

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**JD DAVIDS**

**Interviewer:** Michelle Esther O'Brien

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**Transcribed by** Cassandra Roberts

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**Michelle Esther O'Brien:** Hello, my name is Michelle O'Brien and I will be having a conversation with JD Davids for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is March 11, 2017 and this is being recorded at JD's home in Brooklyn. Hello!

**JD Davids:** Hello.

**O'Brien:** Uh, tell me about your childhood.

**Davids:** I grew up in suburban Philadelphia, and, I don't know. There, uh, I was—I remember when I was I think four, telling my mom that I wanted to be a boy, and also that I wanted to marry a girl, and all these things...and she was...I think pretty shocked that, I think that's in part why I remember it, is her reaction although I don't specifically remember her reaction. And um, and I grew up like sort of mystified by like other children, in particularly girls, like not understanding their culture or why they did the things they did, and uh, but also just feeling socially awkward or not knowing how to like engage with people, although I don't know how much that was just like on the inside versus the outside. And uh, I read a lot. I sort of was an early and big reader, and lost myself in books a lot of the time. And... I grew up in a household where there was a lot of conflict, between my parents and with my younger brother at times, and so there was a disharmonious and dysfunctional experience with some uh hard stuff that comes from having a parent with a mental illness. And, also feeling that we were the only Jewish family in our neighborhood as far as I knew, I mean there were Jews like here and there. There were a couple in my school, but also feeling like that aspect of difference and not sure about that. And, so feeling kind of out of place a lot. And then I, when I was in for fourth, fifth, and sixth grades I went to a Quaker school. And that was really great for me, and I made...I always had like a couple friends, but I felt really rooted there. And then went back to public school for middle school, which is a pretty rough transition, adolescence...and started like, I mean all along I was like, I never, I never felt or never—yeah and still don't feel like I'm in the wrong body, or things like that. And didn't feel, yeah not too much like dismorphic in life. Um, and ended up in adolescence trying sort of like trying to do the girl thing and feeling like I didn't do it very well. But um, and then when I went to high school, I'm pretty like...uh, was...I sort of put peer pressure on myself for sex and drugs and like sweat stuff out, [laughter] and pound stuff, and uh then became like punk rock. And um, was sort of political after a fashion you know? As like, as far as I could sort of figure out in like a non-political family and a very political community, so just sort of just like against stuff um, in the Reagan era. And um, then uh...is this a good clip of moving through the lifespan? Okay then I um, [O'Brien inaudible] and I was like not like, like yeah um like a queer-identified youth. You know, I didn't um, I had boyfriends...and...

Davids: You can tell us a bit more details. Or...

O'Brien: More details?

Davids: Or...I'm curious about the books you've read growing up?

O'Brien: Oh, the books I read?

Dauids: Yeah!

O'Brien: Uh fiction. Well, everything! I was like a voracious reader. Like, I read, everything in like the young-adult section in the library in my little town. You know? Like, just started—like, worked my way through it and read a lot. And so, in part I—and I'm still this way to the day—I sort of like, the way I read is like...just like you wouldn't really remember every meal you had, like I sort of eat books. And I eat the things I read and I digest them and I can't really tell you what they were so much, you know? Um, I really liked *Harriet the Spy*. And I just reread *Harriet the Spy* to my daughter. And it's pretty nasty, like you know? Um, you know, so I did some editing, you know. But it's a pretty lonely kid. You know so I remember really embracing and loving that story and having my spy outfit I would put on and stuff, and when I was about like, maybe like seven, eight, you know my daughter's now seven, so it's very evocative. But um, so I really liked *Harriet the Spy*. And the Madeleine L'Engle books about, you know *A Wrinkle in Time* and stuff. I liked those! And like science fiction, my dad was into science fiction, he introduced me to that. Oh! I remember I was just telling someone the other day, I remember when I was in I think fifth grade, my dad gave me *1984* to read. And, I remember two things about sort of my social circumstances of reading it. One was that uh, my teacher was like, "Oh, there's so many good children's books to read. Why do you have to read something that's so harsh?" in a way. Um, something like that. And then there was sex in it! And I was like, "Oh my god, does my dad know that this is in this book?" [laughter] And I was like horrified, sort of touching the pages and being like, "huh!" Um, so that was memorable [laughter] as well as, you know I did absorb the political message. Um, yeah I just loved reading. And I read really fast, and so I um, you know, was sort of known for that—like being an early reader and a really fast reader, and sort of like trotted around some times for my advanced reading proclivities or whatever. And, yeah I was a funny child. And I thought when I was, yeah when I was in second or third grade my life goals were to either be a spy or a hockey player; a professional ice hockey player. Yeah, so, um...

Dauids: Had you seen any ice hockey?

O'Brien: I think I had seen...the Flyers had won the Stanley Cup for two years around then, so it was—I had seen it on TV and it was kind of a thing then, you know? Um, but it seemed like, I mean, as it turns out...I like being like... like I was not brought up to be like very physical or athletic or anything so I think like, aspiring to something that was pretty rough and male and athletic, you know? Was like, a thing. And then I ended up doing figure skating when I was an adolescent for a couple of years. But um, and then later I wanted to be a writer and I wanted to be a journalist and that's what I ended up being. And I remember I think it was in uh, early high school we had to do a character sketch and I wrote a character who was like a journalist who got like called in by the boss for being too political, and then, you know professed their vows for speaking up for the truth or something like that. So... [laughter] So yeah uh, and then when I was in high school I worked in the mall behind my high school, and I smoked a lot of pot, and had boyfriends. And then one of my more memorable parts of that I had a boyfriend whose former

girlfriend came and ordered a soda from me at the Original Cookie Company where I was working. I knew who she was, so she ordered the soda from me and she threw it in my face and said, "Stay away from Dave!" So that was a really excited moment from adolescence where I was like laughing, and was like I'm going to tell this story forever. And so now I'm tying it into this archive. It just keeps giving back, you know? [laughter] So then, so, yeah I went to college and I dropped out after a couple of months um, George Washington University in Washington D.C., and just like, I was like seventeen and wasted and you know, wasn't I wasn't up for it wasn't interested in it. And then I came home, and had a period of like lots of sex and drugs and still hadn't figure out I was queer and then, more or less got my shit together, and also my parents got divorced and I went back to school at Temple, when I was like...like a year later a year and a half or two later. And then I ended up getting married to one of my high school boyfriends, sort of like the main High School boyfriend, who I cheated on a lot. I got married to him right after my first year...right at the end of my first year of high school a as a way of asserting some sort of stability and independence, you know? And, when I was in my last year of college, I was a women's Studies major, and um, joined the Temple Coalition for Peace and Justice...

O'Brien: What year was that?

Davids: That was, so um I don't know...when I started there it was probably like 1987 or something? And then I graduated in 1990. And so it was my last couple of years that I was involved in that. And during my last year one of the people I'd been in Temple Coalition of Peace and Justice with who graduated a year before me, joined ACT UP Philly; uh Mike Marsico. And I learned about ACT UP from him. And yeah, I think I started doing ACT UP stuff as I was finishing college, and it was also like I had started getting a clue that I was queer, you know? [laughs] So it was a nice way be around and meet queer people, as well as while I was in college, there was uh, a first set of uh cutbacks, not cutbacks but uh, restrictions on abortion rights in Pennsylvania, so there was a lot of like pro-choice organizing. So I thought that I would help with that and I remember really clearly that the groups that came to my campus they just wanted my money or my vote. And I felt, you know, I didn't have that much money and I could only vote now and then and so I um, wanted to do more. And then with ACT UP it was like, "Hey write this press release! What should we have on our signs? Make a sign, do these things, do this..." So it was just like lots to, do you know? And just to be deeply in a movement, so that was really appealing. And so I was like coming out and married to this guy and trying to figure out what to do, and then so I joined ACT UP. And whenever I got out of college I got pretty involved and so in September 1991, was, so that whole summer there was an, ACT UP was joined together to protest along the electoral campaign, you know? And it was, um, well it was before that. Wait, I'm getting my years messed up. But in 1991 was when they were starting, so when George Bush, you know the Elder, was announcing he was going to run for a second term there was a big ACT UP protest in Kennebunkport, Maine where the Bush family has their you know, main compound. And, a lot of ACT UP groups went, and we took an all-night bus and did a big die in where people were like carried up the driveway to as far as we could get towards the compound and I was like carried up and laid down you know, in this die in, and I had um at the time I had bleach blonde hair and cat eye sunglasses, so it was a very dramatic picture that ended up being in AP, um... [laughter] for some reason. I don't know

if it was because of my, look per say, but um, so then after that me and my husband and some friends drove to a friend's cabin in Maine and the whole time I was like crushed out on this woman there who was one of my ACT UP comrades. And then we came home and within the next two weeks it was—I think it was either September 10th or 11th 1991, there was a big protest at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel, where, um, George Bush was coming and it was a fundraiser for him and Dick Thornburgh, who was running for attorney general or something like that. And so there was a big coalition protest like three—I remember it was like three or four thousand people, and there was a big police riot where they particularly targeted and attacked the ACT UP section of the crowd and said homophobic shit, and this one guy was left bleeding in the street with a head wound. And so I thought—I remember thinking really clearly at the time like, "Well fuck! I'm getting like gay-bashed and I'm not even getting like gay sex!" Like, I'm doing something wrong here, like something needs to change. I had already like made out with somebody at Gay Pride that summer I think and anyway things were happening. So then I came out, and left my husband and found my first girlfriend on the index cards people had uh, people had signed index cards that had been in this demonstration so we could like testify or figure out what to do, and I had spotted this person and figured out who she was and got her number off of one of these cards [laughter] and she became my legendary first girlfriend. Um, so that was all really exciting times where things were happening pretty fast.

O'Brien: What was the scene like in that ACT UP Philly? How many people? What were their ages and genders?

Davids: Sure.

O'Brien: Like, what kind of...what was the culture like?

Davids: Well the culture was very like, again it was like, we are doing this for ourselves, we're going to—we can do anything, we're going to make everything happen. It was, and it was uh, growing rapidly. Like, I don't know when really the peaks were, but it was it wasn't like hundreds of people at meetings, but it was like—and I have a lousy memory for this stuff—but it was many many many people at meetings like dozens to a hundred maybe? And many people were in ACT UP, right? And there was—I remember at the time being like, there were protests all the time and so, across a number of issues, there was always something to do um, and go to. So there was a lot of like turn out and showing up, you know? And um, and working together in person; so we would have one meeting a week that was our big planning meeting, and then we have our action committee where people would make the signs, and you know the time, so it was like, we had one computer we shared in our office then we all made signs together, made phone calls together and just did things. It was—the genders were pretty mixed. I'm assuming it was mostly male, but there was a lot of women. It was mostly our alt-implicitly or explicitly you know cis identified people, there wasn't a lot of consciousness about trans stuff or talk about it as I remember. There was— it was mostly white though not all white. And there was uh, we had a sort of dynamic between us and We The People, which was across the country and there was PWA coalitions, so coalitions of people with AIDS that in the one in Philly earlier on, had been sort of uh, got conscious and did some things about race, right? So it was basically like,

there were interventions where it became led by people of color by and large. I mean there was the director David Ferris who was a white guy and there was real leadership, deep leadership, by people of color. Um, maybe similar, sort of like a housing works dynamics they had though, not so much services and much smaller. But so we had ACT UP and we had We The People and there was some crossover and there would be times where We The People would be like, "We've got this." You know, and um, we would sort of take marching orders from them. But there were key leaders in ACT UP like uh, Kiyoshi Kuromiya, uh, Roy Hays, other leaders of color. Um, but particularly in that era it was mostly white, as far as I remember it. And, you know, a lot of people with HIV and dying with HIV, you know people were, it was—I really remember just that feeling which...it's not right to say that it was normal at the time, but I hadn't ever been, you know, that age before and found myself in that circumstance where I would just witness people declining over the course of meetings you know, and working together as comrades, I—and just it seemed not normal but it was expected and inevitable. And including like there were people in ACT UP like leaders like Dominic Bash, I remember um, like handling it with incredible power and grace and consciousness, that he is a person who is like, deeply queer, been kicked out of the seminary, you know, deeply religious, in recovery who found himself dying, right? And just like living in that, like living into that, and just being that...the sort of like culture and ethics being really like really upfront about stuff, you know? And then people would start to have...they would decline, and it was like hard, and so like, you know through the year facilitating meetings, dealing respectfully with people who I knew well or I didn't know well, who either they, you know, had um, AIDS dementia or maybe they came in because uh they had something going on in their lives, that they had some mental health challenges or whatever, and dealing respectfully with people all as movement comrades, right, while running a meeting, is uh, prepares you for a lot. [laughter] So I got prepared for a lot. And then I also, um, I had a couple of jobs out of college but they ended up at one point I...my first like reporter job and one of the few I've had, is I ended up becoming a news reporter—it was a halftime job I think for Occurans [sp?] which was the second Philadelphia gay newspaper at the time, um, so it had broken off from Philadelphia Gay News and it was run by basically...basically it was run by these three men who had started it, and they were all dying of AIDS, basically. And one man was um, Frank Broderick was a news reporter, and I was brought in to sort of shadow him and take over as his health was declining. And um, I didn't know what the fuck I was doing and then the publisher would um, fire us all like every two weeks or so, he would like be really angry and like fire us all, and they're just like...go home for a day and come back it's fine. And so, it was pretty intense, you know, in addition to not knowing what the hell I was doing. So I don't remember how long I did that for. It wasn't long, but it was pretty um...it was both really informative and I can't remember a lot. I've really been thinking a lot lately about how little I remember from those days. [laughter] Um, so that was kind of intense and um, I...what should I tell you next?

O'Brien: Well...what was the...[laughter]...I'm personally quite curious about the class dynamic in ACT UP. Uh, do you remember what kind of professions or backgrounds people came from, and...?

Dauids: Yeah, i mean uh, it was mixed and it was subterranean like, I don't remember too much of it being discussed, but uh, it was a range. Like, in people's professions, like Dominic Bosch had been a hairdresser, and um, I believe it was fairly you know, from Philly working class there were people who had come through like, professional—not professionalized jobs, me, I came from an upper-middle class background. There's, there was a range. And in part, people didn't talk...either I don't remember or sometimes like it was just like, "We're doing this thing!" you know? And, I was like living in you know, and I was living in like the, well so after I broke up with my girlfriend, you know, after a year and a half and then I moved into Erica's Collective Housing from sort of then on out from my time in Philly. So I was sort of rooted in this like, activist-minded, anarchist community in which people supported ACT UP, many people were in ACT UP, and it's also part of why I ended up sort of rooted in that more than the lives of people in ACT UP who weren't in that, or know more about them. So I think that probably what it was, was there was different social class clusters or cliques even in ACT UP. The people would meet up at meetings and do these things together and then go our separate ways. Um, but it wasn't always class stratified, but we sort of went to our home groups or our home communities, right? Um, so uh there was like center-city gay men, for example I'm sure, or like Jonathan Lax, um, and then there would be like, people who...and there started to be more through the years you know, there was a big shift in the group, but there was more like people from the uh, recovery communities in Philadelphia who tended to be people of color from poor working class backgrounds. And then there was like sort of like mixed class anarchists who maybe skewed middle class or upper-middle class, I don't really know but, I'm pretty sure, you know. But it wasn't...there wasn't often moments in ACT UP Philly like I've been in or seen in other activist groups of sort of like, uh, you know breaker of self-criticism and analysis about "Why don't we have this? Or why aren't we doing this? Or look what happens in this class dynamic?" I think there were probably really intense class dynamics that just went on and were un-confronted. Yeah.

O'Brien: So the last specific action you mentioned in ACT UP Philly was in '91?

Dauids: Yeah.

O'Brien: Tell me about the early and mid-90's as in ACT UP Philly.

Dauids: Um, well, a lot of it was like things like I remember in like, for example, like Collingdale which is like a small township or whatever in Delaware county put out one ad for a sheriff, I think it was, or something like that? And they said they had to be HIV negative, like something enraging like that so we would be like, "We'd rather go!" and we'd like go and protest that, right. So we'd be like, case by case, or someone can't get something from their insurance and we would go into that office, we would be like the shock troops, we'd just show up or we'd just show up, so there was that. There wasn't...I remember when I first went to, I went to the Midwest Academy Organizing training, in um, I think it was like 1994, and I was like, "What?! This is what organizing is?" Like, I had no idea. Basically we were mobilizing constantly. And it would also be like, ACT UP New York would have like a national action national action, we would send a busload of people. You know? It would be like part of our job would be to fill the bus. And for whatever reason I never went to these

big national actions that, you know, have been reported on. Like, I really didn't do much of any of those. Um, but it would be uh, um and also what we did in Philly was a fair amount of research advocacy. We put out our own standard of care. It was a four-fold or maybe six pages at some point, and so um, it had something like thirteen or sixteen editions came out before the government had its own standard of care for HIV. And it was uh, in English and Spanish, and it was...we would just mail it out, lots of places, and leave stacks places, and it was a tool that people could take to the doctor with them to say here's what I need, here's how I should be treated. Um, and people would also come to me to share information. So, here's a new clinical trial, here's something that's promising, so there was that aspect. It was a place people could go to live in different ways, you know? We also had some great parties for fundraisers, uh, people would like hook up, meet people at ACT UP, you know. And we would...I wish I could look at a timeline. I mean we definitely had our own campaigns, it wasn't just reactive. We started a meal exchange, for one, right. I just don't remember the years of anything. But it was a great—I learned so much from it because uh, it was led...uh, I remember Scott Tucker who was a leader in the group who went to San Francisco for a year and then came back and said, "You've got to start a syringe exchange." We're like, okay. And the key in our strategy was that we were gonna start it and make the city fund it and run it; that we were not going to be doing this as a volunteer activity. It was hardcore public health and it needed to be funded and staffed. So our campaign as I remember it, was we were going to start it to show what could happen and the sky wouldn't fall down. And we were going to get it acknowledged as legal and funded in six months. And I think we did it in eight or nine months.

O'Brien: Wow!

Davids: Yeah, so that was really important. And then sometime after the states that they were going to come and raid, you know, and shut it down and the um, health commissioner came that day, and the mayor was on-call and said he would show up if they showed up, and they didn't show up. But um, so that was—

O'Brien: The mayor would show up to...

Davids: At the syringe exchange.

O'Brien: To...on your side?

Davids: To defend it. Yeah. Against the state.

O'Brien: Wow.

Davids: Yeah, because it was there was a—something was in the Philadelphia city charter saying that in a public health emergency they could supersede state law. Uh, meaning, in this case the drug paraphernalia law. So that was what it was uh, understood to be. So that's how (?) of Philadelphia got started. That's uh, that's another thing that happened in those years is like we would—we would start something and we got spun off as a non-profit or project. So, different ones include like Midnight Cowboy Project, which was a



street outreach for sex workers, late night stuff. Hasan Gibbs (?) was a big part of that for many years. And, um, the community—God, it was like the Community Condom Initiative or Community Condom Project which became Youth Health Empowerment Project, which was and is like a youth-organizing and services and health place, or initiative. Some of these things came to be um, housed at Philadelphia FIGHT. Which is uh, I ended up working—a bunch of us ended up working at FIGHT, um, which was a—started out standing for Field Initiating Group for HIV Trials. Which was...

O'Brien: Oh, I didn't know that. [laughter]

Dauids: Yes, that's right! It was an acronym.

O'Brien: Wow!

**Dauids:** It—it dropped being an acronym long before that became the current trend. But um, so Philadelphia FIGHT was part of the community based clinical trials network of AMFAR and so one of the first like, things I did there was like data entry in the Mac in the box computer or we were doing a natural history study of just um, putting stuff from people's charts into a national database to just figure out what the hell was going on with people. You know? Um, and then Philadelphia FIGHT grew into these different projects and sort of some programs and became this broad thing. And, but it would have a monthly session called Information You Need To Live, at a hospital or auditorium, or it would be like the latest research...and it was very much the part of you know, there was this culture of like you know we need to—no one's going to save our lives but ourselves and, um we do all we can, and um, Kiyoshi Kuromiya was a big person in ACT UP Philly um, in those years, and his whole practice as a movement leader for many years was a number of things. I would say one was just showing up everywhere and all the time. But the second was just being prepared and doing what needed to be done so, um, a lot of like information exchange, sharing information, kicking the door open and bringing others with you was a big part. And so he was very involved in national and international like clinical trials advocacy, and that was a big thing then because like that's how people got care then was through clinical trials was one of the ways. And so, he um, when I started doing stuff at FIGHT uh, Coleman Terrell, who worked—was one of the first staff people there in ACT UP, he got me the BA on the Community Advisory Board for Pediatric Clinical Trials which also included prenatal transmission, research and then as it was local trials affiliated with a national network and Kiyoshi got me to come to one of their national meetings in D.C. and it was great because it happened to me—it was the AIDS Clinical Trials Group, and it happened to be during the election when Bill Clinton got elected, right? And so I was there at this meeting in D.C. where also the DNC had their victory party. So I was with all these great like, powerful dykes from ACT UP L.A. um, that had this banner...they just brought along this banner that said "no matter who's president, there's still an AIDS crisis." 'Cause that's you know, you can always use that. So um, we took over the stage um, at the Sheraton Omni Hotel I think it was—ballroom right after as Jesse Jackson was speaking, with our banner, and like issued a, you know, call to Bill Clinton saying, basically like, we don't really, well let's see what you actually do now, right. Like, he said good stuff too, he was forced to say good things during the campaign. And the next day went to the National Press Club to

uh, there was like a press conference of LGBT groups I think, or AIDS groups, I don't know but we also did the same things of sort of like, we're not giving you the benefit of the doubt type thing. So that's not what happened at every Clinical Trials Advocacy meeting, but I ended up being a representative to the National, um the Committee of the AIDS Clinical Trials Group that I was appointed to this um, community constituency group that people with HIV and allies won to like sit next to these researchers gaining federal funding to figure out what—how these trials should work, right, and what they should be about and so, I was on the Prenatal Transmission Committee, so in 1993 there was this trial ACTG076 that was the first trial that showed that if pregnant women took AZT um, in the third trimester and then the babies got it for six weeks I believe of life, transmission rates went from 25% to 8%. So it was like besides natal exchange it was like the only thing that worked, um, for prevention for a very long time. It was a huge, huge thing and it was pretty incredible to like be in the thick of that. It was a pretty big deal. And then I also saw—it was another lesson learned. Once those findings came in in Philadelphia and around the country, public health got its shit together, right? And I remember in Philly there was this Blue Ribbon Panel, it was called, that brought together like the neonatologists and the—like everybody who may encounter pregnant women to say how are we going to get these systems in place, like 'cause it was a lot of systems issue of like, making sure that women got tested for HIV and treatment and, didn't like fall through all these cracks. And I saw how they could get their shit together, and they got their shit together for the babies in ways they didn't get together for others, you know? So that has been a lesson that has carried—has not been lost on me to this day. You know, and you look at, for example, what has and hasn't happened with prep, right? Like basically, AZT was prep for babies, and really like mountains were moved, so.

**O'Brien:** I'm excited to hear about the way ACT UP spun up these non-profits...

**Dauids:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** ...that I've heard a bit about how those happened in New York. It sounds like the dynamic from the needle exchange was, you all would come up with an idea, do a volunteer project, and the City Department of Health was on your side, and some federal money...? So then you'd be able to get some city and federal money to keep the project going as a non-profit. Is that...?

**Dauids:** To make it work? Yeah. Well another things is at the time I was like, very opposed to like working for any AIDS groups. So I wasn't in on necessarily, or understanding the funding mix of things as much. Maybe there were some private funds in there, I don't really know. But yeah, pretty much. But because, then I ended up doing it right? Because [laughs] in uh, 1995, we started planning something called Project Teach—I can't remember the name. But basically what was happening was I had lunch with Jeff Maskovsky, and complained. He had stopped going to ACT UP Philly meetings, but um, he was someone I knew from ACT UP. I think he had stopped going, I can't remember. But he had been formative with Youth Health Empowerment Project and other things and he—I was talking about how there was this gap in information where it was 1995 so there was starting to be more hope of treatment, helping people stay alive longer, and there was such a gap

between who was getting this information and who wasn't. And in Philly a lot of it was about like race and class, or primarily even race maybe. But, so, he was like let's start something. So we started this program with FIGHT and We The People called Project TEACH, which stood for Treatment Education Activist Combatting HIV. And um, it was a training program for people with HIV about treatment and activism, and so we our first funding for that, I believe was "CDC Secondary Prevention funds" air quotes, "secondary prevention." Which meant when someone has HIV, how do you prevent progression to AIDS? That's sort of what it meant at the time. And so, I think that was our first—I think we started our own and then got the CDC money. I can't really remember. And I was like, I can only work part time on this because I have to, you know, be a pure activist and not be...and then I was working on my time on it and then it became full time and stuff. But, um, Project TEACH was a pretty awesome, and is a pretty awesome project where um, we also would uh, like I would lead off one of the first classes by talking about how um, there was a you know this HIV definition and people around the country and around the world fought to change the definition so more women would get AIDS. And then someone in the class would be like, "Wait, what?" What are you talking about? [laughter] And I'd be like, "Oh, now I see your listening!" Right? And so um, talk about how HIV is not just medical, you know, or physical. It's political, it's economic, it's social; it's all these things. And then so from the beginning we would really be like opening it up, right. And um, and my stance throughout it, which I got some heat from some people in ACT UP about, was like some people thought it should be more like heavy-handed about you should do this, and now you should join ACT UP. But, I um, saw that it was—it most sort of like ethical and right, and then the fact they'd just be like, "why don't you check out ACT UP?" So we—after we ran our first pilot class, people were like, "Yeah, that was great but we want homework. Like we want this to be more like school." Like, uh, and so and we're like, "Okay!" So for homework would sometimes be to check on ACT UP meetings or ACT UP demonstrations, just like, "How was that for you? What did you think?" So to treat people as like freethinking adults, you know, and not cattle, you know. So um, many people from Project TEACH joined ACT UP, and became—and then there was a set of people who became court leaders the next phase of ACT UP, you know, like John Bell, Joyce Hamilton, Adbdul-Hakim, um, yeah there was a lot of people. And um, which had been our intention in part, to like start this as a intervention to get people information and also to bring people into the HIV movement.

**O'Brien:** Did that...was that a part of changing the race and class demographics of ACT UP over that time?

**Davids:** I mean I would hazard to say it was the way of—I don't think there was anything particular else that we... I mean we had been—well there had been like a consistent and building relationship with One Day At A Time, which was a network of recovery houses. That had key leaders living with HIV like Marc Van Doren (?). So it was interwoven, right? So Marc Van Doren, and his spouse at the time Nadie Doren (?) they were in the pilot class for Project TEACH, um so it was sort of interwoven and um, so there was the One Day At A Time relationship that was deepened through Project TEACH as well. So that was a part of it too. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Tell me about that shift.

**Dauids:** Well, the shift was that more of our members were African, particularly African American people, Philadelphians, several of whom actually come from Baltimore, actually because, at the time, I think it's changed somewhat, a lot of people, were coming from Baltimore to Philly to quote unquote "get clean" because Baltimore had no drug treatment. And Philly was at the time, or is super easy to just say you're a recovery house and start taking half of people's check or whatever and have them live in a rural house that you got donated through a church or something. So there was a lot of people who would come from Baltimore, like John Bell, who very much you know, well—there were two roots. Like one was John and his very sort of analytical and conscious way observed and studied ACT UP and figure out his relationship to it, and where he wanted to be in it and did it, right. And then there was also, we did mass turnout where recovery houses had people working to change their lives, right, who needed stuff to do during the day, and would fill buses to go to D.C. to protest. And then they would talk about you know, how that was for them or whatever, you know. So it became—it was sort of like a whole house would go, it wasn't optional, you know. So people would go together, sort of like recovery [inaudible] or something, right? So it was like, and so several of the leaders of the recovery houses that were either part of the ODAAT the One Day At A Time umbrella, or different recovery houses—some of them joined ACT UP. Other ones were more like, "Okay, call me when we have our next thing." Um, and then there were the...as more and more people went through Project Teach, they would, either become, you know, contrary of ACT UP, just people who would come and do mobilization stuff or come to our Monday night meetings and engage in the planning. There's also one place Community Living Room, was a project that was for people who were um, double or triple diagnosed with HIV and mental health stuff, and for some people also like substance issues. And so we had a good relationship also with Community Living Room and a number of Community Living Room members were also hardcore ACT UP members for many years. So it was a very mixed group, mixed in all kinds of ways, um, in terms of not just race and class, and [inaudible] status but also sort of concurrent health challenges, neurodivergents, things like that. Yeah, it was interesting.

**O'Brien:** So these new members were largely African American coming in through Project Teach and working class?

**Dauids:** Mhm, yeah.

**O'Brien:** What—how did uh, white members of ACT UP respond to that, or engage that?

**Dauids:** Well the group had become much smaller. Um, you know throughout—across ACT UP chapters and across the country—like a lot of ACT UP chapters and some literally died off. Yeah, or people were just the remaining members were just too heartbroken, right. And others were like, once Clinton got elected felt like they could step away, you know and sort of take a break/take a breath. So we'd become much smaller and much more proportionally HIV-negative, as well as remaining mostly white. And so people were coming into a smaller group, and um... I think for the core of us who were involved, it was something that we very much wanted and were like architects and involved in, you know, this transition. So I—there was a core of I'd say about twenty ongoing committed white, as

far as I know, identified people and some others, who sort of saw through this transition and some were down—part of making it happen or watch it happen and then, you know went their ways. I don't think anyone left because of like, it transitioned to being more mixed in our meetings or something.

**O'Brien:** What led some white members to take a step back when Clinton was elected and some white members to really focus on trying to recruit and develop black leadership?

**Davids:** Well because Clinton did come in with a mandate to do something about AIDS, you know, and so he was dogged on the campaign trail and made some promises and some money started coming. And so I think for people who had come in or had come to some belief that in political solutions to the HIV crisis, there was now someone to do it, in order to focus on it in a different way. Um, I do think that a lot of it though was just fatigue, um, and it may have been somewhat you know, structural loosely knit movement. And then people also started getting jobs, I would think, in AIDS organizations or different public health stuff. Like there were some more jobs to be had. So, people shifted, maybe people were doing the same hours but in a different setting. And then for me...I mean for me like, HIV had always represented this what now more commonly is called intersectional issues in work, right. So I wasn't going anywhere, right. So because I was there on purpose, you know. Not I mean, you know, I mean I do feel moved that part of me is uh, was drawn to HIV activism because of my own life path where I do think that um, you know, with um the amount of like, type of sex I had I was protected by my race, by my class, by my geography, and then in some ways by my you know, non-queer at the time gender or sex from not getting HIV. But otherwise, you know, it was luck of the draw that it wasn't me, right. So I have a personal identification with happening to be HIV negative that in some ways was luck, but in many ways was privilege. So my intersectional analysis of HIV also comes from my understanding of my own sort of privilege. And then in that era, the Clinton era, I mean...it had continued to become more and more clear when treatment was available. Like that, there was some people who were getting information and access and there were ones who weren't. And it was tracking along like the academic—like the academic had tracked along lines of marginalization. So you have a sector of people who became positive because of, who happened to be gay, but otherwise were—otherwise had resources in life, and then there was everyone else, you know. So I was sort of sticking with the everybody else, that includes a lot of gay and queer people, but also is about race and class and drug use and other things. So a lot of us were in it because of that and stayed in it because of that. And we were also continuing to do like, you know, stuff about syringe exchange and um, women's access to clinical trials, and um, we had a imprisoned ACT UP member, Gregory Smith, who was in prison in New Jersey for—he had been serving a robbery charge and uh, you know prior to knowing I think, made people in ACT UP...people met him because of his case where he was in for robbery in New Jersey, he was from Philly, and he was attacked by prison guards when advocating for his healthcare and was accused of biting and spitting and sentenced to attempted manslaughter for another twelve and a half to twenty-five years. And so we had a relationship with Greg and worked on his appeal, which was lost, and then supporting him after that after legal organizations stopped supporting him you know, because he was no longer a case, you know. And so, we were working with Greg and then just...we ended up working on issues of healthcare in Philly. You know...there was a lot

of stuff to do. And then at some point it turned into like, Medicaid managed care was coming down the pipe. And so obviously by this time we were doing some hardcore like organizing and some policy work and not following not so much...there had been ACT UP network nationally that sort of dissolved or devolved and so we were pretty much our own force by the mid to late 90's.

**O'Brien:** What year did Project TEACH start?

**Dauids:** We started out first class in um, January of 1996 which was very soon after Jonathan Lax who is one of the people who had been very involved in Philadelphia FIGHT and ACT UP. He died after being one of the first people to get protease inhibitors. He went to the um, emergency room during a snow storm and was misdiagnosed and they didn't catch that he was having a heart attack may or may not have been treatment related, he died. So that was a pretty big deal that he died right before this class started. So that's how I remember it, you know.

**O'Brien:** You mentioned living in the anarchist, uh, group house scene in west Philly?

**Dauids:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Tell me about that.

**Dauids:** Well it was really helpful um, as far as not having to be gainfully employed a lot of the time because it was low budget, and it was very supportive. I remember like...I was noticing like for a bunch of months or whatever, it always seemed like a bunch of us who were in ACT UP we would come home Monday nights from the meetings, they were long and we were tired, and there would be this pot of food and, you know then my roommate Mimi was like "You guys, I make it because I know you're coming home from ACT UP like, it's on purpose," you know. So it was like that kind of thing. You know, and so, it was a supportive easy, fun environment in which to live, that...you know what? It at times would go into an out of sort of self-criticism and stuff you know, like angst and not, about who we were and what we were doing and why. But it was pretty formative and great for a lot of people, and a lot of people come into the anarchist community and be a part of ACT UP, or learn from ACT UP, and sort of had credited it with their next phases or ongoing movement work, you know, as sort of like a training ground for doing stuff and figuring out how to make change happen. Um, and and I uh...yeah. I really appreciate that I got to live in that way. It was helpful.

**O'Brien:** Give us a picture of that scene for people who have never encountered it.

**Dauids:** [laughter] Well there's big houses, so lots of people can live in them. So I ended up...well the place I lived in for the longest time I think I lived for seven years, a place called Not Squat, which had been Hell Squat, which was a squatted four story home that people bought at a sheriff's sale for I think like, \$800 or \$2,000 or something, also by going in and intimidating other buyers—potential bidders. 'Cause people would...developers would come, I mean developers with a small "d" 'cause this is like Philly, you know, in that era like

there weren't really any like big-time developers. But like, so they bought the house. I moved in like six months after it was purchased, and at the time I remember there was like an abandoned car out front where like tumble weeds sort of blew in and so like it was sort of like...it was like going back to nature and there were raccoons living under this car and, we had like, the only toilet was in the kitchen like behind the screen, and we didn't have hot water yet. But there were people who lived there who had skills and would sometimes strong-arm the rest of us into helping sometimes it didn't work, who put in hot water and built bathrooms and things like that. I had a stove in my room that was my heat, because I guess it had been maybe apartments at some point. But, so I heated with the, you know, the blue gas of the stove for a couple winters. And, we would put in I think maybe fifteen dollars a week for food and I think pay. I don't remember [inaudible] so maybe once a month. So we just kept it in a box, we had like a cash in a locked box, and um, have house meetings and um, parties, and um...it was a twin house. So the next door house had been uh, gutted in a fire, and people had purchased that before the Squat was purchased, so people sort of co-owned these houses, and we built the porch. And that created a lot of community goodwill and people were like, "Oh, the hippies rebuilt the porch," or whatever. You know? So um, it was a nice porch. And then eventually we were able to...friends or members of the community were able to get another place across the street and then squatted the place next door from that for a while, and so um...I ended up with some people buying a house on the market so-called...so we got like uh, it was one four-story house and plus four apartments next door that had all been and old funeral home that we bought for \$55,000 with an owner-financed mortgage. That was my big thing of being able to do, you know, to help make that happen. Um, and I remember we moved in and we like turned the heat on and the heat went on and I was like, "Whoa! Hey! [laughter] That's good!" And that was also we...that was a house that um, the initial like founding group, including members of ACT UP who were people of color and or HIV positive, current and former drug users. So that was a move, a intentional move that had its challenges. And, but that was sort of something we tried, that I was able to help try out in community. And uh, yeah, I remember it was nice because I didn't have to like make plans with people. I'd just like sit around in my kitchen wherever I lived and people just show up, and it was fun. It was just a ready-made community. So that was, that felt really fantastic, you know.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, I have a lot of memories I remember too...

**Davids:** Yeah, right? Me too! [laughter] Also it was like, you know when I lived in Not Squat for a big chunk, it was like I was living there with my, I had this partner, and we were living in there together and in ACT UP together, and then we got into a relationship with um, a person who lived across the street, um, and then my partner also got into a relationship with her roommate, and they all joined ACT UP, so we're all in ACT UP. So that was a little complicated but you know, fine at times, and great at times, and challenging at times, so there was that aspect too. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** And how did you talk about your gender and sexuality during the 90's?

**Davids:** Well, that was a long span the 90's; it really varied so um, you know, in the beginning of the 90's, like in 1990, I was straight, female. And then I came out as bisexual,

and then came to take on like, dyke, butch, leather-dyke, different like aspects trucking around there. And then I had like in the mid-90's like what I called my fem fancy phase, where I was like...it wasn't like really fem it was more like glamorous, as I thought it, sort of trashy glamor, longer hair, uh...the clothes were like more expansive. So that was like kind of fun um, for a while. I had green hair a lot then too, that was good, like the um, it was the Manic Panic Enchanted Forest, which actually my boyfriend has now and I put in my hair a couple weeks ago and it sticks because of the gray, you know? I had it for a week again, it was really great. But and then in the, yeah...so like yeah, when we started Project TEACH since then I was known as the girl with the green hair. So I would wear like, I would bike to work in my bike shorts and then like throw this little frock on with my you know, combat boots or whatever, you know, so...and then, and then I just got like yeah—then I was like okay no, I really am sort of like this butch or trans or whatever...I just feel like it was sort of like I didn't really, sometimes I worried about the language and sometimes I didn't. And then I uh, I just...there was just a certain phase where it really transitioned over to more over to a like, in my sex life I felt more male identified when I was doing it and then my gender presentation was sort of shifting more anchored, more core into like gender non-conforming or gender...I think of like gender-queer. I was talking about being like gender-queer was my thing for a while. And I think that part of it was like, I was sort of locked into that...those couple of relationships where I was sort of more of a fixed object. And when those ended, I shifted more...that was like 2002, when I first started coming to New York and stuff. I was more...I was becoming more trans identified. Yeah. So that was, the trajectory.

**O'Brien:** So before we get to New York...[laughter]

**Davids:** [laughter] Yeah...

**O'Brien:** Is there anything more on the 90's span that you wanted to include in this interview?

**Davids:** Well yeah I think that part of it was like, when not having been a queer youth and then coming into dyke/lesbian stuff when I did, like I like came out as I was like 23 I think? And my girlfriend and others who had been out just a few more years more than me, they...everyone all of a sudden was like discovering like, more expansive sex. So I like hit [makes smacking noise] it right on time, where like people were like, "Yeah, fisting!" I was like, "Okay!" [claps] You know so...there had been these like lesbian sex war type things like that. I don't know...they were actively involved. But it had been...there wasn't...it was just a funny...it was a great time; I had a great timing basically. So I felt like I had some really great timing. So I think in part like my gender expression...I don't know the words. But my like naming or whatever, didn't really need to be outside of dyke because it was super...it was like {makes explosion noise} blowing up, right. So there was a lot for me there. Um, so uh, that was pretty exciting. So I just want to give a shout out to that! [laughs] Give thanks to that! Because that was really good. So um, and there was a lot in there for me, you know. And uh, yeah.



**O'Brien:** So that gives us a pretty good picture of the 90's in Philadelphia. [laughter] Tell...what brought you to New York?

**Davids:** Okay so, well there's a piece in about 1999...whew...we started working on um, in ACT UP on global HIV treatment access and global trade issues. We were sort of tricked into it.

**O'Brien:** Global trade was a big issue then...?

**Davids:** Yeah, well we were sort of tricked into it by Rainforest Action Network. [laughter] I went to this research conference, you know I had been continuing research advocacy and training people about research, and I went to this research conference where like someone connected the head of Rainforest Action Network to me because we...he was trying to get...they were trying to get one of the people who were making a keynote speech to speak out against rainforest logging and the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act, on the premise that both the—that there was a potential cures or treatments to be found in the rainforest that were going to be lost, and other things, right. So, fast-forward a couple of years, I went to the Allied Media Conference and heard a presentation from this great rad PR person who said, "When you're making a coalition, look for unlikely allies. Like for example, we are working on this Africa trade bill, you know. And we got the AIDS people in it by saying that there would be potential cures in there..." And I was like, that was me! [laughter] Wait a second! But what happened—and it may have happened anyways and other ways, but like what happened was we had more links to...there had been people who were, they had a state department memo stating that the—particularly the office of vice president, who was about to run for president—was threatening trade sanctions or threatening like putting South Africa on notice as they were updating their post-apartheid rules, laws, that would allow for generic production of medication that couldn't otherwise be affordable, including HIV medication. So, there was like Jamie Love, this policy guy, was running around with this memo, and was like "Hey!" you know. And got to us activists where we were like, "What?!" So we started this big campaign both us and the people in ACT UP New York, and people like Alan Berkman, who was a radical HIV doctor, and he...and we started doing these protests that said, we targeted Al Gore on the campaign trail that said their campaign was called AIDS Apartheid 2000, you know? Like we had like campaigns...and, also people invaded, took over the office of the U.S. trade representative in D.C. and occupied her office and um...

**O'Brien:** What year?

**Davids:** This was 1999 I believe or 2000; Charlene Barshefsky. And, so uh, my activist...my comrades in ACT UP Philly and New York and otherwise, like they did they interrupted three out of four Al Gore's speeches announcing he was running for president; first in Tennessee, then New Hampshire, then New York. And with this banner, it said "AIDS Drugs for Africa." And overheard, I think it was Donna Brazil saying, "HIV isn't supposed to be an issue in this election!" [laughter] And I was doing the press work from home, or, at least from my office and um, it was the first time that I had this experience where the press was coming to us and being like, "Who are you people?" you know, instead of us being like,

"Cover us, please!" So we had a lot of momentum, and so we had this really multi-faceted amazing campaign and alliance and (?) by treatment campaign in South Africa and other groups, where we like during the Battle in Seattle the WTO. That was 2000, right?

**O'Brien:** 1999.

**Davids:** 1999? Okay so, we had a protest at the White House that we [inaudible] and said, we are the consolation prize since you didn't get to go to Seattle, we're having a protest at the White House about the , you know how they're trying to block the access to AIDS drugs, and so there was at one point on TV on one of the stations there was like a split screen; here are the riots in Seattle! Here's the protestors at the White House! And one of the...there were like two actual concrete things that Clinton announced that were victories from that mobilization, and one was they said they would not pursue trade sanctions against countries for making generic HIV medication. So—and I forget what the other one was. It was labor related. So, that was all very exciting and then these planes flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and we were days away from...we were...I was working on—oh! So we started this group called Health Gap, which "Health Global Access Project" and I was working halftime at FIGHT and halftime as an organizer at Health Gap, and I was focusing on, at one point, we were going to have...there was this big um, anti-corporate globalization protests against the IMF, meeting that was going to be happening in D.C. in September of 2011. And I was working with like labor groups to have a labor solidarity breakfast about HIV the morning before the big mobilization and other stuff, and was going to D.C. a lot.

**O'Brien:** What year?

**Davids:** Uh, 20...oh, 2001!

**O'Brien:** Right, right.

**Davids:** Right! So I was working on that, and it was supposed to be like September 27th of 28th or something like that. And then on September 11th these planes flew into the World Trade Center and I was like oh...all right. So then, what do I do with my life now, right? So, I went to IDA in Tennessee for a week and hung out. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** What's IDA?

**Davids:** IDA's this radical fairy (?) community. So I just went and hid out there for a week when the mobilization was supposed to happen. And um, it didn't happen. We decided...everyone decided well, we need to cancel this. And then, the reporters that had been covering the global trade issues got shifted to bioterrorism, you know, stuff, you know stopped covering our stuff. And so one of the minor things that happened is I personally was looking to do something else and like figure out how to...what was next for the HIV movement, right? At this time where there's like non-profitization, demobilization, like...how do we sustain a national movement? How do we learn from the anti-corporate globalization movement, like, what are we doing? So I applied for this fellowship in New

York that Jeff Maskovsky told me about that was called the Charles H. Revson Fellowship on the Future of the City of New York or something that was at Columbia University that ended a couple years ago where ten people, who are like mid-career mid-life do-gooders and troublemakers in New York, would get to go fuck around at Columbia for a year. I mean, two semesters, and get a stipend. That was by no way enough to live on in New York at...you weren't supposed to work. But I was from Philly, so, it was pretty much enough money for me. So I applied and got accepted, it's like their experiment in regionalism. And, 'cause I wanted to...and I went to the interview and, I thought I blew it, because they were like, "so what's next for..." it was like six or eight people interviewing me, and their like, "What's next for the anti-corporate globalization movement?" And I basically said, well, you know, if you're going to have all different kinds of people protesting mobilizations, you have to feed them, and it's about getting the hoagies to the busses, you know. And one of them looked at me and said, "Really? That's what's next, getting the hoagies to the busses?" [laughter] And I was like, yes... And then I went home and I was like, awe, fuck. [laughter] But um, and it turns out that was the right answer.

**O'Brien:** [laughs] Why was that the right answer?

**Davids:** Well, at least it wasn't the wrong answer. You know? It was like, here I'm in the trenches, and now it's like...and no 'cause she was like, "Really? That's what it is?" I was like, "Yeah! That's why I need some time away to think... about the bigger picture! 'Cause I even gain the hoagies on the busses!" [laughter] So, they let me in. And so I started living in New York part-time, and I broke up with those two partners, and, started trying to figure out I...what was next. And I took the the Life and Times of Malcolm X seminar with Manny Mirabal.

**O'Brien:** Wow.

**Davids:** Yeah. And I took a social women's class and failed it because I didn't write the paper. I'm not a very good student. But it was great being able to hang around, I went to the gym a lot. And I was starting to figure out what am I apart from Philly, you know, kind of thing. And I was sure I was going to go back to Philly. Like in my interview they were like, "Would you consider staying in New York afterward?" And I'm like no, I'm a Philadelphian. So then I moved to New York. [laughs] Um, and started this group called CHAMP: Community HIV AIDS Mobilization Project. And the idea was to look at, what turned out to be like network strategies for social movements in HIV but I didn't know that was a thing when I...I didn't know that was what I did was build networks, you know. And so like networks and communication strategies, a lot of...and digital communications, you know. We had like a good uh; we ended up having a really robust email-organizing list before many people did. And then we ended up working on HIV prevention, as an issue, 'cause I thought we'd work on treatment and then one of the people I was talking to, you know, sort of like trying to figure out what to do was like, nobody's working on treatment—um, prevention, everyone's working on treatment, you need to do that. And I was like, ah, prevention, that doesn't really work, does it? Like, there's needle exchange and prenatal transmission, but that's it, right? There like, well...you better look at that. And so we um, ended up being this group that um, we had a sticker that said, "Put the sex and drugs back

in HIV prevention." And did some things. Uh, and so, yeah I don't know what to say about that. But we formed this group and we were a non-profit, God help us, for like seven years, before we couldn't sustain it anymore and some really great people like Lee Chow, and Kenyan Farrow, and Sean Barry worked for CHAMP one time or another. And um, we figured some things out, and we also did some things, like insider and outsider stuff like for example, there were early trials on PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis, which turns out to be an incredibly effective form of HIV prevention that I myself am now using, that, the early trials were opposed by ACT UP Paris and some other activists and we helped again, sort of have the more policy people mobilize to the degrees appropriate necessary so that the trials didn't get shut down. And we were sort of on...we dogged CDC on various things, you know, during conservative administration, to have them be more bold or they...they were throwing money down the drain on the stupid reporting process. Some pretty like inside baseball stuff, you know. As well as speaking out for the intersectional justice issues um, in HIV prevention. Which you know is...HIV prevention is everything. Because it's about economics, it's about where you live, it's about if your family's more likely to be imprisoned or you are it's...it is a sex and drugs and race and class and gender stuff, right.

**O'Brien:** So what years was CHAMP?

**Dauids:** So CHAMP was...we um, started in 2003-ish and then we ended in 2010-ish. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** And I—I remember thinking about CHAMP. So prevention organizing is challenging in different ways and treatment organizing, 'cause there isn't a self-identified constituency around prevention.

**Dauids:** Right, exactly.

**O'Brien:** So how did you...you mentioned mobilizing policy people, you mentioned networking with other kinds of organizations, but how did you deal with the fact that there wasn't a community of people out there like, wanting to organize around prevention for themselves.

**Dauids:** Right, yeah. I mean, there was one person, there was Marc McLaran, at GMHC who Greg Gonzales worked to get hired, who was the one full-time prevention policy person HIV in the United States as far as I knew at the time. And he was on our...[laughs] he joined our board and he was great. He talked about it, he said, "HIV prevention is the bell that doesn't ring" right? And, if it works well, no one notices, that's the thing. And no ones really...well now Gilead, God love 'em, figured out a way to make money off of it. But in general and at the time, there was like...no one can make money off of HIV prevention. No one's making money off selling condoms, things like that you know. It's not a big thing. So, I think...so what did we do? We...we went to, well...I don't even remember if we had the name yet, but maybe we had the name CHAMP, I don't know. But, I was at this National HIV Conference, and CDC was about to dramatically change sort of their priorities for funding HIV prevention, they sort of hadn't told anybody and they sprung it on people at this conference. So we...I and others who were like HIV activists or policy folks, had a town meeting at this conference. We were with the constituents, right. And we collected three or

four hundred names. And I took the names. I was like, oh, I'll take the names! So it was sort of like building up through...so there was that constituency of people who understood out outrageous things were and cared a lot about it, you know. That sort of people who were in deep.

**O'Brien:** Like policy workers?

**Dauids:** No, like prevention workers.

**O'Brien:** Ooh. Frontline staff.

**Dauids:** People who were at this conference that was about...people were presenting on their models. Yeah, well the frontline staff who got to a conference in Atlanta, you know, medium-line staff. Right?

**O'Brien:** Right.

**Dauids:** Like, medium-line staff. So that was...so the HIV workforce, for lack of a better term, right. So there was that. And then we thought of CHAMP as the group that were for...yeah, were for the people who were in HIV to keep or put an activist hat on, even though sometimes they had to take it off and sit at their desk. We envisioned people who were like, frustrated and they either could or couldn't speak out in their work or community but they could through us, right. So we were that. And then, so we...and we also um, leech out when he came to work at CHAMP, he had been working at the um, AIDS Treatment Data Network on a project that was focused on mobilizing to get people HIV treatment and work on pricing and access issues. So he had a big set of contacts that he brought in from there. We basically just—you know, knew how to like make a...collect a lot of names. Like just relentlessly just collected names at conferences and gatherings and um, so we appealed to people's activist sense of things, it was sort of like, hey you may of heard or been in AIDS activism and you're not seeing it today and that's what we're doing, in sort of a national framework.

**O'Brien:** How interesting.

**Dauids:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** So...and organized in a way that relies on this huge professional apparatus of AIDS services.

**Dauids:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Um, with uh, drawing on the mythology and the inspiration of AIDS activism history.

**Dauids:** Yeah, like when I was pitching us to funders; I said, you have in the HIV world a tremendous body of people who are organized professionally and culturally or socially but

not politically, and we're here to do that with you're help, you know. And so I kept going to these funders who were like, it's unclear if there's a million of them...but the handful of them who were gay men who had been in ACT UP in some way or another, or like thought of themselves having been in ACT UP, and I would meet with them and they would say, "Well I'm skeptical." And any time they said they were skeptical, we ended up getting funded. So that was an interesting experience to have, you know. And there had been like a report that came out from Ford Foundation, HIV Advocacy at the Crossroads I think it was called, and there were three groups in it that were cited as having been successful in sort of the previous era, and it was um, Health Gap, Global Aids Alliance, and maybe the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership or ACT UP...I can't remember who the third one was, but I was like, "Hey! Guess what? I was like a pivotal person in all three. So how about you now, invest in this mission that we're doing now." So um, that was helpful.

**O'Brien:** So who would fund you guys?

**Davids:** Uh, we got our first funding was from a little bit from Broadway Cares, Equity Fights AIDS, um, a little...like \$3,000 I think. And then um...well the first thing that I did was on unemployment and did some consulting—like some consulting jobs and put it into the organization. [laughs] And so it was self-funded and I was the only staff person and actually ethically like, we were about to shut down if we didn't get enough funding to hire other staff, 'cause I'm like, this is being a consultant not being an organization, you know? And then we...so we get little bits here and there...so we got Broadway Cares, and then we got funding from the Public Welfare Foundation from Adisa Douglas who was a visionary person working in philanthropy, and um, and then Ford Foundation kicked in. And when they kicked in, we're like, okay, it seems like we can get this to go. And then we came to get funding at one time or another from the Gates Foundation (?) um...I can't remember. I have some blocks. It was a lot. But um, we built up to having at our peak about, uh maybe like uh, I don't know if we ever achieved it, but we envisioned a \$700,000 a year budget, and then at one point we had seven fuller part-time staff people and it was—and it was not sustainable. And all along we probably should've been a project with someone else. Some people said to me, it's a shame you have to be an executive director. And I have a lot to say about that. Maybe for another day.

**O'Brien:** Yeah?

**Davids:** Yeah. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** Uh, so what was your life like during these years of running CHAMP when you weren't at work?

**Davids:** Well it varied a lot like at some point a couple years into it, I moved to Rhode Island because I...I fell in love with someone who was living there and, became partners. We had two small offices for a while, so I was working remotely, and I also got very sick, with a like this mystery seemingly-neurological and autoimmune condition, and then I also was trying to become a parent and ended up conceiving and birthing a child. So a lot was going on and, a lot of struggle and transitions, and well as great times, you know. So it was

complicated and then, also the challenges of running a start-up or movement non-profit that are myriad and thorny. So it was pretty tricky times. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Let's talk about those things [laughter] in sequence. So, uh, tell me about being sick.

**Dauids:** So I started having...I've always had sort of like funny little health things that...or out you know, just been sort of...not being as sickly child, like a sickly child... People would joke like, always go like HIV...I would have like some cold or some virus or something and people with HIV are like, "Why are you sick all the time?" you know. But just prone to little things and then I, started having mysterious symptoms in 2006 after having some sort of seemingly sinus infection or something. I started having nerve pain that didn't go away and then was moving through my body, and then my body went numb, and then they found lesions in my spine which basically means sites of inflammation and they said, well okay if this happens again you have MS. And if it doesn't, you have this thing called iso—idiopathic clinical syndrome or something you know, we don't know. And so then um, I got pregnant and a few weeks into it I got symptoms again and then I had a miscarriage, not related to the symptoms, but then I got the MRI and found out, got the MS diagnosis right after...pretty soon after I had the miscarriage. So I had four years with the MS diagnosis and being on MS treatment, and um, then went off pretty quick. But then I conceived again and gave birth to my child and had the most significant attack of whatever this was, that probably started before I gave birth. But like two months...within two months post-partum I was in a lot of pain and weakness and escalating symptoms and stuff. And then I went on hardcore treatment, like the new generation of MS treatment. And then I...when I ended up moving here I went off treatment and had another attack and my diagnosis was changed to neuromyelitis optica, NMO, now called Neuromyelitis Optica Spectrum Disorder, NMOSD, which is an official rare disease that I'm atypical for as well as atypical for MS. But it's like some weird autoimmune neurogenerative something. And was...I was on immuno suppressive infusions, rituxan, about once a year for a bunch of years and now I'm not on anything. And in fact my...the hormonal aspects of my gender transition in some ways is a strategic intervention that's my best guess at how to handle now having three autoimmune diagnosis, all of which are much more prevalent in quote unquote "women." So I have undergone a hormonal transformation that we don't know, but my neurologist is like, hey, that's a reasonable guess; maybe protective against conditions right? So of course there is no research on that, but I do think it is...when we look at gender and hormonal transmission and transition, and you know, what we can do...cyborg-ian interventions that, looking at the capacity to strategically adjust our own hormonal compositions as a health intervention is significantly under a just. So right now I consider that having high normal—high level of a normal testosterone range and having my estrogen suppressed is my treatment for a cluster of conditions that I've now been diagnosed with.

**O'Brien:** So you've spent your life organizing around health issues...

**Dauids:** I know, it's pretty deep, right? Yeah. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** Are there any reflections on confronting that personally?

**Davids:** Yeah, well the first is if you're high dose steroids; don't email everyone you know at four in the morning when you can't sleep. That's something that happened early on. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** Yeah...

**Davids:** It's an over-disclosure of like the minutia of like, going through a health journey. But, yeah I um, well dealing with these chronic conditions and also dealing with, you know trans healthcare, in all respects throughout having, employer-based health insurance either my own or my spouse's or partner's...um, it's still like hard as fuck, you know? It's just really so much time to manage the administration of one's own healthcare, that's one thing. Um, especially um, you know I have conditions which are probably either...you know we don't know, likely are trauma informed, let's just say, from my own background. And um, or exacerbated um, so...it's just intense to deal with and it affects people—it comes from our intense lives in some ways. And then also...I call it the tyranny of self-care, you know this idea that you if I could just, you know eat the right kind of food and exercise the right amount that I will somehow like, it's my own fault if I'm sick or healthy, like I think that this whole thing of like, at a certain point um...

**O'Brien:** So interesting.

**Davids:** Yeah, and I think it has to do with, in my case with also like choosing pharmalogically like, what I'm doing to deal with these conditions because I have a lot of agency, right. And I go to providers that sort of looked to me or allow me to like dictate a lot of stuff, but at a certain point that doesn't necessarily help me because it means that I am on the hook, right. Like at one point, I was considering whether or not to re-infuse this amino suppressive treatment, and I was talking to a mental health provider about it, and she was like, "Well you could make it a non-decision decision." And I was like, "What?" She's like, "Well, you're not really sure whether to do it or not, and the doctor said that she prefers that you do it. So you could just do it because the doctor prefers it." And I was just like, "Wow...whoa..." You know? [laughter] Um, that was a really great moment for me, right. So there's a lot of like, the—the flip side, the downside of being a highly empowered healthcare consumer, right, is being a highly empowered healthcare consumer. And then also having a health strategy now, or like...I don't know if you call it a wellness strategy or whatever, that involves using my certain aspects of my gender-related care as a medical intervention is not something that like, my health insurance is necessarily down with or for, you know? [laughs] I switched providers to that I were thought like trans-competent in primary care and it turns out they're not. So like now, I didn't get my estrogen suppression for like three or four months because I switched insurance, they couldn't handle it. And uh, it's just a lot, you know. And um, I have a...my girlfriend who is like incredibly skilled at negotiating with uh, and or...like going through labyrinth of health insurance provision, has been uh, without her like, I don't know how I'd be handling my healthcare or my bills or any of it. And that's me someone with a really good income and a lot of privilege, and also being still fairly able-bodied. I had these attacks and I have some disability that's—like invisible disabilities. I have fatigue now and then and stuff but...um, you know, I'm...I get



around and all that. And so yeah, it's just—it's Myriad, the um, issues. Plus I like just having, as far as anyone can tell, I have these conditions that in some way may have to do with having my T-cells you know, going amuck, rather than disappearing. It's like I have like reverse AIDS or something. [laughs] It's just really weird, you know like, really? I have that? Like, did I make this up? You know it's just really it's kind of a mind-fuck. Yeah. [laughs] But I'm doing well, so that's good, for whatever reason.

**O'Brien:** Anything more you'd like to say on this health...topic?

**Dauids:** I just have so much to say, I mean there's just so much. I mean I just...there's also a lot to be said. Now I work in um, digital publishing, um, and on...digital communications on health and uh, the extent to which the market and the pharmaceutical industry determines what information even exists about healthcare and medicine because of what they sponsor and don't sponsor. If you look at uh, online communications as another area now that I think people aren't thinking or talking as much about. Um, or in this era of like, you know, "fake news" or whatever. Like what about the non-news? What about what's not on there? Like the state of digital communications on trans health is abysmal. It's really abysmal. So, um, I knew it was abysmal sort of as a consumer or whatever or a trans person. But now as a um, digital health communications producer or something, I conceive of more how there isn't there. And uh, you know no one...it's because it's not in anyone's economic interest to do it, you know. So uh, or uh sex—sex communication...everything online is about sex but there's nothing about sex, you know. So I could say a lot. [laughs] Um, but also the experience...I also like to talk about the experience of like, uh, and the privilege being able to have um, a form of reproductive support and freedom and justice in my journey as a gender non-conforming and trans person, and getting to conceive and give birth to a child, um...

**O'Brien:** Tell us about that.

**Dauids:** Well, she's great! Um, so like I always wanted to be a parent and then all of a sudden I was sort of um...it seemed expedient to be able to use my own body to do so. Um, since I thought I probably had that capacity and um...then all of a sudden I was like, in my late thirties and hadn't done it yet. And so my um, partner at the time and I were both sort of...she's a cis woman and um, we were taking turns basically a couple months on and off trying to conceive, you know. And um, I was able to...it was a process...probably about two and a half years before it really stuck, right. And um, I was able to go through the process of um, conceiving and being pregnant and giving birth at a time where I was also becoming more and more, uh, just fond I would say, of my gender identity becoming more male, you know. So um, and uh, feeling like, okay, I'll have this kid and then I also will have—not have to sort of biologically or hormonally hang onto this capacity anymore, so I was also excited about that. Um, but...so I didn't identify as male in day-to-day life when I was pregnant yet I was often perceived as that. So that was kind of funny being like five or six months pregnant and on the subway in New York and getting called sir you know, I was just...and um, or we would go in for visits and my...they would you know, indicate to my partner that she should come in and I was like, "No, it's me!" You know um, and then we switched...we were able to do a home birth so I didn't have to go into um, clinical settings for my uh,

prenatal care about halfway through; through the birth...I was able have a home birth. And after I had a home birth, I turned 42 um, ten days before my child was born. And uh, had this home birth, and the day after the home birth, the midwife came back to do the wellness check and she was like, "I really hand it to you know, having a home birth at your age it's...you know it is harder." Like, they didn't tell me until the day after I gave birth, I was like, um, thanks, 'cause they want you to be able to come through with your plan. And then being able to nurse my child, um, as a you know, trans person and see my child grow thanks to my body...it was just a very very affirming process and to be able to do it while ducking out of many of the gendered aspects of it. But then things would happen like, we would...I would go to like—any time I would go to like the child...the few times I had to go to the baby store, Bye Bye Baby—whatever they're called, like Babies R Us. And like, on the wall there would be like spoons, but they don't just have baby-feeding spoons, they have girl spoons and boy spoons. Like literally feeding gender...spoon-feeding gender, binary gender, to babies. And I would just freak out and have to flee. [laughter] You know? I just couldn't take it, you know. So um, I was...it was a real privilege to be able to avoid a lot of that, sort of gender...baby gender...industrial complex. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** This is so interesting. So, uh you alluded to all these issues, right? So often pregnancy is a time when people are hyper-gendered as female by the outside world.

**Dauids:** Right, yeah.

**O'Brien:** And managed...you were trans and gender non-conforming at the time, like uh, not necessarily male identified but..

**Dauids:** Mhm.

**O'Brien:** ...and managed to really side step some of that or not be too stressed out about that.

**Dauids:** No, it was totally affirmed. I also had um, a secondary partner at the time who was just super like, sexually affirming and I also have like a, I don't know, like a...I don't know. Like a...like my whole life I've been more readily available to pass as male or at least non-female because of my body shape, you know, is not curvy or things like that, and so that kind sort of continued until late in my pregnancy and so I just wore like, you know, big pants or whatever. Like it was just, yeah...so it was an incredibly gender-affirming experience for me. Yeah, as I recall it. Yeah. I was able to avoid so much of that, yeah. It was great. Um, yeah. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** Is there more that you'd like to say on the pregnancy or trying to get pregnant or...?

**Dauids:** Um...

**O'Brien:** ...the giving birth?

**Davids:** I didn't realize that by going the home birth route I would be able to opt out of the um, even the prenatal visits would be at home. That was awesome, that was so great, like just being able to not get into that whole system, and not have to go to the hospital was just...amazing. That was just really, um, great as a trans person. And um, I think uh...yeah that's about it. You know for me, and then it got tied in with like sick afterwards was kind of an intense thing so um, but uh, yeah it was just an overall privilege to be able to do all like...it shouldn't be a privilege but uh, I just feel really grateful that I got to have that experience, yeah.

**O'Brien:** So the arc of your gender identity here in the 90's, dyke was this very expansive, open-ended category or word. And then at this point your trans, your gender-queer, your gender non-conforming...did...was there a way that you talked about that, uh, in the years leading up to your pregnancy and around your pregnancy?

**Davids:** I think it was like gender-queer...

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Davids:** ...still like butch...I think for a while I was saying butch-trans, right. I was sort of like...because it was sort of both, and also in my like, I was like exclusively male-identified in my sex life, and like BDSM stuff, you know. And um, so it just became uh, and also I uh...in my day to day like I had a name change, you know I started using JD more in my day to day life. Um, so that just sort of grew. Um, it was fairly like organic or something um, and uh, yeah. It's just...it just...emerged on its own. I emerged on my own or something. Like, every once in a while people would be like, "Are you transitioning?" I'm like, I don't know. Or, "Did you transition?" I don't know. I didn't really know. And people would ask what name I preferred and I'd say, "I don't have a preference." Or they'd say, "What's your preferred pronoun?" and I said, "I don't have one." Um, I didn't like 'they' but like, 'he' or 'she,' I didn't really care. And then I...and then at a certain point I did care. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** When did that happen?

**Davids:** Um, well then I moved to New York, my partner—my parenting partner and I um, broke up and we both moved to different parts of Brooklyn and co-parent a kid uh, in 2011. And...

**O'Brien:** When did you give birth?

**Davids:** In December of 2009.

**O'Brien:** Okay.

**Davids:** And so, about a year and a half later, moved back to New York and uh, that's when I um, I still really didn't have a preference. Um, oh I think it may have...also I started doing testosterone when the kids was about a year old, at a very low-dose cream and um, in part for...again for health stuff as much as gender stuff. Um, and I immediately...it immediately

seemed to like help with like energy and fatigue stuff as well. And so I went on and off and um, a couple years ago, raised the dose more. And I think that was around the time where I started...you know I don't know like, what's uh, cause and what's effect, right, of like doing more testosterone, feeling more male-identified. Um, so I think...and then I...when I started a new job three years ago, I embraced my first name um, and I stayed in the same movement. It was a...it's a publishing job in HIV. Um, but so it's...I'm still working with people I've worked for many years using this new name that many of them didn't know. And then about a year and a half ago I realized...after realizing I really did have a preferred pronoun and really did have pref—I didn't want to use the other name at all anymore and things like that. I switched my um, pronouns and I switched my legal documents. I just have been able to enjoy...switched the bathroom. I didn't...I just...I really hadn't anticipated what a tremendous relief it would be to use the men's room. I really...it's just...there's this absence of anxiety and discomfort that I've had since childhood that I didn't know about explicitly that has to do with that like, being puzzled by girls when I was three or four years old. Like it really, you know, it...my transition has been more affirming than I realized it could be. It's...I've...I'm just so...yeah. I'm so grateful for that.

**O'Brien:** And what the relationship between giving...being pregnant, giving birth, having a child, and then uh, transitioning further?

**Dauids:** Well uh, once I had the child...again like I was like, oh, I don't need this reproductive capacity, as far as like hormones and stuff. And um, and then also like having a child, going through...seeing my child at these different ages, um, connect me to my own history. Um, and also seeing the gendered worlds of children and um, just my relationship with my child, let's just say, has really allowed me to, and encouraged me to just fully live into my gender. Um, so it's been um, yeah like it's just been very...like having a kid has really been an incentive in a way. Um, and what...and oh, when my kid was born...as I was pregnant I was like, "Well what is my kid gonna call me?" right? And um, Liz, her other parent knew she wanted to be mommy, and I didn't really feel like dad. I didn't want to be like...people do these things like "baba" or something, but already I'm such an old parent, I didn't want anything that was grand...could be conceived as grandparent-like, you know. And so I was walking in a park in Rhode Island, and I then thought about "pare." Like, short for parent. It's French for father, but that wasn't...it wasn't...I don't have a relationship to the French language or anything so it was like, pare for parent, P-A-R-E. So I decided I'd be parent, it really felt right. So my child has been calling me pare. Um, and then recently pare the pare, like pare the parent, right. And then recently she discussed with me that um; I was her dad, like pare the dad. I was her dad who she calls pare. I'm like, that sounds good, I'm game for that, you know. And uh, so she had been um, calling my ex-partner, was like her stepparent she was calling daddy, and then we broke up and now I'm dad and...but now I do feel more dad I guess, so you know I've been sort of...but it's up to her, right? But um, so her friends have called me pare, like as a name, like instead of JD they call me pare, so it's kind of cute. But um, also as I pick her up at school and stuff she said, "Well people think you're my dad, so you're my dad." I'm like, okay. In the past she had been like, "Well you gave birth to me, so really you are my momma, but I don't call you that..." So she had that analysis for a while but um, yeah. I'm dad. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** What are your um, social communities like in New York?

**Davids:** Oh, that's a great question. I um, it's really different living here than other places I've lived and um, it's has been really challenging. When I first um, moved here um, a few people reached out (like you!) um, which was really great. Many people didn't. Like it's very difficult here. Um, moving here at a particularly...my age that I am, with some health challenges and a kid, it's been very disorienting. So um, now though in the last year or so I really feel much more settled. So my communities are, my in-laws..."in real life" I used to call it—communities is like, primarily um...I'm part of a uh, radical Jewish collective called the Aftselakhis Spectacle Committee, that produces a, annual porm schpeel, in alliance with um, Jews For Racial and Economic Justice and Domestic Workers United, and some other groups and so I'm part of that collective now and that community and I'm also on the board of JFREJ, Jews For Racial and Economic Justice, so meeting and knowing people through that...that's sort of one social world. And then um, my child goes to school you know, a couple blocks from my house, our regular zoned school is very inspiring to me. And um, just meeting other families through there who have kids in the school um, just becoming friendly with people in sort of day to day life. It's very different than like living with people and sharing a toilet in the kitchen, you know. But um, so becoming friendly with other families and then a lot of my deep friendships are conducted online, you know, my HIV movement friendships are largely online or...people I've known for many years um, that's you know...it's just...it can be very gratifying and feel very rich. And then sometimes I really do long for in-person life. So for example, my Porum process, it's an annual process, it gets very intense for three months. And then it's much less intense and so now, since it happened a week or two ago, I'm in my like [makes airplane noise] my down phase about, oh, what happens now? I would say that my social circles here are—are still pretty little lonely and um, I'm not sure it's all going to end up. The instability I feel as a person with tremendous privilege but still feel the instability I feel in New York City today is not inaccurate, you know. Like, in someone who is aging and um, how it's all going to end up, I just...I think there are some real challenges too, forming deep ongoing bonds with people. Or I form deep ongoing bonds with people and then I don't see them for months. [laughs] Right? So it's a—it's a tricky landscape, yeah.

**O'Brien:** And what do you do for fun?

**Davids:** Um, well I um, sing songs and I play with my kid. I just really enjoy children and I really enjoy my own child. Um, I uh, enjoy my pets. I—one thing I really like, honestly, is I have invested in um, sequential pairs of um, active noise cancelling headphones, and listen to music on the subway. Like just really, really enjoy it. Really allow myself to just enjoy my music cocoon. Um, it's one of the things I figured out a couple years ago. Because I have about an hour commute to work that I go to, you know, several times a week or riding to appointments and stuff. Just really being able to just connect with music, and um...

**O'Brien:** What do you listen to?

**Davids:** Well I listen to WMFU podcast, it's like a radio...it's like a freeform radio station so I know which ones I like. And then also I listen to like Tara Brock meditation podcast on the subway, which somehow feels like I'm cheating or getting one over or something, to like meditate on the subway or something. I don't know. It's a funny stance to have towards

meditation but... Oh, also another important thing, I don't know if it's what I do for fun, but about six years ago I got into a twelve-step fellowship. And, while I don't attend regularly at the moment, it's something I carry with me at all times, it's tremendously important to me. And um, yeah. It's really allowed me to be okay with instability and all the shit that's sort of gone down. And um, I uh, I don't know what else I do...I don't know what else I do for fun. I think my life is kind of fun though. Like I think like part of it...like many days I can be like...part of what I do for fun is really enjoy that I've had such a great life. Like, many days I can really rest...sort of like, I feel like I'm held or can rest in like having had such an incredible life, you know. And so I can sort of just re-experience it, and I still have an incredible life, but I can really feel that sense of freedom and expansiveness that I used to have that I don't sort of realistically have now. I can sort of live in that um...it's...maybe it would be nostalgia? But that's sounds kind of sad, but it's not sad. It's really great. Just...I—I really um, appreciate having been able to be a part of incredible campaigns and movements that...feel like truth you know, to have sort of have lived in truth and to feel like I can live that way now, and sort of to have that be as like a compass of like what I'm doing now, and part of living in truth right now is to um, accept reduced capacity, right. So that means what I can do for fun is like outside the window of my apartment; is I can...there's some trees and in some trees there are some starlings, and I can see them, and that's like what I do for fun, is like look at that tree. It's pretty great. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** You mentioned at the very beginning of the interview growing up as one of the only Jewish families in your neighborhood.

**Dauids:** Mhm, yeah.

**O'Brien:** Um, and then now talking about organizing with JFREJ.

**Dauids:** Yeah!

**O'Brien:** Could you sort of talk a little bit about the sort of threat of being Jewish in how that's played out in your life and activism and relationship to the world?

**Dauids:** Yeah, sure. It's um, so, let's see...when I was growing up, like there's really...I remember like, it was in that first school that I was in, so it was sometime between you know, first and third grade, at one point I mentioned I was Jewish, and in the cafeteria this one boy called me a dirty Jew, like being my one explicit anti-semitic experience. And then I also remember in one of those grades, fairly early on like, a construction paper display that the teacher put up that was about Christmas and Chanukah, and for Christmas it said: For Christmas we do this, and we do that, and like...and I don't know, we like put up trees, we sang carols. For Chanukah *they* do this, *they* do that. They have many—I was like, what? And so I was like, I'm not going to be in...I'm Jewish, I'm not going to be in the Christmas play. So I remember that as like one of my first like, acts of active resistance was around being Jewish, even though my family was not particularly religious per say, nor...but it was just this one...it was something I was, and I knew I was, right. And um, then later like...and I think like there was a sense...I think I probably always in my life, from a very young age, had this sense of um, I—I do, I have a belief in sort of inter-generational trauma, right. And

so I think I had a sense of something being off that comes from, in part, the affect of World War II and the Holocaust, and um, perhaps also Pogroms, and like I have a half...half of my dad's family is from Holland, and my mom's family was from Eastern Europe, right. And so um, it's something they didn't really talk about, they sort of...my memory is that...I didn't find out about the Holocaust until I learned Hebrew school. Like I was sent...and um, was like, what? What is this? And even though my father's grandparents and many other relatives were um, you know, murdered, or their death was caused by Nazis in the war, right. And um, so uh, then when I went to Hebrew school, it was like a funny little land of, belonging and not belonging there too. And it ended up—the synagogue in my town was Reconstructionist so we ended up in this Reconstructionist synagogue, which is a fairly progressive branch of Judaism, so I don't remember a lot about it. I feel probably pretty lucky that...they probably instilled something in me. Um, and so it's always...it's somewhat has been this path of like, consciousness let's just say. And then um, and then as I got later in life I would encounter synagogues or like hear people singing a Jewish prayer—like it makes me teary. Like, there's something that like really connects to me at a deep level about it, even though it's not like my faith per-say. And then when I came to New York, um, it is just...there's just an intersection of people who were in radical-Jewish life, Jewish cultural life, that aren't...and political life, that's both welcome me and is an incredible place to be as sort of a...and it's funny because I'm like a secular Jew who...like there are secular Jews but they are deep in Yiddish. Or they're like deep in in like, you know um, Israel/Palestine organizing or other things. And I'm just sort of here...like I'm here as someone who is sort of more like, I um...found myself in this place, and I have my activism and my beliefs and my beliefs in justice and what I work on. But there's also a place for me in this sort of radical Jewish spectrum, that um, I don't really have like a lot of explicit words for it, but it's just sort of like well, here I am. This is funny that I ended up here. My dad's from...my dad was born in Jamaica Queens. So he was here when his parents had came from um, Holland a couple year before that and um...so, I'm not sure really what to make of it. And then at this time I'm like, really? Like, really anti-Semitism is this front of...I'm just...I don't know, I'm surprised and not surprised. And uh, it's like being like a trans Jewish journalist at this moment [laughs] is just really funny because I don't...I'm very careful to not center myself in you know, as a very privileged person. But is kind of a funny place. And it's also funny that like for my um, child like, experiencing Judaism at...I think experiences it as...what it's about is like, movement work and Judaism and Black Lives Matter, and it's all like one thing. And so I feel like that's a fine way for her to experience it, right. And that's how I'm experiencing it now too, you know. It's like the movement trajectory of that sits right with me.

**O'Brien:** Is there anything else that you want to include that we haven't talked about?

**Davids:** I don't know! There's so much, right?

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Davids:** Um...[drumming noise] Yeah I mean there is a whole like...throughout my...when I think about trans people and HIV and sort of the trajectory of HIV movements, not really focusing on or articulating or standing up for trans issues, you know. Um, it's...there's a lot

to say about what hasn't happened and what could be happening and should be happening that I um, eager to focus more on. But it's a fucking travesty, you know. There's so much there, uh, to talk about that needs to happen. And if it doesn't happen, um, it like...the fight against HIV and all the trouble with it by not centralizing the experience of trans people, in this country and around the world through an HIV lens is um, is an incredible uh, injustice and impairment of deeply changing what needs to be changed, not just for trans people but for everybody. So I'll say that. [laughs]

**O'Brien:** Thank you so much, JD.

**Dauids:** Thank you!