

A C T U P **ORAL HISTORY** **P R O J E C T**

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Interviewee: **Patricia Navarro**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Patricia Navarro
July 20, 2007

PATRICIA NAVARRO: Oh, go ahead. Tracy, I really appreciate your flexibility.

TRACY WARES: Oh, no problem.

SARAH SCHULMAN: We all do. {LAUGHS}

TRACY: That's what we're here for.

PN: These guys are diehard – activists will put up with just about anything. That's the way I feel about –

SS: That's true.

PN: – activism. So you've been thrown in –

SS: Are we ready?

TW: The only thing is, for the actual interview, that flapping of the fan –

PN: Yeah, I won't –

TW: – will make a little noise.

PN: I won't, I won't.

TW: Right.

PN: I won't use it, then.

SS: If you need it at some point, that's fine.

TW: Right, and rolling, and great.

SS: Jim?

JIM HUBBARD: Yes.

SS: Okay, so the way we start is if you could just tell me your name, your age, where we are –

PATRICIA NAVARRO: The traffic's okay?

SS: The traffic's okay?

PN: Well no, I mean I'm having trouble hearing.

SS: It's okay. It's worth it.

SS: Okay. Tell me your name, your age, where we are, and today's date.

PN: I'm Patricia Navarro. I'm 62 years old; and will be 63 next week. I live in Simi Valley, California.

SS: And today's date?

PN: And it is July 19th, two thousand, 2007.

SS: And where are we?

PN: We are in East Los Angeles, in the home of my aunt; my very dear aunt, Fabiana Barraza; who is more like a sister to me. We're sisters in the fact that we each lost a child to AIDS. We have just been through the loss of her sister and my aunt, due to Alzheimer's. And it took us to another level of sisterhood. And she's also one of my best friends right now.

SS: Great. So where were you born?

PN: Acch. I was born in San Diego, California.

SS: And what kind of community did you grow up in?

PN: It was a community housing project for people who worked in the aircraft industry. My father, who wanted to be a pilot, did not qualify, as a Mexican American, and for a lot of other reasons. And so he came to California to work in the

plants. There was no work in the town he grew up in, which was a copper-mining town, so it was the land of opportunity.

SS: So he was a factory worker?

PN: He was a miner.

SS: A miner – while you were growing up.

PN: Oh, I'm sorry. While I was growing up, he worked in the aircraft factory. And then he went into the construction business. Not into the business; he became a construction worker, as a carpenter.

SS: Okay.

PN: So he was a skilled laborer.

TW: Can you give it a second for the sound? Just for adjustment.

SS: There might be water running, or something like that. And where was your mother working?

PN: Oh, my mother was a homemaker; until there was a strike, a very long strike, for the carpenters. And she went to work. Started in the sewing factory. And soon became a floor lady. Being bilingual was a huge advantage to her. And she spent all her career in the garment industry, going from, just going up, until she reached the level of supervisor of quality control.

SS: All this ti-

PN: And that's what –

SS: – in San Diego.

PN: – she did always. Well, from the time I was probably – six or seven.

SS: Now was your family politically active, or community-oriented?

Were you raised with any of those kinds of values?

PN: My father was a union man. From what I understand, after going to his hometown reunions, which we're going to now every year, for the last three years; he was the kind of man who was always helping people. He felt it was an obligation that we help each other. And so while this wasn't necessarily something that my mother was involved with, my father was a person who was always going out in the neighborhood; if there was anybody who needed something, he found a way to help them.

As far as political work, he was a staunch Democrat; and encouraged everybody to vote, always; was a very committed union man. Whenever there was an accident on one of the job sites, he, I always remember him bringing bags of money home, and counting the money, and then, with somebody else with him. And then they would go off to visit the family. I don't know if that's political, community, what; but that was my father.

He always let us know how lucky we are to have what we had. Although we didn't have a lot, we had what we needed, and that's what, it's kind of followed me through my life, to not really – want things that aren't necessary. And it's been really kind of interesting, because to try to pass that on to children is difficult.

SS: Right. So when you were growing up, when you were a girl; what kind of future did your family prepare you for? What was their image of what kind of life you were going to have?

PN: There was never any talk about anything about my future.

SS: Were you expected to get married, or –

PN: There was never –

SS: – to get educated?

PN: – any talk about anything about –

SS: Why do you think that was?

PN: I think there were limited interpersonal skills there.

SS: So where did you get messages about –

PN: At school.

SS: – what kind of – hm.

PN: Although my first eight years of education were somewhat turbulent, because it was in a parochial setting. In those days, we had all nuns and priests. And I always questioned authority from the time I was little. Very little. And even though I knew that they didn't like it, I still, for some reason, continued to do it. So I would get in trouble.

SS: Were your parents believers?

PN: My parents never went to church, but we had to go every Sunday. They went, my mother went, on Christmas and Easter. We all got new outfits; and we went to Christmas and Easter mass with our family. But other than that, growing up, as long as we were in parochial school, we had to go to church every Sunday. To Mass.

SS: So when you were making trouble, already, in Catholic school, did it trouble your parents for religious reasons, or just because it was –

PN: I don't even think –

SS: – going against discipline?

PN: – they knew about it. If they did, I don't remember. I never got in trouble for it, at home –

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: – that I can remember. I don't remember anything really traumatic. I just remember – that I would keep asking, why? And they used to get really pissed off at me.

SS: The nuns.

PN: Yes! And so they'd take me and isolate me. I'd always get punishment for it in school. But I never cared. I don't know if that, I never cared what other people thought. I've always had that about me, that I wasn't concerned about what other people thought about me; if I thought I was right about something.

SS: So then when you started to form your own dreams about what kind of life you wanted, what were some of the things that came into your heart at that time?

PN: I don't think I had any. It sounds sad, doesn't it? But I don't think I did. I don't think I thought beyond my next responsibility. I was taught responsibility for things; things around the home; or things having to do with my extended family. And I, you were simply expected to do what you were supposed to do.

SS: And where were you in the birth order?

PN: I have an older brother, two years older. And then there's myself. And then I have a younger brother who's three years younger. And then a brother who's around two years younger than him. And then a sister, a couple years younger than him. Between me and my sister, there are 12 years.

SS: So you were the oldest female child.

PN: I was the oldest female. And given a lot of responsibility around the home.

SS: Right. So when did you start to separate from your family, or to move away?

PN: I just survived. I grew up in an alcoholic home. And we find ways to cope. It sounds really like a terrible way to grow up, but you develop coping skills; survival skills. And I spent a lot of time at my friend's house, two doors down. She's still my oldest and dearest friend. We've baptized each other's children. Politically, it wasn't a religious commitment as much as a – a cultural commitment.

And I escaped a lot. I found ways to escape.

SS: Like what?

PN: Going to my friend's house –

SS: Right.

PN: – becoming almost an extended member of their family, there a lot. Being reminded that it's time to go home.

SS: Right.

PN: But I didn't, I was never offended by that. And I tried to stay out of trouble. I just tri-, what you do in the type of household I grew up in is you just try to kind of just maintain a level of, I guess you kind of protect yourself by trying to not get in the middle of too much, because there's so much going on around you.

SS: Now what kind of messages did you get about homosexuality when you were –

PN: None.

SS: Did you know that it existed?

PN: When I was — oh, my goodness; I think I might have been as young as 12 — I ran away from home. And I was, I was gone for two weeks. And when they picked me up, they, my father and mother told them to put me away in Juvenile Hall. At that time, they called it incorrigibility. And I went to McLaren Hall, which, I think it was just called Juvenile Hall at that time. And it was a lockdown facility for youths, offender, youthful offenders. And that was my first exposure to lesbians. And I really liked them! They were really cool! They had a good sense of humor. And they liked me, and they protected me.

But at that time, I was clearly heterosexual. I had a boyfriend already outside. And I just thought, I thought they were fine! But as far as men, I didn't really know any, quote unquote, hood, heterosex-, homosexual men, other than what I suspected about my cousin, the one whose home I'm in right now; his mother's home. I knew that he was, but we never talked about it.

SS: You never met his boyfriends, or —

PN: No. We never talked about it. It was kind of like, I loved him; he loved me; we never talked about his, his life. He knew that I knew; I knew that he knew that I knew; but we never talked about it.

SS: But when you and your husband had children, did you ever ever think that you would have a gay child?

PN: Oh my god, no. I tell the kids all the time: nobody goes out to have a gay kid. We just, we don't say, well, I want a straight kid, and I want a gay kid, and I want a bisexual. We don't do that. It just – it just kind of happens.

The story about my son, my having my son is that I was, I had had a child out of wedlock when I was 16. We were called unwed mothers then. And I knew a young man that I had known since junior high school. And we both ended up at an adult school together. And he knew my circumstances, of how I had my child. We were friends before. We remain friends. We ended up getting married. Even though I resisted it, I finally, after much pressure from everybody that it would be good for me to get married to this wonderful man, because he loves me and he'll love, he'll be a good father to my child.

Tape I
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And I liked him. I really liked him. But I have to say that I don't know that I would have chosen to marry hi-, I definitely did not want to get married at that time. I had planned to go to community college. Because – I'm going to go back a bit. And I hope I'm staying on what you're asking, but – when I became pregnant at 15, my father had a huge problem with it. The household, it was already dysfunctional, became even more dysfunctional. And because I had been a ward of the court – as a result of that 12-year-old runaway that I did, I was still a ward of the court. So maybe I was older than 12. That might have been my second or third runaway that I got busted. Because I was still under the order of the court; you're called a ward of the court. My mother told my probation officer that I was pregnant, and the things that were going on at the home.

My father's drinking escalated, and he became very threatening. Although he never did anything, his rages were very threatening.

So they put me in a maternity home. I was thrown into a maternity home after being raised in a ghetto with predominantly blacks and Latinos. I was thrown in an environment with very few minorities; almost entirely Caucasian girls and women. And I was introduced to a whole new world.

SS: Was it run by the Church?

PN: It was called St. Ann's Maternity Home. It still exists; and it was Catholic.

I actually maintain a relationship with somebody that I met in there; but nobody knows about her past.

SS: I see.

PN: She encouraged me – to continue my education after I kept – I was one of the few people there that kept their child, even though they tried to talk me into putting up for adoption.

When I came out, I had, I finished my adult school, my high school education at adult school. And I had planned, thanks to my friend, who, we became very tight, even though her family did not approve of her friendship with me. I think, I don't know that it was so much because of the fact that she came to the ghetto to see me and all that, which might have been a factor. But the fact that I, I think, really, that they were concerned about me being part of that part of her life, because she did give up her child –

SS: I see.

PN: – and went on to, there are many, many women out there that have her experience.

But to go back to the question, which was –

SS: Well, you were saying, when you got married – how old were you when you got married?

PN: Eighteen.

SS: And I asked you if you –

PN: About Raymond.

SS: – about ever having a gay child.

PN: – about, about my children.

SS: Yeah.

PN: So I was perfectly happy. We had never discussed children. I had a child, which became our child. A couple of years into the marriage, my husband wanted to know when we were going to have another child. This was pre-feminism for me. There was nobody that I could talk to about the fact that I never wanted to have another child. I had had this child out of obligation to the man that was her biological father. His family wanted her, because he was killed. The only reason I didn't get married was because he was killed.

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: And I didn't know I was pregnant. That child had more love and people that wanted her than a lot of people.

All of a sudden, my husband was putting pressure on me to have another child. And I felt really trapped. And I finally agreed, after everybody in the world told me what a selfish – person that I was, and how ungrateful I was. And that is the only reason I got pregnant.

After I was pregnant, way along the way — five or six months — the conversation came up that, what if it's not a boy? I had never really thought about the sex. But my husband was really, suddenly, very — it was very important for him to have a son. And of course, once again, without a lot of, I didn't know about feminism or anything, but I knew that there was something wrong with that. I felt that there was something wrong with that; that it shouldn't matter what the sex was. Back then, we didn't know what the sex of our children —

SS: Right.

PN: — was going to be. And I have to tell you that I had the most miserable pregnancy, I think, of anybody. Because I didn't want to be pregnant. And then suddenly I had this pressure put on me about the fact that if it wasn't a boy, we would simply try again. And I said, I will never have another, I will never get pregnant again. And I thought, how sad. And I was suddenly, I suddenly felt so unbelievably trapped. I didn't know what to do. My mother, and my comadre, everybo-, all my friends; everybody just — I, I had nobody that I could talk to about my real feelings.

And so I had the baby. And all I cared about was the sex of that baby. And once I found out it was a boy, I went back to sleep, and everything after that was fine.

The minute I saw him, I loved him. But it's important for me to tell that story —

SS: Sure.

PN: — about that pregnancy. Because I know I'm not alone —

SS: Oh, of course.

PN: – in that. And the minute – and he was – a funny-looking little baby. He wasn't a really pretty little baby, like his sister had been. Which I thought was really, I, I, it made me laugh. But he was a ver-, and of course as he developed, he grew into his features, and – he was the most loving little baby. And even though I did not know how to nurture my daughter, he taught me how to nurture. There was something very special about him, even as an infant.

SS: That's interesting.

PN: And it was, and I have talked about this with other mothers of gay men. And we all have that in common, that these children — I'm sure there might be some that aren't — but every one I've talked to —. We talk about the same similarity of these little boys; being gentle, loving little babies. Being sensitive, and all the rest of the stuff that a lot of, I don't want to perpetuate the stereotype. But every mother of a gay child I've ever talked to has shared that experience.

SS: What year was Ray born?

PN: He was born in 1964.

SS: Okay. So when did you first start to realize that he was not going to be a super macho?

PN: While my children were growing up, I discovered feminism. I went back to, I went to a community college.

SS: This is, where were you living?

PN: I started reading – in Simi Valley, California.

SS: Okay.

PN: We moved out there. Although I was perfectly happy to stay in Los Angeles, my husband did not want the children growing up around what might have been – he wanted them to have all the advantages of the suburbs. I resisted. I wanted to stay in Los Angeles and have my children grow up around a diverse community. And I know the city as an exciting, wonderful place. My husband knows it as a lot of poverty and a lot of gangs. And we just had different experiences. There were gangs where I grew up; but I wasn't one of them, and they never affected me.

But we were in Simi Valley, California. And I was going through, our marriage was having some problems. And we were separated at the time. And a friend of mine took me to her women's reentry program class. And all of a sudden, this whole new world opened up to me.

Until then, I had been a PTA mom; I had worked in the preschool with my son; I had done all of the conventional things that I was supposed to do. Although I gravitated towards the off-color people in the neighborhood – I found them much more interesting than the boring, traditional people, which I was part of. And I went to that class. And read a couple of copies of articles. And suddenly, it just opened up a whole new world to me.

SS: Do you remember any, which articles?

PN: One of the books was *Up Against the Wall, Mother*. Oh, gee. A lot of them were just copies. Well – Germaine Greer.

SS: Oh, *Female Eunuch*?

PN: Um – Simone –

SS: de Beauvoir?

PN: Yes.

SS: So what were some of the things you were talking about in that class?

PN: Well, the whole, the women's movement. It was all about, the name of this particular cla-, well, I eventually enrolled in a special 12-week program for women that were reentering. Somebody got ahold of me and said, you have got to go to this. So I signed up; and started, went back to school.

And one of the things that I remember that I didn't like — I know they meant well — but some of the non-minority instructors — because there were no minority instructors — although they were very minority-friendly and all that; sometimes they would ask me to share experiences, and after a while, it was like, I don't want to share these experi-, sometimes they tried to stereotype me and ask me things. And they meant it in a good way. But I didn't appreciate it. Because for all intents and purposes, I was assimilated. I'm second-generation. I grew up with no cultural education. My parents were assimilated. They grew up in a mining town in Arizona. They were, yes, English was their second language. But by the time we came along, English was their primary language. We were not taught Spanish. Which – I can understand a little bit more than not having any cultural appreciation. So one of the first things I did after I finished the reentry program was take Chicano history. And I took all the Chicano classes that were available.

And I have to say that as a teenager growing up, I identified as a Chicana, and I hung around with Chicanas, and I only dated Chicanos. And we were like, you develop your own little clique. And although the school at that time was a third Latino

Tape I
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— which we say now — a third African-American; and a third non-, just all, everything; Anglo, Asian. I want to say this: kind of like Ray's tape about the strings that he did on the introduction of one tape.

I used to be Mexican-American, and my friends were Negroes. Then I became a Chicana, my friends were black. Now I'm a Latina, my friends are African-American. So it's, I go back and forth between the term "black" and African-American, because black is the term that I'm most comfortable with. I've never been comfortable with "Negro."

SS: Were you attracted to the Chicano movement at all at that time?

PN: I didn't know the Chicano movement. There was no movement where I went to school. I went to school in South Los Angeles. And there were no politicians there. I think it was just starting. We're talking about 1955.

SS: Right. The UFW is not for 10 more years – yeah.

PN: So while we – we were very assimilated. So, although we liked each other's company and we had things in common; there was no political movement that I was ever involved with.

SS: So how did getting into feminism relate to – because I had asked you about Ray's gender behavior. And your answer had been that you were in the feminist movement.

PN: And I discovered — oh, what's the word? — humanism. I discovered liberation. I discovered that we should not put people in boxes and categories. And I decided that I wanted to kind of re-teach my daughter. Ray was still little. Well, maybe eight, 10. And I had always been pretty open with them; of never putting

restrictions on them. That comes from my experience of having been told as a young girl that I couldn't do things because I was a girl. I never accepted that. They never said to me, well, you can't be out at night because there are people that will want to harm you. They just said, you can't, you have to be home at this time because you're a girl. You can't go there because you're a girl. Yet my brothers got to go. And it just really pissed me off.

So I did not like – once again, what started in elementary school continued in the home, as a preadolescent, that I couldn't understand why I couldn't do things. So when my children were growing up, I pretty much tried to let them do whatever they wanted to do. Not everything; I wasn't completely promiscuous. But if my daughter wanted to dress a certain way, I let her dress a certain way. I didn't insist that she wear dresses. And in the case of my son, if he wanted to play with Barbie dolls, I bought him a Ken doll.

SS: Right.

PN: So there was enough in me that wouldn't let him have a Barbie. Somehow I thought he had to have a Ken. So somewhere I had gotten the message that he needed a Ken instead of a Barbie. But I thought I was allowing my children to be whatever they wanted to be. And I feel that I did.

Tape I
00:30:00

Raymond used to go next door — there were two little girls next door — he used to go next door, and get into the trunk that they used to get into, and put on dresses and hats. And they used to have plays in the driveway.

I thought that was wonderful! I never thought that that meant that he might be gay.

He was always artistic; he was always drawing. And women, some of the mothers have really come down on me: Of course you knew! And I said, I swear, I didn't know. I didn't want to categorize him. You have to understand that I was coming from that place, and it wasn't that I was in denial, or anything. I just thought, he's going to be whatever he's going to be. And later, when I told people that he was gay, after he decided he was gay; when I told people, they said, I always knew he was gay. And I'd say, well, then you were putting him in a category. I never did. When he told me he was gay, I knew he was gay.

I just, and plus, he dated; he had girlfriends. He had the most beautiful, gorgeous little Farah Fawcett lookalike. So that's what I used to call him. They were the, they were gorgeous! They had hair out to here! And they were, and he was very, very popular. He was *the* most popular boy, with all the girls. He was of course now, of course we say, yeah, of course. But at that time, he was just Mr. Popularity. He was a good dancer, he was, so the girls even liked him more because of that. I have a plaque at home that says that he won a dance contest. He was the snow prince of the junior high school. And he was, he was a very – I couldn't have asked for a happier kid, and he was academically very, he was very good academically. He was in honors classes, and what do you call them? Pre-college advanced placement. And he was self-motivated, which of course made it very nice for a parent.

SS: So when he was in high school and all of that, were you working at that time? Or were you continuing your education?

PN: When he got to high school, I was – I always went to school and worked in the family business and ran the home. And I just did what needed to be done.

I never thought of it as anything more – the school was for me; the working in the business was for what I call bread on the table.

SS: What was the family business?

PN: It was an auto parts store.

SS: Okay.

PN: That then, then we opened another one, and it just kept getting bigger and bigger. But I insisted on doing my schooling. And through going to the community college, I met the Chicano activists in the community.

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: There was a conference at the community college I was going to to organize the Chicanos. It was called the Concilio; to organize a concilio. I don't know what the conference was called, but out of that conference came a council of all the different Chicano organizations in that county where I live, which is Ventura County.

SS: And what was the name of the school?

PN: The Moorpark College, Community College. And I became less of a student and more of an activist. And I became very involved in this organization, which had, still, a lot of sexism in it, because there was majority of men. But there were a group of us women, and I'm very close to some of them to this day — that, we had an organization called Mujeres Unidas – United Women — and it did a lot of things on its own, but part of what we did was we were part of this concilio. And I was in it for years. I was in it when Raymond got sick and went to New York. I was always in, it was like, I can't remember when I wasn't in it. Except that now that I'm talking to you, I wasn't in it when I first went to school.

SS: Right. Now what were some of the things that –

PN: That they did?

SS: Yeah.

PN: Well, we demonstrated against Dole Foods. We, the purpose of the group was to – the purpose, originally, was to just organize the Chicanos to get some things done that needed to be done in the community. But our mission statement was to — oh, what's the word? — improve the quality of life for all people in Ventura County. But we really cared about the Chicanos. And there was a correctional institution, a correctional association involved; there was – cops, Chicano cops. And there was a probation organization of Chicano probation officers. A teachers' association. Mujeres Unidas; there was a medical group. So we covered – and there was an employment, a group that worked strictly on employment.

So we covered all the basic needs of the community, which were education, employment and health. And housing.

SS: And the Dole boycott was to support the farm workers.

PN: Oh yeah. We –

SS: Yeah.

PN: – whenever there was an issue locally – and we worked on local issues, in Ventura County. There was a strike of the farm workers. And I think it was UFW. It must have been. We demonstrated; we walked picket lines.

There were some middle class Chicanos — teachers — that were picketing in their business suits, and someone said that was the first time they had ever done anything like that. And it was incredibly empowering for them.

It was empowering for me, too. But I had already, I was already used to doing things that were not popular. So demonstrating, to me, was just an extension of that.

SS: So your children were raised with your example, of uniting with your community, standing up to injustice, community organizing.

PN: Uh, poor little Raymond. I took him to demonstrations, and I took him to so many things, and exposed him to a lot of – he just didn't have a choice; he just went. But when he got older, he didn't care so much to go. Because teenagers want to do their own thing. Plus he was working, and he had too much school, or whatever. And I remember – I'll always remember this, because – when I would go to these demonstrations — and sometimes we'd come into L.A. for things — I would take back all this material. And anytime there's a demonstration, the Socialists always show up with all their stuff. And then of course we have some Chicano stuff. And some of the grassroots stuff was really crude mimeographed stuff. That's the way it was then. I love those days. I personally would rather go back to those days than the days when everything is so professional that I feel that there's a real loss of touch with grassroots people.

And I would always leave the stuff in the bathroom – so that he could see it – in the bathroom that they used, the kids used. And every now and then he'd come out and he, because he was very smart academically. As I say, he was very good, he was a writer already, as a little kid. He'd come out, and he would start criticizing the grammar. And of course then I would have to take him aside. And I would have to give him my lecture on his being so uppity, thinking that it's not about the grammar, it's about the

content of what they're saying. And I would go into this big – and we would end up having these, these strong arguments about what's more important. And then he would go off and I would feel that I'd done my duty. But it used to happen all the time {LAUGHS}.

SS: And how old was he when he came out to you?

PN: He was a student at Otis Parsons, out here in California. He was around 19. I'm sorry – yeah, around 19.

SS: And was he already working in video?

PN: He went to Otis — that was his first choice — and he had to do the foundation year, which he hated. So no, he didn't do video; he had to do paint and clay – pottery, I guess that's what it's called – sculpture. And then he had to do drawing. And he just hated it. And he wanted to be an, he had to do it if he was there; it was his foundation year.

And they would do things like — he and some of his friends; or one other friend, anyway — would put things in the kiln that they knew were going to explode. And he just thought it was so cool. And I just thought, Raymond, grow up! You can't do this! This is very expensive! I mean, even though he was on scholarship. We didn't pay his tuition. We could never have afforded it.

In fact, recently I was thinking about this, and telling somebody that – I wanted to support him always. But when he went to Otis, I had a real fear that I was going to lose him – to – to – ambition and materialism. That's what I feared more than anything; that he would get caught up, because a lot of the students at that school were

very well-to-do. His roommate came from a very rich family. And they rented an apartment together.

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And I actually – used to, Ray used to get pissed off because his roommate wouldn't pick up after himself, and do things. And I used to end up advocating for the rich, by saying; the kid doesn't know any better. He had maids all of his time, Ray. You've gotta be patient with him. If the shit bothers you, clean it up. But don't lose a roommate, don't lose that contribution to your rent just because you're expecting this guy to do something he can't do. I remember, we had a real – loud argument one time, I think at MacArthur Park, about that. Because he was saying that he couldn't continue to live with this slob. And I kind of was advocating for the slob. Or telling him, if it bothers you, clean it up, just clean it up. Because he's obviously not going to clean it up. I know it sounds a waste of tape, but –

SS: No, not at all.

PN: It was funny.

SS: No, it's important.

PN: It was so funny, because I woulda never thought I would be in a role like that.

SS: Because I mean, in ACT UP, some of his friends were some of the richest people in the world. Right?

PN: Pardon?

SS: In ACT UP, some of his friends were some of the richest people in the world. Actually –

PN: Yeah, but he never commented on that.

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: I mean, he never, ever – it didn't, if it meant something to him, he never –

SS: Okay. So – when did he move to New York? He went to the Whitney Program.

PN: When he came out to me. You asked me that question.

SS: Yes.

PN: Let me finish that.

SS: Oh yes.

PN: He was at Otis. And at the same time, he got a job in the first crew at MOCA, the Museum of Contemporary Art. They opened up in a temporary contemporary building, in downtown Los An-, east of downtown Los Angeles. And he was hired to work at the ticket booth. We laughed about it, because, well, it doesn't matter, but he was in. The point was, he was in; he got the job; and that he was going to be part of the staff, which he worked himself up very well in that position, in that facility. But he, they had the first show. And they had a huge reception. It was a big deal; big, fancy deal. He called me up and he asked me to come. He said he was going to be working, working that night, and he wanted me to come and see the show.

So I went to the show. And of course, he was working. He would introduce me to everybody as Patricia. Which I thought, well, that, you know, he didn't want to say, this is my mother, for some reason. So – he was embarrassed. But he called me Patricia. So.

He showed me around, and he told me about some of the big pieces that were there, and all that. And then he said, I have to go back. So he went back to work. And then, he said, I'll find you. So he came back to find me. And then he says, oh Mom, I'm so excited, I'm in a relationship.

The kid had been miserable for a while. He used to call me, and we used to talk. And he was very unhappy, because he had found somebody that he thought – a girl – that he would end up being disappointed. And it doesn't matter, the details. And he wanted a Latina. And he was super-disappointed all the time, because there weren't that many at his level of — how do I s- — education and awareness. He was not only smart academically, but he was very lateral in his awareness. He was political already; he was, he knew about a lot more. When he went into his first year of high school, I gave him all my Chicano history books, and I told him to read them; that he couldn't study California history without knowing this part. So he already had an awareness of more than the average student. And, so he was always disappointed. And he'd call me up, and it was heartbreaking.

So when he told me – he said, oh Mom, I'm so excited, I'm in a relationship! Those were the words he used.

I said, oh, Raymond, I'm so happy for you. Are you happy?

And he said, yes, Mom. I'm in love.

SS: Oh.

PN: And I said, oh my god, who is it?

And he says, it's a guy!

And I said, oh my god, you're kidding! Are you happy? I just kept saying, are you happy? I didn't even have time to process it. And then he took off again. He kept doing this hit-and-miss things with me through the night.

So I kind of thought, oh, wow, that's, that's interesting. But I didn't have him to interact with.

So he came back two or three times and he kept saying, so what do you think? He kept asking me, what do you think?

And I kept saying, Raymond, are you happy? I just want you to be happy, Raymond.

And I, I, that's, that's all I could say, because that's where I was. And then finally, when he had a little bit more time to spend with me; I said, well do we have time to talk about this?

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00:45:00

So he took me, we sat on some steps in a corner of the Temporary, and – and he told me a little about the guy. His name was Todd; he was, oh, a Latin American political science student at ULCA; he was – blah blah. All the gaga things about somebody who's just head over heels in love with a new –

SS: Right.

PN: – a fresh relationship. And he just kept saying, so what do you think? And I said, okay, Ra-, Raymond; if we have a little, few minutes here, talk. I'm scared for you. Because I grew up in a racist, sexist world, Raymond. And you're, you've got a lot of stuff out there to deal with. I'm afraid.

Ah, Mom! C-hhh-, he grabbed me and hugged me. And he goes, Mom. And I think one of the things he said — and I wish I could remember better — but he

said, he asked me if I was afraid about AIDS. And I, it went right over my head. It literally went right over my head.

SS: Had you heard of AIDS?

PN: Yes, because we all got something in the mail from the surgeon general. But I didn't connect AIDS with – to me, I read everything the surgeon general said. And I didn't think AIDS-gay; gay-AIDS. It – and I had read Randy Shilts's article in the *Los Angeles Times* about the bathhouses. I read it in my backyard, in my patio. I remember when I read it. I thought, how horrible. And then I kind of thought, well, what are they do-, well, what are the bathhouses? Wven though – because he didn't go into detail.

SS: Right.

PN: I kind of couldn't get the connection. You have to understand that I was very ignorant about gay culture. And even after my son came out to me, I accepted him and loved him. I accepted his boyfriends; they were welcome in our home. But I didn't ask a lot of questions. I just – accepted him, his gayness, like I would any other culture. I don't know if that makes any sense –

SS: Sure.

PN: – to you.

SS: But what about his –

PN: I didn't have preconceptions.

SS: Um hm. How did his father feel?

PN: Oh well, his father thought he was going through a phase. So I let his father go through his phase, because there was nothing I could do about it.

SS: Right. Now when did he go to New York? That was to go to the Whitney program, right?

PN: He went to the Whitney program – after two years, he finally went through their little video department. At that time, it was very small — he was very unhappy; very frustrated — and applied to Cal Arts. Went to Cal Arts, where Mother had some adjustments to make, because Mother was very comfortable with his being in a very structured setting, at Otis. {LAUGHS} And, now we were very, very close. So I have to tell you, I was pretty, I was very – not hands-on, but I was always looking at what was going on in his life. And I was always very – ooh, sensitive to keeping my distance. Because, of course, boys let you know when it's time — I guess girls do too, but not as much — when it's time for Mother to, Mother, just get back there, okay? I'm a man now, or whatever, right?

SS: Right.

PN: So, but yet, he always invited me to the school; he always invited me to the openings. So he clearly wanted me to be part of his life and his educa-, as he was evolving into this artist. He was always telling me what he was do-, he would call me up and tell me all these new projects he was doing. So as long as it was on his dime, and he wanted to talk, I had to, I would be like, oh my god, just hoping that I had the time to give him that he needed. Of course I was busy, too, so I wasn't always available.

SS: Sure.

PN: But we were very close. And so when he went to Otis, even, he – went into a whole new world, and didn't have any time for me. Because what they had there were nothing but political artists; people that he absolutely just – merged with.

SS: Do you remember any of their names?

PN: Gosh. Holly was one of his friends, and I don't remember Holly's last name. There was a couple. I want to say his name was Randy, and I can't remember her name. I think they were married. They lived in these, they lived, even though they weren't supposed to, they lived in their studios, that were like underground. Had anxiety about that, because I had anxiety about them, the entrances being closed, and how would they get out of this underground – they were literally underground.

SS: At Otis.

PN: At Otis. They had these little art spaces that they were only supposed to work in. But they all lived there. They hid their hotplates and everything, and they lived in there. And it was kind of a – an unofficial – they kind of let it slide. And I just used to have these horrible nightmares about him burning up in that little studio. I know it sounds crazy, but that was just another thing that Mother had to get used to.

Back to your qu- -- when he went to, so he finished at Otis; he got a BFA. And he, by then, had been at the Museum for so long; and by then, they opened up the new place, the actual Museum of Contemporary Art. And everybody loved him. They really did. I'm sure there were people that didn't like him. We all have people that don't like us. But they wrote a position that allowed him to apply with a BFA. He competed against people with masters in museum management. And he got the job as the assistant theater manager of the new museum. And as far as Mother was concerned, she was very happy, because her son had a nice job, after being in college for all those years – I think it took him four years, maybe five. And it was a nice, clean place. I know this sounds ridiculous, but these are the things that a lot of — maybe not a lot of; maybe some

people don't — but I was really happy that he was going to be in a nice, clean facility, and he had a job.

SS: Right.

PN: He had a salary; he had benefits. And he did that for a couple years.

SS: Now did he realize he was infected while he was in California, or was it when he had already moved to New York?

PN: Not until he got to New York. After a couple years at MOCA, he told me, once again, he relayed how unhappy he was, how he wasn't doing anything; he was just going to work every day. He didn't like that life. He applied to Whitney; got accepted; and he went to New York.

SS: Now did he join ACT UP before he realized he was infected, or after?

PN: He didn't know he was infected until after Anthony got sick in June of 1988.

SS: Okay. So he was already in ACT UP, right?

PN: No.

SS: No?

PN: Around — I mean — first of all, we don't know when they got infected. Hhe was probably infected when he was 15 years old, because he wasn't gay in Simi Valley; he was gay in West Hollywood.

SS: Right.

PN: Okay? That was the time, probably in 1986 and '87, he went to West Hollywood, and according to him, had as much sex as he could possibly want. And that's how he says he got infected.

SS: Okay.

PN: Unprotected sex, I should say.

SS: Right.

PN: So he probably got infected then. He was not diagnosed with AIDS until January of 1990. But Anthony became ill first, because they went up to Montreal – I don't know if you were involved at that time.

SS: Um hm, yes.

PN: The World Health Organization had a conference in Montreal. Anthony came down with PCP. Raymond called me, and I just found the notes. The call was in June, I think. He was hysterical because Anthony, his lover, and he'd been, they'd lived together in L.A. before then went to New York. They met at Otis. I'm sorry; they meet at Cal Arts. Anthony was a dance-choreography major. Anthony went to London for a year; came back. They got back together. They met right before Anthony went to London. When he came back, they just got together and stayed together.

When Anthony got sick, Ray was calling me. And – he was calling me all the time from Montreal. He was very upset. He was crying. He was just beside himself. So all I did was try to support him on the phone.

SS: Right.

PN: And I told him, get back to work; because that's going to help you deal with this. He was supposed to be writing about the conference. I said, go back to

work; write. And he, I can't do anything, I can't do any—. I said, well you're going to have to do something, because you're going to go crazy. I can't go up there. You're going to have to find a way to cope with this.

So finally Anthony got out of danger.

SS: Because he was hospitalized in Montreal.

Tape I
00:55:00

PN: He was hospitalized – in Montreal. He was diagnosed with PCP; hospitalized. And they were staying at the home of, according to him, a beautiful elderly French lady who let them stay in her place while they were up there. Well, he ended up staying longer than he was supposed to, because Anthony was in the hospital.

I have to tell you — and I've talked about this before, in another interview — that although I was sensitive to what he was going through, because his lover was so sick; all I could think about was maintaining my control on the phone. Because I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown. All I could think of was, well, if Anthony's infected, surely he's infected. Once again, I was really ignorant about a lot.

When – I went the next day, after he told me about Anthony – I had a meeting, one of my community meetings. And on the way to the meeting, I stopped at the library in that town. And I checked out as many books as I could on AIDS. And they were old, and they were – there wasn't very much. I took out six books. But there wasn't, they weren't current; that's the word I want to use.

And – went to my meeting, took care of what I had to do. I came home, and I read everything, and took them back the next day, because everything, there wasn't that much. It was redundant.

Then I got on the phone and called a hotline.

SS: The AIDS hotline.

PN: An 800 AIDS hotline.

SS: Um hm.

PN: And started asking a lot of questions, and started educating myself about HIV. See, because I wanted to know everything about HIV. I anticipated that Ray might be HIV. But I wasn't ready to anticipate that he could have full-blown AIDS.

SS: Right.

PN: I was protecting myself, I think, somehow. A form of denial.

Finally, after a couple of calls from Canada, I asked him about getting tested. And he said, well, there's no way I'm getting tested up here. I won't get tested till I get back to New York and go to an anonymous test site. And I'm like, what are you talking about? I knew nothing! I did not know this language.

So I, all I want is for him to get tested, because I want to know. And I have to be really careful. Because whenever I would start pressing Raymond too much, Raymond would say, I gotta go, and he'd hang up on me. And that has happened to me before. So I didn't want that to happen, because he was in Canada. He wasn't at a number that I could call back right away.

SS: Right.

PN: I didn't know the number where he was.

SS: I just have a couple of questions about this moment.

TW: Change tapes.

SS: Change tapes? Okay.

PN: Okay. How you doing?

B: Okay, I'm burning up –

PN: I'm sorry it's taking so long! Are you okay?

B: Yeah.

SS: Okay.

PN: I don't want you to be uncomfortable.

B: Am I turning red??

PN: No no, I just want, I, I, I want you to be comfortable, and if you want to go outside, you're welcome to.

B: No no no.

PN: Okay.

B: I opened the back door, it's open.

PN: I'm sorry. Am I, am I doing what you want?

B: There's a black cat –

SS: You're fabulous.

B: – I've never seen before.

PN: Okay, because –

SS: Yeah, it's perfect.

PN: – because I can go on and on.

SS: That's right, we want you to go on and on.

PN: Oh, well okay. But –

SS: That's right.

PN: Because I kept thinking – you have to, you have to guide me.

SS: I am guiding you. It's going great.

PN: Okay. All right. Because I have problems answering question-. I remember the last time I was interviewed they kept saying; answer with a q-, with the question.

SS: No no, forget all that.

PN: And I kept fucking that up –

SS: We don't do that. We don't do that –

Tape II
00:00:00

SS: All right, I have a couple of questions. So my first question is, had you ever met the ACT UP people, or seen ACT UP, before this had happened, before Anthony got sick?

PN: Oh no. My cousin Abie –

SS: It's okay –

PN: –whose mother's home we're in right now –

SS: It's fine.

PN: – told me about the group, because he made a bunch of tamales at a certain time of the year, and I don't know if it was for Pride, because it doesn't make sense during the summer. But he would make tamales, and sell them, and then give the money to different groups. And he told me about giving money to this group called ACT UP. That's the very first time I ever heard the name of ACT UP. And I don't know if Ray ever went when he was out here in L.A., because he came to visit me in August of, I think, '89.

SS: But you had never met Gregg Bordowitz, or –

PN: Oh god no, I didn't know anybody.

SS: You didn't know any of his friends.

PN: Oh no, I went to New York because – he got sick, with tuberculosis.

And then he was in the hosp-, well, fir-, well first, he –

SS: Let's wait. I want to wait for that.

PN: Okay, what are you going to ask me? The answer to whether or not I knew anybody from ACT UP ever, before I went to New York, is no.

SS: Okay. And my other question is, Anthony's family: did they accept him? Did they, were they involved in his care?

PN: Anthony's care?

SS: Yes.

PN: Well, they lived in California. His mother was divorced. And very limited income. She had all boys; Anthony was one of four boys. And one of them was just around 12 when Anthony got, went to New York and became ill. And – the boy – Raymond really liked Anthony's family. They were very different from us. She was a single parent. And there were a lot of dynamics there that Ray helped Anthony work through..

SS: Okay. And his last name was L-E-D-E-S-

PN: Ledesma. L-E-D-E-S-M-A.

SS: Okay.

PN: I tried to connect with Anthony's mother after the boys were gone. The last time I saw her, I called her and told her that the quilt that the Mother's Support Group made was going to be at the Queen Mary in Long Beach. And she went. We had a meal afterwards. She took some of her family. She said she would be moving. She

didn't know her new address. I've been in the same place forever, and she's never contacted me.

SS: Okay.

PN: And I feel sad about that. But I understand that everybody deals with the loss of a child in different ways.

SS: Right. So Anthony had PCP. Finally, he was well enough to come back to New York. And then, did Ray get tested when he came back, like he said he would?

PN: Yes, I kept, I – they had to move. So they were busy with the move, and I kept missing them.

SS: That's when they moved in with Jennie Livingston, or out?

PN: They were living with Jennie when they went up there.

SS: Okay.

PN: And when they came back – after a while, they had to move. And I had trouble get ahold of him. I finally pinned him down. The first time I asked him had he been tested: I don't have time, I've been busy, I'm doing this. He was always working on 10 different things at the same time. And depending on which one he was into at the time, he would tell me about it. But he – finally – I asked him, in one of our conversations: Raymond, did you ever get tested?

And he said, yeah, Mom.

And I said, so what were the results of the test?

And he says, I'm positive.

I said, okay, so what are you doing?

Tape II
00:05:00

And he says, I found a doctor. And he's a very good doctor. I want to say the doctor's name at that time was Dr. Goodman. I don't remember for sure, but it sounded like. And he talked about Body Positive, and all these things that he was doing. And – he – I asked about Anthony, of course. And Anthony was getting stronger, but was, just had been really taken down, with the PCP.

They had a very dynamic relationship. I would listen for hours to Raymond talk about all their problems. But, in the middle of it all, he talked about all the things he was doing with ACT UP. And at one point — although it must have been before he went to Montreal — at one point, well, he called me one time to tell me that if I got a phone call, that he was going to be going to Washington. There was going to be a demonstration. But that I should not worry about him, because they had a bail fund. And I remember going off on him on the phone.

What the hell are you doing, going to a demonstration? You're supposed to be there studying art. What does art have to do with going to a demonstration?

I'm ashamed to say that that's how I reacted, even though I knew the importance of demonstrations, when it came to my kid – that all went out the window. Basically, they went down to the FDA; it was the FDA demonstration, I think, in '88. It was before, I want to say it was before they went to Montreal.

But I heard about ACT UP through Ray. What I remember him being the most excited about was DIVA. [Damn Interfering Video Activist Television] He went on and on about DIVA. If we can – I didn't think he was one of the originators, but he was part of the process. I think it had started before him, maybe. But I remember him talking to me about – if we can get all these artists – because artists, we all have these egos, Mom

– and if we can get everybody to agree to work on this collectively, it's going to be fabulous, it's going to be absolutely fabulous. And he just went on and on about DIVA; about stuff they had shot; and he'd just interviewed somebody, or whatever. I mean, he, or he was at an interview, or – da da da da, and they were editing, and da da da da da. That's all he would talk, once he, when he went to New York –

PN: Just a second. [To her aunt]

SS: Okay.

PN: When he went to New York, everything was about – activism. He didn't even talk about school. School was like, oh yeah, yeah, we're doing this stuff at school, and – I have to write a paper, whatever. But it was like nothing; it was like work. Everything that excited him to talk about was ACT UP; and DIVA. And all these, and he went to this party. And he met this fabulous this, and this fabulous that. And oh Mom, it's so wonderful, I'm so glad I came. The kid was just in seventh heaven.

And it was nice.

SS: Now, because I knew them both when they were living with Jennie, and I remember when they had tuberculosis, and then they had to move out of there.

PN: Yeah.

SS: Now, did he tell you that he had tuberculosis at that time?

PN: Um hm. Well, he called, he had gotten a seizure in the subway before, or right after he went to Montreal. When he came back from Montreal, he had – molars that were infected, or whatever, they – impacted. He had to have all four molars

taken out. He had been in the, he had been recovering from that for a long time. That's when he decided to grow a beard, because his skin was so tender that he couldn't shave.

Anyway, he was out for the very first time with Anthony. They were going out to eat someplace, because this was the first time he was going to be able to eat regular food. He had a seizure in the subway. And Anthony was smart enough to tell the attendants that he was his brother. So Anthony went to the hospital with him. Anthony called me and told me what was happening. And he met the person who continued to be his neurologist there; Dr. Martin – I can't remember first name.

But as it turns out, Ray had a form of, a seizure disorder that he had apparently been living with his whole life, but had never had a seizure from. A brain disorder, I guess; a neurological disorder.

So she put him on anti-seizure meds. And he recovered from that. And that must have been, if they came back in July — because they stayed longer than most people did, in Montreal; the lady let them stay longer.

So he had the infected, the tooth, and then he had – and in January, he was all excited because he was going to be, he wanted, more than anything to do work in the Chicano community. And he felt alienated, because some people weren't, because he was this assimilated little suburb kid, who for all intents and purposes acted and everything, white, because that's where he grew up. Some people weren't very kind to him. And he wanted to establish credibility in the Latino community, the Chicano community.

They were having a South, oh, Guadalupe – they were having a film festival in San Antonio. And Ray was presenting a program about video activism, about

how to use video to teach and to stimulate activism about AIDS. He put together a catalog, I think. He was working with this really nice guy — can't remember the name of the — but it was about video and making catalogs. Boy, he was such a nice guy; can't remember; he came to see him once. And he kept him working, because Ray freelanced everything. He was doing 10, he had his fingers in 10 different things to try to make money to survive. Because he was very poor. Living as an art student in New York, and an activist.

And anyway, my point was that — he called me in January. I couldn't get ahold of him. And I tracked him down. And I knew about the move, but I really didn't care about the move. I figured, that's your problem. There's nothing I could do about it. I knew there were some issues, and — but I had more important things to talk to him about. So I didn't dwell on it.

I know he really liked Jennie. He was real happy with this woman that they were living with. And I guess she was a filmmaker, too, and he was — he only had really good things to say about her. And then all of a sudden, they had, when he was in the hospital, they had to move, or whatever. But he came down with the TB. And I tracked him down, and found out that he was in the hospital. He got really pissed off that I tracked him down, but I don't know how I did it, but I did. I think Anthony called me.

Well, Anthony called me about the seizure in the subway. So we took care of that. And then almost like right away, this TB thing came up. So the TB thing pissed him off, because the drugs they had him on interfered with his writing, and he had articles that he needed to finish so that he could get paid. Everything was about trying to make money to survive and pay his rent. So he truly was a model of the struggling artist-

activist. People told me that they used to feed him. And I know that for Raymond, that wasn't easy.

SS: Right.

PN: He was uncomfortable with that. And at art school, he talked to me about it once, because somebody made a derogatory comment about him never having any money, like, what's new about that? And I said, well, that's not your friend. Fuck them.

CHCHCHCH. Those people aren't their friend, your friend, Raymond. If somebody invites you to go to a meal, and you let them know you don't have any money; if they offer to pay, you can graciously accept that and pay them back in other ways. But if somebody's going to make a comment, that, you don't want to have anything to do with that person. I don't care how much money they have. They obviously have no manners. You don't have anything to do with them!

It was really hard for him, because he was always really poor, even when he was in art school. We couldn't give him a lot of money. He lived with my parents the first year he was at Otis. He hated it. Not only did he hate having to live with Grandma and Grandpa; he had grown up in Simi Valley, around grass, neat yards, blah blah blah. And he was thrown in the heart of a black ghetto, living with his grandma and grandpa. And Grandpa was an alcoholic. The kid had a really hard time. But he wanted – I said, you want to go to art school, that's the only way you can go to art school. Because you can't drive back and forth to Simi Valley every day.

SS: Right. Now, when did you go to New York?

PN: He got the TB.

SS: Right.

PN: He recovered from the TB. He didn't want me to come. I offered to go; he said no. He left the hospital, and went to Jean Carlomusto's apartment. He told me that Jean Carlomusto was the finest person he had ever met.

SS: That's true.

PN: And I always remember how he described her to me: this woman is a beautiful, fine person, Mom. And she's letting me go to her home. Can you imagine what a fine person that would be, to do that?

I always remember the way he described, he always had a way of putting things that – were almost poetic, to me; of course, I'm his mother, but you know? I felt that was really a nice thing. So that was how I learned of Jean Carlomusto. I think he had only been there a couple of days, and he just suddenly had this horrible headache that he couldn't get rid of. And I think within three days of getting to Jean's, he was back at St. Vincent's, with a diagnosis of cryptococcal meningitis.

I tried to get ahold of him. I think I had Jean's number. I couldn't get ahold of him, I kept calling Anthony's house. They wouldn't answer. Somehow or another, somebody was there, and they answered the phone, and I think it was Aldo Hernandez.

Somehow, through, I found out that he was back in the hospital. So I called the hospital. Sure enough, they located him. He was, he could barely talk. I wanted to talk to his doctor. Of course, we had to get his permission, for the doctor to tell me what she could tell me. And the doctor bas-, Dr. Martin, who was that neurologist,

Tape II
00:15:00

from the seizure; I introduced myself to her. She told me everything she, the medical stuff.

And I said, well, Doctor, do you think I should come? He doesn't want me to come because he had tuberculosis. Should I come now? I want to come, but he doesn't want me to. I was telling her.

And she said, well, Mrs. Navarro, if you don't come, it might be too late. CCCHHH! ACCCH. I just – stopped. I almost stopped breathing, I think.

So I got on the phone, and I made, I found out the first available flight. I booked it. I was gone, I think, the next day. I was up all night. The next morning, before the flight, I had a lot of responsibilities, and I always took my responsibilities very seriously, in the community. I made phone calls to get people to take care of things that I had commitments for. Didn't have a lot of time to talk to them. My plan. I made the trip for two weeks. I don't know I got there, but I got there. Anthony – I want to say Robert Garcia and Anthony picked me up at the airport – in somebody's car. Oh, Anthony's car! Anthony had a car!

SS: Okay.

PN: Anthony had a car that he insisted on taking to New York. This car was so much trouble. Anyway.

So I got to the hospital. I just said, I want to go to the hospital. They said, I said, take me to the hospital.

Got to the hospital; walked in his room. And there Raymond was, sitting, like on a throne, with all these people, having a conversation. I think Zoe [Leonard] was

there; she had just come back from a show in Belgium or Berlin or someplace with a “b”.

I think Hunter was there; he had just come back from –

SS: Who’s Hunter?

PN: Hunter – oh –

JH: Hunter Reynolds?

PN: Hunter Reynolds.

SS: Oh, okay, I don’t know him.

PN: Beautiful tall blond man. Hunter had bought, given Ray a little chip of the Wall; the Berlin Wall – with some barbed wire. Little piece, that Ray had on the shelf. And Ray was showing me all these things. And he introduced me to the people. And – those are the two people I remember. I remember Zoe. And it might have been another visit, but I seem to remember Zoe and Hunter in the room. And some other people.

And then I went in the – there were around five people in that little room. And I went to the waiting room. And that’s where I met Jean; Jean Carlomusto. And I remember what Raymond had said about her. And she was everything he said. She was beautiful. He didn’t talk, really, about how beautiful she was. And she gave me this. I still have that first ACT UP button that she gave me, which is a *Silencio Equals Muerte*.

TW: Can we get a close up real quick?

PN: And she –

TW: Thank you.

PN: – told me about what had happened –

SS: That’s good, thank you.

PN: – with his being ill. And they were all really concerned about him.

And Ellen was there at that time; Ellen Neprin.

SS: Ellen Neipris.

PN: Neipris, Neipris. So those were the people that I remember that first time. I think James – oh, Cascaito was there.

SS: Don't know him.

Tape II
00:20:00

PN: He was an Italian Literature professor at – Columbia. But an ACT UP member, and a poet. And the reason I know he was there was because he told me later — because I've seen him in different visits to New York — he told me that he remembered my asking the group: tell me about these meetings that my son goes to, this organization that he's part of. And while I'm here in New York, I'd like to go to one of the meetings. So remind me, you guys, when the next meeting is.

And they said, well, they meet every Monday.

And I was like, well, you tell me when the next, I had a lot going on. And I'd been on the plane all day.

And James reminded me of that. I wouldn't have remembered that, had he not reminded me.

But the thing, more than anything, I noticed the people. But the main thing I noticed when I walked in was Ray's smile. There was that big-tooth smile, out at me. And somehow, when I saw that smile, I knew everything would be okay. For then, for now. I'll put it this way: I was okay when I saw the smile. I didn't know what to expect; I try not to have expectations. I had made one other phone call before I left for New York. I called MAP, which is the Mothers of AIDS Patients. And I asked them for

a phone number in New York; if there was a mothers' support group there, I was going to need it.

SS: Was there one?

PN: Yes there was. It wasn't a MAP group, but it was a group under AIDS service organization, run by a woman named Fran. And I'm embarrassed that I can't remember her last name. So I got there on a Tuesday or a Wednesday, and I was trying to find that today. But I remember it was March 12th or 13th. And I remember, in my head, I have that the next, and the mothers' support group met on a Tuesday, so I couldn't go that night; or I missed that one week. So I knew that the very next Tuesday, I would go. So I waited, and when I, I called and found out exactly what, it was right around the corner, at St. John's, on 11th and Seventh. You can imagine; everything right there.

SS: Who were you staying with?

PN: Well at that time, I stayed with Anthony.

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: Anthony and I went home, and after we left the hospital that night – Anthony had a lot of issues, because he was a man living with AIDS. And they had had a lot of problems, which I knew Ray's side of. So Anthony needed, Anthony always wanted to tell me his side of the story. And I would listen; and then I would tell him what I would tell a girlfriend. You know what? If you're not getting anything out of this relationship, I think you ought to leave it.

And I felt bad about that, but I didn't know what else to tell him. The guys were having a lot of problems. Raymond was gone all the time, at meetings. And

that's, and Anthony was still ill. And, so there I am, exhausted, at Ray's Pizza, on Sixth Avenue and I think 11th, or whatever street it's on; listening to Anthony; and just wanting to go to the house and go to bed, to the apartment.

So we got to the apartment, which was on East Seventh; 208 or something, in that – Aldo still lives in that apartment building. It's on Seventh and A.

SS: We interviewed him there.

PN: Okay, yeah.

SS: Aldo, yeah.

PN: Oh, well, he's right, his apartment's right above the boys' apartment.

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: And – so the rest of the time, I just – I of course – had to go, I went to the hospital every day. And was horrified to see that Ray was in such pain, and drugged and hallucinating from the medication.

The next, the following Monday, I did go to the ACT UP meeting.

SS: What was that like?

PN: And I found the map that somebody wrote in my book, because I always keep a book of, a notebook. Somebody wrote a sketch of where the meeting was. Because I remember people were saying, you want us to pick you up? And I said, basically — because I'm very independent — look, I'll get to the meeting. Just, you guys, I don't want anybody depending on me. Because I didn't know if I was going to have to be with Raymond. So I said, I'll get to the meeting. If I can make it, I'll be at the meeting.

So luckily, Raymond always had so many friends! There were always people coming. And when his friends would come, I would leave the room, so that they could have their discussion without me there. I wanted, I was always sensitive to Raymond having his privacy. I've always been sensitive about my kids not having a mother poking in their room. I knew what was going on. I poked enough to know what was happening. But I wasn't there. I never put myself in there. I was, that meant a lot to me, that I could probably say that I never was a buttinski in their room all the time when their friends were there. That was important to me.

Tape II
00:25:00

SS: So what was the ACT UP meeting like?

PN: Well – I was overwhelmed. Uh – I walked in the building, and of course, I kind of checked the place out. And I really liked that it was in this old building. And then I was just kind of blown away at all the people that were in the Center. And I think it had already started. And I liked the theater, the way they did it, with the theater atmosphere. I loved all the facilitators, especially David [Robinson]. I mean, David was just absolutely fabulous! Robert was good.

SS: Robert Garcia.

PN: Robert Garcia. Ann –

SS: Ann Northrop.

PN: – was very good. I really liked Ann a lot. I, I never, I never really interacted with her that much, but – Roma.

SS: Roma Baron.

PN: I sat with, I used to sit with, I used to look for Roma all the time. Because they were, they were women my age. And I, and they were, and it didn't take

me long to figure out they were feminists. Well, I think they were all lesbians; I don't know. I never really, because I used to, when, I knew lesbians when I was in juvie; and I knew lesbians when I got involved in the women's movement, later in life, when I went back to school. But we never really talked about them being lesbians. I knew they were lesbians; they knew I was heterosexual. I didn't talk about my heterosexual life, and they didn't talk about their gay life. We talked about politics, and women's stuff; political stuff about women.

But I got there; and somebody had saved a seat, some people were waving for me to come and sit. And I was a little, felt a little self-conscious about that. Later, of course – now I know that it wasn't about me, it was about that I was Ray's mom. And they had such, everybody — well, not everybody, I'm sure — but people had such a high regard for Ray that I was just instantly accepted by everybody. And that felt really good. People would ask me about him. And I would encourage them to go see him. And I know that it's hard for people, especially people living with AIDS, to go visit people with AIDS.

And slowly but surely, ACT UP became a rock for me. Because when I was in there, it was empowering. Outside of the ACT UP rooms, I was vulnerable. The mothers' support group fed my heart; they gave me what I needed; of support and love from other women. But it wasn't political. ACT UP made me feel there was something that could be done. It gave me hope; it was intellectual; it was emotional. I fell in and out of love in those rooms. And that was, that felt good. That was my humanity coming out.

SS: How involved did you get in ACT UP?

PN: Well, I went to every meeting when I was there?

SS: For how long?

PN: I don't think I ever missed a meeting. Raymond laughed about it with me. Because he'd say, I remember him telling somebody: that's my mother! Oh, if my mother's got a meeting? CCCCHH. Forget it! I made sure there was, I always made sure when I went to a meeting that somebody was there with Ray. Which wasn't hard to do. What I learned was, when people say – Patricia, is there anything I can do, just let me know. I'd say, yeah, when can you come and stay with Ray? Because I have a meeting on this. What I did was, since, and then, of course, there was Anthony. When Anthony was there — which would be in the evenings — that I would need some, I would need to go someplace, and I didn't want to just hang out in the waiting room.

SS: Right.

PN: So I went to WHAM meetings. I loved the WHAM group. Elizabeth Meixell was one of the ones I remember. Oh, there's a bunch of them that I can't remember by name, but by face, I can see them; just these really fabulous feminists. And they were, they kept me, they kept my feminist political side in balance. Thankfully, one of the women that I stayed with, one of the mothers; when Raymond was coming out of the hospital for the first time — I know you want to talk about ACT UP, but I need to talk about the mothers.

SS: Go, go ahead, that's fine.

PN: I went to these mothers' support group meetings. And these women were so different. The whole, they were mostly women from Manhattan. There were a couple people from the outer boroughs, but most of them were from Manhattan. I think I

was the only Latina at that time. I was the youngest at that time; I think I was 47. I seem to remember 47; I might have been a year or two older. But I was the baby. Before I left, in November, there was another baby. There was a kid younger than 20, than Raymond, that was in there. That had AIDS, and his mom was at the group.

People came and went, but I was there every week. Every Tuesday, I was there. And one of the women from there, I had stayed at Jean's during one, whenever Raymond came out of the hospital and went to the apartment, I wanted to be someplace else. So I had put the word out that I was looking for somebody to put me up while Raymond was out of the hospital, until I could get my stuff together to get home. Because I was always planning to come home – when Ray got well enough. I still had that denial, that Ray would be well enough that I could come home. Because I had this husband who – I had abandoned. I had abandoned everything for this. And I couldn't be guilty about it, because I had to be there.

SS: Right.

PN: And I – one of the women that I had met just a couple times at the mothers' support group, because she was really living in Scarsdale with her son and his lover, who both had AIDS. And I had been staying at Jean's for two weeks. I think Jean's was the first place I went to when Raymond came out. Because I told people, I can't be there; these guys – plus, they had all this stuff going on between them; I did not want to be around. And, plus it was a small apartment. So Jean put me up for the first two weeks. But John Greyson was coming to town, and she had promised him the room, because he was going to do a residency at one of the colleges there. He was coming down from Canada. So she let me know ahead of time that I could only stay there for

two weeks. Well, at the end of those two weeks, the weekend before John was going to be coming, one of the mothers invited me to go up to Scarsdale to visit this woman Florence Rush, who was one of the mothers from the mothers' support group that I always –

SS: Florence Rush the writer?

PN: Yes!

SS: Oh, okay.

PN: Florence Rush.

SS: Okay.

PN: So Florence, so I went up to see Florence. And I really hit it off with her son. And he was in manufacturing now, he worked in manufacturing. We were talking shop, literally. And I embarrassed that – Matthew; Matthew was his name; Matthew Rush. So I spent, we spent the day there. The woman that took me, her name is Rhea Parham, and her son was a videographer. He made a film about the mothers's support group. Her son's name was Adam.

Rhea took me up to Scarsdale. We visited with Florence. And then Rhea told Florence my circumstances. Well, I was going to go back to the apartment. I was just going to bite the bullet and go back, and make the best of it, and just be gone a lot. Walking the streets, or whatever, to leave the boys alone. I had already put that together in my mind. I'd just go to the library or something for four hours.

And Rhea tells Florence about what's happening, and Florence says, oh my god, that's ridiculous. My, I have an apartment right there that's sitting there empty.

You should use my apartment. And I said, you don't even know me. And she said, I don't need to know you. I know you.

And then Matthew, the son, told the mother: oh Mother, that would be wonderful.

So I said, look, look; you're just doing this in the spur of the moment. You think about it. I'll call you.

She said, okay. In the meantime, I'm going to tell the doorman to leave the key. And, Honey, you may not like my apartment. She said, you go, you check out my apartment. It's right around the corner, it's on Jane and Hudson. It's two blocks from the hospital; two or three blocks, right?

So she's talking me into it, and I'm saying, well, I don't know. So anyway, I end up checking the apartment out. Of course it's a beautiful, big apartment. But I was uncomfortable about it. I don't know; somehow I felt like it was too much, for her to offer this. But Rhea talked me into it.

Tape II
00:35:00

To make a long story short, Florence is a feminist. I couldn't have had a better situation. We are dear friends. She'd older, she's getting older. I'm sorry I haven't been able to get back to New York to see her. I was there for her 80th birthday. It's the last time I went.

But the mothers were just unbelievable. They would do anything for me. But because Ray had so many people to do for me, I really didn't have to ask much of the mothers. And Florence gave me so much. It was unbelievable. I lived there on and off those eight months. Whenever the boy, whenever –

SS: You were in New York for eight months. You came for two weeks and stayed for eight months?

PN: I came for two weeks. I left in December. I came in March, and I left in December.

And of course, I, and then Florence had people in her building that she introduced me to that became very welcoming to me. I played poker, up in a penthouse, every Saturday night –

SS: {LAUGHS}

PN: – with Susan Brownmiller, the writer –

SS: Oh, uh huh, uh huh.

PN: – and their writer friends. I was just instantly accepted. I mean, it was a, it's almost like this incredible story. In fact, Susan wanted to write about it, for the *New Yorker*. But it was right after Raymond had died, and I just wanted to disappear.

SS: Now I have a really big question for you, and I really want you to tell me totally the truth, which I know you will. But I mean, there were at least a thousand people with AIDS that came through ACT UP. And nobody's mother came to ACT UP. As far as I know –

PN: Yes, there were. One of the other mothers went, from the mothers' support group.

SS: Who had a child in ACT UP?

PN: Yeah.

SS: Who was that?

PN: He used to wear a beanie, with a thing on the top. I want to say his name was Steven. He came up to me that first night, and told me he knew Ray. And then he told me about the mother's support group, and I said yes, I already know about it, and I'm going next Tuesday.

SS: Oh, okay. Do you remember his last name?

PN: No. No, I'm drawing a blank. I can find out later. But she went to ACT UP.

SS: Okay, so there were two of you.

PN: And, and I think Florence went once.

SS: Okay. But that's not what I'm asking.

PN: Okay. Well no, there weren't, I don't know.

SS: But any—

PN: Do we know that for a fact?

SS: I mean, I know that most of those people's families did not come into that room; 99.9 percent did not come to ACT UP, did not, could not tell you the names of their son's friends; did not —

PN: Yeah, but my circumstances were different.

SS: But I, it's deeper than that.

PN: I needed ACT UP. Okay? I didn't give very much to ACT UP; ACT UP gave me the strength to keep going. I went to the meetings; I went to some demos; I really couldn't do a lot. And some of the discussion, it was way over my head. What I did at ACT UP was I listen and I learned about gay culture.

I used to get real impatient when I would get to that meeting at seven o'clock — along with PWAs who were there to listen to information about AIDS — and I would hear stuff that in my opinion — and this is very un-PC — in my opinion, were not about AIDS.

And I used to get impatient, because those PWAs and me were there to hear about AIDS – and treatment stuff. And there were a lot of other issues that, yes, were highly, highly important issues to the gay community, but they weren't about AIDS. And I sometimes resented the fact that those ACT UP meetings were used for other than AIDS stuff.

SS: Okay.

PN: If ACT UP wasn't, if it was about everything, including AIDS, I would have had a different attitude.

SS: No, I understand that.

PN: But sometimes, I didn't have a lot of time.

SS: But I'm going to stop you, because I want to get back to what I was talking to you about –

PN: Okay. About the mothers.

SS: – because I feel like it's very important. All of us, who watched so many people get sick and die, and their families never showed up; never. It was, so that was the common experience. I remember people who maybe their mother came and visited them in the hospital, or something like that. But usually it was that the brother showed up at the memorial service, or something like that. You're, the way that you saw everybody in that room as a human being, and saw yourself as a

human being, and one with everybody else; almost nobody else was able to do that, who was a family member.

PN: But I've never had – well, as far as a family member goes, I don't know; every family deals with illness in their own way. And as far as, these were adults involved in an issue that they were passionate about. In all fairness to those families, this was their family member's thing. They may not have, to me, it's more important that they be at the hospital than they be at an ACT UP meeting.

Tape II
00:40:00

SS: Yeah, but you know very well that many of them never went to the hospital.

PN: Well of course, yes, I know that. And that's true, and that's very unfortunate, and I'm sure those people are going to live with that guilt the rest of their lives, that they weren't part of their family member's family; part of their lives. That was their choice. And what I tell young kids today that are coming out and they're pissed off because their parents aren't all giddy about their being gay – heh – don't let them get away with it. Remind them that you love them and need them in your life. And you need to remind them.

You may be the first gay person they've ever met. They don't know about gay. They're afraid of gay; they've only heard bad stuff about gay. What do they know? They've heard every, they've seen every bad image that the right likes to throw in our faces, and they think that's what being gay is.

Gay people can be some of the most boring people in the world; just as boring as straight people. And they can be just as creative, and everything else, as

straight people. Of course, the mothers and I all think that our children were specially creative. And just special people, because that's what we have to hang onto.

SS: I think what I'm trying to tell you is that the reason that people responded to you was not – yes, Ray was extremely well loved, and is still talked about all the time, and is very alive in people's lives.

PN: That's nice, because he would really like that.

SS: But it's *you*; because *you* were exceptional, in terms of the way that you responded to this. And I think that people really needed you.

PN: If I was helpful –

SS: Yes.

PN: – to people –

SS: Um hm.

PN: – then that's good. That's good.

SS: Yeah.

PN: If I did anything to make people feel better, or inspire them in any way, that's okay.

SS: I just want –

PN: But I was there because I needed to be there.

SS: That's okay, I just wanted to say that.

PN: Thank you.

SS: Okay. Thank you. So – as Ray got, his care group was so extensive.

PN: Um hm.

SS: All right; did you ever have to take responsibility for organizing it? Or was it always sort of in place?

PN: Well, I had a calendar. We kept a calendar in the room.

And as I said, anytime anybody asked if there is anything I could do, I'd say, yes, when can you come and spend the night? Once Ray lost his sight – okay? – until he lost his sight, he was there alone at night. I would go home to the apartment, and come back in the morning. And he'd already had breakfast by then. Because he was taking amphotericin, he lost his sight and a lot of his hearing. He fell out of bed. And I walked in one morning, and he was tied to the bed.

And he was very upset. And I raised holy hell. And then I saw that he had hit his head. Well, it turns out that he had gotten up during the night to go to the bathroom, and he fell. And to protect him, they tied him down.

Well, I put up such a stink. And I said, I want somebody to be here at night with him, from now on. And they said, well, you can have a private nurse. I said, I don't have money to have a private nurse! I want permission to have anybody spend the night with him, so I can go home and get to sleep. I can't s-, the room that he was in was, they had two people, there wasn't enough room for a cot. After that, I got cots and stuff in other rooms. I, pretty much, I got anything I wanted, after a while. But it took a while for them to build trust.

I said, I basically threatened that if they did not allow me to have anybody I wanted to spend the night there with Raymond, so that if he needed help going to the bathroom, he could have help, because he would never be strapped in again; that I would have to seek legal, I would have to find out what legally I could do to get them to pay for

a private nurse. And they backed off. And they made an exception, and they kept always reminding me: well, this isn't normal. And I'd say, that's fine, I don't care. I have to go home and get my sleep, so that I can be here for my son in the morning. I can't be falling asleep. I have to be here for when the doctors come to keep track of what's happening.

So we started the calendar. And I think Kim Christensen – who's a beautiful, wonderful person; another dear friend of Ray's; I think she kind of let the word out, at the meetings. And pretty soon, people kind of knew. But then again, anytime anybody asked me what they could do, I asked them. There were kind of regulars, like Lola and Julie. They usually came together. They were a couple at that time.

SS: Right, Lola Flash and Julie Tolentino.

PN: Yes.

SS: Yeah.

PN: And, oh – I don't want to forget – there were some people that I didn't know, that I only got to know — and they didn't even know Ray — but they came; maybe once every two weeks, they'd put in a night.

So it, it kind of, it just kind of happened. And it wasn't a lot of work. And if somebody wasn't there, I spent the night. I threw two chairs together, and I slept. I always had my radio with me. I had never had such an incredible choice of fabulous Salsa music! So between Salsa and blues, I had the headphones on all the time when I was sleeping, and – one time Ray couldn't wake me up, and he threw his, he threw something at me to wake me up in the middle of the night, because he needed to go to the bathroom. But anyway –

It just happened. People brought him tapes. Now, Kim – what's the wor-, organized the tape collecting. Pretty soon we had to say, no more tapes. Because Ray had a, they were reading books into tapes. They were reading newsletters into the tape; they were reading *New York Ti-*, they were reading things that they thought he would like.

Because, see, everybody knew a different part of Ray. He had all these different friends, pocket of friends. Deb Levine and he had worked at a project at Museo de Barrio, with some youngsters. People would come in, and I'd ask them how they knew Ray, and they would tell me; it had nothing to do with ACT UP. It was something completely different that he had done for them, or that they had worked on together.

He loved collaboration. He wasn't a person, he wrote alone; but he loved collaborating. He loved the time with Catherine Saalfield. At that time, she was Catherine Saalfield. He loved doing things with Catherine. He loved, he made, he made art with Zoe. He said, Mom, I'm going to make art. I said, what are you talking about?

He described to me these photos that he was going to have Zoe take, because he was going to get them ready for this show, the Army of Lovers.

He wrote the es-, he dictated the essay into –

SS: He described the shot that he wanted to Zoe, right?

PN: Did you read Debbie's paper, Deborah's paper?

SS: Yes.

PN: She wrote a paper on, well, yes. She went, she des-, she tells it exactly, through Zoe, of how he did it. He took, he described to Zoe everything, and according to Zoe, she was doing it, exactly what he wanted. She was his prosthesis.

Which I thought was an incredible, incredible thing. When Debbie called, Deb called me and told me she was doing that, it was, it just – was so wonderful. Because the thing that Raymond told me, more than anything, is that he didn't want people to forget him. And he was, he said that very, he was, and I thought that was really incredible, that he was able to, to say that; that he knew how important that was to him. Mom, I don't want people to forget me. And I thought, that's interesting, for a person who knows they're dying, to say.

I, I don't know. I've always thought about that.

SS: Well, I haven't.

PN: I know. And that means so – it means a lot to me. But it even means more that that's one of the things that was so important to him.

SS: Well, after Ray and Anthony died, now here we are; it's so many years later; and you are still active in the AIDS community.

PN: Well, every time I went back to ACT, every time I went back to New York — and I went back at least once a year; a couple times twice a year — because I went through a – I couldn't break away. The mothers were the only place where I could keep my son alive. And ACT UP – just became a place where there was hope that there would be less people dying of AIDS. And when I went back to New York, I went to the mother's support group meetings, and I went back into my old mode. I don't think I went to any WHAM meetings after that, because when I wasn't, I went to ACT UP on Monday nights, and mothers' support group on Tuesday nights. The rest of the time, I visited with the mothers, I visited with some of Raymond's friends.

Sometimes – sometimes I stayed at a woman named Barbara Meyerhoff, who lived on Prince and Broadway.

SS: Oh sure, I know who she is.

PN: She was a feminist.

SS: Part of the Susan Brownmiller circle.

PN: Part of the poker group. And I stayed at Barbara's a couple times. I stayed at Aldo's, I stayed at Zoe's place one time. I stayed at different places. I didn't always go back to Florence's because Florence had a woman that's like a daughter to her, Amy – can't think of Amy's last name, but she's a political scientist, who teaches at Kalamazoo, University of Michigan. And Amy was like a daughter. That was Amy's room, was the room I would be staying in. So if Amy was there, I found someplace else to stay.

Right after Raymond died, I stayed in his apartment with Anthony. And then Anthony rented the room to David White, a designer-artist; a very good friend of Aldo's. And David moved to California – after Anthony died. Anthony died in March; March 18th, 1991. That was really hard for me. Because I couldn't be there with him. And – I just couldn't get there. And his father was there. And – yeah, they had a service here for him. And I don't think they liked it, but I got up and said something. And – maybe that's why his mother didn't appreciate me, but I talked about the Anthony that I knew, and how special he was to my son. And I appreciated that.

SS: So, I know you just did an event, just a few weeks ago, at LACE; an AIDS event. I mean, you're still –

PN: Oh well, the, oh, Don Ryan's group; what's the name of his group? They're doing an ongoing project. He called me, and asked if I would participate in this piece they were doing. Something Red is the name of their group, and I wish I could remember the name. Ferd Eggan, a beautiful man who just died July 7th; Ferd was on the panel, I was on the panel, and there were a couple of – uh, geez, what's the right word? Oh, boy. Transsexuals? Is that the – I can't remember the word anymore, because I've been, it's, I've heard so many different versions. There were a couple transsexuals; there were – there were five of us, I think. Anyway. And they wanted us to talk about the state of AIDS today. I can't remember what the question was, but we spoke for five minutes, and they turned around and scrambled them all up, and they did some art thing with them. I don't know. I'll go anyway. We went to, I'll go anywhere they ask me to go to do something about AIDS.

But I, what happened when I got back – because – it took, I went into severe, severe depression and severe anger mode after I came back from New York. I was angry, and didn't know what to – between my anger and my grief, I didn't know what to do. So I went to ACT UP LA meetings, for a year. Went to demos, participated in the discussion. Once again, I'd rather, I gravitated towards the women; there were feminists. And – there were some straight women in it. There were straight women at ACT UP.

SS: Deb Levine, yeah.

PN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, there were other straight women –

SS: Elizabeth Meixell, your friends.

PN: Yeah, but there were others!

SS: There were plenty.

PN: There was a woman that worked on insurance that was a –

SS: Oh yeah, Karin Timour, one of our heroes.

PN: – heterosexual woman. There were a lot.

SS: Yeah.

PN: And Mike Spiegel, and the lawyer, the other lawyer, that Mike was involved with; Students for a Democratic –

SS: Oh, Debbie's husband.

PN: Yeah.

SS: Yeah.

PN: No, no, yeah. Mike's, Mike's Debbie's husband. But then there was another guy that was Kim's partner. I can't think of his name right now. But anyway. But that, that wasn't important. What I'm saying is that I went to ACT UP meetings. And then after a year – I said, I'm not really doing much. This isn't, this isn't like ACT UP New York. It, well, I'm, they're equally important, but different.

SS: Um hm.

PN: But what I'm saying is, I didn't have, it was, there wasn't, I was only going into LA for the meetings, and then going back to Simi Valley, where there was nothing. And by then, I had finished my obligations, because I was not sitting, I sat on different community boards. I was on this Concilio board; I was on the United Way board. I, I had things; I had a life. I was doing things in the community before my son got AIDS. I had a political life. And –

I finally decided that I was going to have to find out what was going on with AIDS in Ventura County. And I had tried to find out. And it was so – uh – different from the intensity of New York and Los Angeles that I went to meetings for a long time and just listened and took literature from ACT UP LA and gave it out; trying to figure out what the situation was.

Well, Ventura County has small numbers of people with AIDS. Thankfully. There was, there's a small, there was a small bit of activism going on, but in the form of organizing an advisory committee to the Board of Supervisors; establishing services. That was the type of activism that was going on. That was activism. It's a very conservative county.

So I had to find out where I fit in. Now I already had connections with the boards of, members of the Board of Supervisors, through my work in Concilio. And I already knew certain people through my work as a Chicana activist. And for women's issues activism. So I simply took all of that experience and focused it on AIDS.

So I listened a lot. And I resisted becoming part of the bureaucracy, but slowly but surely, when that's all you've got to work with, you do become part of the bureaucracy. You take a little responsibility, that makes you part of the bureaucracy.

We did have a small ACT UP group that we used just for our purposes, when we want to do a demo. But they didn't have discipline, so I decided that I wasn't going to continue with it, because the discipline wasn't there. They didn't understand about issue-specific politics. They wanted to throw everything and the kitchen sink in there. And in that county, the kitchen sink got out there; but AIDS got lost in the story. So I decided that I wasn't going to be, it wasn't going to work out there. And I, not that

they didn't do, and are still doing, some good stuff. But the AIDS type of stuff wasn't going to work.

So I have had to find a way to do things that, where I feel empowered that I'm doing activist work; but it may not look real activist. It may look rude; and it might look like, tedious, because the questions continue to be asked until I feel I get the answer that I need.

That's not a pleasant place to be, sometimes. But because other people refuse to open their mouths and ask questions that they should, that they know they should be asking, but for whatever reason, people just aren't comfortable, because that's not their personality. So I'm often seen as – a problem. And I'm okay with that.

SS: Like you were okay with it in Catholic school.

PN: {LAUGHS}

SS: I'm done with my questions. I just want to say that I'm really grateful that we had this conversation. And the work that Ray did and the work that you did and the work that we've all done, and all the people we've talked to; there are so many people alive today, enjoying their lives, because of the work that we all did. And I'm so glad we got a chance to sit down and make record.

Thank you so much.

PN: I hope you got the answers you wanted.

SS: I got them. Thank you so much.

PN: You're welcome.

SS: Thank you. Okay.

TW: Before we get up, I do room tone for a second.

SS: Yeah.

**TW: Can we just all sit and be quiet for a second, so I can just record
the fans.**

SS: Okay.

TW: Room tone.

{DOG BARKS}

PN: I'm so sorry. Are you okay?

FB: I'm happy I was able to do this.