comfortable or less comfortable. So I have it, so obviously I wanted to have it so I could try it but I haven't quite gotten to that point yet.

O'Brien: So going back to activism. What are broadly the groups or projects that you've gone to more than one meeting since leaving ACT UP?

Bauer: So War Resisters League Local, various and sundry little groups that sort of formed and didn't stick, and in November I started working with Rise and Resist.

O'Brien: Tell me about that.

Bauer: Which was interesting for me because one of my decisions about working with them was that I was going to be out as trans from the get go there.

O'Brien: So who are Rise and Resist?

Bauer: Rise and Resist, it was formed by, or called for by a hand full of men who had worked with either Treatment Action Group or ACT UP New York and they called it as a sort of queer group in response to Trump's election, although it is much more mixed now than just queer. And I got the call because people knew me from ACT UP, and they wanted some people with activist backgrounds there and I sort of just got sucked up into it. But I told Donna when I went that I am going to insist on they pronouns, and I'm going to be open as both queer and trans. And let people— if they think that those two things conflict, then let them just figure it out. And Donna is also in it which makes it harder since we're a couple and people naturally assume that we're a lesbian identified couple. So I've done a lot of "they explaining" to people. Because the average age there, there are not people who have had a lot of experience with people who use they as singular. But we've done a lot of anti-Trump demonstrations and other basically things around Trump or Republican agenda, and it's worked out.

O'Brien: How has it been, the "they explaining" and being out?

Bauer: You know so, for a long time, not for a long time. So after I came out I said that I was "pronoun challenged" and so I'd go to these meetings and people would sit in a circle and go around with their name and pronouns. And I don't want to use *she*, but I don't want to use *he* in my regular life. And I hadn't really been using *they* either so I just say that I'm just "pronoun challenged" or "pronoun fucked"— just call me Jaime. And skip the pronouns, which you would think that almost nothing is more awkward than using *they*, but not using pronouns at all is even more awkward. So I tolerated, you know because most people don't use your pronouns in your

presence, they use them when you're not there. I told Donna just use whatever pronouns you want, and I'm not there I'm not going to object to it. Because she had already told everybody in the world what I was doing and everybody that she knows, knows that I had top surgery and changed my name and all this so. But I really didn't want to be in a political group or meeting all new people as well as some people that have known me for a long time and use *she*. So I really made a decision to use *they*, you know there is some special snowflake-ism to it but I'm more comfortable with it now than I was three or four years ago. And I really want to move away from *she*, and have people stop using *she* but I'm not really a *he* either. And so I just want people to gender me as me. Which is not so easy and is certainly almost impossible with strangers.

O'Brien: Could you imagine that opening up more in the future?

Bauer: So this gets back to the testosterone. So without the testosterone and being read as gender nonconforming as opposed to being gendered as male— although I get a decent male gendering, decent amount of that. I wish that it was as easy to wear male pronouns as it is to wear quote on quote “male genes.” And in this society it's really not and so it feels, it doesn't feel right for me to ask people to use he pronouns for me. Both because I don't necessarily feel that *he* is the best option. And because again I'm not on testosterone, I'm not visually moving more towards— one's visual looks should not have to match one's pronouns 100% but it's like do I want, how much energy do I want to put into correcting people's pronouns for me and how much energy do I want to put into living my life?

O'Brien: I feel like how a lot of early 20-somethings have dealt with that is to just hang out in a gender queer centered community, right. To like form a subculture where non-conventional pronouns are intelligible to everyone. And to like not deal with the rest of the world.

Bauer: Yeah but that doesn't work in real life.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Bauer: You know and eventually it will, and it's like every year *they* gets a little bit more circulation and will eventually become something people stop thinking about. But I was— actually there was a little demonstration this morning Uptown at the Indonesian Mission about the 140 in Jakarta who had been arrested in a spa. And so I was talking with one of the guys there who is my age, a gay man, and he was like, “Oh, I know you use *they* but it just, it's hard for it to roll off my tongue and I said, “Jay,” that's his name, and I said, “Jay, do you want to be part of the problem or part of the solution?”

O'Brien: Well said. [laughter]

Bauer: And he was like, “I know.” I said, “you've got to— there was a point that people used *thy* and *thou* and now we're using *they* and you have to roll with it.” And he's like, “I know” and so like roll.

O'Brien: Why do you think that shift is happening? Why do you think we seem to be making some progress?

Bauer: So you know before, I said that there were all these people who were trans who didn't transition, and I think that with so many people who are trans transitioning, that they are trying to find what feels honest and authentic, does not split up on binary and why should you use pronouns that don't feel right, whether they are she pronouns or he pronouns? And why should you not transition because neither of those pronouns fits you? And so I think that it's great for people to say, you know, whether you want to talk about a spectrum or continuum or a three dimensional space or whatever, to find the place they are in now with the understanding that that might not be the same place they're going to be in in one year or three years or five years. And I was really concerned to change my name to pick a name that one went both ways, that felt comfortable, and that felt like I could live with. And the nice things about names you can either create one or you can choose from the million out there and the problem with pronouns is that most of the world only recognizes two and it's not like you have to either be Dick or Jane, when you choose a name you've got but with pronouns— You know we have a very inflexible language.

O'Brien: Yeah. Are there other issues that I didn't ask you about that you would like to talk about?

Bauer: No, I mean I think, I wish I could've done what I'm doing now back in 1989. I wish there would've been a way to do it and there really wasn't. I mean, I would have had to create it myself. I think if I had transitioned in '89, I would've done a binary transition and I'm not sure whether that would have been good or bad. I mean I think I would've lost my job and lost my partner and had to have reinvent myself and start over and I'm not really sure that that would've been a good thing to do. I'm not really sure that it was necessary to wait as long as I did and I'm still really unclear why I had that snapping moment when I did as opposed to ten years before or fifteen years before.

O'Brien: You said you retired from MTA? When was that?

Bauer: Yeah. Like two years ago, but I'm still consulting for them.

O'Brien: And you've been able to, you changed your pronouns on the job, you said? Or your name?

Bauer: I changed my name on the job, but people sort of got, I mean some people asked me directly and I told them directly but it was like once I did that flip the name had to go and the chest had to go

O'Brien: Yeah.

Bauer: And that was really clear to me. And people were, by and large people have been very cool with the name. Even the people who have known me for thirty years and are over 50, and over 50 your brain just does not work exactly the same and it's slow to accept changes but the

one thing they did do on my job was every time someone slipped up, everyone else in the office would say "It's Jaime." Because they were so relieved it wasn't them, who made the mistake. So I actually never had to correct anybody because the people around me corrected constantly.

O'Brien: That's great.

Bauer: When I first changed my name, they were quite reasonable about it.

O'Brien: Cool, well thank you so much for spending the time and contributing your story.

Bauer: Yeah, it's been interesting. At some point I should try to figure out all the dates of everything I did, I'm not a good archivist.

O'Brien: Yeah, well if you ever want to be interviewed again I've got more specifics on any of it I'd love to hear and thank you for contributing.

Bauer: Good and thank you yeah it was interesting.

O'Brien: Wonderful.