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Oral history interview with James Wentzy,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with James Wentzy on 2017 January 23 and 31, and March 31. The interview took place at Wentzy's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by Cynthia Carr for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

James Wentzy and Cynthia Carr have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. This is Cynthia Carr interviewing James Wentzy at the artist's home, Bailey-Holt House in Greenwich Village, New York, New York on January 23, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is card number one. The first thing we need is for you to say your name and spell your last name for them.

JAMES WENTZY: Surely. James Wentzy. Wentzy is spelled W-E-N-T-Z-Y.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. And when and where were you born?

JAMES WENTZY: I was born in Brookings, South Dakota October 21, 1952.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

JAMES WENTZY: My mother's name was Mary Elizabeth Wentzy. Crawford was maiden name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: She went by Betty.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Big bone girl.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: My father was born in—basically in South Dakota. Except his father was so paranoid about childbirth there that they actually took a train to Chicago. So, technically my father was born in Chicago, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: And what was his name?

JAMES WENTZY: —born and raised. Woodrow.

CYNTHIA CARR: Woodrow.

JAMES WENTZY: Woodrow P. Wentzy.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what did they do for work or whatever?

JAMES WENTZY: My father—since I had been born my father worked at the—my hometown university, South Dakota State University.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And he taught photography in the Department of Journalism. And also, the manager or shift manager of the local—growing up I used to call it the "educational channel," but of course it was public broadcasting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And my father and my mother worked for the county welfare division. I guess, early growing up she was a secretary for a grade school. I don't remember her other jobs though. Welfare, basically.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So your dad was a photographer?

JAMES WENTZY: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Did you get your interest in it from him or—looking, you know, watching him work and, you know?

JAMES WENTZY: I'm—no, I was actually in high school when I decided to pick it up. And I'd go and—initially it was the old physics professor at high school.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Physics teacher who was working far beyond his usual age of retirement because he was so endeared. But he was the staff sponsor of the three photographers covering the school. Good stuff for yearbooks, and so I became one of them. So, I learned basics from him. But then it was easy to go to my father to keep learning.

CYNTHIA CARR: Did you have a dark room at your house or at the school? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: I had always accessible at school.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But I have had dark rooms in my bathroom when I first came to the city.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Now, when you were in school were you interested in art at all? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: No. Not particularly. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: —but photography—

JAMES WENTZY: But I could always—well, I could always copy a picture. I could draw—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —easily.

CYNTHIA CARR: Was there like a regular photography class in your high school? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: No. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: No. So, it was strictly separate. But we had a dark room there and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I think I learned you really don't mess around with a school photographer.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: You know that's just bad form.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Your pictures won't turn out very good in the yearbook.

CYNTHIA CARR: So you—did you do all the pictures for the yearbook? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: No. I guess the other two also were taking—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And then there was a professional hired for the sit-down portraits for the yearbook.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And apart from that were you taking photos on your own that—just things that interested you apart from that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: What sorts of things were you photographing?

JAMES WENTZY: Some people and places.

CYNTHIA CARR: Like portraits, or what we would now call street shooting, where you were outside?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Candid. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Candid.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I don't know, it's something like—probably comparable to the adage, "You never show your student films to people after you've left school."

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [They laugh.] So you've never shown them?

JAMES WENTZY: Not too many of them. Sometime—I have a lot of pictures of myself and sometime I'll maybe put together—I don't know, to be self-effacing or just to be sorry. I have a collection of the aging process. Because it seems like, you know, the worst picture you have of yourself when you were younger is going to be far better than anything you have when you're older.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Just a guess.

CYNTHIA CARR: Very true, very true. So, was your father interested in you being a photographer? Did he care about that or was he encouraging? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Encouraging enough. He—I actually took one of his courses—

CYNTHIA CARR: —at the college.

JAMES WENTZY: At the college, yeah, and—the university—and perhaps I took it only because I knew it'd be an easy grade, but he did have a reputation of being a tough grader.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Not many people got As. Just only a few more got Bs.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: He was a strict grader. I even—once I even came to New York City and I was wearing, I guess, an SDSU sweatshirt. And somebody came up to me—probably last time—and said, "I went to Brookings."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: "Went to school there." Found out my name. "I took a course from your dad. He was tough grader."

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: So, you went to South Dakota State for college?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. For two years. About—took all of the school's two courses they had in filmmaking. They gave you—gave us a 16mm Bolex. And made my first animation. Drawing cell.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I realized that's really what I wanted to do. Before that, I was always into the sciences. But I looked around at the library at a catalog from—for Southern Illinois University. And I liked all the coursework they had for—in the arts. So I went there—drove down there. For some mysterious reason, they gave me a scholarship and I was able to go there. And—so my—

CYNTHIA CARR: Hmm [affirmative]. For junior and senior year?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, I graduated from there. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Majoring in film.

JAMES WENTZY: Actually they let me just design my own major.

CYNTHIA CARR: Really?

JAMES WENTZY: I just called it visual communications. But I basically took any course I wanted to justify it.

CYNTHIA CARR: You were still doing still photography at that point? Or less of it maybe.

JAMES WENTZY: Less of it—no. It was—then I was really—I'd gotten a part time job working for their local public TV station. So, they had a series on—a weekly series called *Spotlight on Southern Illinois*. And a crew of us—so I was hired to film it. It was all filmed in 1975, 1976 and it was before video was used too much. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But we were filming prized pig competitions. Hambletonian [horse -JW] gambling races.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, I was doing a lot of film work but it also made me realize I did not want to get into the news end of filmmaking.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I took a good course from a photographer who taught. And made that next jump up, next level to photography. And he was also tough, maybe mercifully tough. If he had some student work on the wall and something fell down to the floor, he'd look at it and leave it and say, "That's probably where it belongs."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: He also was the first course—he would have everybody pair up. And one person would take pictures for a time and the other would guide him around. Because he wanted the people taking pictures blindfolded. And he always laughed to see the blindfolded people, how many people still put their camera up to their eye.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: He'd get his laughs. He thought that was pretty good. But I said—I like that experiment.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, maybe that was my first introduction of photography as expression.

CYNTHIA CARR: As sort of art form or something.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Instead of a, you know, news.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well when you were doing film, were you interested at that point in maybe doing feature films? Or were you always interested in documenting?

JAMES WENTZY: No. I think—yeah. I think I was always interested, maybe, in—I mean, my famous—my favorite filmmakers would have been the usual: Fellini, Bergman.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And I had that surrealistic streak in me. So, I was always headed towards that. But, you know, right after college and I came to New York City, and I realized—oh, film is expensive. I'm not doing film.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, perhaps that's why I did go back to still photography.

CYNTHIA CARR: You went back to still photography when you got here?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, I mean I worked a little bit in film.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, I mean—

CYNTHIA CARR: When you were in college you probably had to make a film. You were a film major.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: So you probably had to create a film as a final project or something.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Took me—I hadn't finished by the time graduation came so I was, like, three months behind. They gave me—

CYNTHIA CARR: What was the project that you were filming?

JAMES WENTZY: It was a 25-minute color, sound film. Actors, I got—

CYNTHIA CARR: So, something scripted.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And use half of the location driving 100 miles to St. Louis. And there was an old movie palace, the Fox Theater.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I naively went up there asking permission to film after the movie was finished at night. And they said yes.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So I filmed a few hours while the movie was still playing, you know, up in the upper balconies.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Ornate hallways, sculpted lions—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —mythology and it was grand. The movie they were playing was *The Exorcist*.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, I won't say the line I kept hearing over and over again about the mother in hell.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Did the actors come with you? Were they—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You were filming them there in the—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. So, there was a story. You were telling a story. And that—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. A cross between Bergman and Fellini.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: [Laughs.] Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Have you ever shown that film since then? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Once, sort of afterwards. Back in Brookings, my home town.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And the people seeing it probably didn't have too much to say other than "beautifully photographed."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: You know I was mixing up sexual identities with people when I clearly had not come out of the closet yet.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, you hadn't?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Were you political in any way while you were in college?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: No.

JAMES WENTZY: No. I mean, when I left South Dakota I didn't—I guess I was surprised for the first time it made headline news, just as I was leaving South Dakota for SIU. Headline of the paper was—in Rapid City—was "Boy brings his boyfriend to the prom dance".

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And that made headline news out there.

CYNTHIA CARR: In your home town, Brookings?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, that was in Rapid City.

CYNTHIA CARR: In Rapid City. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: But the fact that made statewide news—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, it takes maybe about five or seven years for anything closely related to finally reach South Dakota.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] To reach South Dakota?

JAMES WENTZY: Right. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: If ever.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Then when I came to Carbondale, Illinois and I—maybe one of the first things I—I was living off campus but I noticed a wheat paste poster stapled on some trees saying, "Gay, lesbian meeting every Thursday night." So, I browsed through these. "Interesting to make note of." So, I knew something was happening that I wasn't used to in South Dakota. But I didn't follow up until, you know, my senior year, which was just as well.

CYNTHIA CARR: So when you saw that sign you didn't connect it to your own sexual identity or anything like that?

JAMES WENTZY: I think I must have.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay, Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: There wasn't any denial on my part. It was just me—I didn't—inherent shyness perhaps or I was in a strange place. I mean the whole—just the population of the university was twice as big as my hometown in South Dakota.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And that's the fifth largest in the state.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So—

CYNTHIA CARR: And that would have been around the time of Stonewall. When you were at the end of your college time, I think. Right?

JAMES WENTZY: '76.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. '76.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. So, after Stonewall.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Just about the time, maybe, the news is hitting South Dakota.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. Now, when did you move to New York? Did you come right after college or did you go somewhere else?

JAMES WENTZY: Basically I had a—for two years in a row, I had—I'd worked with some producers in Washington D.C., who were making these features for tax deferment. They had a tax deferment program back in those days for—I forget what they call it—but if you lose money on a project. So, you can make a nice low budget, drive-in movie type feature.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And get a tax deferment. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —that's what they were doing.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: And so I worked for them two years. Second year, second summer I guess I'd finally finished my film so I could graduate. And worked on this film. And we shot it outside of Washington at a military school that was closed for the summer. And we made a schlocky horror movie called *The Redeemer*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They may have changed the name for when it was released. I don't know. I'm not sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: So it was like one of those Roger Corman films sort of?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. I was assistant to the producer.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And I think I did my job well. Like, cameraman after a week of shooting was depressed and wanting to quit, and I kept him on his job. And that's a good job.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Good accomplishment.

CYNTHIA CARR: So you didn't do any shooting there yourself?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: No. To this day I still like to watch. I like to watch.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But then at the end of shooting, it was going to be edited in New York at the Film Center Building on Ninth Avenue.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And I asked the producer, "Can I go and be an apprentice editor, whatever you want to—I'm just interested."

CYNTHIA CARR: Huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I'd never been to New York before. Been to most other cities in the States. Didn't really think too much of them. But—so I guess I should check out New York. And we drove up to New York. And I remember the first question we asked after getting out of the tunnel, must have been—I don't know which tunnel it was. But we asked—think it must have been the Holland Tunnel. Soon as we got on the Manhattan side we asked the question, "Which way is uptown?"

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Which is so—which I was so pleased last year. I was walking the sidewalk and somebody asked me, "Which way is uptown?" So, pleased I could say, "It's that way." And coming to New York, the first time, it was love at first sight.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I was just impressed with all the garbage and the denseness and the variety of people.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Right. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, without even having to make any statement or promise to myself, I just stayed somehow.

CYNTHIA CARR: And you worked on that—finishing that film. Doing the editing.

JAMES WENTZY: Worked on that and did some other films. Worked for a company that got little jobs here and there. One was like doing a commercial for Twining's Tea in Japan.

CYNTHIA CARR: Ah.

JAMES WENTZY: We did a commercial for Twining's Tea in a Japanese market. Densu advertising agency hired the QE2 for us and flew down a crew of models and the equipment. I was the production manager for that. I was told, "Yeah. You just tip the sky cap some money and they'll get overweight luggage onto a plane for you."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And so I tipped him a 50 and we had lots of camera equipment and flew down the equipment and the models to St. Thomas. Got aboard the QE2 to come back to New York City.

CYNTHIA CARR: Hm. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I don't know. Something about heterosexual camera companies, filmmaking companies who have to hire male models, they never think to check them out. So, they had a swimming pool scene with some of the male models and—well, both the male and female models. But they never realized the male model had an appendix scar—appendix removal scar. But that's probably perfectly fine for Japanese audience. It's okay.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Just to back up a little, the film you were working on when you first came up here, what was the

title of that film?

JAMES WENTZY: That must have been *The Redeemer*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. *The Redeemer*. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. The horror film.

CYNTHIA CARR: Was that released in theaters? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: You know, that's about the time when movie theaters started closing.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Drive-in movies.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, it was for drive-ins.

JAMES WENTZY: It was sort of like it. I mean, I don't know if you could really tell the difference necessarily.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But it was probably bad enough where it would have done fine on drive-ins, but I guess wrong.

CYNTHIA CARR: But not other, regular theaters?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I mean, there's a listing online for it. I was surprised to see.

CYNTHIA CARR: So then, when you worked for the ad agency—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, we did the commercials like that. They also got hired to do the scenes of *Searching For—or In Search of...?* I'm not sure which. The series.

CYNTHIA CARR: The TV show?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: *In Search of...?*

JAMES WENTZY: The TV show, *In Search of...?* Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So were you doing—

JAMES WENTZY: This was the year that they had hired Leonard Nimoy to—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —to do. So, that was fun and memorable.

CYNTHIA CARR: Were you doing the camera work then or producing or what was your job?

JAMES WENTZY: No. Definitely—

CYNTHIA CARR: Or directing? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Just running around. Probably for them. I was probably fetching water for Leonard. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Leonard?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Went by—we're on a first name basis.

[They laugh.]

He did mention though—I was told that he told the producers, "That guy really works—runs around and working fast. Working good." So, second hand praise from Leonard Nimoy.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh! [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: That's what I heard. That's what I like to believe. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And you know, when I first came to the city for the first month or two I was just living in a room that you rented. It was nearby the Film Center Building. It was across the street from the High School for Performing Arts. It was a room for \$50 a month. Bathroom was down the hall.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But I stayed there, and during that time my—I got a call and found out that there's an opportunity to live in Brooklyn, Clinton Hill. And my best friends of my family, my mother and father back in South Dakota, their boy had bought a brownstone there and renovated it. And then his job had changed. Wanted—moved him to Florida. So, he would be very interested to have somebody that he knew was responsible to live in that brownstone before it was sold.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh

JAMES WENTZY: So—

CYNTHIA CARR: So this was like a friend of your parents? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yup. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, yeah. We knew each other. He was older than I was. But grew up basically the same. And so, I lived in Brooklyn for several years. I lived in the brownstone and had quickly found out that my neighbor there was named Arch Brown who was a gay porno director.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And he was doing a couple films. Said, "We could sure use some help on for camera work."

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And just coming from school I knew all the cameras and, "Yeah. I would love to do that." So, I photographed a couple of his gay features. *Musclebound* and *Harley's Angels*.

CYNTHIA CARR: *Harley's Angels*?

JAMES WENTZY: *Harley's Angels*, yeah. Yes.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Good porn names of course,

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: We shot in 16mm.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And, I don't know, when I was working in a film business I kind of quickly realized I really didn't have a lot of work ethic in me, by nature.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And to work in film, or probably any freelance business in the city you have to do a lot of knocking on doors, keeping in touch with people, keeping that network.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Constant touch. I didn't have that in me, really. So, you know, my film work sort of started degenerating into negative matching. That's a tough job.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. That's during the editing process, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: You have to do that too.

JAMES WENTZY: I had to work on—when you work on a work print and then you have to transfer the original film to the exact edit.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: That's the way those are done.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Pretty mindless stuff. But—so, I'd done that for a while and then some other porno work. Found out Gerard Damiano needed an editor. He's the director that did *Deep Throat*, and a pretty big name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: *Devil and Ms. Jones* and—so, I went up to his facilities out in—he had gotten, like, an old abandoned factory that he revamped. He had sets for kitchens, living rooms, the bedroom. And a Steenbeck for the editing room, 35mm.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, he shot 35mm, you know—gay films. Gay porn 16, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: He was doing gay porn?

JAMES WENTZY: No, no. He was—he did the straight porn. And I was hired in to edit his—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Were all these things done in Manhattan? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: His was out in Corona, his place.

CYNTHIA CARR: Corona?

JAMES WENTZY: Corona, Queens.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. I see. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And the gay porn Arch Brown shot anywhere, but probably wasn't Manhattan. He did a film, I found out—I haven't seen it, though—at one of these piers. On pier, I believe it was Pier 34 before it became the art pier for a year, last year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yes. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, he filmed some things there. And maybe the piers that were up here too. I think he's one of two people who made that their location for film.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: I'd love to see some of that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Pier 34 was always pretty empty during the day.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: It was not like these piers—where they probably had people in them all the time.

JAMES WENTZY: Right [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: You're off Christopher Street.

JAMES WENTZY: Yup.

CYNTHIA CARR: So what years are we—was this happening, late '70s?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I came to the city in '76.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And probably wasn't until I'd met a friend that—uh, we became friends. I met him at a bar, the Ninth Circle. Young, black man who was drawing pictures and that appealed to me. So we became friends. And he decided we could probably get into P.S. 1, the artist studio program [years later to become MoMA -JW]. And so, we applied together. I took some pictures doing what we were planning to do, was morphing the dimensionality of still pictures by re-photographing them on different surfaces.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And—

CYNTHIA CARR: And what was his name, your friend?

JAMES WENTZY: Darrel Ellis.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. So, you worked on that—

JAMES WENTZY: D-A-R-R-Y-L or E-L. I'll confirm that. I think it's E-L, actually.

CYNTHIA CARR: You can—okay.

JAMES WENTZY: [inaudible] Ellis with two Ls, I-S. Yeah. He was from the Bronx and an artist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps the first one I really knew at the time, personally.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, we had an artist studio at P.S. 1. We shared a tiny studio. Now, it's enlarged to be the restaurant—or the coffee shop of P.S. 1.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see. Yes. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But 105 was the original number. You know, and we were one of the six people that were living there illegally.

CYNTHIA CARR: You were living there?

JAMES WENTZY: We were living there too, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You moved out of the brownstone by then?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And the—they turned off the heat at five o'clock every day. It was cold, cold s s hovelng coal.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And when you're young you could care less. It doesn't matter.

CYNTHIA CARR: When you're young, yeah. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And we shared the studio. Opened it up most weekends for people to, say, wander in. I'd quickly kind of decided, I guess, that I didn't want to do that kind of art anymore. He was interested, but the re-photography and the—

CYNTHIA CARR: It sounds like very conceptual, that kind of project. Like re-photographing and—you know—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I mean—and for me it also started sounding like a rut.

CYNTHIA CARR: A rut. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So we amicably split apart. We asked—

CYNTHIA CARR: How long were you there?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, one year and then we decided to split apart and got a second year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So we asked Alanna Heiss who was in charge of P.S. 1 at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: We asked, "Well, we're going separate directions. Can we do another year?" And, "Yes."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, Darrel kept that room. And then I moved up to the attic.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: It was a nice space. I liked the attic. If you haven't been up to the attic at P.S. 1, it's worth it. They don't always have it open, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. I'm not sure if I've been up there. But it's a—what were you—so, what was your project then, when you moved up to the attic?

JAMES WENTZY: I'm not sure I cared that much or was driven that much.

CYNTHIA CARR: During this time when you were working for, you know, ad agencies and the porn directors and that, were you doing your own photography and filming your own projects?

JAMES WENTZY: No. Not filming, but photography yes. But I remember just, maybe, sitting on the back porch in the backyard in Brooklyn having the yearning to take a picture but not really seeing anything I wanted to photograph or exactly where.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, just as a—I don't know—consolation.

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JAMES WENTZY: Right, I've taken a self-portrait, I've taken a picture of myself.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Actually, I have a lot of pictures of myself as consolation.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Right. Right. So—

JAMES WENTZY: Also at that time, when we moved into P.S.1, we were going to build a darkroom, and on one side of the wall was the first classroom in the hallway and it had a bathroom that was, of course, not in use, but, so we got permission to take a sledge hammer and go through the cinder block—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —and when we had access to the bathroom and we hired a plumber to come in and get it all plumbed for a darkroom.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, he just happened to mention to me, "You know, I have a good friend of mine who's a photographer in SoHo, James Dee, who photographs artwork for artists and galleries and he needs a darkroom printer."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: It was a part time job, so it would have been like 1981. "Would you be interested?" And I said, "Yeah, sure." So, I called him up and we met and I guess, I guess he originally said no, but his wife said yes. So, I was hired—

CYNTHIA CARR: Cool. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —to work two or three days a week in his darkroom.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And then he, he lived at 70 Wooster Street and then he bought a building. The sewing business, the needle manufacturing business [Dubrow & Hearne -JW], finally decided Manhattan [was too expensive -JW], you know. This was in '82. So, they moved out to Queens and Jim Dee had—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —this building at 12 Wooster and it was just raw space. The second floor had so much machinery the floors were oil-soaked and, but he didn't have enough money to, he had enough, just enough money to buy it, but not enough money to renovate it, to live there, so—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: —he started renovation. But I told him, I came and I said, "I'm"—it was the end of my two years at P.S. 1. It was time to move and I told him, "Well, maybe if you paid me more I could afford a place to live or just let me homestead an area of the basement." And he said, yes. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, in lieu of any major salary shift, just minor salary and—

CYNTHIA CARR: And you were still working in the darkroom for him at that point?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. And for the 31 years afterwards.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, really?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Up until I moved here [on Christopher Street -JW].

CYNTHIA CARR: Twelve Wooster it is?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, I'd homestead a nice space there and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —comfortably. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: His name is very familiar. I know he used to photograph artwork.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: I would see his name all over the place.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, you were doing the printing of that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. In fact we got—one of his gigs was for Aperture Magazine.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Their issue on David Wojnarowicz.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, really?

JAMES WENTZY: And so, pictures came in. He photographed it. I'd load it up, 4x5 [black and white -JW] sheet film, copy film.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Only used for re-photographing photographs. Till now a-days.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: I printed all those.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, you did color and black and white?

JAMES WENTZY: No, just black and white.

CYNTHIA CARR: Just black and white?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Otherwise, color it would be either slide film or 4x5 transparency film—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —for them.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, I printed—for some reason people, some people at the time, they don't say any longer—at the time they wanted black and white. So, I would print all their black and white.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And, sometimes it would be like 90 prints for a session. I did everything by hand and I got to be a machine. I was quick and I was out of the darkroom, like, in three hours.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. So, during that time, did you feel like you came out as soon as you moved to New York? Or before that? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, I did, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: When you were still in—

JAMES WENTZY: When I, actually the first few days when I came to New York. I stayed at the editor's loft apartment he had on 26th Street and 6th Avenue. Now, I think it's a parking lot or a huge building, and the first night, a real nice man, he walked me, we walked down 6th Avenue and the first restaurant was the Broome Street Bar.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: As we were walking down 6th Avenue, he did point off to the right he said, "And to the right is Greenwich Village, or West Village, commonly called, and it's full of Bohemians, artists, and gays." And, I clearly remember making a mental note.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, I had to go back and picked a bar and became friends with a clique of people for a while. Never good with picking up people, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. A clique of people meaning gay people or artists?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Or both? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. There's something to do when you're too frustrated for [cruising -JW]—or exerting yourself.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But I really wasn't into the bar scene too much. I don't know what to say—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Well, did you get active in any gay groups or anything like that? Political groups?

JAMES WENTZY: No, I'm sheepish to admit.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I'm sheepish to admit. No, I lived in a basement.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I was beneath it all.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Do you remember when it was that you first heard about AIDS?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, early-'80s a friend in the neighborhood—

CYNTHIA CARR: Remember that story in the *Times*?

JAMES WENTZY: No, I don't think I read the *Times* too often. Start with these newspapers if you only have to throw them out afterwards or recycle. No, a friend in the Village, a friend to several people around this neighborhood actually, and, and he died early on—'82 or '83, maybe.

CYNTHIA CARR: Really? That is early.

JAMES WENTZY: And, but it was because of AIDS so '82 or ['8]3, you know, and his partner, [Larry Blank -JW]—I remember him asking me, "Do you really think he died of this disease going around?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah. I think so."

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: He later died presumably of PCP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, he had the pneumonia—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I'm very blank. I don't know what Drew had died of.

CYNTHIA CARR: Who? Drew?

JAMES WENTZY: Drew—I don't know his last name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And, and I know even Drew was a made-up name for him.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, really? Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: He was hired to do a mural at Tavern On The Green. So, obviously, he had talent.

CYNTHIA CARR: To do what? What was he doing there?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, he did a mural.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, a mural? Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: An art mural for decoration for Tavern On The Green.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But he also cut hair, which was probably his main income.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Who was your friend who died early, like '82 or '83?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, that was Drew.

CYNTHIA CARR: That was Drew. Okay, and then his—

JAMES WENTZY: And his partner, Larry—

CYNTHIA CARR: —his partner, Larry, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —was the one that asked me the question. I knew that he was also sick or pending sickness.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And he knew that too. But we kept in touch, and so there were no surprises with him, I guess. Yeah, that was my first awareness of, of this. I'm not sure I recognized it as much as the plague that it was, is.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: At the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: It wasn't even getting much coverage in papers—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —except for the *Native*, if you read the *Native*.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: It was covered in there.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, I certainly knew and at the time, I'm also really ashamed to admit I listened to Larry Kramer. I'm sorry. Not, I listened to—a mental block, don't—Gary Null is what I'm—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: That is what I'm—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —really—

CYNTHIA CARR: He had all that nutritional stuff that you were supposed to do to—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, well—which some of it isn't bad, and I'm not sure—now he's an AIDS denialist. That's why I'm ashamed now to admit that I even listened to him. Now, Gary Null is an AIDS denialist. "HIV does not cause AIDS," so—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, boy.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I have zero respect. That's still one of the things more than anything else in this world that ticks me off.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But you don't have to wait too long usually for an AIDS denialist to die.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Did he have AIDS? Gary?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Right, so.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, you had a friend who was sick very early.

JAMES WENTZY: I knew about it, but still I didn't, I still wasn't a part of any community or aware of the enormity of the plague yet.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: I was in the basement and—

CYNTHIA CARR: I think it was easy to be in denial in those days.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: I mean who could have imagined how awful it was going to get?

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know? So—

JAMES WENTZY: And, I started doing long distance backpacking, and in 1983, I think, I decided I'm going to walk the Appalachian Trail.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, '83 I scheduled, scheduled to have somebody else to come in temporarily to do my job, printing, and I was taking a holiday out to take the bus down to Georgia. Start at Spring Mountain heading north on the Appalachian trail in April and, all of a sudden, some work came and my boss asked me to delay my trip for a couple of weeks. So, I did that and then started hiking and got up to about, [600 miles, and at the state line of Virginia -JW] I developed a stress fracture in one of my toes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Ooh.

JAMES WENTZY: Had that x-ray that said, "Yeah, there it is." I was kind of bummed out and spent the rest of the summer at some dear friend's house [. . . -JW] in Kent, Connecticut and then came back, came back to New York and worked. But I always did a lot more hiking. Smaller trips. Originally, I had hiked every, every step of the way from my front stoop to Canada. So, I did a lot of long distance hiking. I thought—

CYNTHIA CARR: From your front stoop to Canada?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I put together several hiking trips together, you know, going—walking up to the GW Bridge and crossing it and then getting on the trail that goes from the GW Bridge up to just a little below Albany. And, when you pass the Appalachian trail and Bear Mountain where it goes up to the first third of Vermont and goes over to Maine, and—but you can keep on the long trail that goes up to Canada. So, I did those trips.

CYNTHIA CARR: When you did these trips did you take a camera with you?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Not in the early days because you were counting ounces—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —when you were carrying. But later on, I did and later on when I had a car, a very cool 1966 Karmann Ghia, VW Karmann Ghia—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and I had a bike rack and I would put my bicycle on it. So, I could go to a hiking trail and put a bicycle on one end of it, park the car and start hiking up to it and then, then stop off somewhere to recharge the batteries of the camera, which by then it was video and then get the car, re-looping, pick up the camera and start hiking. So, actually, a lot of my VHS camera original tapes are hiking days—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, from hiking, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, yeah, so. Sometime, assuming I live long enough, I'm going to digitize those and get those in order.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, great. So, all this hiking was taking place in the '80s?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and I thought, this is a perfect life. Carrying what you need on your back. Waking up with the sun, going to sleep with the sun. It's something that's fundamentally human. Basically, human or—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, I like that.

CYNTHIA CARR: It's simplified.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, I did a lot of that. Probably around 2,500 miles or more of hikes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: I do remember in '85 calling one of the agencies in town. I probably looked it up in the phone book, a hotline, an AIDS hotline. I called them up and asked them, do you think I should get tested? And the reply was, "Well, you're a gay man—promiscuous, more or less." Their answer would be, "No. Don't bother. Just assume you're positive." My head must have bounced back a few times, the barrage—and accepted that, and strangely enough, I think today that was probably good advice at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: That's when the first antibody test was available.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: In '85.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, right, right.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, you called as soon as the—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —just to see, should I do it?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I think I noticed maybe some thrush on my mouth or something.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I think, nothing serious but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: That probably made me want to crash. I mean I didn't have a lot of sex. Maybe I'd go to the baths twice a month, but I never liked the real dark rooms.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But that, I'm quite sure I probably acquired HIV and—well, when I was living in P.S. 1, actually—I have a photograph of some spots on my leg. They weren't raised or anything. They were just pigmentation that never appeared there before and maybe every four months they'd move around a little bit. I wanted to ask doctors in New York what it was. "No, nothing, they don't know." I went to a doctor in South Dakota after I thought, I can go back to my home state and I'll be able to get a good answer there. They didn't have a clue. But when I went to the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam in '80, in '92—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Went to the scientific posting, poster room and I noticed one that said epidemio, epidemiolo, I can't even say it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Epidemiology?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, epidermal, responses, early indications of HIV transmission through skin pigmentation. And they had the same pictures.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: That I shot back in '81.

CYNTHIA CARR: So you think, you think it was Kaposi's?

JAMES WENTZY: No, it definitely wasn't.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: It was just pigmentation for some reason.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And it would move and, and it disappeared after a year or two. But, but I wasn't sure until I saw that poster in '92 that, yeah, I have this HIV since '81, '82. I mean one thing, being as mentally explosive as it was with AIDS, I did take to safe sex to heart and did use condoms for anything from '82 on, I'm quite sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. So, when did you get tested?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, so, when I was living in the basement, I moved in the basement in '83 and finally in 1990, I decided I was going to get tested. It took a few weeks to get an appointment at, at a public health clinic in Manhattan but it only took two weeks to get one in Brooklyn—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —a city clinic just on the other side of the Manhattan Bridge. So, I made an appointment and had a test, my blood drawn and then you have that two-week wait and when you're waiting for test results it's like on a Monday you're going to think, "Yeah, I'm positive." Tuesday: "I'm not positive." Wednesday it's, "I'm positive." Thursday it's, "I'm not positive." You go back and forth so—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —finally in two weeks you get the results, and so a large nurse: "I'm sorry, it's positive," and gave me a big official hug, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: A hug?

JAMES WENTZY: Real nice, yeah. I remember walking back to the city. Walking over the Brooklyn Bridge and it was light rain and just as you round the corner for cars, traffic and pedestrians to turn north into Manhattan, it was before the time they had put up a fence separating the cars from the pedestrians. So, there was no fence. It was just a little raised walkway and just maybe ten seconds before I was about to make a turn, a car had slipped on a wet pavement and popped over on a pedestrian walkway and had I been walking, literally 15 seconds faster, I would have been rubbed out right away.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, wow.

JAMES WENTZY: So, could there be a better life lesson for me to worry about AIDS? Well, there could be a light rain on a, on a highway just as easily.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, not that I was really worried about it, but it certainly gave me some perspective and my main thought I was continually thinking walking across the bridge was, "Now what am I supposed to do? And how am I supposed to do it?" I didn't know and I got back, back to the studio and my place and I told him I was getting a test. He said, "Sorry." He was photographing the work of Robert Farber at the time. And Jim Dee said, "Here's Robert. He's been living with this a long time. I think you two can talk." And so, we sat on the front stoop for a while and Robert said to me, "I should take you to an ACT UP meeting."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, he did. And I was just so impressed with everything. So I just went every week.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you would have heard about ACT UP before this, right?

JAMES WENTZY: You would think so. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: But you hadn't really heard about them?

JAMES WENTZY: No, not really.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean I'd even seen the "Silence = Death" posters.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: The, you know, iconic—the imagery probably greater than Virgin Mary was supposed to be. I didn't really know what it was about.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps not the smartest camper in the woods.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, ACT UP was the first, sort of gay group. Not that everybody in it was necessarily gay—

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: I think most people were, but that was the first one you joined?

JAMES WENTZY: I was involved with Sundance a little bit.

CYNTHIA CARR: Sundance?

JAMES WENTZY: Sundance. That was one of the gay groups that would be at the Center and plan either hiking trips, weekend hiking trips.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see they were located at the Gay Center?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, well, located at—they weren't an official group. It was just—they got the Center to sponsor a meeting place for them—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see. It was like, people interested in hiking?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. I mean there were lots of other things. They probably had square dancing groups.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Lots of varied groups.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Since I'd done a lot of long-distance backpacking I thought, "Let's get gay into it." So, I knew a little bit about the Center but again—not HIV, not ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Or Gay Men's Health Crisis? You hadn't heard about them?

JAMES WENTZY: I'd say no. Certainly, if I had heard of them, I forgot about them.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I don't know.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, when you started in ACT UP did you join an affinity group?

JAMES WENTZY: No. I was interested in the committee, the Alternat[ive] and Holistic Treatment Committee. I guess that comes from my Gary Null radio in the early days.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, that would have been with Jon Greenberg and Bob Lederer.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Close to another group. They were sort of the bad children in ACT UP or the wishful thinking people. I don't know. They weren't respected overall, but not—but accepted.

CYNTHIA CARR: This was a group looking into alternative treatments?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: I mean the only thing available at that point was AZT.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Which wasn't—

JAMES WENTZY: —even the treatment activists knew that wasn't, that was not much better than crap or Drano.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean it wasn't until '93 at the Berlin AIDS Conference was when it was made official that it has no use, if any, it has no use after a year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I'd accepted that from the beginning. I wasn't going to take anything if I didn't have to. Luckily, I didn't have to. I never had bad health for a while.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Maybe all the time, never. I mean, when I came to the city, I realized—I need some bad habits. So, I took up smoking.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And, and some marijuana use. I thought I needed to be bad sometimes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And smoking I stayed with, because how was I going to tell whether you're in good health? I mean you can't smoke when you're sick.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, you know you're sick. Okay. I've just recently given up smoking.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So now I'm really not sure how will I ever know when I'm sick though? And the pot I realized, no matter what kind of a good idea you had flashing in your brain at the time, you're not going to remember the next day. So, I started drawing pictures or writing down notes in little black pocket books. Thinking, well, I'll bank these good thoughts away for later when I'm old.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, because I am now, no doubt.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Thinking, but when I'm old I won't have these good ideas. So, I'll go back to them and oh yeah, I can do that. Banking good ideas. I have a bunch of them and a friend had made a film out of them—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —which actually, he made it ten years ago, but it actually premieres in a couple weeks at the MIX Festival. *Books of James*.

CYNTHIA CARR: *Books of James*?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Who's the friend who made the film?

JAMES WENTZY: Ho Tam. Ho Tam. H-O, T-A-M. Ho. Tam is the last name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Artist in Canada.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I met him at a MIX Festival and he was showing some of his work. I was showing some of my work, and so we were friends for a while. He had a three-year visa, artist visa to be in New York. And then I remember when he came back from Hong Kong on one vacation trip he came back, we went out to a restaurant in Chinatown and he said, "I think I'm going to break up with you," and I had my brain jarring and I just kind of covered over it my brain jarring movement by saying, "Okay, I'll get a cat." And, he did. I did get a cat and—but we've remained friends ever since. He was visiting the city one summer and I had to go to an AIDS conference and "make yourself at home, you know, I'll be gone for six or seven days" and he discovered I had this book or these notebooks and said, "Can I look at these?" I said, "Sure." So, when I had come back from the AIDS conference, one of the first questions was, "I like these books. Can I make a film out of them?"

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: "Sure." He made a 17-minute film and then he decided to make—up it and make a feature-length film. Sure, you know, but I was, I was meticulous in staying away from it. I just gave him access to anything he wanted, but I wasn't going to do anything more than that. Well, finally he asked me to do some narration from some of the things I'd written in the book and he lived in Canada. I did some of the narration, and I think he still wanted to slam me in the face with his fist by how monotone it was, but you know, you're born and raised in the Midwest, self-effacing. You just can't do too much glorification of yourself.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: It's just not permitted. Might as well not be born—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —if you're going to start gloating over things that you were probably more given than earned. So, I'm still like that a little bit.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Do you remember when you joined ACT UP what your first action was that you got involved in or first demo?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, the A&H Committee. The Alternative and Holistic Treatment Committee. Called it A&H because that was much easier. [We decided to go to protest against—JW] a Quack—so called, Quackbuster's Conference held in Kansas City.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Missouri. And so, the committee asked for funding and approval and we got it and we flew maybe about eight, 10 or 12 people to attend and zap the Quackbuster's Conference and they were would-be doctors and would-be professionals who were just against anything alternative.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They were against, you know, against chiropractic—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: —use. They were against vitamins. They were against—

CYNTHIA CARR: So, they were comparing all that stuff to crack?

JAMES WENTZY: Quack. Quackbusting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Quack? Oh, quack!

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, so they—these practitioners were quacks.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: So, they were, so we were protesting against them because not all these practitioners are quacks. Some of them have a point. So, that's what we, that was my first demo and I filmed that.

CYNTHIA CARR: And what year was that or—

JAMES WENTZY: It must have been—it was 1990.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay, and you filmed it?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, what was the action? Did you just go in and start chanting or march around and front or—

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JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. We were definitely on the inside more than out.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: But a lot of ACT UP chapters from around the area also had come.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: So, there were a lot of us, and it was nonstop all during it. We made front page news.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: There was a picture of a cop arresting a protestor, dragging him away by—we had never seen this before—by pulling from behind the protestor on the ground. He would put his fingers up their jaw and then just start moving them out. And a front-page picture of that being happening, and in the background, you see me with the camera overly dressed, but I was trying to look passable.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, it was videotaped at that point. You were videotaping?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: What kind of camera did you have?

JAMES WENTZY: I had on-the-shoulder type VHS full size, VHS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Cameras were big still at that point.

JAMES WENTZY: So big.

CYNTHIA CARR: You had to carry that all the way to Kansas City?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, no. I took a plane. I did not walk. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Well, of course. Right. But you had to bring the camera with you?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And all throughout though when I came back I quickly edited—I think I edited first a 40-minute version and I cut it down to a 20-minute version.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And we had some screenings at the center for ACT UP on what we did.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: We are not just vitamin-toting lazy people on our committee. We did some good actions.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And it was only a few weeks later, January of '91, where I decided I am going to film everything and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And because I am filming everything, I am going to do a weekly public access show and just start cranking it out.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I did not think it mattered what I did. Even lousy video is better than it just sitting unseen on a shelf. So, I committed then. The Day of Desperation was probably the first demonstration I filmed, knowing that I would be doing a lot, and I guess also Testing the Limits last demonstration they filmed.

CYNTHIA CARR: It was what?

JAMES WENTZY: Testing the Limits—last thing they filmed [regarding AIDS -JW].

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, it was a psychic passing of the baton, and DIVA TV had been in existence for almost a year by then. When I joined ACT UP, it wasn't really—it lasted about one year and then it did not happen anymore.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. A Day of Desperation—was that in January of '91?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. And so, you filmed what happened at Grand Central?

JAMES WENTZY: I did. Yeah. I was on the mezzanine and so was an NBC reporter. And I was bending over the rail getting shots of people, and I kept hearing this reporter saying, "And it's rush hour, and people are having a difficult time getting home." And I thought, boy, is she missing the point. I mean, it may be true, but that's not the point. And then she started again, "And people are having a difficult time getting home."

CYNTHIA CARR: Maybe you could describe what was going on in the station.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. We filled it up. It is a big place, and, all of a sudden, we had it filled, and—

CYNTHIA CARR: With protestors, it was filled?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. It was not like we set up any barricades or anything. People generally would have a difficult time getting to the entrance to the train.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But this happened at 5:05 or something like that. Rush hour, sure enough, but then we were gone after an hour.

CYNTHIA CARR: And there were some banners that were dropped.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And things like that that were hung up.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. We started off with a banner. One by one, they brought in little groups of balloons as if they had come from a birthday party next door—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And then they all converged at the same time and hooked the balloons up together, and it lifted a huge long banner saying, "Money for AIDS, Not for War."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. So, these were helium balloons?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And deftly done. I was at the balcony. Nobody told me this was happening. So, actually the footage I have originally is backwards. You can see the banner but it's—so, it wasn't until I went digital and video in 2002 that I was able to flip it around. So, I had to reverse behind the screen. And then they had a nice banner over the time-table for the train departures.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And their time table was one AIDS death every eight minutes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And a few extra smaller signs. "AIDS Isn't Over," that sort of thing.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But when this reporter just behind me—NBC, I heard her say a second time, "And people are having a difficult time getting home," I said—I scrunched my eyes—like if she says this one more time, I'm going to have to say something. I mean, it's just too wrong. She's not doing her job right. And, sure enough, she said it a third time, "And people are having a difficult time getting home." And I hadn't thought of anything before and it is certainly not my personality, but I did turn around, leaned over her shoulder and said, "And people are having a difficult"—I tried shouting but—"and people are having a difficult time dying, too." So, I did that. I know. Afterward, she just never looked at me. She was like—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and later, I befriended somebody who used to work at MSNBC, and she said, "Oh, yeah. I remember her. She's gone into public health now—

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and that was her first remote." She had never been on remote before.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh—[Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I like to think that maybe I changed her—[Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, that would be good.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, the day before though, the Day of Desperation, which was on January 23, we started downtown early in the morning like 7 a.m. and snaked around the streets downtown, but then during the day there were all sorts of little affinity actions.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: People dumped bones up in the state office buildings in Harlem, I believe. Our committee, the A&H Committee, we did an office zap of the Health and Hospital Commissioner, and we were going to take over the place until he met with us, because the food in hospitals is not doing service to their needs in the hospitals. And so, we went up there to the Health Department, A&H, and the commissioner came out and loved it. He said, "Yeah, I did some protesting in my youth. Come on in. Come on in. [inaudible]. We'll see what we can do." So, it was fine. Not that I can say anything changed, and then at five o'clock everybody was going to rendezvous at Grand Central Terminal, but the night before was when activists got in front of Dan Rather for the news zap.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: "Money for AIDS, Not for War." With John Weir and a few others.

CYNTHIA CARR: John who?

JAMES WENTZY: John Weir.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: E-I-R. And, he was the only one that got on camera. The other two were [nabbed -JW].

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. You went along to CBS?

JAMES WENTZY: No. I wasn't there, but some other compadres were there and filmed, not at CBS, but outside where the police arrested—

CYNTHIA CARR: They went to MacNeil/Lehrer also at PBS.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Jon Greenberg, Anna Blume, and a couple of others. Yeah. So, they also got on and off the air, but yeah Lehrer before he wrapped the story said, "And I understand there are some problems up in New York." So, they cut to MacNeil and he said, "Yes, there are a group of anti-AIDS activists here protesting the fact that we do not do enough on the subject of AIDS. I told them we are very concerned about the AIDS matter and we will continue to do more." So, it made a difference.

They were asked how did they get into—fake passes, of course—and I made fake press passes that looked remarkably like the police-issued press passes, except it wasn't signed. It wasn't a forgery because it didn't have any fake signatures or anything. It did [not -JW] mention the police department. I still wonder to this day why our press accreditation is issued by the police department. It can be concerning—disconcerting when you think about it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: But mine worked. Only once did a cop say, "This isn't real." And I just walked around and found another cop, but it really worked.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. You talked about that Testing the Limits group. Now what was that?

JAMES WENTZY: That was a collective of—early on—a whole bunch of people, and they did the first feature on AIDS, on ACT UP—"Voices from the Front." They did that.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, they were a media group, or?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Doing films or videos?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And there was a mixture of them and DIVA TV. It was all comingling, incest and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Was Testing the Limits filming? They weren't documenting events like you. They were making

sort of information-type films about—

JAMES WENTZY: Well, they were documenting things like I was.

CYNTHIA CARR: They were. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And anybody who had a camera was filming things. They would just [lend their material -JW].

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Which is confusing later, when somebody wants to ask permission for footage.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Then you have to get permission from the four independent leaders of Testing the Limits. You also might have to reckon with whose footage is it really because they might not have shot it. It was just material that was given to them for use, which has happened to Jean Carlomusto a lot.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Were you giving your footage to Testing the Limits?

JAMES WENTZY: No. Pretty much by then they had all they needed for AIDS. They were ready to move on.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And they were really starting to move on to gay and lesbian rights.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, it definitely moved—

CYNTHIA CARR: So, they stopped covering the AIDS demonstrations.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Definitely.

CYNTHIA CARR: Around that time—like after Day of Desperation they stopped?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. That was it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. And then this was the time of—what—'91, I think you said?

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: You started working with DIVA TV?

JAMES WENTZY: There was no DIVA TV then.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, there wasn't? Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: No. They started in '89. They did *Target City Hall* and *Like A Prayer*—about the Catholic Church action, and one more film they did.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, they had ended by '91?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: By '90, even.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, what was DIVA TV?

JAMES WENTZY: They were just people in ACT UP who liked the idea of documenting with cameras.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. It was part of ACT UP?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Definitely.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: That was part of ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: And what does DIVA stand for?

JAMES WENTZY: Damned Interfering Video Activist, although I always added the "s" for activists and always used that when I had to. I always spelled it out: "activists," but originally no "s." It was just "activist." I guess it was just one.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But it was true collective, and when I started doing my thing, I realized—in fact, I even made a mistake. I asked for a bunch of old media people to come to my basement to talk about what we were going to do new, and I think I had mentioned—uh, a word I can't think of right now which means you make up your opinion based on what the whole group determines—and I said, "Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I mean I'm going to do my thing and enable you to do your thing and that is fine. That's what I'm going to do." I had no particular yearning to be a coalition. I just knew what I wanted to do and certainly knew that I couldn't accomplish it without their help, but I think being creative, having a collective in a creative situation, probably doesn't last too long. I can't imagine that. And indeed, for DIVA TV it didn't. It lasted a year.

CYNTHIA CARR: One year. They lasted one year? Oh

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, I had no intention of being a collective of sorts, other than doing my thing which is full of high spunk and determination.

CYNTHIA CARR: Were you still part of A&H affinity group though?

JAMES WENTZY: No. That practically dissolved when one of the main organizers—I can't remember his name, but I don't want to remember his name even. He just turned into an AIDS denialist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, no.

JAMES WENTZY: I guess it is a fine line between—

CYNTHIA CARR: —he had been part of A&H?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, after he became a denialist, the whole group kind of—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Broke up.

JAMES WENTZY: Surely. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. When was that? In '90 maybe?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Towards the very end of '90.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Michael Elsner. Elsner, I guess is his name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And he made his living—maybe still does, I don't know—as a hypnotherapist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: [Laughs.] It is only natural you stick your head in the sand and don't believe in—

CYNTHIA CARR: —yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Antivirus. "It is in your brain."

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, it is like what happened at *The Native*. I mean for a while they were the only media outlet even reporting on AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And then they got into this whole swine fever thing.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Weren't there some dolphins involved too?

CYNTHIA CARR: Possibly.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, it's like you could not take them seriously anymore. It's really sad.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. So, then did you—it sounds like—well, see if you think this is a fair thing to say, but it sounds like when you got into ACT UP and started filming, it's like you found your calling.

JAMES WENTZY: Definitely. Absolutely.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And when I was cranking out these programs, it wasn't until 1993 when I—actually January—when I started the weekly series. So, I was cranking out shows every week. Very few repeats.

CYNTHIA CARR: And what channel was that on?

JAMES WENTZY: Originally public access channel 69, I believe, at 11:00 p.m.

CYNTHIA CARR: It's called MNN. Is that what it's still called? MNN?

JAMES WENTZY: That's what now it's called. Yeah. Before that it was—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, this was before all the cable stuff.

JAMES WENTZY: Maybe the incorporation of public access had just started. Time Warner had a contract with the city since they were digging up the streets to lay cable. They had to provide certain channels for the community.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: So we got out public access channels, and yeah, I was cranking it out up to the point where, you know, the material was so good, that I personally didn't think that—as bad as I might be at some point, I could never fuck up the material. It had a good quality of its own. So, I didn't worry about that.

CYNTHIA CARR: So this started in '93?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. The weekly series started in '93.

CYNTHIA CARR: And was it a half hour show? Or an hour? Half hour?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. 29 minutes.

CYNTHIA CARR: 29 minutes?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I mastered it on three-quarter inch U-matic tape.

CYNTHIA CARR: U-matic?

JAMES WENTZY: U-matic. Yeah. It is a big tape format. It was popular for a while. My camera was in what was Hi8. So, a smaller camera, but I still opted for a larger camera as I could use because I had these fake press passes, and I wanted to look like real media.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And whether or not I achieved that impression, I got away with it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Totally.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, what are some examples of shows? Were you on there as, like, the host of the show or—?

JAMES WENTZY: No. No. It was all video. No narrator. No. So, it was all footage.

CYNTHIA CARR: What was the title of the show?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, I never put a title on it other than the title of the series was—I always had "*AIDS Community Television*."

CYNTHIA CARR: *AIDS Community Television*.

JAMES WENTZY: That was—I actually felt kind of beaten up in the very early days when I started. Once I announced I was going to film everything, or that I was going to have a weekly series, I made a budget to buy some equipment and did a proposal in front of the floor of ACT UP. We were at Cooper Union at the time. A short time when we were at Cooper Union. Went in front of the floor and submitted a proposal I think asking for \$6,000 to buy equipment then to start cranking out a weekly show —and then people were—and then you'd come back the next week and then it was voted on. So, a big proposal was asking an amount of money and you had to wait a week before you would get a vote, and it seemed like I was still basically off the boat from Lake Woebegone.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But they were merciful on me. But I later heard they were calling up some old-time members in the old DIVA TV and saying, "Who is this guy? Who is this guy?"

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, they weren't quite sure, and so the next week came by and we submitted the program idea, and they took the vote, and there were probably 500 people in the room—early days of the Cooper Union location—and I missed it by like six votes. So, Amy [now Jamie -JW] Bauer was facilitating at the time. She said, "Well, maybe B. C. Craig." She said, "Was there a hand on my shoulder? Usually when people miss a vote by just a little bit, we suggest you come back later and resubmit it." So, I did and got it. I mean I had gotten a North Star grant.

CYNTHIA CARR: What's it called?

JAMES WENTZY: A North Star grant.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And, they were the first people to fund me actually. Then I went to the floor and I said, "Well, I got \$6,000 from North Star." I don't remember if I asked to match it or not. So, they did. It was unanimous.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. What's North Star?

JAMES WENTZY: North Star was a community funding group at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Like funding nonprofits or something like that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. North Star. Slaves would follow the North Star for freedom.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. I see.

JAMES WENTZY: That's the idea. That was the allusion.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, that was a local group or sort of New York group?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. And for me \$6,000 was everything I had.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. And then you got \$6,000 from ACT UP?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, it was great, and I had a good professional Hi-8 deck with camera tape. And two three-quarter inch decks and a monitor, and I was editing linear, you know. Like if I decided to make a change in the tape halfway in the middle of the tape, I would have to edit everything again to the end of the tape. So, there was no computer insert or—

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, it turns out I think I got to be, not without some skills, just constantly cranking this out. Again, I didn't care overly if—like I think mentally a voice was always going off in my brain, "Oh. If it's not good this week then next week it will be better." [Laughs.] So, I just didn't worry about it that much knowing the footage could speak for itself.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, it's like getting the information out was the point.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. And again, better seen than sitting on a shelf.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. So, on the show, the *AIDS Community Television*: How many years did you do this?

JAMES WENTZY: Three years as a weekly service.

CYNTHIA CARR: Three years weekly. And so, what are some examples of shows that you would have on there?

JAMES WENTZY: Luckily, I have a database so I have everything listed.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And I was always good on putting dates on the tapes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And so, I had that on a computer and then the New York Public Library—before I had to move out of the basement, I got the library to collect it all.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And any duplicates went to Fales Library.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh [affirmative]. Is that on your website?

JAMES WENTZY: Not in so many words yet. I mean the library is still processing—

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: —it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, probably you—

JAMES WENTZY: —I had like 600 hours-worth of Hi-8 tapes. Camera original tapes. About 600 hours.

CYNTHIA CARR: You had 600 hours that you gave them?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, that takes a little time. I worked for them a little bit. I worked alongside of them during the AIDS Activist Video Preservation Project of theirs. And I know—I love those archivists. The archivists are really great people.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But sometimes this job can kill them.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: There was one old archivist that had been working there a long time, and he was just starting to process the GMHC collections that were left up there.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And died. You know, it killed him, and so.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And the library as an institution moves at the speed of a glacier—before global warming.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right—[laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Always has so it's going to take them a while, but I have a feeling they must be coming close. And when the archivist asked me when he was coming to—I invited him to see my place before I had to leave, but with all these tapes, he said, "And, do you have any problem with all this material going online?" I said, "No. That's exactly what I want. Everything online." So, hopefully, may we live long enough, it will all be online and successful.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, I suppose maybe one week you would show a demonstration that had just happened or something like that.

JAMES WENTZY: Or sometimes there would be, well, AIDS conference material.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: A demonstration then and media people talking. Columbia University had a forum on The Possible Transmission of HIV During Oral Sex. So, I filmed all that and put two shows together.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And when I first started, then I got CUNY TV, channel 75, to pick up my show monthly. So, that went to all five boroughs once a month, but even better, I got them during World AIDS Day to give me the whole channel all day. In fact, the last two years, they gave me 24 hours for World AIDS Day. On CUNY. Yeah, they were running all the shows for 24 hours, and that was kind of nice just to look at a channel and all day long, all night long, seeing your work.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Did you ever interview people on this show or—?

JAMES WENTZY: Other than, you know, much like my favorite or maybe my only question I could come up with usually is, "Why are you here?"

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Not the best interviewer.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Not my forte. Never said it was.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But that's basically the only time. Otherwise, it was just catch whatever material is out there and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Whatever protest had happened that week or whatever conference or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Anything related to AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: There would be yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Did you ever film an ACT UP meeting?

JAMES WENTZY: Sometimes, but it is kind of rare footage, but it does exist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I did a little bit. Tony Arena did a fair amount.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: A-R-E-N-A. But, you know, to film a meeting: do you remember those meetings, you know? [Laughs.] It's like filming there you would have to be—

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, I remember—it might be in that film called *How To Survive a Plague*.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: There was footage from meetings.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, he got that from probably either me or Tony.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: It is rare. Because we would only film a meeting if there was a reason to.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Something would come up. Like I had heard David Feinberg was going to come to an ACT UP meeting directly coming from out of the hospital to rant and rave, and so there were a lot of people at the meeting because that word had gotten out, and I filmed it. I was instructed. And he came. Once a buff guy, he was probably down to 120 pounds and in all actuality, had only two weeks to live.

CYNTHIA CARR: Hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And so, he came and sat down and ranted as promised and then left. I filmed it. Afterwards, right after he left, a few hands came up including Larry Kramer's—wanted to speak, and everybody decided no. Nobody needs to speak on this. Let it go, and I think they were right. You don't tell somebody with two weeks to live how wrong they might be.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And I do believe he was at least 50 percent wrong, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Why? What was he saying in his rant?

JAMES WENTZY: I do have it online now.

MS CARR: Oh. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: He's going to put it on. How basically he wanted everything to specify towards the treatment activism to save his life, and never mind all this other psychosocial babble. So, you know, hard to, but you know, I shot this, and I remember one activist came up. I won't mention his name, but he came up to me and said, "Now, I hope you're not going to show this footage—

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JAMES WENTZY: —anywhere." Well, of course I am, Bob.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: You know, it was probably a 12-minute rant out of my 29-minute show and so I will, but intact, but somehow, subtly I had to add material on either side of it that might let people understand why they might not believe everything about his rant.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So I tried anyway and I think I did, but it's online now.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: But I thought it was definitely important to show somebody dying of AIDS, not just a hospital situation.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, yeah. When you worked with DIVA TV, what were the things that they were filming?

JAMES WENTZY: I didn't—I never worked for DIVA TV.

CYNTHIA CARR: You never worked—

JAMES WENTZY: Because they never were around when I—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —had first joined. They were still gone.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: In fact, it was sort of like—the attitude I got second-hand, that some of the DIVA TV people might have felt resentful that I might be attempting to do what I was saying I was going to do, a newcomer, you know, this Johnny-come-lately. So, I sort of got a bad vibe from them, second-hand vibe—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —and so I never really called what I was doing "DIVA TV"—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —and that's why I came up with the title "AIDS Community Television." It was actually—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —directly to stand on my own. I mean, some years later, still doing it, you know, I gradually was saying "Okay, DIVA TV, it's a good state of mind," and so I use it as a state of mind in my—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] I think your Wikipedia page says that you worked with DIVA TV, so.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. You know, I just discovered that. Who did my Wikipedia page?

CYNTHIA CARR: I don't where mine came from, either.

JAMES WENTZY: Huh. I mean—

CYNTHIA CARR: It's like—[laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: It's nice I guess.

CYNTHIA CARR: But it has mistakes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, right. Well, it mentioned my home town, my birthdate. I thought— how'd they get these? I guess it's easy to find that out, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: They mentioned my porno work, my work in editing porno.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I think they just said "editing" and—

CYNTHIA CARR: So the porn work—

JAMES WENTZY: That's strange.

CYNTHIA CARR: —you were just editing, not filming? You were editing.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Editing, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Editing or filming, I'm not sure what they said, but how did they find that out?

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And then—but not even mentioning that I did all the AIDS activist work for video and it's like—I mean Visual AIDS just had a show on obsession, I guess.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh?

JAMES WENTZY: And they had about nine of us being represented on people doing video work obsessively.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I was part of that—[laughs]—and first one of them had written a short bio of me and I wrote back, saying "Well, if it were actually going to demonstrate obsessions, you might mention that—600 hours of material, 160 half-hour tapes, a feature film. So, if I'm going to be obsessive about it, let's have the facts, so."

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So they did that. That was nice. This year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Was that one of their online things when they, you know—they put up people's work on their website sometimes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, this was—

CYNTHIA CARR: —at Visual AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: It wasn't. It was a gallery show—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —at La MaMa Gallery.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, right, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: And then right after, on World AIDS Day, December 1st, they had the New Museum—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —and so they had edited—Jean Carlomusto edited a one-hour show with, like, six-minute excerpts from each of us—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and put together a one-hour show and that's online and also that went all over, literally all over the place, the States and the world, to broadcast online concurrently and then they had a panel afterwards and I was glad I didn't fuck up on the panel because usually I don't have much to say.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I was at one panel at the library and there were, like, five other filmmakers, old timers, women, video-makers—activist video-makers—and they were each saying their comments, microphone coming closer to me, they were talking eloquently and when it came to me, I didn't have anything more to say. I mean they said it all—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and so I told them my favorite movie line was: Hank Fonda comes up to the saloon and says to the bartender, "Mack, you ever been in love?" He replies, "Nope. I've been a bartender all my life."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: I thought: all I had to say.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But this time I had—at the New Museum I was on a panel and, yeah, I told the audience that we need to brush up on our civil disobedience training. Number one lesson: never touch a cop or his horse or the car. You get into big trouble if you do that, and then I said to be as creative as you possibly can be and to strike back with every unchivalrous dodge you know. Good advice in this day and age.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: It's always good. At least I wasn't stuck with a balloon—or the saloon quotation.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] So, when you were going to these demos, you really were there to film it all the time, you weren't in it to be shouting or carrying signs?

JAMES WENTZY: No, and I really—And I knew early on, when I first came to ACT UP, that it's also not in me to clap on cue or—I always hated that—or walking in circles or chanting. It was just not what I liked to do, or do, so certainly having a camera, accomplishes not having to do that. Plus, it's a little bit like being a school photographer; nobody messes badly, overly-so with a school photographer. I got the camera, you know? People were chanting, marching in circles in front of an institution they're zapping—there'd be times where some of the activists were just good-naturedly smiling and I'd say, "Don't smile."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: "You're supposed to be angry," you know? So, I would—

CYNTHIA CARR: You were gesturing to—don't smile.

JAMES WENTZY: Right, and there were times where the cops were really going after an activist and all of the sudden I show up with a camera, you know, press pass dangling—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —all of a sudden, they're just one iota better.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, I have some photographs, or some footage where you can hear the cops saying to the other cops "Don't hit them with the lights on, don't hit them with the lights on." You know, the movie lights on the camera. And so they just tend not to be quite as rough as they might be inclined to be if there's a camera on there, so I definitely noticed that. Sometimes that's my only job.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And yeah, I just don't like clapping or chanting and so you don't have to do that when you're holding a camera.

CYNTHIA CARR: But you found your role, which is—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —a very valuable one.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and I—yeah, I just fit in and nobody else was doing it at the time, so it was an easy set. I know, coming into a group like that, how difficult, possibly impossible it is for some people to fit in—but I had no problem, filming. What I was doing, I was going to do no matter what.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, yeah, I found my niche and would say all throughout those years of producing the series, "If you want to know how I'm feeling, just watch the show." I was giving it my all.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, maybe since you're wearing a t-shirt today that has images from David Wojnarowicz's funeral which you filmed. You were filming then?

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Maybe we could talk about that. It was the first political funeral—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —and then there were some more. I guess that was The Marys, the affinity group that set that up. Did they call you up and say "We want you to come and"—

JAMES WENTZY: Sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: —"film this," or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —maybe you'd heard about it at the ACT UP meeting, or—

JAMES WENTZY: Possibly, but they probably might have called me anyway. I really appreciated it when people call me up, wanting me to do this.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Because it didn't always—in an early process, to cover—to go to the international AIDS conferences—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —was a real bureaucratic chore and I remember the first one I went to here, ACT UP, a bunch of people of course wanted to go to Amsterdam. How many would actually do the conference is another thing, but —

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But I did it and whatever the process was between Andy Valez and Aldyn McKean, they said—I, actually, was turned down, not to go to the AIDS con, be sponsored to go, started walking back home, and I walked about a couple blocks at night and then just stopped, turned around, went back to them and just interrupted their process, not altogether un-politely, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and I told them, "You know, doing your work and not having it covered in media is absurd. You have to make media to document this," and just—so I simply needled it and drove it in. But they took another vote on it, passed right away. Later that night, Aldyn McKean had called me up saying, "Just so we don't ruin the whole process, can you maybe not say that this is what happened, and I'll make sure you go, but I just don't want other people to start doing the same thing." "Okay, Aldyn." You know?

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Big cheese and, you know, out of respect for the reviews he'd garnered, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: And this was for the Amsterdam conference?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. Which was supposed to be held in Boston, but the U.S. Congress had just passed a law saying anybody with HIV cannot come into the country.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, right.

JAMES WENTZY: So the international conference was moved to Amsterdam.

CYNTHIA CARR: And what year was that, do you remember?

JAMES WENTZY: '92.

CYNTHIA CARR: '92, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: So, you know—so I mentioned that because there'd be times where I'd have to remind people how important it was to be filmed. Sure, there's an element of performance—performing arts—in actions, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —there should be something a little bit more to stretch the time, so I appreciate it when activists would call me to say "You should film this."

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: That means they realized, you know, that it should be filmed, documented and that I'm your man.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, for the most part I had them well-trained.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. [Laughs.] So, that one marched through the East Village, from where David lived—I think they went down Avenue A and then came around to that parking lot.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, in the middle of the street. That was a parking lot, now it's not a parking lot anymore [inaudible].

CYNTHIA CARR: I know. It's a huge glass building now.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, but—yeah, and they threw out all the posters, one-pole posters into a pile, set it on fire, and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —and that happened one other time, for Aldyn's funeral, actually.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: We built a little bonfire right at—right at Union—

CYNTHIA CARR: At Union Square?

JAMES WENTZY: Union Square.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Park Ave.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. That one I didn't know about. I knew about the funerals that were organized by The Marys.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Yeah, so we set a large blaze, a bonfire in the middle of the street.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Police left us completely alone. It was—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: In fact, I guess for all the political funerals they'd left us alone.

CYNTHIA CARR: I was—

JAMES WENTZY: Except Tim Bailey in Washington.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, down in Washington it was very—did you go on that trip?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I filmed it and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: Saw the coffin, the body in the back of the bus [van]. You were there?

CYNTHIA CARR: I wasn't there, but I've seen some pictures.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And—that was—and I heard a big description from Joy Episalla about that.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: It just—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —sounded horrendous.

JAMES WENTZY: The problem was—yeah. There were some tactical errors there, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —but still, it's like—David Robinson was there in Washington and he was shouting out to the police, "Yeah, we've got a dead body here. What are you afraid of?"

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: "What?" and, you know—and I came to realize when I was filming these actions, some people might respond to a certain action, saying "It didn't work," "the failure," and I've come to believe, no, there was always something accomplished.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, even going back—driving back from Tim Bailey funeral where police were—police and the other two Capitol enforcement people were determined not to let that body out of that coffin—or the coffin out of the van.

CYNTHIA CARR: Out of the van, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and yet, a few stills and video directly showed what priorities or what they're excluding—what their priorities are excluding and what bureaucracy doesn't accomplish and I have a feeling that I'll be going through a lot more of this in the next four, or eight, or 12 years. Dare I say 12? [Laughs.] "What, there's something Constitutional about two terms? Not me."

CYNTHIA CARR: Now during this period of time and while you were documenting the AIDS activism, were you still taking still photographs also?

JAMES WENTZY: No, no.

CYNTHIA CARR: You stopped that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and writing in the notebooks.

CYNTHIA CARR: You stopped writing in the notebooks?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I was really giving the video everything—I mean there were—I was giving video everything—

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: —and maybe at the very beginning, I might have taken a camera, but if I'm doing something with a still camera, then I'm not doing video and it was all video. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Now it's all still camera and from time to time going back to my notebook, drawing pictures in that, especially if the battery of my camera runs out, then I'll just sit and draw something.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. There was the political funeral that started at Judson Church.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mark Lowe Fisher.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: That went up to Republican headquarters.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, on 43rd Street [marching with the open casket up 6th Ave. -JW]

CYNTHIA CARR: And it was raining out.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, probably went through one camera, there.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh really? [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Sure. I had made—as a quick aside, I had—I had four dead video cameras that may turn off—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —shooting and somebody had given me an artist's box, that wooden box with a glass cover.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, I put my four dead video cameras in it—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —they're entitled "Four dead video cameras in an Evita-like coffin."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: NYU Fales picked that up, so they had a—

CYNTHIA CARR: Is it because they would get rained on, or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —damaged somehow?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So rain is really—

JAMES WENTZY: Rain bad for electronics, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see. Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: But that was an important funeral.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, and what he wrote "Bury me, bury me furiously"—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —of the order [inspiration of David Wojnarowicz. -JW]

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and I guess Tim Bailey was the same group and Tim was among the group of people that zapped the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour too—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —but Tim Bailey, I heard from Joy that he initially wanted The Marys to literally take his body to D.C. and throw it over the gate—

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and they said, "Noooo, we really can't do that."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: "All right."

CYNTHIA CARR: They just wanted to carry it past the entrance there, I think.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, right, they weren't going to do anything—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —that extreme. They were horrified enough at the way it was treated.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, it was horrible. It's very different—I mean the way the police acted in New York was very different around those funerals.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Really sort of respectful—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I mean when we walked up 6th Avenue with Mark Lowe Fisher, with his body in the coffin —

CYNTHIA CARR: And it was an open coffin, right? You could see him.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, and a light rain so actually there had to be umbrellas—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —held over him. There's one thing a gay man does not want is runny makeup. I mean, that

would—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, yeah—but we were doing all the traffic marshaling, but towards the end even the police were taking over, and we had heard—we had somebody, one of us from inside, I'd heard, was up at the Republican Convention—uh, Headquarters—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —on 43rd Street and they were—they were really dead-certain that we would—and greatly afraid that we would bring up the coffin to the headquarters.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But relax, guys, we're out front. There were a few speeches and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —then we went on to our merry ways.

CYNTHIA CARR: And you filmed the entire—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —event?

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: After that was—shortly after that was Tim Bailey's—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —D.C. Well, missed saying right after David's [march/procession -JW] were the Ashes Action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Where we threw the ashes, cremated remains, ashes and bone chips over the White House fence.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: George Senior, first George, White House.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh, Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And there was police from one agency or another; they were determined to stop us, but we were really good.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, I also filmed just brief amounts of the activists doing the marshaling and the tactics they were going to use to keep the cops away so that the ashes-bearers could get up to the fence, and it was like a football game, with the blockers and they were literally blocking both lines and protesters carrying the ashes were able to get up to the front, all the way to the White House [fence -JW].

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Rain broke out seriously right after it was all finished.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh really?

JAMES WENTZY: I looked back later and it was like a big pile of concrete—

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: —on the grass.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, there was that much thrown over?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. [Laughs.] Well, with the rain they wouldn't have been able to clean it all up.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, right. Yeah. Probably it left a spot there for years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: And then Mark Lowe Fisher, Tim Bailey, and then Jon Greenberg died and we carried his coffin up on one of the avenues—

CYNTHIA CARR: To—yeah, to Tompkins Square.

JAMES WENTZY: —to Tompkins Square Park, yeah, and we got in and, you know, there was always a lot of noise activity at Tompkins Square.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Drumming, shouts, and everything. I tell you—when that top of the casket opened and we started talking, it seemed like the rest of the park just quieted down.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I was filming this and Barbara Hughes had read something Jon had written that he was going to deliver on Mark Lowe Fisher's memorial, but then was just too shaken up to actually speak. So, Barbara had read what he wrote, there at Tompkins Square, talking about the MacNeil/Lehrer zap and how a light is flashing to make sure, to keep you on your side—and how important it is to go beyond your fears, to do what you have to do.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: When I was—through the camera watching Barbara, filming—at least, framework filming, the other eye was looking at Jon in the casket and thinking that's got to be the most beautiful corpse I've ever seen. If you think that's important or not, I don't know. I think it did—[Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: The last funeral was for Aldyn, Aldyn McKean, and I think by then Joy and BCH and, some of the others from The Marys actually came up to me, little chagrined facial expressions, saying "You know, I'm not sure. This is almost becoming too easy to do."

CYNTHIA CARR: Huh [affirmative]. I didn't know they organized that one with Aldyn.

JAMES WENTZY: I'm not sure they did either, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Maybe it was some other group.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy. So, that was at Union Square.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, well, that was just marching; we had no body involved.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: But they certainly—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —certainly public in a huge manner.

CYNTHIA CARR: A banner with his name on it? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —something, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And we went from the—do they call it Friend's Center [Quakers -JW] and then across 14th to Union Square and then more speeches and a bonfire, good bonfire.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: There are too few bonfires in the city.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Maybe we'll be seeing more in the next four-some years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yes, maybe. Well, I wonder if this is a good place to stop for now.

JAMES WENTZY: Surely. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF wentzy17_1of2_sd_track05_M]

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay, you know, you were showing me some of your things on Vimeo and it's funny—one thing I was going to ask you was—is there something that stands out in all your years of, you know, videotaping or filming everything. Something that was the most powerful—most important to you—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And you talked about—

JAMES WENTZY: Well, yeah, one of the most moving is that 12-minute reading I did by Jaime Manrique and he wrote about visiting Reinaldo Arenas, author of *Before Night Falls*—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —and as it turned out, a few days before he died.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Before he killed himself, and it's just—his control of the words and English and the atmosphere and spirit of the whole event was just so moving—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: That of the six or so hundred hours of everything I photographed—that's some of the most moving—those 12 minutes.

CYNTHIA CARR: When did—

JAMES WENTZY: I filmed those—I filmed that in '93.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: For World AIDS Day. CUNY TV let me have a whole day of programming.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yeah [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: The next two years for World AIDS Day, they actually gave me 24 hours each time but the first time they did it—they just gave me their whole day—was pre-empted by a—48 of my programs.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh huh.

JAMES WENTZY: So I did this artist's readings just for that event and had people reading their work —well, I think there were about six or so writers:

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I mean Manrique was one of them.

CYNTHIA CARR: Was he a person with AIDS?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: No?

JAMES WENTZY: No, just wrote about that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Actually, other than David Feinburg I don't think anybody else had a —although I also had found Sarah Schulman and this was before I knew her.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And her account which was fiction—I thought it was so real to me that actually I thought she was talking about herself as a person with AIDS and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, you mean her book *People in Trouble*?

JAMES WENTZY: I'm not sure if that was it or not. Maybe. And it's not like I ask people how diseased they are.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, I think they were just writing about AIDS for the most part.

CYNTHIA CARR: And the Reinaldo Arenas. I actually saw the movie—I have the book and haven't read it but, you know—but that was about his coming from Cuba as a—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And becoming ill with AIDS. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Later, he says in this piece, "I left one island jail to come for another jail."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: "To worship —the worship of money is as bad as the worst in Cuba," he wrote.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh huh [affirmative]. Well, last time we started talking about the specific stuff and—like Day of Desperation—that you filmed.

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: And that was the first one that you did.

JAMES WENTZY: The first one where I knew that I would be filming everything for a weekly series.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, for your series on—

JAMES WENTZY: That was to come a couple years later. But I knew that was going to happen.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: So that was the first time I realized that I was going to film everything from then on.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There's—another important demo that year was the one up at Kennebunkport. Did you go to that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: And that was in September of '91.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. That was phase one of two phases for the Target Bush campaign. This was the old Bush.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: And, so John Schabel and I went up there to [film -JW] Kennebunkport. He's a good friend of mine.

CYNTHIA CARR: You went ahead? Like a couple days ahead or something?

JAMES WENTZY: No, I think early that same day.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So we filmed Kennebunkport. Yeah the video's good and between the two of us we filmed a lot and John had photographed some of the locals and some of them said, "Oh I think this is probably an important demonstration. They're entitled," and some said, "I wish they'd leave our President alone."

CYNTHIA CARR: Hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Bush's response to it was, "Well, there was a demonstration last month that was about unemployment and I felt for those people because they had families." As if people with AIDS don't have families.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: It was just absurdly ignorant.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: He was dead-set against needle exchange which fundamentally totally saves lives, you know.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But I guess those people don't have families either.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah so. That was the one where they unrolled this long banner.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: With their 32-point plan to end the AIDS crisis.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. It was also carried later—carried up with Mark Lowe Fisher—when we carried his body in an open coffin up 6th Avenue, up to campaign headquarters.

CYNTHIA CARR: Up to Bush headquarters, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: We also had that banner.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh I see.

JAMES WENTZY: What else do you do with a banner once it's made? A month after that we went down to D.C. in front of the White House.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: To protest. Which—

CYNTHIA CARR: That was also part of Target Bush?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. Then I believe right after that—if I'm not mistaken, then the Ashes Action happened, where we carried cremated remains and threw them over the fence of the White House.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: That we talked about before. But I think after—I think it was after the Target Bush, was one of the campaign debates with Bush and he even mentioned ACT UP on the debate.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I got footage and threw it in. It's on the video.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And when I was listening to the debate I'd filmed it and then when it became obvious how absurd he is—was—I started turning the camera upside down—so turned him upside down. When you watch it, you could swear you can hear change falling out of his pockets.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But I doubt he carried change in his pockets anyway.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You went to the actual debate site and filmed it there?

JAMES WENTZY: No, no, off the TV.

CYNTHIA CARR: Off the TV. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I just filmed off the TV, yeah. My TV still worked upside down.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] That—but that year, '91, that's also when you started working on the Estate Project?

JAMES WENTZY: Was it?

CYNTHIA CARR: I think so. That's when the Estate Project started. Maybe you didn't get in right at the very beginning of it—but maybe we should say what the Estate Project was. Basically, estate planning for artists with AIDS. Think that's a good description or—?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it makes sense.

CYNTHIA CARR: And it was started by Patrick Moore.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And what did you do with them? What was your job there?

JAMES WENTZY: That's a good question.

CYNTHIA CARR: Maybe—were you photographing the work to keep a record of it?

JAMES WENTZY: No. Good idea, but—.

CYNTHIA CARR: Like what you were doing with James Dee. What he was doing so—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I was just working in the darkroom.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, yeah but—

JAMES WENTZY: But no, I didn't do that. Jim Hubbard was working a lot with Patrick. Jim got me for something but I'm not sure what. So, I'm a little confused—I know, maybe it started morphing into the project that was later controlled by the Alliance for the Arts.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, I think, it was part of the Alliance. Yes, the Estate Project became part of the Alliance for the Arts.

JAMES WENTZY: Okay, well, now we're cooking. Because I was hired by the Alliance for the Arts via Jim Hubbard to work at the New York Public Library, and we started collecting AIDS activists' videotapes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: So videomakers would donate their tapes—GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] donated their tapes and we started working on the AIDS Activists Video Preservation Project. Which is now at the New York Public Library and accessible.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Anyone can email them and make arrangements to come and look at whatever tape they pick in the collection, and that's still evolving since I had to move three years ago. They came and took all my video tapes. That was six or seven hundred hours of the camera original Hi-8 tapes—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And my three-quarter inch master tapes. The duplicate copies went to NYU Fales library. And then I had some—maybe a couple dozen VHS tapes of the programs that I did go to the Leslie Lohman Museum.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Just up the block from where I used to live.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So the NYU—I'm sorry, so the New York Public library is still working on that deluge of videos I dumped on them.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: But you started it, you know, by getting tapes from other people—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: That had recorded things.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I mean, they were at the library and then I was—it was my job, to remaster them onto a more stable medium which is beta tape.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Not even beta digital. The nature of archiving video is still somewhat up in air.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And the most stable medium is still not quite considered to be digital, but that's changing every year I guess.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, it's starting to evolve anyway.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I guess for each way of digitizing—of archiving—preserving.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I'd done that work and, also, 2002 which I guess, probably, is close to the time that I stopped working at the library. I loved working there too. Just the librarians, archivists they're—such beautiful people.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But, it was also—I had a friend who was in charge of the Mix Festival, at the time—the lesbian/gay experimental film festival—and I'd met him and we went for a walk along the Palisades and I told him, "I apologize that it had been awhile since I did a piece to contribute to the Mix Festival, maybe I should do something and maybe I can make a program for AIDS, and ACT UP specifically, for this next coming up Mix Festival," and he said, "Yes, let's have you do that." And I went home. I'm thinking, "Well for the program why don't I just do a program—a feature-length program." So, I committed to do a feature-length film so I had to learn digital technology and non-linear editing, so I did. Not easy for an older person to learn new tricks, but I managed and in a month's time I put together this feature-length documentary. I sort of had an advantage, I didn't even name the tape at the time I just had ACT UP at the top of it—front of it, but for the festival its name was *Fight Back, Fight Aids: 15 Years ACT UP*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And it was non-narrative and—as all my work basically is. And it was easy to do. You know—to do feature-length in a month, it seems not too many people do that, but for me it was easy. For one thing, I knew that when it premiered at Mix that the room would be full of old burned-out activists.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: At ACT UP, I certainly didn't have to tell them what they were doing.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: In fact, it would probably be dangerous to try to do that.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: So that made things much simpler and, basically, I put in all of my favorite clips, and being at the library and having access to some other people that predated me—I might have erred and concentrated too much on that material because it was so new and fresh to me but I had access to that material and I just put pieces of those pieces in and then after 1991, that was basically all my material.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So that was easy and I just put my favorite little pieces in as 75 minutes of my favorite moments.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And when I was at the Berlin Festival, I'd keep getting for each screening—I kept getting hands raised, questioning, "Why didn't you have a narrator?" followed by the question, or the statement, "I'm so glad you did not have a narrator!"

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, it would go both ways. I realized people that had no connection to AIDS activism wouldn't exactly know the details, but I thought perhaps it wasn't important and if it is important they can look it up.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: It's not my idea to give the answers to everything.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Just showing them what was happening.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Just a minute.

[END OF wentzy17_2of2_sd_track02_M]

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. This is Cynthia Carr interviewing James Wentzy at his home at Bailey-Holt House in the West Village, New York, New York on January 31, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and this is card number two. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I didn't mind that first part.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: As long as it's there. You were just talking about the film of your favorite clips from all that—that time. It's called *Fight Back, Fight AIDS*. It's actually online. I watched it.

JAMES WENTZY: [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And anybody who Googles *Fight Back, Fight AIDS* can watch it online, which is great. One thing that comes through in that—and, of course, anybody who's been to a demonstration knows this, but—I think we'll wait for a minute for that.

[Music and noise in the hallway]

[END OF wentzy17_2of2_sd_track03_M]

CYNTHIA CARR: Anyway, we were talking about—oh, yes, the feel of it. You know, what happens in a demonstration, there's so much chaos.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: You know, I was thinking about the Ashes Action at the White House—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —where there's police trying to push back and people moving up to the fence and—people are getting crushed and there's—and I was just thinking about, you know, you being there as a filmmaker. I mean, did you develop any kind of strategy for how to deal with filming this sort of thing, or did you have, like, plan out

I'm going to stand here or did you just sort of plunge into the chaos and film what was around you, or what did you—

JAMES WENTZY: I did tend to plunge in. I guess I always felt like I had the camera in between me and the violence.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I don't remember if I had mentioned it to you before. It's, like, when I have blood drawn, I have to look away. [Laughs.] I'm so needle phobic. I can imagine in my mind—I have the mental image of the tip of the syringe inside a vein and it's just something I don't want to go—I don't want to imagine. So, I look away, but I have no problem filming it.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Something between that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: When I was filming the towers coming down for 9/11, I was filming that all the time. I remember hearing the hushed moaning of voices around me, but I don't know how I would've felt if I wasn't filming. I know I woke up the next day thinking—my first thought was, "Oh, maybe it didn't happen." So, I had to dress and walk over to Canal Street and look, and yeah, it happened, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: I had that same reaction. It can't have happened. It's not real.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But filming with the camera, there's something safe into media.

CYNTHIA CARR: I've often heard photographers say that, that it changes it to put the camera in front of your eye.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And somehow then—it becomes an image instead of—[Laughs.]—the thing, you know. Something like that.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Maybe the last time it happened to me was during Matthew Shepard mayhem.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Where the police had arrested the marshals who were old, experienced activists right in the beginning.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And had a large collection of people, and so some other people stepped into do the chore and marshaling. You don't tell a crowd what to do. You just try to keep them going where they want to go in a safe way and the police were determined not to have this happen. And I had a line where—of cops on horses and moved the march, jagged it over to west on 43rd Street and then there was a line of people marching and the police on horseback. And, all of a sudden, the police moved in. A few people sat down, but only a few and they got trampled because if not everybody sits, then the horse has—had no choice, but—and that was mayhem.

And I remember I was on the sidewalk at the time and from people that were marching just in front of the camera was cops on the horses right behind them. And horses were practically over their shoulder and they were scared. And first time I wasn't sure whether I was going to really be in trouble either by horses, cops, or the protesters fleeing all that. And so not only did I have my camera in front of my face and filming everything, but I also was holding my press badge—[Laughs.]—underneath the camera lens, albeit a fake press pass. It was a good facsimile.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: It's for that extra feeling of protection.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I ended up to be fine, but yeah, I was concerned that time. It had been years before since I was that afraid that something might happen, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What year was that Matthew Shepard demonstration?

JAMES WENTZY: Seems like it was maybe '96 or maybe '97.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. Was that organized through ACT UP or—

JAMES WENTZY: Not really, but by some of the same activists.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay, right.

JAMES WENTZY: ACT UP was pretty constant in dealing purely with issues directly around AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: About the only deviation they did was they were always supportive with abortion as healthcare rights.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah, it makes sense about healthcare. I know David always went to the abortion marches.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: You know, and all that stuff. Yeah. In '92, okay, that's the election year, Bush versus Bill Clinton.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And I think ACT UP did a number of—well—went to both conventions, Republican and Democratic conventions.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, I was—yeah, I was at the [Republican -JW] one in Houston.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I was in that. You were there?

CYNTHIA CARR: No.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh.

CYNTHIA CARR: No, but you were filming the—there was—there were demonstrations going on outside both conventions.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. I went with Lou Maletta, who was part of Gay Cable Network and for years, he'd gotten press credentials, press accreditation for the Republican conventions.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: It's incredible to me.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Somebody there liked him, a closet case or something, but—

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: —you can't imagine how much courage walking around a Republican convention with microphones labeled Gay Cable Network, how much courage that would take and perseverance and he'll always have a star in my mind and my heart for him for that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So yeah, I drove down with him for that and that ended up to be mayhem. There was one day, a Wednesday, where it was going to be protesting AIDS, so everything was concentrated, a long march and the police had maneuvered the end of the march into a cul-de-sac. And so there was nowhere to go, and there were some anarchists who had started throwing things and—not part of us, but just wanted to get a piece of action. And so, that brought in the cops on horseback just to scatter us. That was where I heard—at night with other

cameras with professional news media with lights on and that's where I heard the cops saying to each other clearly, "Don't hit 'em with the lights on. Don't hit 'em with the lights on," they repeated. So, the next day, we had a press conference and there were ACT UP activists, women who were showing their huge welts on their legs from being hit by the cop's night sticks as they were laying on the ground. Yeah, it was just—

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: It was clear.

CYNTHIA CARR: Had activists gone down from New York or were you—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —working with the local people there or both or—?

JAMES WENTZY: Both, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative]. There were activists, AIDS activists— trained activists in nonviolent civil disobedience. They were from everywhere.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: We were working with AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, ACT UP always did those workshops about—

JAMES WENTZY: Civil disobedience training, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —civil disobedience training.

JAMES WENTZY: Before every action, yeah. It lasted all afternoon, and I did film them and I do have a half-hour tape as a distillation of that training.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I think maybe that's something our communities have lost recently. We don't know that you're not supposed to ever touch a cop or the horse or the car or—things like some of the useful tips are necessary sometimes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: And probably more than ever, this—in these next four years, eight years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Dare I say 12 years?

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: I know that was the thing with—you know, ACT UP always did that in preparing for a big action.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: There would be—they were always really well planned, you know.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And the civil disobedience training was always part of it.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: I—there's—well, that year, '92, that was also the beginning of the political funerals—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —which you filmed. And there was a big one at St. Patrick's, I think, again. Stop the Church.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Now there had been one in '89, I believe, because I know that—I knew David was part of that first one.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And—

JAMES WENTZY: Was it '89 or '90?

CYNTHIA CARR: It was, like, December '89. It was way at the end of the year.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So this was another one, the Stop the Church one.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I wasn't there. It was just before my time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, for the first one, but this time you filmed it.

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, you didn't film the one in '92?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, at the church, you mean? Yeah, there was one. Yeah, I filmed a little something. I don't remember it as being anything major, but yeah, I did film it.

CYNTHIA CARR: I guess Cardinal O'Connor was still in power then.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, he'd lost power by then. That's one thing the Stop the Church action accomplished was, all of a sudden, the church no longer had such great sway over what was being taught in our—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —in our public schools. Because they were principally bureaucratically totally resistant to any AIDS education. Sex education.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah, but they're still preaching to not use condoms and all that.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, well, they still are, dare I say.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And in fact, the Catholic Church has, any time they had or have places for homeless youth, they don't have access to safer sex information or condoms.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And indeed were kicked out of the facility if they were caught having condoms at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, wow.

JAMES WENTZY: The Church always said we were great for taking care of people with AIDS, compassion and all that, but leaving out the fact of how they might be somewhat responsible in the first place.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Think of all the people from Africa.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And the way that church allows them to live with disease.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Not my idea of making a pope a saint.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes. Yeah, well, you know, it's—I knew so many people with AIDS who ended up at Cabrini Hospital, which no longer exists, but that was run by the Catholic Church.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And—but they were getting—I think they were getting paid by the state to take in patients with

AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Actually I'm not sure about that. It should be checked, but that's what I had heard, that that was why there were so many who went there, but—

JAMES WENTZY: A good friend of mine put me as his healthcare proxy and that was back when there was St. Vincent's Hospital and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: He said, "Your one job is to keep Catholic nuns out of my room."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: He later died, but that was after St. Vincent's closed.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, actually at the beginning, I think St. Vincent's had more people with AIDS, you know, than any other place, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Now expensive condominium apartments.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Oh, gosh.

JAMES WENTZY: Probably have ghosts.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Let's hope so.

JAMES WENTZY: I hope so. I do.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, in '93, I was looking at the ACT UP website and, you know, where they have lists of all their actions from every year —

JAMES WENTZY: I hope I put them up right.

CYNTHIA CARR: —and there were lots of—there's—what?

JAMES WENTZY: I hope I put them up right. I've been doing the website—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —since '98.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, well, it's sort of impressive how much was done every year. I mean, there's, like, in some—in some months, there's, like, a demonstration almost every week, it seems like.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: I mean, there was just a lot going on and—but in '93, it seemed like the—one of the focuses of that year was targeting the drug companies, you know. Like, there was that demonstration at Hoffman-La Roche and—

JAMES WENTZY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Did you film that?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah, early in the morning out on January, freezing. I seem to remember it was, like, 23 degrees.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: I only had a camera to hold, but some of the activists were laying on the ground with the

Greenpeace technique of putting your hands inside metal cylinders, handcuffed inside so that way the cops couldn't bring their chainsaw out without cutting through a few arms.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They did anyway. I mean, they brought all the chainsaws in.

CYNTHIA CARR: And they had surrounded the company grounds or something?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it was—this was La Roche.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And yeah, and there were, like, 13 entrances to the factory, so there are a lot, but one main entrance.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, they were blocking entrances?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and some of the people were not happy. I know one person did get out of his truck and he just happened to have a chainsaw—[Laughs.]—and he—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And Amy [Jamie -JW] Bauer came out. She was probably the head marshal for all time, having the power more than anyone else to really negotiate some calmness.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Be it protestors or the police authorities or disgruntled public, and I still have an image in my mind of her telling people—well, telling this person coming out of the truck with a chainsaw, "relax, relax," and actually calming him down. I think her occupation at the time was she was the go to person in anything with—that went wrong with the New York City subway system.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They would call her and somehow she would—she's mostly retired now, but I see her in the neighborhood every once in a while, Jamie Bauer—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But she's great, with this miraculous power.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Unequaled.

CYNTHIA CARR: Now had—I know there were a couple of groups involved in that. I think The Marys were involved and probably some other affinity groups from ACT UP or maybe—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —the whole of ACT UP was involved?

JAMES WENTZY: The whole of ACT UP certainly, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —I do seem to remember—

CYNTHIA CARR: Did they have a list of demands to give them or—

JAMES WENTZY: Undoubtedly.

CYNTHIA CARR: Just—like lower drug prices, things like that?

JAMES WENTZY: No doubt, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I don't remember the specifics.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah. And then there was also a big demo at the headquarters of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah, in D.C., yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: That was in D.C.?

JAMES WENTZY: Always a nice fun place to go to. Not. I say ironically.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, D.C. is a tough town.

CYNTHIA CARR: You mean tough for demonstrations?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Because who doesn't have a gripe?

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Directed towards anything in D.C.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And the police seem to have not too much patience with it, I think, but—

JAMES WENTZY: No, and there are three different major police authorities. I mean, Capitol police and several other—

CYNTHIA CARR: D.C. Metro or something like that.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and—Secret Service.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh and Secret Service, okay. Okay, but what happened down there? There was, like, a demonstration outside the building—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —of the pharmaceutical—

JAMES WENTZY: And I [don't] remember going inside. But your usual; complain, protest, holler-and-leave signs, posters, and some—I seem to remember on that one—some statements left behind in chalk.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm [affirmative]. On the floor? Walls?

JAMES WENTZY: Sidewalks.

CYNTHIA CARR: Sidewalk, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Walls, yeah, outside. Yeah, I never—I don't remember ever going inside there, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —I'm not sure I'd want to. Maybe only once did I do an office takeover and I—that's kind of harrowing actually and—but—

CYNTHIA CARR: What was that? What office?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, the time I was there, I think—Oh yes, it was a campaign to change the definition of AIDS. It was, like, a three-year campaign and, arguably, it could be called the single most effective campaign accomplishment in ACT UP. Arguably, because it could be many others actually, but that was definitely a one big one where the definition of AIDS was determined by the Centers for Disease Control, CDC.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And they had a specific definition of AIDS, which did not include people that were—it did not

include women who were getting AIDS. And it took about three years after constant haranguing of bureaucrats from the CDC to actually change the definition of AIDS to include certain conditions that were only affecting women. So, women were dying from AIDS, but not getting the definition of AIDS and not getting any public assistance support.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see, oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And we had achieved finally changing the definition, including more opportunistic infections that were happening to women. And worldwide, other countries have the same definition of AIDS, no matter—as determined by the CDC here in this country. So, we did change the world.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And it was part of the campaign. The CDC has offices in New York City and it was towards the end of that accomplishment and we did an office takeover. I was there with the camera.

CYNTHIA CARR: At the New York CDC office?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. And so we were—activists were using their phone to phone people or phoning the CDC office in Atlanta and—"Hey, we're in your office now. We're taking it over," and they were going through all the file cabinets, leaving in flyers and information about the importance of this action and the campaign and how important it is for them to change the definition. And finally, the police arrived and the first thing they did was to remove me, the press, anybody with a camera.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: So I was kicked out and again, my friend John Schabel, was also filming with a second camera and he was already out in the hall. And when I was escorted out of the office, a door closed behind me and he said, "I turned around and I just kicked the door."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: I guess that was true, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I might've been mad that I was—couldn't no longer stay in there, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. So, AIDS was defined as something that affected only men?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, do you actually think medicine was made for anything other than that, for men?

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, it's true. I mean—since women's bodies are different. I think that the drug—the effect of the drugs would be different.

JAMES WENTZY: It's always been the case, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And, you know, I know even when, you know, vitamins are made—like, the regular generic vitamins are made for men.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: But women need a slightly different kind of dose—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —with certain vitamins and I think that's been sort of recent that that's been figured out and now they, you know, it makes—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Actually it's good for the drug companies. They have a new market.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, right. Yeah, true.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] So—but yeah,—I know that, like, some of the drugs that work for men, don't seem to work for women with AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So yeah. Boy, you wouldn't think it would take that long though. I mean, the CDC is made up of doctors. I mean, they should've known that there were—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, at some point, they become bureaucrats.

CYNTHIA CARR: Ah, uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I don't know at what point they cross the line, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —they do.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, well, that year of '93, there was also a big March on Washington apparently. Another—I mean I found—I got this from your film. It was labeled *March on Washington, '93*, but it's easy to lose track— [Laughs.]—when you do so many marches on Washington.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Was this one—I seem to remember a major one where AIDS was barely mentioned. It was all about gays in the military.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And I'm not sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, that probably wouldn't have been '93 because the epidemic was so intense at that point, but—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, but the gay community—sometimes we can be abysmally ignorant about AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: I was at the one where they unfolded the quilt for the first time. Were you there for that one?

JAMES WENTZY: For the first time?

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: The first time in Washington. They covered the mall with the quilt.

JAMES WENTZY: I guess, I was there for the last time it was unfurled in totality. It was the last time. Then it became too big to reveal all at the same time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And that was the time of the Ashes Action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So that was '92.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: No, say it was '93 about AIDS. '94 was "Stonewall 25" in New York City and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: The 25th anniversary of Stonewall and also at the same time, that same week, the Gay Games were happening. And it became obvious that AIDS was going to be—if mentioned at all, it was going to be an afterthought.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, at the Gay Games?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, Gay Games and the Stonewall.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: The organizers had arranged—we called it a march, but more like a little parade, and that year,

it was going to be from the United Nations over to Central Park. What's over there?

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And again, AIDS wasn't barely mentioned, if at all, and if mentioned as sort of—"Oh, and AIDS!" as an afterthought. So, that was when activists, ACT UP and other AIDS activists, decided to take control and have our own march, the so called alternative march, and we started at Washington Square Park at the arch and went up Fifth Avenue, took the whole street, and went up to Central Park, where we merged with the main march going into Central Park. And it was a huge march. The so-called alternative march.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Biggest, perhaps the last really great demonstration. Massive march. ACT UP always sent out flyers, you know, announcing a march that was going to happen. They always mentioned "massive march." It wasn't always massive, but this one was massive. Massive march—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —filling Fifth Avenue for blocks and blocks and blocks, marching up Fifth Avenue.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So even by—at '94, with people still dying like flies—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —AIDS was barely mentioned outside of, like, the Vito Russo speech. "You hear the bombs dropping, but only you hear the bombs dropping. No one else seems to notice because it isn't happening to them."

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, *that* speech. Now when did that speech happen?

JAMES WENTZY: That happened twice in '89, once in Albany and then a month later at the Department of Health. Is that right? [Russo's second delivery was at HHS in D.C. -JW]

CYNTHIA CARR: Here in the city?

JAMES WENTZY: In D.C.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, in D.C., okay. What—Health and Human Services or something like that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I think that's it—yeah. New York State.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, so he gave that marvelous speech, twice, in Albany. And again, when I was working at the library and last minute decided to do a feature putting together footage. This predated my work by a year or so and so I listened to this—saw this speech, both of them actually, same speech. And it was the best speech I've ever heard dealing with our communities and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —I had two choices though. The footage from Albany, I think both of them were shot by one of the people from Testing the Limits. I think I knew her name at the time, but now I'm not sure who it was without looking it up.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But footage from—at Albany. Vito gave this speech. The first time he gave the speech and the person doing the camera work was—well, how shall I say it—was not on a tripod.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: It was a bit moving to and fro a bit.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps unnecessarily.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, I can see when you're in an action, the middle of an action, where you might have some jittery camera work sometimes. It comes with the territory, but this was just a speech and such a great speech. And the second speech was in Albany and the camera was on a tripod. So, it was very steady.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And I decided on my feature to use the less steady camera. Somehow that suited me.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: So—

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JAMES WENTZY: That's—so for better, for worse. That camera moves around a bit, but it suited me at that time.

CYNTHIA CARR: For *Fight Back, Fight AIDS*.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: The Albany—now, so you weren't at the Albany action?

JAMES WENTZY: I wasn't there.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. That was like, ACT UP had gone up there to protest the state legislature —

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —for what they were not doing? Or the Governor?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I'm guessing it was Governor—

CYNTHIA CARR: Who was it? Pataki, at that point? Or—?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: —the first Cuomo?

JAMES WENTZY: The father.

CYNTHIA CARR: The first Cuomo.

JAMES WENTZY: Cuomo, yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Cuomo, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I remember protesting Cuomo, get him out of office, and then you get Pataki. So be very careful what you protest. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, no, that would have been Cuomo.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: The old one, the first one.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah, and then, okay, Giuliani takes over in '94—

JAMES WENTZY: Psh.

CYNTHIA CARR: —and within a month he tries to eliminate the Division of AIDS Services.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, they all tried to.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, he was quite a character. God love him.

CYNTHIA CARR: And so there—a lot of protests about that?

JAMES WENTZY: We knew he was coming; that was coming. We had a protest the first day he was in office. He was elected, he was in office. We had—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —city hall, day one action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, so we knew that was coming, and we were not wrong.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it was nothing but trouble with that arrogant SOB.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I remember when that division got set up under Ed Koch, but it was a big fight to get him to pay attention—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —to what was going on.

JAMES WENTZY: Really.

CYNTHIA CARR: And ACT UP had done lots—

JAMES WENTZY: Carmen Miranda, you mean?

CYNTHIA CARR: The—

JAMES WENTZY: The mayor, Carmen Miranda [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Koch—I'm heterosexual and I'm Carmen Miranda. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: One of my favorite signs.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah, I remember it well: the other one called—all the number of AIDS dead and then, "How'm I doing?" Which was his—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —always his slogan.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: The Ed Koch slogan. But—I know the woman who ran the AIDS division—you know, the AIDS services when it started. And she talked about how people at that point, they had to be in an office that was separate from everyone else. They couldn't even use the same air conditioning.

JAMES WENTZY: [Laughs.] I know.

CYNTHIA CARR: It's like we can't breathe the same air—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —as people who were dealing with AIDS.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And they had such a backlog of people needing help. And it was—you know, it was just very tough.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And boy in '94 it would have been just as bad, you know?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So it's—

JAMES WENTZY: Indeed. Until '97—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and, all of a sudden, the resurrection started happening.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I know that in one—the protests that I have from '95—well, there are a couple of them—the Queens-Midtown Tunnel.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, you filmed that—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —for sure.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Where people were what—lying down blocking traffic?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Coming in, or—

JAMES WENTZY: Going into the tunnel.

CYNTHIA CARR: —going into the tunnel.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. From Manhattan?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. As if we really wanted them to stay in Manhattan. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, that footage I remember, perhaps that holds a distinction of the—filming the longest take of cops carrying away activists—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —because they refused to move so then the police have to literally lift them up and move them off to the side.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, that action I remember is—I've never filmed for so long one take of cops removing the activists.

CYNTHIA CARR: How long was the take?

JAMES WENTZY: I don't remember.

CYNTHIA CARR: What would be long? Like 20 minutes or something? Or?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, the cops can be real efficient when they want to be.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Or 10 minutes? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: —I guess maybe 12 or so.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Plus or minus, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And they tended not to be too gentle when they dropped the activists back in town—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —off to the side.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Some of that, but also, I remember an ambulance coming, needing to use the tunnel, and activists quickly broke the group up to let the ambulance through.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see. Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So as self-centered as we might have been for the cause, we never forgot that we were fighting for healthcare. And if an ambulance needed right of way, we always gave it to them.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then there was a demo that year at Gracie Mansion.

JAMES WENTZY: Isn't there always? [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it was at the morning action, or a wake-up call or something. It was—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —I seem to remember one early in the morning.

CYNTHIA CARR: When Rudy was there?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I'm not a morning person, I did not go there, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay, so you didn't film that one?

JAMES WENTZY: I did not, but—I certainly had some photographs or footage from somebody else who did. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: —perhaps some angel went up there to film it and dropped it off. It didn't happen too often, but I was always appreciative when it did. Especially for early morning.

CYNTHIA CARR: Were you the one that was—you were known in ACT UP as the person who was filming everything?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, more than anybody else. I mean, there were a handful of other people, but certainly before my time I was not the one, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: And you filmed meetings, also, which was really—that was interesting to watch in your film.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Rare. Tony Arena gets credit for the meeting footage, I think. Mostly in my—the ones I used in the film.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay. So, he was—

JAMES WENTZY: David Feinberg—that was mine—

CYNTHIA CARR: He was the one filming the meetings? Tony Arena?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, he did the one after the Ashes Action. After we came back and we had a post-Action review—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —with Tony Arena. Certainly, for the David Feinberg, but that wasn't in my documentary. So, yeah, you don't tend to film meetings unless there's something specifically happening there, because—

CYNTHIA CARR: And would you have to get permission from the group every time?

JAMES WENTZY: Technically. Yeah, the facilitators would ask permission from the floor if we could be filmed, and then they'd always be say—and they'd always be quick to point out, "Anyone who does not want to be filmed move to this side of the room and the cameras won't film you."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: "Will you?" They would ask.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Certainly after my time was pretty well established, the facilitators would just tell the group of people, "You're being filmed." [Laughs.] And just leave it at that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: If they would start to ask the question, maybe I'd start to glare and then they would—[laughs]—realize I was going to film, but it took a little bit of training. At the beginning, they'd be asked permission—and never not granted.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. I like that footage. Just the intensity of it is—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —really amazing to watch.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it is, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know?

JAMES WENTZY: Agreed.

CYNTHIA CARR: And it's—I'm trying to think, what year was that big AIDS conference in San Francisco? Where Peter Staley spoke?

JAMES WENTZY: 1990.

CYNTHIA CARR: 1990? You know that one where some ACT UP chapters boycotted it because Jesse Helms had made that rule that no person with AIDS could enter the country?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Or '91.

CYNTHIA CARR: Maybe it was 1990, or maybe—

JAMES WENTZY: Was it '91?

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, I guess it was that early, '90 or '91.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, because '92 is the first AIDS conference I went to in Amsterdam.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And that conference was supposed to be in Boston, but because of the HIV exclusion law—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —immigration law, where no one could come into this country if they had HIV, not even as a tourist, technically.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Not that I believe they would actually ask. But doing the website for ACT UP all these years, until that law was recently changed over—with Obama, that rule was still in law.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh really? Until Obama?

JAMES WENTZY: And I would always—

CYNTHIA CARR: That was in effect?

JAMES WENTZY: —yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: And I would often—that was the main email I would get in ACT UP for the—on the ACT UP website was, "I'm going to be visiting friends in New York or San Francisco, and I have AIDS and I have meds, What do you suggest I do?" And—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —or, "Should I not even bother coming?" So, I replied to them. Usually I'd just say, "It's for heart disease or blood pressure medicine. Label it that."

CYNTHIA CARR: You mean it they question the meds?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, we had that law which was absurd.

CYNTHIA CARR: And the advice was to never admit that you're HIV positive?

JAMES WENTZY: Right, no, yeah. No, no, if—and then they ask you and you tell them, then they have no choice. You're not—you're going back to where you came from.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy.

JAMES WENTZY: And I have footage of congressmen in Washington talking about Haitians coming into this country spreading AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, [quoting congressman -JW] "I'm not saying that just because they're Haitians. If they were all little red heads, I would still say the same thing." I mean—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —just racist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I'm not sure Congress has changed that much.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, look at the way they treated Obama. I mean, I really think historically—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —we're going to look back at this Congress and view it as a real racist time.

CYNTHIA CARR: I agree. Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But he wasn't lynched.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Or even shot. I'm kind of surprised.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. Boy. That's—do you still consider yourself a member of ACT UP?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I think you're always a member of ACT UP. Yeah, I guess so.

CYNTHIA CARR: There are still meetings that you go to?

JAMES WENTZY: There are still meetings, but not that I go to. No. No. No.

CYNTHIA CARR: You don't go? Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, I mean, everywhere I live, there's ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And my old place I couldn't go to the bathroom without passing constant reminders of ACT UP. I mean—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: —all my film work, ACT UP, ACT UP, ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah. And, as I've admitted, I wasn't political—overly political in any way before ACT UP. And now—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —now I am. So, I definitely—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —I'm a changed person.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yes. That's actually one of my questions: about the years of activism and how it changed you as a person. But you mean you weren't really—

JAMES WENTZY: Sweeter.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I'm sweeter.

CYNTHIA CARR: But you weren't an activist at all before?

JAMES WENTZY: No. No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. And you didn't recall even when you first heard about AIDS, it seems like.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, I did, it was that friend—

CYNTHIA CARR: A friend was sick.

JAMES WENTZY: —I'm placing—I'm probably placing around '82.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh yeah. That's very early.

JAMES WENTZY: For sure, but it was probably before defining the disease as AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: It was quite a bit unknown about it at the time, but we knew something was going on. So, I was aware of it, but—and probably at the same time it happened to me being unaware of it happening.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, '96 is when the protease inhibitors were finally released.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And that's, you know, that made the disease something you could manage—for most people.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: So did that make a change in ACT UP or in your work when that happened?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, certainly. I mean, I—perhaps, personally, in my work I kind of—I remember sitting down in front of my monitors with some videotapes around me and turning around in the chair and wondering where did everybody go?

And then—and then all these—and then I was remembering—I can remember then also when my own health suddenly started declining, not to the point of anything major, but I probably had gotten, I presumed, a case of PCP pneumonia, and I was [inaudible] back to him that I was fine. And—but then my blood work showed that I needed medication for the first time then and the timing was good, depending on your point of view, where I was put on the multi-drug regime and so then I had my maintenance therapy. And then the question became different for me personally, because I don't know if I mentioned it before to you, I'm not sure I have such a great work ethic, and I certainly worked hard probably for the first time in my life doing this, but I expected to die soon, too. [Laughs.] And now, all of a sudden, there's an indeterminacy for a life span and I don't know if I want to work this hard for an indeterminate amount of time.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, when is it going to end?

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And certainly a big part of it was a feeling of a lack of community around me. I was really happy to do all this work with people around that I admired and where I was—they were doing their job, I was doing my job and it was some real synergy. And so suddenly I thought—I noticed and felt this lack of synergy happening. Lack of community. And so, it's sort of like, "Well, you're all on your own now." This was being said to all of us.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

JAMES WENTZY: So I don't—so I'm not exactly sure what to say or think or do.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: It still continues. I mean, not so long ago, I was asked to—or I guess it was for one of the wars with George W.—the second Bush—and one of the activists from The Marys asked me to go back to the footage of—from Grand Central terminal for the Day of Desperation to ask if I could give them a frame still of the balloons hoisting the big banner up to the roof up to the ceiling, because they wanted to count how many balloons whose helium it took to lift a banner up.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So they wanted to repeat that. So, I did that dutifully, and with pleasure. And they repeated it dutifully and with pleasure on the protests.

CYNTHIA CARR: What protest was that—where they were lifting something with helium balloons again?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I can only hazard a guess was George W.—I guess it was probably the Gulf War. I mean, the big one.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, the Iraq War, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: The Iraq War. I mean, yeah. Right, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. I see, so it wasn't really about AIDS anymore, it was about—

JAMES WENTZY: No, this was, yeah. This was outside of AIDS, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Yeah. In '97, though, there was a big Wall Street demo—also about drug prices.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, sort of an anniversary action for ACT UP. Was it 20? Yeah, ACT UP 20, yes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes, 20, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Or 10, it would have been 10. It started in '87, ACT UP.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So that would have been the 10-year anniversary.

JAMES WENTZY: Right, right, right, exactly, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Feels like 20. [Laughs.] It feels like.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I filmed that and I do remember something. One of the protestors, somebody I didn't know, maybe some student coming into town to take part with the action and civil disobedience—she broke through a police line and went up to one of the Wall Street doors at the exchange and she's covered in red, fake blood colors and, you know, the fake blood that was spread everywhere on the door and the police were hauling her away, and I was there and filmed her quickly. And the police were not really handling her with any respect and I do remember getting some satisfaction knowing that my camera actually provoked the cops to handle her just a tad more humanely.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: She was doing her job, they have to do their job, sure, but there was a little—for a while there was a little loss of perspective until I showed up with my camera and they eased up a bit.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So I remember getting some satisfaction that way. That had happened quite a bit in the past, but it had been a while and it's nice to see that still happens.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, when you did that demo it had been awhile—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —since you'd done one?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: The AIDS community television—did that kind of end at that point also? In '96 with—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah that actually ended because I'd been on the air for three years and there was a policy by MNN who controlled public access that producers who had a show on prime time, could only stay in prime time for three years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So, I was actually then kicked off. They actually called me later saying, "Well, we could make a deal with you, though. If you want to stay in prime time, we can give you every other week. Otherwise you have to go off prime time—or go off the air." So, I thought, "Hmm, still prime time, but every other week. Then I only have to work half as much."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And that didn't turn out to be true. I really lost a sense of timing by that every other week schedule.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So it did not work out well for me with the series of time. But, yeah, it was just a—I would have kept going otherwise, I'm sure it wouldn't have occurred to me on my own to have stopped.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But—

CYNTHIA CARR: And that was a half-hour show?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah—29 minutes, I think.

CYNTHIA CARR: —29 minutes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So one of the last shows I did, it was just me talking to a phone, idle, an old phone. When I first moved into the basement I saw this old Bakelite rotary phone, and I said, "That's too cool."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: It was too cool not to hook up, so I hooked up and so for the longest time, until basically just before I moved here, I had this old Bakelite rotary phone from the '50s on me.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I know it was from the '50s because I can see old movies and there's my phone. And so it wasn't until I moved here that I got a cell phone. I'm so over rotary phones now. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Especially when you get a call from your doctor's office saying, "For important medical information, press one."

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Can't do that on a—It's true, you can't do that on a rotary phone.

JAMES WENTZY: For the last show, I called in another well-known video maker and public access, Rick X, who did *The Closet Case Show* in Manhattan.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And it was a fantastic series. He was on the air for 10 years. Late at night. Pressing the boundaries of what you could show and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —he certainly smacked against the boundaries.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: The rule in public access was you just can't show yourself touching genitals or showing any satisfaction from touching. So, he would have—he would show what he wanted to show with a narration telling people, "on me, not in me" and really teaching our communities how to have sex safely. People were going to have sex anyway, but they just wouldn't know how to protect yourself or other people.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And people's lives were saved because of him. So, I gave him a lot of credit. He just died a year ago. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —but, one of the last shows I did was—before I was cancelled was talking to him and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —on the air, suggesting, perhaps, they call the administration to change their policy. And the administrator for public access in the city—I saw him the next morning and he said, "I was getting calls all night. I did not appreciate it."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: "As if you think that would change the policy." [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: I did have an audience.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Obviously, boy. That's great, because only a little percentage of people hearing that will actually make a call.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. What do they say? If somebody writes to the paper back in the old days, for every letter they receive it's an indication of 10,000 more people that didn't write.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Something like that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. [Laughs.] I guess so. One thing that interested me, I had never heard about this thing from 1998—Steve Michael political funeral.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And it was in front of the White House.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Two strong activists who lived in D.C., and when they died a surviving partner had actually gotten permission to have a demonstration leading up to just outside the fence of the White House—carrying his coffin with the body inside.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, yeah, that was one of the last political funerals—

CYNTHIA CARR: And you went down to Washington to film it?

JAMES WENTZY: I did, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Were they friends of yours? Or just you knew them through activist circles? Or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, comrades. Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative]. There were a few other political funerals that I filmed that I never utilized the footage or didn't utilize the footage very much. There was a second Ashes Action—more organized by ACT UP Philly. Tom Rauffenbart had carried David's ashes—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —some of David's ashes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: He said maybe it was an arm or a leg. [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And that went to the other side of the White House, the front side, so-called front side, I guess. And ashes were thrown all over. That was covered by the *New York Times*. The other Action's not covered much by the press.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Mainstream press, I mean.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But the *New York Times*, I believe, had a photo of that action on top of the fold, maybe, on the front page and you actually see Tom throwing a piece of David.

CYNTHIA CARR: There's actually a picture of Tom throwing—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. That's it.

CYNTHIA CARR: —you see the ashes up in the air.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. I went down on the bus with him.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Something that doesn't get conveyed very well in the picture or by the newspaper writing was the direction of the wind—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —it was not favorable for a throwing of ashes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Not favorable for the activists throwing the ashes, that tended to have a taste of David in our mouth for a while. And that's other people—

CYNTHIA CARR: They all blew back at the people?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. So, that was a new taste of cotton mouth.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: New definition, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —yeah, but that was another action—in my mind not quite, I don't know, the way it was organized, perhaps—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —in less than the way we desired.

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, the first one was really rough. You've got footage of the first Ashes Action and it looks like —

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —people were being pushed around by the cops and—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —it looked very violent.

JAMES WENTZY: The police were mad that we had successfully sidestepped their will.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And there were horses there, too, I think.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mounted cops, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But, again, activists, when horses were coming, the marshals instructed everybody to sit down along the fence and everybody sat down. And when that happens, the horses stop. Horses will never trample somebody deliberately.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: One thing, they have long legs and they could hurt themselves if they fell. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —that's perhaps one reason. I tend to think of a more spiritual reason, but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —they won't trample somebody if everybody sits. And everybody sat and the horses stopped. And you can see footage that side of the march of the action. Tony Arena was there and his camera has that action and you can be—he pans up to the cops on the horses and they look really perturbed

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: They are just stuck there.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps that's why after the action some of the pushing around happened right after the action. So that perhaps was just a little belligerency from the police who did not get their way.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. You were filming it right up by the fence I think—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —because you did catch someone getting their ashes in—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —onto the grass inside.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh yeah, plenty. All the ashes got thrown over.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Everybody was successful in that. And afterwards, the heavens let loose—I guess you could say. It started raining.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, so then there—

JAMES WENTZY: I look back and there was just a pile of concrete it looked like.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] I mean, you know, it was actually a very emotional event.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: These are people putting their friend's remains onto the lawn.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know, so you see people hugging each other—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —and crying.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know? It's really—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —and the horses—[laughs]—in the background and it's like—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —wow. You know?

JAMES WENTZY: Afterwards everyone was instructed, "Do not—when you leave, do not leave alone. Leave with somebody. Just in case."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: As it turns out, nobody was arrested or hassled overly.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: So it was fine, but it has happened where after a demonstration, the cops want some satisfaction. So, things have happened in the past for other events, but not this time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: There've been times—actually even before that action, the Amsterdam AIDS Conference—

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JAMES WENTZY: —In '92, the summer of '92, an activist had brought a supply bag full of ashes and had gone up to a drug company executive. She was holding her ashes and said, "This is my friend and he lived trying to get your drug but couldn't," and she was saying, "We just want you to know that there's something personal involved with this—our lives, and here's one that didn't make it." So, I have that, there are a few other instances.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. So, New York's ACT UP went there and they got into the conference and—I mean, it was a conference for doctors and researchers, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, this started in '89, actually, at the International AIDS Conference that was held in Montreal in '89 and, up until then, these conferences were strictly scientific and medical. And the community was never intended to participate, and that was the first time ACT UP and Canada's AIDS Action had collaborated and literally invaded the conference at the opening ceremony and taken the stage and sang, "We're not just numbers, we're here as participants of this plague." And everybody in attendance stood up and clapped, not really realizing that we sat down amongst them and stayed. We were going to stay and had ever since that time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, for all these conferences, we were always a part of these conferences, be it activists who were responsible for having—setting up bureaucratic mechanisms for community participation and always went as media, established media, with press passes and all that, and no fee. These conferences are expensive. Now, I don't know, they're probably up over a thousand dollars for entrance fees.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: Which is kind of ridiculous and now I don't bother going. It's not—I see no point to them. Things are online, the community part of these conferences now are completely segregated to separate venues and so —

CYNTHIA CARR: How many did you go to?

JAMES WENTZY: Let's see, Amsterdam, Berlin, Yokohama, Geneva, Durbin, South Africa.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Bangkok, Thailand. So, I may be leaving out one but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —quite a few. After the '93 conference in Berlin, that was a conference, it's only—oh, Barcelona AIDS Conference, I went to that one. So, seven, I guess. The '93 conference in Berlin notable only for the fact that information finally came down from the medical scientists that AZT was not—if it was effective at all, it was only going to be effective for one year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: That was its notability.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: And after that conference, the international conferences were changed to every other year. So, every two years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And all the ones that you went to, were there demonstrations there or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: There were.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: From ACT UP.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Or of its like.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, I mean, probably if it's in, you know, South Africa or Japan it would be hard for people to actually make that trip, it's so expensive and—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —time-consuming and—

JAMES WENTZY: But still, nonetheless—

CYNTHIA CARR: —people did go.

JAMES WENTZY: —certainly, in South Africa, that was only a few years after apartheid.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So they did not need ACT UP to know how to demonstrate. [Laughs.] They were really good and —

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —in fact, that was perhaps the only time I went to an AIDS conference, an international AIDS conference, where I found it to be thrilling. Just, literally, thrilling to be there. That community, they'd gone through so much, still were going through so much, and this conference I think was 2002.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I started looking—you know, the medicine now had been out for quite a number of years and yet the communities in South Africa were looking around this conference and the world and saying, "Everywhere has these medicines but us. We don't have—what is wrong with this picture?"

CYNTHIA CARR: Really? They didn't have the—

JAMES WENTZY: They did not.

CYNTHIA CARR: —protease inhibitors—

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: —and other drugs?

JAMES WENTZY: No, it was not. So, they were justifiably riled. There was an old, beautiful Supreme Court justice in South Africa. White guy—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —South African, who was HIV positive, a person with AIDS. And he knew I was from ACT UP and he knew, also, that just recently, before the conference, Al Gore running for President was zapped by an ACT UP member from New York. Apparently, there was some laws cooked up in the books that prohibited generics from being made and also the—for drug pharmaceutical trade for exchange, crossing lines, country lines, international lines. So, there was about, I seem to remember, like, 12 zaps of Gore when he was campaigning—all over the country, activists needling him on that point—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —because he was in charge of some national committee that manufactured the rules of this issue—and he finally changed the rules—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —and the Supreme Court judge in South Africa knew what was going on and credited ACT UP for having changed the rule—and increasing the possibilities of medicines coming into South Africa.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But, again, at the time they had a president who was an AIDS denialist—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —who did not believe HIV caused AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So—[Thabo] Mbeki. So that was—I don't know how to spell his name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, that was a complication for them also, but it was a thrilling conference. The next conference, two years later, my last conference there was in Bangkok and there was one woman who was Thai and a scientist and she had revolutionized national healthcare in Thailand. Something we don't even have in this country.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, so, all of a sudden, AIDS was covered for the national healthcare program in Thailand. She cooked up manufacturing of three drugs in one pill and she was this short, kind of round, woman. Somewhat cross between a laughing Buddha and an angel.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Just incredible and she said, "I can go to any country that can give me electricity and clean water, and I can make these drugs for next to nothing."

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: And she has. She's gone to countries in Africa now, making these drugs. So, an incredible woman. So, that's the solution, I think. Rather than even concentrating on countries that can get cheap generic equivalents of these drugs. I think the real answer is make them yourself.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yeah, that was sort of the point back in your early days with ACT UP, with your affinity group—with the holistic approach.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: But that used to be the only option, you know, trying to do—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —I mean, I remember some of them that came along that people would start taking. These, sort of odd, treatments but there was nothing else to take.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. No alternatives.

CYNTHIA CARR: But they were homemade. So—but you're saying now they can do a real thing that's homemade.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. You worked on *United in Anger*. You were the cinematographer.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, yeah, only in that they—most of the footage they used, if it isn't archival, it's from the ACT UP Oral History Project and I filmed all the interviews that were done.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, you did?

JAMES WENTZY: In New York, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They went to San Francisco and didn't take me.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So, some of the activists had moved out West, to the West Coast.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, it was focused on New York ACT UP.

JAMES WENTZY: It was.

CYNTHIA CARR: For the AIDS Oral History Project.

JAMES WENTZY: For ACT UP—

CYNTHIA CARR: ACT UP Oral History Project.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, I've seen some of those and you were the one who filmed them. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So, it was nice of Jim to give me credit. Plus, he used some of my footage for archival footage.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: I don't know why, but it could be noted that anytime I've seen films from other parts of the United States—well, let me put it another way. There wasn't much that was filmed outside of New York, I don't know why but—

CYNTHIA CARR: Even in San Francisco?

JAMES WENTZY: No, you won't see much footage coming from San Francisco. I am not sure why, but in New York, there's a lot.

CYNTHIA CARR: Thanks to you, mostly, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Well, yeah, for a certain point.

CYNTHIA CARR: I mean, you did this all. You didn't get paid for this, right?

JAMES WENTZY: No, right.

CYNTHIA CARR: Did they pay for the film and the—like, if your camera broke, they would get you a new camera or anything like that?

JAMES WENTZY: They being ACT UP? I was able to finesse some money from ACT UP and also, I mentioned from the North Star Fund.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. To pay for the equipment that you needed.

JAMES WENTZY: Equipment and some things, yeah. For a while, it would be, like, \$6,000 here and there. But—so, I was always able to finesse the minimum requirements to do this. It never included—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, but you didn't—but didn't include being paid for—[laughs]—

JAMES WENTZY: —salary. No, no.

CYNTHIA CARR: —for the work, right?

JAMES WENTZY: But, again, luckily, I, you know, I lived where I did. I didn't pay rent.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I worked in my boss's darkroom. James Dee. Worked in his darkroom a few days a week with—he paid just a little bit. And—but didn't pay rent and that's a big chunk of money—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —having to spend that in New York and I didn't have that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And also, because of my work schedule, I had a lot of time to do this. So, I couldn't have done it without him, in this situation.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. James Dee. He was aware you were doing all this, I'm sure.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Very supportive, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Ever since I came back, told him I was positive and—you know, he told me to start with Robert Farber on the front stoop. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —Jim Dee was always very supportive.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, then—let's see. Do you remember—are you still filming for them or do you remember the last action that you filmed, if you've stopped now?

JAMES WENTZY: I've stopped.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I do rooftop gardening now.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I called once—

CYNTHIA CARR: Out along the Hudson here, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Right, on my roof.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I was successful. I grew a pumpkin.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Carved it into a Jack O' Lantern.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow, that's—[laughs]—

JAMES WENTZY: What more life fulfillment can you have?

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Well, do you remember the last action that you filmed?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, what a cruel question.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, a real cruel side to you. [Laughs.]

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: No, again—I was filming ACT UP Oral History Projects.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I remember the last ones of those.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I do remember the last things I filmed.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, what year was that done, the Oral History Project?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, probably the last 13 years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, lots of people to interview there.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, this is me pantomiming milking.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, yeah, and all your footage is at the New York Public Library now?

JAMES WENTZY: Yes.

CYNTHIA CARR: And that collection is called—there's a gay activist collection there but there is a specific—

JAMES WENTZY: Specific collection, AIDS Video Activist Preservation Project.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay. So, everything is there.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: The reason I just had gone back—when Jean Carlomusto did her documentary on Larry Kramer: *In Love and Anger*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: *Larry Kramer In Love and Anger*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Which is an outstanding documentary, one of the best AIDS films I've ever seen.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And I went with her because I'd never really gone to the library and I was wondering how the system worked, just for the general public and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —and it really worked.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I was surprised.

CYNTHIA CARR: You mean you'd never gone there to use the—

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: —the thing, you'd gone there to work.

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: But not to, like, use the—

JAMES WENTZY: And when I did the work and remastered the original tapes onto archival tapes, we would deliver tapes to the lower floors of the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street and putting them on shelves that were somewhere in between the trunk of Herman Melville and Babylonian stone tablets.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Pretty incredible, actually.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, mean what they have in the basement there?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, yeah. Since then they've moved out their main archive storage unit to some high-tech facility in New Jersey.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But they still have an area down there. It's great.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. You talked about what—for most of this, what kind of camera were you using?

JAMES WENTZY: It was always a Hi-8 camera and it was a slightly higher end, regular consumer camera.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: It wasn't a high-end camera at all.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But again, I tried to make it somewhat of a bigger camera. It was never small enough to put in a pocket, it was always bigger.

CYNTHIA CARR: You had to carry it on your shoulder.

JAMES WENTZY: Well—or I usually had a shoulder attachment to have the camera out here.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, it was about the size of a deflated football. An illegal football, you could say.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Because I didn't want to go with a small one that wouldn't fit with the fake press credentials.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, I went with slightly bigger but then I couldn't afford, you know, a real professional camera.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, it was somewhere in between the small consumer camera, handheld, hand sized consumer camera and between a big, big but cheap camera from NY1 News or something.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Well, you had—you told me you were in a show, the Visual AIDS Ephemera show, I think, where—is that where you had the dead cameras?

JAMES WENTZY: No, that was when I had my empty pill bottles I had taken—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —through the years since I started meds.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, what was the show with the dead cameras?

JAMES WENTZY: That was not a show, actually. I just had that around my place and then when it was time for me to have to move, you know, New York Library had their first shot and got my originals, and they also got the Bessie Award presented to ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Somehow, I ended up with that plaque.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And some other paraphernalia around the room—ephemera. But I still had my camera, my four dead video cameras in an Evita-like coffin.

CYNTHIA CARR: In a what?

JAMES WENTZY: An Evita-like coffin.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Because it had a glass cover to it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And when NYU came, NYU Fales Library came—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —to pick up some of the first-generation duplicates that I had, and I asked them, "Do you want this one?" The piece, four dead cameras, and, "Yeah, yeah, we'll take it." So, they have that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, great, great. Did they just wear out? Is that why they died or—?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, they either wear out, or perhaps a mercy killing, or something.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: But they weren't damaged—

JAMES WENTZY: They're tired.

CYNTHIA CARR: —they weren't damaged during a demonstration or anything?

JAMES WENTZY: No, that would have been something, yeah. Please, I could make up stories but no—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. They just wore out because you used them so much.

JAMES WENTZY: Or, used them in the rain.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Certainly I'd cringe whenever it rained and I would put plastic around them, and tape up plastic, but if it's really raining and if it's something that I really need to film, I'm going to film anyway.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And rain always can get in. So, yeah, I lost at least half of them, probably, because of that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Because of rain, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, some political funeral, probably. I can think of two. Tim Bailey, also, it was raining lightly.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And Mark Lowe Fischer it was raining more than lightly.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, right.

JAMES WENTZY: More than others.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But, you know, I think also there's something, like, anytime you build a big building or something there's probably going to be involved some deaths involved with the work. I'm filming these overpowering actions sometimes and there's going to be a cost.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Comes with the territory.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Better my cameras than me.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Maybe?

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Well, that's the thing that comes through in the footage with the—I mean, there was a lot of violence and, you know, being—it just was, you know, very tense situations and—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —chaos and violence, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I remember for the 10-year anniversary action for ACT UP, you mentioned before, one of the ideas that I cooked up—it was my idea—was I suggested that we have a story-telling session. And so, I proposed that and had somebody else that actually arranged to have Judson Memorial Church to host it. So, that week had a night where people would come and activists would tell their favorite moments from ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And Maxine Wolfe told a story about the Women's Action, during the Women's Action of Shea Stadium.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Don't remember the year, was it '88 maybe? But, I'm not sure, and so the women were going to use Shea Stadium, during a ball game, to have an action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And some of the activists on the floor, in those days we would have been talking about, like, 250 on the floor, plus or minus, and at first there was just silence on the floor. The closet case baseball fans didn't come out yet. Some were afraid, "Well, aren't they going to beat us up?" Or—and certainly later on there were many people who came out of the closet and said, "I'm a baseball fan."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But before that, "Aren't they going to beat us up in that?" And it was reminded to them, "No, it's the people in suits you have to worry about. They're the ones that are probably more responsible for people dying." So, I found that interesting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you go along with them to Shea?

JAMES WENTZY: No, again, that was before my time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, that was before. Yeah, right.

JAMES WENTZY: I consider myself, like, a third-generation AIDS activist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: A first generation, I put down as, like, very first days. Like, '81, '82, when a phone hotline started happening from our communities. U.S. Government was doing nothing yet, at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: We started responding by having phone listings.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, people were calling all the time. In fact, there was a woman [Jeannetta Bushey -JW] working here at Bailey-Holt House who was doing phone work and answered some calls. We're talking about '82 or '83, answering calls. One mother saying, "My son has AIDS and we were traveling in the car together. Do I have to get rid of the car now?"

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Because he was sitting there.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: You know, it was at—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —she actually took the call with the owner of, at the time called The River Hotel, here where I live. He wanted to know if the AIDS Resource Center wanted to buy this building, and she just laughs saying, "We don't have any money like that." But, it was finally arranged.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So, this was established as the first AIDS housing in New York, if not the world, and this was late '86.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: When Bailey House was established. What led me to this discussion?

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I forgot where I was going with this. Oh—third generation AIDS activist.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes, yeah, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: First one being people who came together and started answering questions, questions they really didn't know the answer to but nobody did, so—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —better than nothing. So, I call them the first generation. Then let's say '86, some activities started happening. People getting together, leading directly to ACT UP in early '87, considering AIDS as a political crisis and starting to work in that direction. So, I call that second generation.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And AIDS—you know, these generations were really quick-lived.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And then I joined ACT UP in the middle of 1990, so I call that even the third generation and so I'm a third-generation AIDS activist. Not noble, not proud of it.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But better late than never.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Certainly, thrilled when I got involved. I got involved because I was thrilled.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.] Yes. Well, we might be at a stopping point here. This list,—but you did—your show was on every week, right? It was on—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it was.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, well, it's great. Seems like—

JAMES WENTZY: I know—

CYNTHIA CARR: What? Is there something that I missed, do you think?

JAMES WENTZY: No, not beyond touched the topic of being thrilled.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But I know back in my evolution of considering myself as in the arts, I know that happened—meeting Darrel Ellis.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps the first person I knew who as he was growing up, quickly, he came from the Bronx and his father was shot by the police when he was—was an innocent father. But he's probably the first person I met who I saw and comprehended as somebody who grew up living as an artist. I never really—I had everything more classified as a photographer or one niche or another. So, he made a big difference but somewhat in exchange I taught him photography, and that was sort of the deal, but he was a big influence and when we lived as P.S. 1 for two years.

Then, after I left P.S. 1, and then started homesteading the basement of a building in SoHo. Then I really didn't know exactly what to do, I was showing art or something was on exhibition, publicly, every weekend at P.S. 1 and then suddenly I was underground, literally, and first two weeks of living at the basement, I noticed somebody sitting on the front stoop. Tehching Hsieh—and I recognized him from some of the posters he puts out when he was doing his one-year performance pieces.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And so, I recognized him and came out to the front stoop and it was a cold February in '82. I remember it because the building I lived at, now that I just moved into, didn't have heat but he was doing his one-year, outdoor piece. Where he did not go inside for one year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, as I said, cold winter but I had shelter and I was fine indoors.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: He was outside and so I really respected him and I knew what he was doing, and being young then, obviously more young than now—I was sort of moaning and whining to myself except he had to suffer along with me outside there, next to me. Saying, "Oh, I don't know—"

[END OF wentzy17_2of3_track06]

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. Let me begin with—this is Cynthia Carr interviewing James Wentzy at his home at the Bailey-Holt House in Greenwich Village, New York, New York, on March 31, 2017, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And then this is Card Number 3. Okay. So, I wanted to clarify something that I think I gave—I may have left the wrong impression from the—during the last interview. Just to clarify, you actually did not work for the Estate Project. Is that correct?

JAMES WENTZY: I think that's correct, yes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. It's on your Wikipedia page—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —which mysteriously appeared. I mean, I have one too. I don't know who put it there. I—

JAMES WENTZY: I don't either. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So that is not correct. Okay. Then you had funding from North Star and from ACT UP to—and that was for the AIDS Community Television?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. To start the series, because I knew I wouldn't be able to manufacture a weekly series every week and crank it out by renting equipment.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, right. Right. So, did you think of it as kind of an ACT UP project? Or did they keep, you know, some—did they check up on you or wonder what was going on or anything like that?

JAMES WENTZY: No, no. No, I had no accountability other than my own sense of ethics.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, I considered it principally an ACT UP vehicle. But it was more in general to reflect the community responses to AIDS—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and specifically AIDS as a political crisis. And there were few places, individuals, or organizations that could surpass ACT UP—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —as a fight in AIDS as a political crisis. Certainly, ACT UP was featured. But poets, authors, other—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. And this began in January of 1993.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, that was when the weekly series started. But by January of '91 I knew I was going to go for that weekly series.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. But it just took that long to get it rolling.

JAMES WENTZY: It did, yeah. And in the meantime I guess I produced eight one-of-a-kind—they call them "specials" on public access. So I did specials that would run maybe four times—and then disappear. And so in lieu of a weekly series that I was building up to, I did those.

CYNTHIA CARR: What were the specials?

JAMES WENTZY: I'd have to look it up. One was, like—would have been—"Day of Desperation" would certainly have been the first one.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. So, it was also, like, a 29-minute show or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And with footage from that day?

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I believe those still—yeah. Let's see. First thing I filmed was late summer of 1990, the conference in Kansas City—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —where people, so-called "quack busters"—and so ACT UP and the Alternative Holistic Treatment Committee went down, and I went with them to film. So, I put that; and then Day of Desperation; expanding the definition of AIDS administration for the local office of the CDC here in town; National Healthcare Actions Compilation, there were two demonstrations in Washington, D.C., advocating for national healthcare; Target Bush campaign, presidential campaign, '92.

CYNTHIA CARR: Now, these—the four public—the one that you did first, before you had a weekly show—that was "Day of Desperation" and—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. These were all before I had the weekly show.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, this—there's more than four of them.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, there are eight.

CYNTHIA CARR: Eight of them, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Eight or 10. Ten. Ten, excuse me.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: "Target Bush Campaign, presidential campaign '92"; "Native American, Two Spirits and HIV"; "Amsterdam Treatment Report from the Amsterdam AIDS conference"; "HIV-Positive Haitian Political Refugees at Guantanamo Bay"; and then kind of a generic compilation I put together entitled *Time to be an AIDS Activist*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, and that was footage from all of the above, in a way.

JAMES WENTZY: Probably, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And then I started the—a weekly series in—

CYNTHIA CARR: In '93.

JAMES WENTZY: Inaugurated—

CYNTHIA CARR: You know, the one action you mentioned, expanding the definition of AIDS, why was that important? Why was that an issue?

JAMES WENTZY: I think that was—if there's any one single accomplishment ACT UP and AIDS activists at all achieved, it was expanding the definition of AIDS, which worldwide—other countries base their definition of AIDS on the CDC's definition. And at the time, it only encountered—it only considered certain opportunistic infections that were male-centric. So women were having AIDS but having no support, no—there was no social mechanism to support them. And almost without exception, I think all the women that worked on that campaign, which took three years to actually change the definition—I think with—almost without exception, all the women that were involved with that campaign, who had AIDS, died.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: But from their work, more was covered so that women could finally get covered, get social support—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —because then they were—you know, pelvic inflammatory disease, things like—things that would only affect women. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, and—

JAMES WENTZY: So that was a great accomplishment, actually. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: No, it's true that the healthcare does focus on men, you know.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And—yeah. So there were particular opportunistic infections that women would get that men would not get. Is that true?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah, and—

CYNTHIA CARR: And nothing was done about them.

JAMES WENTZY: No, they couldn't get on the network. They couldn't get the definition of AIDS for any—albeit meager at the time—support.

CYNTHIA CARR: So doctors would literally tell them, "You don't have AIDS," or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah, there would—yeah, it wasn't under the details that classify—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —or determine the definition of AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy. When was that, the change? Like, in this demonstration about it? From—

JAMES WENTZY: This one in New York was '92. That was probably shortly thereafter, when it finally changed. But again, it took three years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: So, any time the director of the CDC visited during those three years, there'd be a campaign.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: People—they had a target with his picture on the target—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —which he didn't appreciate, but—and I'd filmed him at one of the AIDS conferences. I guess it was Amsterdam AIDS conference, yes, where a bunch of women confronted him. And he agreed to sit on the table with them and talk.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And so I had that filmed.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what was the name again?

JAMES WENTZY: The AIDS conference at Amsterdam?

CYNTHIA CARR: The guy, the man.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, his name was James Curran, C-U-R-R-A-N.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. Yeah. I wanted to—I mean, I'm looking at the list of your shows. It's—in a way, it's—there's kind of a broad range to it because—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —I was struck—well, you had the—say, the HIV immigration exclusion. You know, that Senate bill that I guess was Jesse Helms and company that kept out people at—were stopped at the border if they had HIV.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And people were often emailing the ACT UP website, which I did—do still.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Oh, yes. Yeah, you had told me about that. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And their chief question that I'd definitely answer was, "I'm coming as a tourist. I know people in the States I want to come see, but I'm afraid—if they find out I have AIDS, they'll turn me away." And they would.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So I just said, you know, "Change your meds to something for, like, blood pressure or diabetes."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Right, yeah, different—a different label.

JAMES WENTZY: You could say leprosy and they'd let you in.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. So, now, a show like that, what footage would that include? Would it be something from the Senate or from, you know, airports or people talking, or what kind of thing would that be?

JAMES WENTZY: In that case, I had—I know I had some C-SPAN footage with people talking. I know I had one of the right-wingers from the House. I'm forgetting his name. But let's see. Oh, yeah, Robert Dornan.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, Dornan. Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Miss him.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, he would—he—

CYNTHIA CARR: From Southern California, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So I had some footage of him. And he said, "I would fly into China, 1988, and I picked up a visa application." And it said, "If you have tested positive for the," he says, "he-mono immunodeficiency virus, don't get off the airplane. You'll be held and turned around at the airport." Now, China is not a good example because it is a cruel communist dictatorship.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Well, that's the same law we had.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: There were about five other countries: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and I don't remember now the three other—

CYNTHIA CARR: Great countries to emulate, huh? [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And it was only with Obama when that was turned around.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah, so you would have some speakers from the Senate. And maybe—I don't know, maybe activists talking about why they opposed it? Things like that?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. And then this one sort of struck me—the show on this Zen Buddhist monk.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And so what was that? It was an interview with him or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, two interviews, actually, I combined. Yeah, actually, when I tested positive in 1990, just by chance I saw on the bulletin board at the community center, "Invitation: if you're positive, living in the city—if you're positive, you're welcome to come to visit a monastery in the Catskills over the weekend and hang out." And this monk, he was a Jewish operatic set designer who just got fascinated with the bells and whistles of Zen Buddhism—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and became a monk. And they gave him his monk—his dharma name, Donge.

CYNTHIA CARR: Donge John Haber is his name, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah, he said, "Vickie Lester. Vickie Lester," out of *A Star is Born*, where she was renamed for her star name.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: But, yeah, he had HIV/AIDS and died a few years later. But Vince Satmire and I went up there to interview him. And I just—for something completely different, I thought it was nice to put on the air.

CYNTHIA CARR: Vince a friend of yours? Vince—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, Satmire. He was in ACT UP.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And in fact, we'd even—we never edited the film. But he was also from the Alternative Holistic Treatment Committee of ACT UP, sort of the contrary to the treatment committee, Treatment Data Committee.

CYNTHIA CARR: And who—the monk was on that committee—

JAMES WENTZY: No, no.

CYNTHIA CARR: —or your friend, Vince?

JAMES WENTZY: Vince. Vincent was.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: And so—and we were interested in anything alternative. And we—and urine therapy was also a contender at the times. So, we tracked down perhaps the foremost authority on urine therapy—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —and went down to Fort Lauderdale to interview her.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So that footage, the library has now. I never did edit it into a show. But I have a Hi-8 interview of her—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —the foremost authority on urine therapy.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: That's out there for the kids to look forward to.

CYNTHIA CARR: Never made it into a show, though. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: No, I did hear about people trying that—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —because, you know, everybody was desperate.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So the show that was the interview with the monk—just was kind of straight forward, showing him talking.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And, now, with—in any of these, did you do, like, voiceover—

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: —or, like, an introduction to do it or anything?

JAMES WENTZY: None of them, no.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: No, I just started—

CYNTHIA CARR: Subtitles or, you know, titles at the beginning about what it was or—

JAMES WENTZY: When I'd gotten a computer, an Amiga computer, there was a software program called Toaster. And that would—you could make graphics on it. And when I got that, then I could put on titles or graphics. Before that, all the shows didn't even have the graphics or, you know, 'video by.' And if I put my own name, I was real generous with—because everyone in ACT UP did a lot of work but never got credit. So, I didn't feel that was so necessary for me either.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But the videos were all edited, linear editing. So, if you decided you want to change something, you would have to redo the whole video from that point on, where nowadays with non-linear editing on the computer you can just insert it, and it moves everything over.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, with the digital stuff.

JAMES WENTZY: Sweet. Yeah. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, makes it—yeah. Boy. So, you were still using a Steenbeck and all of that to—

JAMES WENTZY: Well, that's for film. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: For film. Oh, this was video, that's right.

JAMES WENTZY: Video, yeah. And when I started, I didn't really—I'd done video—or, I'm sorry—I had done film editing before—even before I came to New York. So, I knew film. But I'd never done video before. So, a friend in the city from ACT UP, David Buckingham—he actually went into Downtown Community Television and he taught me how to edit video.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, it took about 15 minutes.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: It's not all that complicated.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But the do's and don'ts, and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: But he got me started.

CYNTHIA CARR: Great. Great. Let's see. There's one—well, you did this one called "Bob Rafsky Obituary." Now, is that—that wasn't the funeral. That was maybe footage you had of him from meetings or from demos?

JAMES WENTZY: It would have been from meetings. Occasionally he spoke. I do remember towards the end he said, "I'm not going to speak at any more of these funerals." So, I had that in there.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, at any more memorials or whatever. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, he just had enough of speaking.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I don't remember. Let's see. I don't remember what I did for that show.

CYNTHIA CARR: You don't remember all the footage from that.

JAMES WENTZY: Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, and these are the kinds of things that are now at the library.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Is that—so people could go there and look at them.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Hopefully—when I was doing the digitizing work for the AIDS Activists Video Preservation Project, I kind of waited until the very end of the project to do my own work. I didn't want to play favorites. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And so maybe I'd actually only digitized a couple dozen of my own edited shows, and maybe just a handful of the Hi-8 original, camera original tapes. So I actually left a lot undone. But then when I had to move three-and-a-half years ago, I—they came and got all the Hi-8 tapes and—for the plan of digitizing everything—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, great.

JAMES WENTZY: —and putting it online.

CYNTHIA CARR: There's one here called "Schoolboard Stealth Candidates." Was that—what was the stealth involved there?

JAMES WENTZY: I did a lot of—they would be real repressive.

CYNTHIA CARR: Very conservative.

JAMES WENTZY: Very conservative—

CYNTHIA CARR: People trying to make—

JAMES WENTZY: —and dead set against having any sex education or—

CYNTHIA CARR: Or condom distribution or things like that. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Right. Right. So, they were trying to get elected.

CYNTHIA CARR: So it was about who they—this was a show about who they were and—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. I did a lot of documentation of the schoolboard, because we had an active YELL—Youth Education Life Line—in ACT UP. They did a lot of work against the schoolboard. They would write out—they got official stationery and they wrote out letters of recommendation for everyone—

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: —and passed them out to the board. And then the Board of Education had a HIV advisory committee. And they were basically right-wing people.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So it was a real—

CYNTHIA CARR: And the letters of recommendation were for—what? Teachers or—

JAMES WENTZY: Letters of resignation.

CYNTHIA CARR: Recommendation.

JAMES WENTZY: They were for the—yeah, they were passed out to the advisory board members and to the Board of Education members who were against—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, letters of resignation. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, they were, yeah, on official letterhead paper. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Nicely done. But, yeah, it was one demonstration after another.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: I wish I'd actually edited a compilation of all those actions together, but I hadn't yet.

CYNTHIA CARR: You still might do that?

JAMES WENTZY: Somebody else—well, maybe I'll leave it to other people now.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: But it'll be a—possible.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. And I like this show that you did: "Activist on Vacation." [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah, I just went back to my home state of South Dakota and went through the Black Hills, one of my favorite spots on earth.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And there was a new trail there that was just opened up that goes the entire 100 miles of the Black Hills from Wind Cave National Park up to Bear Butte.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And so I hiked it and had my video camera around and photographed me hiking the trail.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And, oh yeah, well, that would be the exception. That's the only case where there was voiceover of me talking about—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, describing it as you went along? Or did you add it later?

JAMES WENTZY: No, I was just describing—after I came back, I was talking about coming to New York and then living with HIV and not being a passive participant in this plague.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. All right.

JAMES WENTZY: So it was all me, talking throughout the footage. I guess I was trying to rationalize it—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —showing up in an AIDS-activist venue.

CYNTHIA CARR: But it's a good break to have in August for—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Actually, some people actually liked it—[laughs]—I was surprised. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah [laughs]. Yes. Boy, so—

JAMES WENTZY: I know I'd done also four shows on the HIV-positive political refugees from Haiti—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —who were stuck on Guantanamo Bay. That started in the first President Bush's reign.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And candidate Clinton, running for president, said he—"That's unconscionable. We'll stop that." And he didn't.

CYNTHIA CARR: He didn't? Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: It had to go to court, a Supreme Court in Brooklyn. And a judge ruled against it. But we had four demonstrations throughout the city, the last one culminating in the stars, Susan Sarandon and other stars that demonstrated against it. And I made four shows of all of them. And I don't think the court would have ruled against it had it not been for community responses.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see a show here, "Guantanamo and HIV Immigration," in June of '93.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So did—

JAMES WENTZY: Might be the last one. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So that was footage of the demonstrations about that. And—

JAMES WENTZY: And somebody—a group of people had gone to Guantanamo and gotten permission. And so, I had permission to use their footage.

CYNTHIA CARR: ACT UP—people from ACT UP had gone there?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And from—lawyers from other groups, too, as I seem to recall. But there was always the connection, shared advocacy.

CYNTHIA CARR: So, did they speak during this show? You recorded them, interviewed them talking about it?

JAMES WENTZY: I didn't. I just used their footage—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, the footage that—

JAMES WENTZY: —that they took in Guantanamo.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh they took footage down in Guantanamo? Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. But there were people that killed themselves in Guantanamo. That's how desperate they were feeling.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Just so wrong.

CYNTHIA CARR: If you're that sick with that awful disease down there, I can't imagine it.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Horrible. So then when they were let go, what did they do? They went to Florida, or —

JAMES WENTZY: Some were—came to New York. We have family members here, I know.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: I think there was one time when Giuliani was—his previous job before he was mayor, when he was Attorney General, and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, or District Attorney or something like that. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Some bodies washed—in one of the mass exoduses from Haiti from some of the dictators, Papa

Doc, one or the other of them, they didn't quite make it to Florida. Bodies were washing to shore. Giuliani made sure the bodies were sent back to Haiti. He wasn't going to have anything untoward.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, boy—[laughs]—Wow. Boy. "AIDS Policy Coordinator Gebbie—a speech."

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, Nurse Gebbie, yes. She was a nurse.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And she was appointed the AIDS Czar.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: She was a real lightweight and really—the poor dear was just—

CYNTHIA CARR: That—was that under Clinton, when she was AIDS Czar, or—

JAMES WENTZY: Was it Clinton or—I think it might—yeah, I'm not sure. Is there a date on that? No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, it's '93.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, that would have been Clinton.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and I would have kept that current. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Clinton appointed a nurse to be the AIDS Czar. And the poor dear was just a little underweight for the job.

CYNTHIA CARR: She was in over her head in a way.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. That's—

JAMES WENTZY: And I guess our community might have been a little bit harsh on her.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Were there demonstrations against her?

JAMES WENTZY: No, I think she was—just zapping whenever she did a community meeting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: She tried to get along with the community. But it just wasn't going to happen. And I finally lost all respect for Clinton when he fired his Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders. This one week, she had come to speak at the United Nations on World AIDS Day. And she gave a presentation. And then one of the first questions asked was, a reporter asked her, "Do you think masturbation should be taught in schools?" She kind of hemmed and hawed around the issue as anybody would—[laughs]—and then finally said something to the effect of, "Well, that's something that should be considered to be a part of a total explanation of protecting yourself—perhaps it should be included." And that was enough. One week later, you know, conservatives all jumped on the—on her. And Clinton finally fired her one week later.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And she was good. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So until the stained dress showed up and everybody was after Clinton—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —I just had enough of him.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Personally, I think any president should get laid or a blow job anytime he wants.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Keep the president happy, by all means. But, yeah, he just—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Well, they needed somebody as an AIDS policy coordinator. I mean, that's the—a missing thing that—it'd been missing for all those years of—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —all these different—the CDC and the—all these different groups doing different things. And no one knew what the others were doing, it seemed like. So—

JAMES WENTZY: I don't think that's improved. That hasn't changed.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, the CDC has, you know, a long campaign of "everybody get tested." But in many of these states, if you get tested and you know your status and you have sex with somebody and you didn't quite tell them, you could be thrown in jail for years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: So if you're in a state that has these laws, it'd be better not to know your status. I mean, it's not a good thing. It's hard to advocate that. But if the choice is that and not—and the choice of going to jail isn't your choice, then I'd say, yeah, go on the dumb side and—

CYNTHIA CARR: Some states still have those laws?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Including my home state of South Dakota.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy.

JAMES WENTZY: And it doesn't even take into account if you used a condom, safe sex. Or if you've taken meds and you're undetectable, the chances of transmission is practically zero, if not totally zero. I mean, there's just no way to get HIV when you're undetectable.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: But you'd still get a 13-year sentence behind bars.

CYNTHIA CARR: Thirteen years?

JAMES WENTZY: Or more.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow. Here I see one that's "The Introduction of Legislation to Find a Cure for AIDS." And that's your rep here, Gerald Nadler, who's in the House of Representatives.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. ACT UP had a campaign, the AIDS Cure Project, which—I guess originally it was named the Barbara McClintock Project, a famous botanist, biologist. I think she was also a contender for the \$20 bill.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: But later renamed, just for clarity's sake, the AIDS Cure Project—and that was to dedicate funds for basic research on AIDS—how the virus works, something that isn't really studied that much, still to this day.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And it would have been good.

CYNTHIA CARR: So did you film it off C-SPAN, or did you go to Washington or—

JAMES WENTZY: No. I'm not sure if it was ever presented. If Nadler actually ever presented it or not. But he was

in favor. No, there were demonstrations here in town.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: And he showed up. And also we had—ACT UP did a teach-in on the project. And ACT UP was always good with teach-ins.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So we had—we gave a little bit of history of—do you know the NIH, the National Institutes of Health, really only began when immigration started to become big and all these immigrants were coming into our country, bringing in diseases and things?

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: So that's how we started funding the NIH, was to study the effect of diseases coming into this country. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: Was that, do you know, from the Ellis Island period or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: I know that people were checked there, at Ellis Island.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. So, this legislation to find a cure—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: I assume that never got to—

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: It probably never even got considered, much less—

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CYNTHIA CARR: —passed.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Even Dr. Gallo—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —who otherwise might not be a great name, but a big name nonetheless, in spite of his faults, he also had recommended that there be a specific institution just to study basic research on AIDS. And from that you probably have the workings of many other diseases, too.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But, no, that didn't happen. And even TAG, our own off-splinter group from ACT UP—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —they were against it. They wanted the money spent on the Office of AIDS Research.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And that didn't happen either. But they were against it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh huh [affirmative]. TAG, Treatment Action Group, I think it was.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. It's funny, it's so ironic—when the protease inhibitors were finally—you know, discovered, they wanted to slow it all down.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] It's very—

JAMES WENTZY: They got into trouble with that with ACT UP, too—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —because we found out about that through *Barron's* magazine. All of a sudden it was—

CYNTHIA CARR: *Barron's* magazine?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, really?

JAMES WENTZY: They had a story where I believe TAG had—was advocating large-scale simple trials that would go on for a long time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And no one else would have access to that. And that was just kind of the antithesis to ACT UP's advocacy history.

CYNTHIA CARR: I know my friend Tom started the cocktail, you know, as it was called—while it was still being tested.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And I know that doctors in New York, from what I know, people who—the doctors who really specialized in treating people with AIDS—

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: He got—you know, Tom and David had had a doctor like that, Dr. Friedman. He got Tom into—all the trials in New York were full. You know, everybody wanted to get in.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: And he sent Tom to Philadelphia. So he had to go there every month—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —but was definitely happy to do it. And it saved his life, of course. You know? So—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, of course. Yeah, my T cells were dropping at that same time, but not seriously until, I guess, '96—when they were finally released, and so, my timing was good.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Then they were released. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So the minute I actually started needing something, then they were on and I was able to get triple drug therapy.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. It's sort of—I know it's sort of a—just a coincidence. But you had—you stopped doing the show in '96, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Or at end of '95 or something, because you could only do it for three years.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Well, a little bit of a coincidence. But also I have to admit, you know, when I tested positive my first thought was, "Now what am I supposed to do?" Because I was pretty successful avoiding commitments to anything, you know, long-distance backpacking in the woods—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —living in a basement underground. But now what am I supposed to do? And then the artist Robert Farber took me to ACT UP meeting, and I was just flabbergasted and awed, slightly intimidated perhaps, too. And so I knew what I was going to do: just start documenting everything.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And DIVA TV had—I later came to know DIVA TV was really established. An acronym for Damned Interfering Video Activists—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —had been established in '89 to film demonstrations. But by the time I joined in mid-1990 it already wasn't in existence. It was a real collective. And they'd done three videos. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: Three videos related to AIDS?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: AIDS activism?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: But then they kind of fell apart

JAMES WENTZY: They did "Target City Hall"—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, "Target City Hall," yeah the early stuff. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —"Like a Prayer," the Stop the Church action—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —and one other. But doing something so creative as a collective, I knew that was headed for trouble. So when I started—when I knew I was going to start cranking out materials on a weekly basis, and I thought there was nothing worse than having timely documentary videos—there's nothing worse than having them sit on a shelf unseen. So a weekly series, that was my way to just keep it rolling.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: You know, getting it seen. But—so I invited a bunch of people at my place and told them what I was going to do. And—but I also knew that it wasn't going to be a collective. I said, "I'll get this equipment so I can do my thing, and I'll help you do your thing." But a collective, I knew that would be—troublesome, with the personalities and that.

CYNTHIA CARR: So there were other people filming some of the actions?

JAMES WENTZY: There were: not too many others, but certainly David Buckingham, who helped me learn video —

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —Tony Arena, he was great in filming things—

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —and a handful of others. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: But it was your equipment. So, you would—

JAMES WENTZY: Well, for editing.

CYNTHIA CARR: For editing. I see.

JAMES WENTZY: But everyone had their own cameras.

CYNTHIA CARR: I see.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And when I made press passes for everyone who needed one, I passed them—that just happened to look very similar to the police-issued press passes—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —you know, I enabled them to get the shots, too, very easily.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Well, that's great. [Laughs.] Boy. I guess this show on mandatory testing—was that footage from demos or people talking about that? Or—because that was a big issue for a while—

JAMES WENTZY: It was. Yeah, between demonstrations, which would always—could always utilize ACT UP for—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: They would have a demonstration at the drop of a hat.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But also the AIDS Advisory Council was a meeting held in the city, answerable only to the governor. And they would make recommendations on AIDS policy to the governor. And I remember when the curator of the New York Public Library came to check out my place and all the tapes that he was about to have, there were, like, 600 or 700 hours of Hi-8 tapes, camera original tapes, that he was going to collect.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And he asked me, "Well, you think we need to do all of them, or can we get by with just doing partial number of these tapes?" I replied to him, "I think you might have to do all of them," because just recently I was looking at a tape that, from the title—like, this tape on mandatory testing. I didn't remember exactly what was on it. I had the date and the title, but I looked at it and it was this committee meeting held uptown talking about the issue of mandatory testing. And it was the most interesting thing I had seen in a long time, because they were going after city bureaucrats, saying, "You've had one year to work out a mechanism to avoid names-reporting. And you come back here at the last minute and say, 'We can't do anything other than collect names.'" And they just needed this health commissioner of the city—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —who just stalled for so long that—

CYNTHIA CARR: And this was a committee meeting of some city officials, plus activists who came to be at the meeting?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. And in this case it was against the city health officials—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —who just weren't—I mean, names-reporting? I mean, how many people in New York City are named Brown or Carlson?

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So—and it was easy to—if you needed to track things, it's easy enough to have unique identifiers where you don't have the names involved.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy.

JAMES WENTZY: So the city bureaucrats really got harangued and—

CYNTHIA CARR: They were so clueless. Remember, like, Steve Joseph who was—what? The Health Commissioner?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: There was some point where he actually announced—it was in the paper: "Gay men are getting immune to AIDS."

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: It's a miracle!

CYNTHIA CARR: And I thought, "Boy, this is the health commissioner?"

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. So, when you brought up that name, that was one I actually brought up to the archivist at the library. I said, "So, you really can't pick and choose, because there's going to be something interesting to somebody down the line."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And so I had him take it all.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] I'm surprised they would even ask. Like, "Well, are some of these not so good or—and not so interesting?"

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Oh, that's—

CYNTHIA CARR: But, you were out there every week with whatever was happening that week. So—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and there were usually things happening every week.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, more often than not, there were several things happening that week.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and I always got it on the air. Depending on the time of day it happened, I was at—either later that same week on the air, or the very following next week.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So I had to—kept the show pretty timely, I think.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. There were—I know that in your list you filmed a number of funerals—like the political funerals and I guess some memorials. But this one that sort of stands out is a little different: the Jeffrey Schmalz memorial, which is called "Whatever Happened to AIDS?"

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. He was a *New York Times* reporter—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —who'd come out living with AIDS and wrote about it. And up until that point, *The New York Times* wasn't so great on reporting AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: I remember, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But he was the AIDS reporter after he came out. And when he died, there was a big memorial service. Larry Kramer even spoke. And I'm not sure which accusatory language he was on at the time.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: He sort of went from, you know, "Plague, plague!" or "Genocide, genocide, genocide!" or "Murders, murders, murders!" So, he went through various forms of identifiers.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But yeah, he was fond of shooting at *The New York Times*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, and sometimes shooting at other gay people.

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. Oh, definitely.

CYNTHIA CARR: "You did it. You're—" [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, definitely.

CYNTHIA CARR: "You haven't done enough." [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Absolutely. Yeah, well, actually it started that way.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: He gave the first speech. As I understand it—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

JAMES WENTZY: —he said, "Half of you—well, everyone stand up. Okay. This half of the room, you'll be dead in three years." Something to that effect.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Yes. A very—

JAMES WENTZY: So, it was that—that other people got together and started the first ACT UP meeting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There's a show here that you did in '94. And the Jeffrey Schmalz thing, that was also in '94, in June. But this one in October '94 is just—it just says "David B. Feinberg."

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: What was that about? He was an activist, right?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and an author.

CYNTHIA CARR: An author, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I believe that one was when he came to an ACT UP meeting to deliver a particularly vitriolic speech.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see. I remember, yes.

JAMES WENTZY: He had checked himself out of a hospital, came to ACT UP floor, and really ranted for 12 or 15 minutes. And I was told he was coming. Lots of people were told he was coming.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So a lot of people were there, but I filmed it. And I know afterwards one ACT UP activist who shall remain nameless came up to me and said, "I hope you never show that on the air." And I'm not sure whether I said this or whether it was just implicit in my response: "Of course I will." You know, here was a guy that was really muscle-bound for many years, built up, and came to an ACT UP floor two weeks before he was to die, probably weighing 120 pounds, and criticizing the floor basically for not saving his life.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: It was—you know, his speech was—what I guess I would say was "half wrong." But there was no way I was not going to show it. And nor was I going to overtly show anything—since it's a 29-minute show, I had to fill it. The speech [inaudible]. Nor was I going to show anything that would overtly try to say he's wrong. Just wasn't my place. But I did try to show some footage of things that people might be able to interpret—to go beyond his speech.

CYNTHIA CARR: So after his 15-minute rant, there was some footage of—

JAMES WENTZY: There's footage before and after, actually—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —even including my Zen monk friend, Donge.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative]. So other people talking and having a different point of view.

JAMES WENTZY: Probably less talking than just showing reactions.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, they—the documentary that I made in 2002, a feature-length documentary, I guess I hadn't done a video for a long time. We might have talked about this before.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, it was called *Fight Back, Fight AIDS*.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, *15 Years of ACT UP*, which I actually never named. I just had *ACT UP* as a first title.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And a person at directing the MIX Festival [that year -JW] actually named it. Fine. But that was the first time I'd gone with computer editing, the non-linear editing. So, I had to learn Final Cut and then put together the video. I don't know why I brought that subject up.

CYNTHIA CARR: Related to what we were talking about—David Feinberg and then adding some other things.

JAMES WENTZY: Well, sorry, maybe the disc won't survive anyway.

[They laugh.]

CYNTHIA CARR: But when you did all these shows, now, did you ever appear yourself on—

JAMES WENTZY: I do remember.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, go ahead.

JAMES WENTZY: No, I didn't appear on them. And that's why when these MIX film festivals came up once a year and they were real supportive to me, like the other—there was a gay and lesbian experimental film festival done every year.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And they encouraged me to make little films every year. And that experimental film festival was mainly targeted for short films.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Five minutes, three minutes, five minutes—10, 12 minutes practically was the maximum. And they—and specifically Jim Hubbard, who was one of the founders of MIX, he encouraged me: "Make it personal."

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Make it personal, because all my edited shows weren't personal. Although if my friends asked me how I—"how are you?" I would just say, "Watch my show." Sort of a reflection of me. But—so these short films that I made periodically through the years of MIX, they were six- or 12-minute things. And I was going to bill them as—because I was told, "Make it personal, make it—"

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Perhaps to some degree, sheepishly embarrassed or—to some degree or another, because when you're just doing documentary work and you're not making it personal, then you have the out. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Could you give an example of one? That were personal, that you were in?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. The last one I did for the festival was called *How to Have Sex in the Age of Panic*, 12 minutes talking about how sex is politicalized. Is that—

CYNTHIA CARR: Politicized?

JAMES WENTZY: Politicized, thank you. And people against anything having to do with sex—in our community and in our society.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I certainly started off by saying, "I was never very successful having sex with strangers or having sex with friends. How do people actually negotiate having sex?"

[They laugh.]

"How do they get laid? I don't." So, I started off being personal. And then I just went on other people, both the news and the political people talking about their view of sex usually being very negative. In the background I had these chroma-keyed people having sex.

CYNTHIA CARR: What? What was that word? Chroma key.

JAMES WENTZY: Chroma key.

CYNTHIA CARR: Chroma key.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. That's like a newsman standing in front of—a newsperson standing in front of the weather map, you know.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah. I see.

JAMES WENTZY: Same thing, except—

CYNTHIA CARR: That's called a chroma key, that thing? Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Chroma key. Yeah. Or in movies, called green screen, you know.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: But same thing. So, I did that. And—

JAMES WENTZY: And you were showing—was it porn or—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: But because I was talking about sex and the political-social aspects of our society dealing with sex, I was able to show it here in the city. And they convened a panel to determine if it was obscene or not. And quickly everybody agreed clearly it's not obscene. It has definition of cultural value.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And so I got by with throwing it.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: Also, bare back sex, that was the first time it was mentioned in print—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: —about people fucking without protection. So, I had to include that, because it was just emerging.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, what year was that, again?

JAMES WENTZY: '97.

CYNTHIA CARR: '97, okay. .

JAMES WENTZY: So—

CYNTHIA CARR: It's true, that became a big issue after the drugs were around.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, so, I had a bit of me in all those short films. And those would be the exception to the rule, where I would have voiceover.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But they weren't shown on AIDS Community Television. They were your—

JAMES WENTZY: No. Well—

CYNTHIA CARR: They were your films for the MIX festival.

JAMES WENTZY: In one case, I had a short film on—for the festival called—well, what was it called? It was actually against boundaries. Screaming now—the subtitle was *I Can't Scream Because I Have to Hold the Camera Steady*.

CYNTHIA CARR: Wow.

JAMES WENTZY: That was the subtitle.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And I actually took that short, 12-minute piece and enlarged it for a—and title for a whole 29-

minute show.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: Exception to the rule, though.

CYNTHIA CARR: Let's see. I thought I saw something here about screaming on your list.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, something about screaming. Yeah, screaming.

CYNTHIA CARR: Let's see. Yeah. Oh, "AIDS, Expression and States of Mind?" That says that's the MIX festival from '94. But—

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. I curated a show on AIDS and I had other people's work showing. And I guess I ended it with one of my pieces, "By Any Means Necessary."

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Yes. Here's the one that—"Holding Steady Without Screaming."

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. Right.

CYNTHIA CARR: And that's from September of '95.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So that was one of your personal ones.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, which was expanded for a regular weekly show. So, I had added footage to expand the 12 minutes into a 29-minute one.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. I see. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I don't think I'd ever done that before.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Boy. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: There were times where—more often than not I had a new show every week. But there were also times where I opted for a—

CYNTHIA CARR: A rerun?

JAMES WENTZY: —taking shortcuts. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Do a rerun or something?

JAMES WENTZY: You could have—I think you could have maybe four reruns a season. And I rarely had that many rerun.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But there were times where I would take something I'd edited before and had a different take on it and just did a different edit—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —on some of the footage and rearranged things.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Some are very—like, here's one from '95: "Harlem Town Hall Speak Out for Clients of the Division of AIDS Services."

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: So you went up to Harlem and filmed some kind of meeting.

JAMES WENTZY: That's about 14th Street, right? I doubt that. I can't see it happening.

[They laugh.]

I wonder—it could have been held Downtown though.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, okay. Or, well, maybe at City Hall or something. It's—I mean, who knows. But—

JAMES WENTZY: I don't think they would have cared. I mean, all those mayors tried to get rid of Division of AIDS Services, now called HASA.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yes. Here's "City Evicts-Hundreds from East 13th Squat."

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. Boy, that was—if you haven't seen the city pull up their tank in person, that's a sight to behold.

CYNTHIA CARR: I have witnessed a few spectacles because, I mean, I live in the East Village.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: But, so, this building on 13th Street had a lot of people with AIDS?

JAMES WENTZY: No, they were just squatters—

CYNTHIA CARR: Squatters, okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —perhaps some with AIDS. But no one asked, when the tank was coming up.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, so this was—

CYNTHIA CARR: So you put that in AIDS Community Television just as a kind of a—

JAMES WENTZY: I did. Yeah, I was thinking it was pretty important for people with AIDS—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —or not having AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes. Yeah. I see. Yeah, those were always pretty dramatic—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —those encounters with the squatters.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: City pulls up with their tank and they would just break down any barricades they might have had. So people that were living in these empty houses for years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. I knew—I know some people in—one in particular, who—she moved into a building and she's still there, actually. The city gave them that building.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm -hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: But she—her apartment didn't even have a floor.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] It was really starting from scratch.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And they in my opinion really did a pretty great job—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I'll bet.

CYNTHIA CARR: —of putting these places back together from, like a shell of a building—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —into a place where people could live.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: So—but a lot of them were—yeah, a lot of them didn't survive.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I think any building that's empty for a short period of time in this city, something like that should be done to—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Wow. "City Council Meeting with—on Department of AIDS Services: Deputy Mayor Walks Out." And that's your last show, I think, that you did. It's the last one on the list of '95: "Deputy Mayor Walks Out"—[laughs]—Well, maybe not. Well, yeah. I think it is. No, maybe not. You did some compilation things after that and—

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. Well—

CYNTHIA CARR: "On Board of Education"—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, I—

CYNTHIA CARR: You did a couple after that. But—

JAMES WENTZY: I did a few one-of-a-kind specials again—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —including the Matthew Shepard piece I had edited.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, and you covered the Ashes Action.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: Right, "Storytellings." Yes. But—

JAMES WENTZY: The Ashes Action was one of those examples where I'd made several versions of—I guess sometime after the fact, I finally got my hands on other people's footage. And I was intrigued—how to put them all together, and I did. And that actually got a review at a film festival showing—screening down South where the reviewer compared it to Sergei Eisenstein's work on editing.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And then when I talked to him on the phone, curator of the festival, I was happy with the comparison. That's sweet. But basically, it was just a fundamental response: How do I put footage together from completely—two different angles? Because you really couldn't combine the two right after they would cross sight. So, I just—after I'd finished one angle, I started over from the beginning and then got it from the other angle and put together that way. Really mundane when you ask the filmmaker for the explanation.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: I should have stuck with the Eisenstein.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Right. But I'm sure it was necessary. I mean, that was such a chaotic scene—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —that it'd be good to have a couple angles there. So, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, and that one—there was also something. When you finish editing, I guess—the happier you are with the edit, then it's more an invariable fact that there's something left out and you wish you had done. And in that case, there was just a few seconds that I wish I'd thrown in the Ashes Action as the horses are coming at the activists. A couple of the marshals that—whose only job is to keep the protestors safe, not to direct them in any way but just to keep them safe, when the horses were coming at them, they turned around to the protestors and said, "Everybody sit. Everybody sit." And everybody sat. And in true fashion, horses are stopped cold, because horses will never deliberately stomp on anybody—

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JAMES WENTZY: —whether it's altruistic or whether they just don't want to fall and hurt themselves.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: But—so there's nothing—there's no other expression on a cop's face mounted on a horse that's stopped cold. There's no beating the consternation on their—on a cop's face—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —on a horse that won't go anywhere, can't go anywhere. So, it really worked.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I'd left out that—those few seconds saying, "Everybody sit. Everybody sit." I mean, I showed them—horse coming, people were sitting, and it stopped. But I wish I had thrown in that little bit: "Everybody sit." Unlike the Matthew Shepard thing, where they got some of the same advice but only a few people sat, and they got hit by a horse and broken ankles. And years later they got settlements from the city.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But I'm not sure if they can ever walk quite right afterwards, even. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So if everybody sits, it will stop the horse. But if they don't—better not be alone sitting.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. So, all this footage, though, is at the library now. So, you can't really redo it if you—even if you wanted to. Or could you?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, yeah. Sure.

CYNTHIA CARR: You could.

JAMES WENTZY: The footage is at the library. In fact, some of the few Hi-8 tapes of mine, my camera original tapes, the ones I did remaster when I was doing that work at the library, were the political funerals, which include the Ashes Action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So those were preserved first. And yeah, anybody will have access to that footage, maybe with the exception of one person—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —but literally anyone else. And, yeah, they can edit their own Ashes Action.

CYNTHIA CARR: Boy. So, you put one name on there that —you don't want to get access to it.

JAMES WENTZY: I didn't. But there's, yeah, one person that did that show that's kind of revisionist history, *How to Survive a Plague*, which—even the title is so presumptuous—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: —written in a—by the perspective of only somebody who has that sense of time that can last a long time—would come up with that kind of title.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And, you know, I have some footage of Larry Kramer speaking. "Plague! Plague! Forty-nine people is a fucking plague, and nobody acts as it is!" He used that speech and cut away to a ACT UP meeting, people sitting on the floor of ACT UP listening to him, as if Larry Kramer was criticizing them, which wasn't the case. It was delivered at, I think, Bellevue Hospital or NYU Hospital at the time. And it was a special forum. It wasn't an ACT UP meeting at all. And he just—to add cutaways, just—it's revisionist history, as it turns out.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, and that's part of that film, *How to Survive a Plague*.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, it is.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I didn't realize that.

JAMES WENTZY: So I'll see those little clips on YouTube. And they'll say, "Oh, the footage from *How to Survive a Plague*." No.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: In fact, that same footage is in so many documentaries now. Jean Carlomusto used it in her film-documentary on Larry Kramer.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And very—practically no one has seen the footage intact, which actually starts off with 12 minutes of three activists zapping Larry Kramer for revealing the HIV status of Tom Duane.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: They're saying, "You're wrong!" And Larry Kramer's just—he can't begin his speech because he's getting heckled from the very back. And—but I only kept the camera on Larry the whole time. I never turned around to the back of the audience and got those. So sometime it'd be good to show the whole piece. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, that would be interesting.

JAMES WENTZY: The library has it.

CYNTHIA CARR: The library has all of it.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: All that raw footage. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And everybody will have access to it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I do remember why I brought up that—why I brought up the—about my feature film—

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, right.

JAMES WENTZY: —and boring editing—was when you'd asked me about—I never had a narrator or I never narrated it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: When I showed that feature at the Berlin Film Festival, and the news—when that happened, that was—I premiered it here at MIX Festival 2002. But in Berlin it was 2003. And the big headline was, "After a long absence, AIDS finally returns to the Berlinale."

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: And so I showed it. And we show a movie three time and you take questions and answers after every screening. And every screening, hands up. And half the people said—asked me, "Why didn't you have a narrator?" The other half thanked me for not having a narrator.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So if that's a lesson that I needed one—but if that's a lesson, then the lesson is, "Don't do it." Don't try to do anything based on what you think other people want—

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. .

JAMES WENTZY: —because half of them will want the opposite.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So I never did. And I guess that I really don't exactly know what the definition of an experimental film is or an experimental documentary. That's—they've called it that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But perhaps it's just because you don't have a narrator telling you what you're supposed to think.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And I might have mentioned that in the earlier—parts of our interview. It was clear to me, as it premiered at MIX in New York City, that there'd be a lot of these—all these old, burned out activists watching themselves on the big screen. And one thing they didn't need was telling—somebody telling them what they were doing.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, I see.

JAMES WENTZY: So I just avoided that by not having it.

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: So I had no narrator. But all my films were like that. I didn't do that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: I really left it to the activists. And I'm not a—to say the very least, I'm not a great, skillful interviewer on the streets when actions are happening. I think about the only thing I ever always had come up with was, "Why are you here?"

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And more often than not, the ACT UP people were well trained on how to deal with the press. No matter what they asked you, you knew what to say to them. And so, I got lucky a lot of times. And people would say that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And of course I would clip out my inept question and just go

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: —right to their talking. So that was the only time I had a talking head on, would be the person—the protestor.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right. How many—I should have counted these. I don't know if there were 52 every year. I guess it was—or maybe it was like a TV season, where there's—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, 52.

CYNTHIA CARR: Fifty-two every year?

JAMES WENTZY: There's a lot—some repeats. And some were—I'm not sure I ever indicated the repeats. But I ended up with, like, 160 shows.

CYNTHIA CARR: Hundred and sixty of these shows?

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: A hundred and sixty. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Half-hour shows.

CYNTHIA CARR: Do you have any idea how many demonstrations you've filmed? Did you ever keep count of that?

JAMES WENTZY: No.

CYNTHIA CARR: Just that there were—

JAMES WENTZY: I would guess—I had people pretty well trained, and it did take some training, but I had pretty well trained people to let me know when things were happening. So certainly if things were in town, I'm

guessing I had 90 percent of everything that was planned.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Wow. Well, what do you think? Is there anything that I've—that you want to add to this or go into about working on your work related to AIDS, or anything that you might want to add?

JAMES WENTZY: I'm not sure. I did get the sense of something—I always watched the shows when they were on TV.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: The one thing I really enjoyed was, when there were screenings, I could really get a sense of what people were feeling when they were watching the work on the screen, if I was in the audience. That happened as recently as World AIDS Day this last December at the New Museum. And I had that feeling again that I was feeling what they were feeling, with that short piece I had.

CYNTHIA CARR: And at the New Museum, were they showing some of your AIDS Community Television shows, or the—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Jean Carlomusto had put together an hour-long show based on, I think, nine people who worked with—worked in AIDS videos as an obsession. The show was definitely linked to obsessions. And so, I was one of those nine people. And so, everyone had six minutes, roughly six minutes.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: And she put together some highlights here and there. And—

CYNTHIA CARR: So you had to pick six minutes out of your 600 hours?

JAMES WENTZY: Oh, even better: she had to.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Oh, she had to. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Afterwards, I was grateful because sometimes we both thought—Visual AIDS is a great organization, but they sort of leave out video work pretty consistently.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So she brought that up to them. And they got instant revenge by saying, "Okay, you do it."

[They laugh.]

And so, she did. She gets a lot of credit for that. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I guess I get some credit for letting her do it all.

CYNTHIA CARR: Right.

JAMES WENTZY: So, sweet. But, no, she had carte blanche. And she did nice work. And so that got shown all over. But that was the first time in a long time I was in an audience and felt that.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh.

JAMES WENTZY: But actually, on the weekly series, when I was watching it, I sort of had that sense in cable of other people watching. And also, I'd swear, like, days—some days later, there'd be some headline or some feature story in a newspaper or other media that would cover that. And I just felt it was more than coincidental, that other people were actually watching my series. So there was that—

CYNTHIA CARR: I'm sure, because you had actual information there about what was happening.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: And it was—it's very—it's sort of weird to me, but it was often hard to really get information about AIDS in those days.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know?

JAMES WENTZY: People depended on the media to learn most of what they knew about AIDS.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And they weren't doing the job.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. It's really true.

JAMES WENTZY: So, yeah, I remember even delineating my purposes for doing video work then was, first and foremost, to show people why we were doing what we were doing; and then secondarily, to bring more people into activism, to join us; and thirdly, to preserve an archive for the future, what we'd done and what they'd done.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And it really didn't take me too long to realize, this media, it doesn't bring people into activism.

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

CYNTHIA CARR: At best, it might educate them, why we're doing it. But I was at least pleased that I got the third one nailed, that I had it archived. And I've been a still photographer a lot longer. And all the pictures I've done with my still photography, I'm not quite sure what will happen after I'm dead.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: But there was never any doubt about my video work. That was archives. So, that was some satisfaction.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And now I'm kind of thinking, well, maybe time to focus on the still work.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: I mean, I saw a lot of artists in ACT UP who have a great vocation and artwork. But somehow they didn't have to leave their work when they were doing their activist work. Both really good work, but separate. And I couldn't do both video and still photography at the same time.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh, so you gave—

JAMES WENTZY: So I completely stopped still photography while I was doing the video work.

CYNTHIA CARR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: And I think I lost a lot of time on that, a lot of work.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: And so, I mean, with all the—you know, the divas or the stars of ACT UP that went through the Whitney program—I didn't go through the Whitney program. But I had an Artist Studio at PS1 for a couple years.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: But that was—didn't quite count either.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: So now I do a lot of gardening.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yes.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: That's what I like to do.

CYNTHIA CARR: But you are back to your still photography now?

JAMES WENTZY: I am, yeah. I'm doing a lot, yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Well, the video stuff is just incredibly important that you did.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: You know, and, I mean, that whole period of time which—because you and I lived through it, it seems—it sort of seems still fresh.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: I mean, you can go back there emotionally so quickly, I think.

JAMES WENTZY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: But I know that younger people have no clue about what was going on—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CYNTHIA CARR: —you know, including younger gay people.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: They just have no idea. And you got it, because it's in the video. You see the rage and the desperation and the intensity and the—you know, it's like people's lives were literally on the line.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. You had nothing to lose.

CYNTHIA CARR: And—yeah. And that really comes through—

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah.

CYNTHIA CARR: —in all that video footage.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Thank you. I—yeah, that's what pleases me, too, in my satisfaction.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah. Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah, when I was providing footage for one feature I don't even want to repeat the title of—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: —the arrangement was going to be—insistently so, they were going to—they wanted exclusivity for the video footage. Great. Nothing like trying to represent the community and then having exclusive control over the footage. Well, there was no way I was going to agree to that. I'd never done that in the past. I was never going to do that in the future. Nobody has exclusivity to this footage.

CYNTHIA CARR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES WENTZY: If anything, I viewed my work as caretaker, and I would never assign exclusivity. So, I was ready to walk away. And the director asked me, "Well, don't you want to be a part of this film, a part of this history?" I replied something to the fact of, "Oh, I've already established that for myself. Thank you very much. That's not something I have to worry about if I'm not in somebody's documentary—I have that nailed."

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah.

JAMES WENTZY: So in the end, I guess rather than walk, which—I'm sort of sorry now I didn't walk. But I basically asked them, "Well, okay, what if I signed your damned contract, but having no intention of honoring it for exclusivity?" And they looked at each other and nodded, saying, "Okay, we can live with that." So, then I let them have the footage and—But exclusivity? That's so repulsive.

CYNTHIA CARR: Yeah, that sort of goes against the spirit of what you were doing. It does.

JAMES WENTZY: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, so, there was no way I was going to do that. So—

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: He's the one person I would—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.]

JAMES WENTZY: —that I was thinking about with the library.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay.

JAMES WENTZY: [Laughs.] Oh, yeah. Let Focus on the Family have my material. Fine, no problem.

[They laugh.]

JAMES WENTZY: Donald Trump, even, the comb-over orangutan. No problem. But—

CYNTHIA CARR: [Laughs.] Okay. Okay, well, I think we're done.

JAMES WENTZY: Thank you very much. Yeah. Thank you.

CYNTHIA CARR: Okay. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]