

THE
OH
PROJECT | Oral Histories
of HIV / AIDS
in Houston,
Harris County,
and Southeast Texas

*To collect, preserve and make available the experiences
of people impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in
Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas*

Oral History # 18

An Interview With
Ray Hill

Place of Interview: Houston, TX
Interviewer: Renee Tappe
Terms of use: Open
Approved: RH
(Initials)
Date: 9/29/10

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAY HILL

RENÉE TAPPE: This is Renée Tappe interviewing Ray Hill for The oH Project, Oral Histories of HIV/AIDS in Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas. The interview is taking place on September 29th, 2016 in Houston, Texas. The purpose of this interview is to document Mr. Hill's recollection concerning the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston.

Hi, Ray.

RAY HILL: Hi.

RENÉE TAPPE: Thank you for joining me today.

RAY HILL: Thank you for the invitation.

RENÉE TAPPE: It's quite an honor.

Let's get a little bit of your family history, if you'll tell me about your parents, where you born.

RAY HILL: I was born in Houston. I was born at Baptist Memorial Hospital, which at the time was located in downtown Houston, across the street from the library and kind of catty-cornered across the street from City Hall. I spent most of my life demonstrating at City Hall, so I did not go far afield. Both of my sisters went to Lillie Jolly School of Nursing, which was in the next block, moving south.

When I was born, we lived in the Heights, Woodland Heights, 1202 Aurora. The house is still there. Raymond had gotten it for about \$2,500. As of the last time it sold, it was \$140,000-something. Property does appreciate.

Then we moved out to North Shore, and I went to Galena Park High

School, some junior high schools, and elementary. I went to Cloverleaf Elementary, Woodland Acres Junior High School, and Galena Park High School. While I was at Galena Park High School, I came out of the closet as a gay man late in my junior year, and then I completed my education there and got my diploma.

TAPPE: How was that coming-out process in Galena Park for you?

HILL: It was easy. Nobody knew what the hell I was talking about because homosexuality/gay was just not in the conversation. I didn't know the word "gay" when I came out to my mother, Frankie, but she gave me the word, and so I told people I was gay, and they didn't know what that meant, so I'd spend a lot of time defining the term.

TAPPE: Did your family members have any inkling at the time?

HILL: I came out to Frankie kind of cold-turkey. I had been reading a lot. My first career was as a teenage Baptist evangelist, and I gave that up and the faith at the age of 17. I came out at the age of 18 and stopped drinking later at the same age.

When I told Frankie that I was homosexual — I didn't know the word "gay" — she sighed and took a drink of coffee and a puff off her cigarette, and she said, "Well, that's a relief." You don't expect that now, much less in 1958.

I said, "What do you mean?"

She said, "Well, we notice you dress up more than the other boys in the neighborhood, and we thought you were trying to pretend to be wealthier than we are, and we were afraid you might grow up to be a Republican. So if you're gay, we can handle that."

Then we had a family meeting where Butch — that was my domestic

nickname — “Butch is gay, he’s homosexual, and that’s all right. If you hear things bad about that, defend him.”

My two sisters kind of received their orders from Frankie and Raymond, my parents. Raymond was almost as accepting. I played high school football so that Raymond would have something to talk about at the union hall, not because I was particularly interested in football, but he appreciated that, and so that was that.

TAPPE: You did the son thing.

HILL: Yeah.

TAPPE: So you graduated from Galena Park High School.

HILL: I got my diploma at Galena Park High School, graduated with some honors. I had played successful football as long as I played. They discovered that I had a heart disease, and that interrupted the season, but before the season was interrupted, I beat Pasadena at their homecoming game, which made me the natural hero of the football team.

And so I graduated. I upstaged the senior prom by going to Havana to join the Revolution with my boyfriend. We couldn’t go as dates to the prom. Now, I was a big guy and I couldn’t, what, pass, and so nobody made fun of me, really. I didn’t get that kind of treatment in high school because I was one of the few guys in the high school that could whip your ass, so you don’t get a lot of — but the guys I dated got harassed, and that would get me into fights, and of course I’d always win.

TAPPE: Did you want to go to the prom?

HILL: Yes, I wanted Jimmy and me to go to the prom, but we couldn’t do that. And we

didn't even know how to maneuver around that, "No, if you're coming to the prom, you're going to have a girl date," so we just went to Havana, joined the Revolution, and upstaged the prom. That worked. In the *North Shore Sentinel*, if you could find a copy of that *Sentinel*, our story is above the fold. "Local boy is in Cuban Revolution." Turn it over, below the fold, it's "Galena Park has a nice prom." Our plan succeeded.

TAPPE: It did. That's great. Very interesting.

HILL: We didn't really join the Revolution, but we got drunk, and then I got worried about getting them out of there in a shooting revolution, so I stopped drinking on January the 4th, 1959, and I have not had any alcohol or drugs since.

TAPPE: That's great. So you were obviously drinking in high school. Was that just a typical —

HILL: No, I was drinking as a preacher. I was 14 years old, and I had more money than 13- or 14-year-olds knew how to handle. Part of that meant that I wanted a Studebaker, which is its own kind of addiction, and the other part of that is alcohol. Cuban rum, to be exact.

TAPPE: Were your parents really involved with the church?

HILL: No. Frankie was an atheist, and Raymond would have called himself a skeptic.

TAPPE: Do you recall what your attraction was to that?

HILL: Well, Frankie had promised her mother — one of those deathbed things — to raise her children in church because Frankie's father was an atheist. He was a physician. He was an atheist and a Marxist in Leon County, Texas around the turn of the 20th century. So Frankie took after her father in the belief system, but her mother was a Southern Christian and made Frankie promise her, as she was

dying, that she would raise her children in the church. And so I was the last child. I remember the occasion, my 13th birthday. I went bounding into the kitchen ready to go to church, and there was Frankie in a robe. I said, “Aren’t you going to church?”

She said, “No.” She said, “I promised my mama I would raise my kids in church, and you’re my last child. You’re now a teenager. You can go if you want to, but I’m not going to go into one of those dens of hypocrisy for the rest of my life,” and she didn’t.

TAPPE: Is that right?

HILL: Oh, yeah. Frankie was a very decisive woman. She was 5 foot 2 inches tall but trim.

TAPPE: And your father was not involved, really, one way or the other?

HILL: Right, Raymond never went to church. Raymond would go to the Odd Fellows Lodge but not to church. The Hills, back generations, described themselves as skeptics.

TAPPE: And they were from Texas also?

HILL: We had come to Texas when the Cherokees got run out of Georgia. They ran us off too because we supported the Cherokees.

TAPPE: We get rebellion going way back.

HILL: Oh, yeah. It’s in the blood.

TAPPE: It certainly is. Well, you have been an activist all of your adult life. Can you explain how and why you became a leader within the gay community?

HILL: It was my community. Well, it didn’t exist at first. The trouble we had in the early days of the gay and lesbian movement was, there was no gay community to

organize. There were gay people, but they came one to a box, and there wasn't any uniform thinking about where we would go if we would go anywhere.

The first thing you try to figure out as an activist, if you follow Saul Alinsky's rules, is build an army. Well, how do you build an army out of a scattered bunch of people? It's kind of like herding cats. But Anita Bryant came into town, and that gave us something to get cohesive around. It was 1977, and in 24 hours the term "gay community" changed from the part of town where the bars are to a group of people having common goals and aspirations. In 24 hours, the community came into existence.

And then the next thing I wanted to do is create institutions that would support and sustain that community. Out of that has come Montrose Counseling Center, now Montrose Center; Montrose Clinic, now Legacy Health Services. We had organized Gay Political Caucus in 1975, but in 1978 at Town Meeting I, everything that's standing — Montrose Sports Association, Lesbian Softball — all of that grew out of Town Meeting I and subsequent, but it was founded. That's why I get listed as a cofounder of everything is because Town Meeting I was my organizational concept.

TAPPE: What year was that?

HILL: 1978, the last week in June. What we did for Pride Week in 1978 is, we held Houston Town Meeting I in the Astro Arena and 2,400 people registered, and we argued about issues and passed resolutions and created the institutions that still to this day serve us. I don't know what we would have done with AIDS without the Counseling Center and the Clinic, but we had set those up in 1978, and our awareness of AIDS did not happen until early 1980.

TAPPE: Including the town hall and the things that came out of there, you've been involved with a number of organizations. Can you maybe just give me a rundown?

HILL: Well, to get a lesbian organization in Houston is part of it, except for one group called Integrity, and I tried to attend Integrity as soon as I got out of prison, and they wouldn't let me. They threatened to have me arrested for trespassing. Well, they didn't realize that hell, I've been sentenced to 160 years in the Texas penitentiary. I've actually done almost five. A night in jail for trespassing is just not a big deal to me, but "If you don't want me here, that's fine. I won't go here." That's whenever I conceptualized we needed to do something around Gay Pride Week, and that would have happened in June of 1975.

I called a press conference, and then here comes Integrity saying, "Well, you can't do this."

I said, "I can do anything I damn well please."

They said, "Well, include us."

I said, "Fine. Welcome aboard."

So two members from Integrity and I and the pastor from Metropolitan, what is now Resurrection Church, Metropolitan Church, Bob Falls, had a news conference and announced the founding of the Caucus in June of 1975. We didn't hold our first meeting until September.

TAPPE: That was the founding of the Caucus?

HILL: Uh-huh.

TAPPE: Tell me about Integrity. Were they connected with one of the churches?

HILL: No. There is an Episcopal Integrity. That's the name of their national

organization. But Integrity Houston was kind of like a local response to the Mattachine Society. The motto was: What you do reflects on me. What I do reflects on you. What we do reflects on the whole community.

That means if you're going to have a demonstration, you wear a coat and tie. Well, that's not my kind of activism anyway.

TAPPE: They were concerned about having you involved because of your prison history?

HILL: Yeah, that prison thing was a dead block for them. When we formed the Caucus, they got involved in the Caucus, and their first suggestion was: How do we get rid of Ray Hill? They spent two years trying to do that. A big meeting was held in Gary's [Gary Van Ooteghem's] house. Gary was the first president.

They suggested that they just ask me to leave Houston, and my response to that was, "I'll be here to piss on your grave," and I was.

TAPPE: Ask you to leave Houston?

HILL: Uh-huh.

TAPPE: Now, Gary was involved with Integrity?

HILL: No. Gary was an outsider, parallel. Gary had been hired in a Price Waterhouse search to come down here and be the first assistant to — a County Treasurer had been elected, Hartsell Gray, and Hartsell was totally incompetent. He's a good politician, but he wasn't an officeholder, so they found somebody to actually run the office, and Gary was that person. We were all in Dallas in early 1975 when we were at a Metropolitan Community Church conference, and I picked up the *Houston Chronicle* and it said, "Assistant County Treasurer fired for being gay."

I thought, they hunted this guy down with a Price Waterhouse search. It's

in the story.

So I said, “Here’s our first president of our Caucus,” and we came back and announced forming our Caucus.

TAPPE: And you were very good friends with Gary, if I’m not mistaken?

HILL: Gary and I were very close. We quarreled a lot, as we were wont to do. He was more of a Republican bent, and I’m a liberal, progressive kind of guy, but we loved one another. We worked on projects together, and I was explaining over lunch the big thing about the Anita rally, which we both played roles in organizing, and that was very successful. The event was most successful and Houston’s real equivalent to Stonewall.

After it was over, I’m standing next to him, and we have a news conference, and he’d said there were 12,000 people.

I said, “There weren’t 12,000 people. There were 6,000 people.”

So if you read the *Post* article, there were 6,000 people there. If you read the poster on the wall over at Montrose Center, there were 12,000 people. That’s the difference between my figures and Gary’s figures, and for years I carried on a joke that if I outlived him, it would be 6,000; if he outlived me, it would be 12,000. He died first, and as I eulogized him at the funeral, I confessed that I was adopting his figure.

TAPPE: Oh, is that right? So it is 12,000?

HILL: The official is 12,000.

TAPPE: Okay. Good.

HILL: That’s not true, but that’s what it was.

TAPPE: What was your recollection of what went on between Gary and the City of

Houston and his firing?

HILL: The County?

TAPPE: The County, yeah. His firing.

HILL: Very simple, he took a vacation day, took a day off so that he wasn't on County time, and he went before Commissioner's Court to give a speech in support of Leonard Matlovich, who was being mustered out of the military for being gay. Gary very quickly got involved in the Leonard Matlovich support movement, and as Assistant County Treasurer, he took a day off and he went down to give a speech before Commissioner's Court and to ask them to come up with a policy of nondiscrimination against gay and lesbian employees of the County.

Well, Hartsell Gray just flipped out. He didn't have much class anyway, so he just flipped out, and he fired Gary and hired another gay guy, hired Scotty Tillinghast to take Gary's position. Scotty is still in town. He's my age. He's still around. He hired Scotty, and Scotty was one of these guys that wear the plastic visor and has the pocket pen protector. Scotty filled the vacancy that Gary left behind as long as Hartsell Gray was in the office. Gary got fired, and we put him where — he was a CPA. He was an accountant. He had educational background to do what he did, so he became our property instead of the County's.

TAPPE: Did he file a lawsuit?

HILL: Yes, and he won.

TAPPE: And was that a long process? Do you recall?

HILL: No, no. He won at the District Court level, and they didn't have to appeal it because the County bean counters said, "We can appeal this, but we'll probably lose and it's going to cost us too much money."

TAPPE: So they let it go.

HILL: They let it go, yeah.

TAPPE: The other man that they hired to replace Gary was Scotty?

HILL: Scotty, Scotty Tillinghast.

TAPPE: He was openly gay?

HILL: He was openly gay. We'd see him at the same meetings. Gary and I would see him. He was a friend of ours. We didn't hold it against Scotty for accepting the job. You don't piss on somebody's leg because they've got a paying job. Scotty did it and did it well. A lot quieter, lower profile than Gary.

TAPPE: Before we get into some of the details about the early years of HIV/AIDS, I want to talk just a little bit more about you and your role in the community. You've been known for many years as the Mayor of Montrose, which I think is a very affectionate term.

HILL: Yeah, well, I earned that. Prior to me, it belonged to a decorator. There was an era when designers and decorators were the royalty of the community. I went last weekend down to Clear Lake to see a movie called *An Ordinary Couple*. It's about two designers, one of them a fashionable designer, and the other is a designer of movie and television show sets, but they're a couple and they formed a couple.

There was an era in Houston, and in all the gay communities everywhere, that the designers made a lot of money. They were flamboyant. Most of them didn't bother being closeted back in the 1950s and the 1960s because their income depended upon — the question is not: Are they gay? Are they gay enough to be the decorator?

Curtis Wright was a decorator. He had an antique store. He decorated My Ladies' houses all over River Oaks and all of that. He had somehow gotten the title to be Mayor of Montrose. I knew Curtis, and we had mutual friends, and we kind of hung out together over at the Precinct Judge's house, and so he decided that he was going to pass the title of Mayor of Montrose not to another decorator, but to the guy who was making the politics work. So I literally got the title because I was organizing the Caucus politics and going precinct by precinct and organizing Montrose politics.

TAPPE: Well-earned, I must say.

HILL: And whatever Curtis Wright said at that time, that was acceptable as a law. His office was over on — what's the name of the street? It's the same street that *OutSmart* is sitting on now, that funny little three-block-long boulevard.

TAPPE: Yeah, I know exactly where you mean. I can see it [Audubon Place].

So he was trendy, himself, at that time?

HILL: Yes.

TAPPE: As we shift to the HIV/AIDS issue, starting in the early 1980s, what is your first memory of a health concern among gay men?

HILL: Well, when you're trying to organize — we're talking about 1977, Anita coming to town; now I've got a community — well, you don't go to the discos to organize, because the music is too loud and it's too dark, and that's not what the discos have done. But you go to the neighborhood bars, and the most active neighborhood bar was Mary's, and so I would go to Mary's simply to talk politics. Now, I had given up drinking long before, so I'm not a good customer. I'm not buying any alcohol. So I'd go into Mary's usually in the early afternoon.

Mary's opened up as early as they could legally in the morning, but I'd get there early in the afternoon while there were still a few sober people left, and I'd go in and I'd get to know the bartenders very well.

The idea of Mary's is, they had the best-looking bartenders in town. That was their business plan. Among those bartenders was Mac McAdory. Mac was one of these inordinately rosy-cheeked, medium-complexioned, dark hair, dark eyes. He was just this beautiful guy, plus the fact he took very good care of himself, so he had this body that was worth showing off. Mary's bartenders wore cutoff Levi's and had nice legs to afford to wear cutoff Levi's.

So I went into Mary's one afternoon, and Mac was behind the bar — I hadn't been there in a few days — and he had on long pants. I said, "Do you expect it to be colder than it is?" This would have been December of 1979.

He said, "No." He said, "The weather report doesn't say it's going to be cold, but come here. I want to show you something."

And so he came out from behind the bar and headed into the men's room, and I followed him into there, and I thought, well, this might be my lucky day. So he got in the bathroom and he pulled off his pants, which was more indication that it might be my lucky day, and on his legs were red, angry-looking, swollen places, kind of like an exaggerated strawberry rash, some of them the size of a half dollar, some of them even a little larger, and a lot of them smaller. And he said, "What is that?"

And I said, "I don't know." I mean, I'm not a medical person at all. I said, "Have you been to a doctor?"

He said he was afraid to go to a doctor.

Well, Frankie was a nurse. Her father was a physician. For somebody to tell me they're afraid to go to the doctor, that hits me like a swarm of bees.

So I said, "Okay. We're going to go see a doctor."

He said, "I don't even know a doctor."

I said, "Well, I do."

So I called Larry Carlton. Larry Carlton was a general practitioner physician over at Chelsea Place. He had a little office in kind of like a low-rise. I called Larry, and I said, "Larry, I need to make an appointment. I'm going to bring some" — because Mac told me other bartenders had the same thing. So I said, "I'm going to bring over some of Mary's bartenders."

And Larry said, "Well, it's going to be my lucky day."

And I said, "Probably."

So I got two or three bartenders together, and we went over to Larry's office in a day or two. I said, "Boys, take off your pants," and Larry looked at me like [indicating] surprise, and they took off their pants. They didn't have trouble getting out of their pants. They did that regularly, I am sure, not necessarily for Larry and me.

I showed Larry. I said, "What's this?"

He said, "I don't know." He said, "I'll have to biopsy it and send it off to the lab."

So he biopsied it, which means cut a piece for it, put it in a test tube, and send it to the lab.

A couple of days later, Larry called me and said, "I've got time. Come by the office."

I went by the office, and I said, “What have we got?”

He said, “That is Kaposi’s sarcoma.”

I said, “Well, what the hell is that?”

He said, “It is a disease that is common among very old men who have led very rough lives.”

I said, “These are kids.”

He said, “Yeah, I noticed.” He said, “The literature doesn’t tell me about them. The literature only tells me about old men who have led” — usually like street drunks and things of that nature. We didn’t even think about an immune issue. That’s not where our heads were.

So he started doing what the literature said do for these people, and he didn’t even charge them. He did it for free. Ultimately he would get them involved with Harris County Hospital District because none of them had healthcare. Hell, it was 1980.

Then in January 1980, we all met over at Bering Church in that upstairs education wing and formed the Kaposi’s Sarcoma Committee.

That’s all I know how to do, Renée. I’m an organizer. If there’s a problem, you organize. So we didn’t know what we were dealing with. We were not the physicians. We could depend on the physicians to be the physicians, but we needed to organize because we had a problem that was affecting several people in the community, so we formed the Kaposi’s Sarcoma Committee at Bering Church.

Living people that were there: Debra Danburg was there that night. Ron Pogue, who was the pastor of the church, was there. Gay Pogue, his wife, was

there. Everybody else in that room, except those three people and me, is dead.

So we formed the Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee, and then as this began to evolve in other cities — because you had Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York, which is not named AIDS because AIDS had not been chosen at the time they did it — our first big battle was the name of this thing. Well, it was likely to be GRID, gay-related immune deficiency syndrome. Well, whenever you're the leader of a movement, you don't even want to think about naming a disease after your community, so we had to fight that battle, and we fought that battle through 1980 and 1981.

And then in spring of 1982 at the Paris Conference — I couldn't afford to go to Paris; I didn't even have a passport at the time — Dr. Piot, who is a French doctor practicing in Houston, went to that conference, and he called me from Paris and said, “You won. It's acquired immune deficiency syndrome, not GRID.”

TAPPE: That's when they made that official naming?

HILL: That's when they made that decision, yeah.

And I said, “Well, what's the name of the virus?” because we knew it was viral by then.

He said, “Well, it's human immunodeficiency virus, HIV.”

I said, “Okay. As long as my people don't appear in the title of either the disease or the virus, I'm fine with that.”

Then we changed the name of the Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee to the KS/AIDS Foundation. If AIDS is going to be abbreviated to first letters only, we'll do the same thing to Kaposi's sarcoma. It operated under that for several

years, and then in a restructuring thing, they dropped the KS.

TAPPE: They dropped the KS, yeah. I remember, years ago, the big check that was walking down Montrose.

HILL: The big check, KS/AIDS Foundation, yeah.

TAPPE: That was the first time I remember seeing it.

HILL: So if you run across anybody that says that they were present for the founding of the AIDS Foundation, look at them suspiciously because the AIDS Foundation was an evolution of something that was founded as the Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee.

TAPPE: The KS Committee.

HILL: And there are people like that out there.

TAPPE: That claim —

HILL: Yeah, and they don't even know that.

TAPPE: Well, I remember the KS/AIDS, not the KS Committee.

HILL: Well, KS was just a committee. We weren't a 501(c)(3), didn't raise much money. We just got together organizing, have support groups, discuss people with the disease and all of that and everything. When Mac McAdory died, he still looked — see, in our early age, you remember, people looked emaciated. They would just deteriorate into nothing. That didn't happen to Mac. He died the same beautiful man I asked him about "Why aren't your legs showing?"

TAPPE: That was unusual.

HILL: Yes, it was unusual. Mac was unusual. He was the first Chair of the KS/AIDS Foundation. He was smart. He needed a little help getting it kicked off, but once it got rolling, he knew how to manage a meeting and how to follow the by-laws

and how to —

TAPPE: Now, the McAdory House, I'm assuming, was named after him, yeah.

HILL: Named after him, yeah.

TAPPE: At that point, they had some federal funding, or was that all local?

HILL: Oh, no, we didn't have anything. Well, we would get funding where we found it.

I mean, a lot of local funding. Jesse Jones' money is The Houston Foundation, and we got money from them. We got money wherever we could find it. I didn't do that part. We put people on the Board who could do the fundraising. I'm the structural guy. I write by-laws, chair meetings. I was chairing the foundation meeting for Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee. I chaired it. See, I know Robert's Rules of Order. I was at that time a Registered Parliamentarian, so I knew the difference between a regular meeting and a foundational meeting, and I knew how to do all that. I did all that and wrote the first set of by-laws for the organization.

Then it went on, and as it evolved, the by-laws have to change because you have to meet certain criteria to be a 501(c)(3), your tax-deductible status, and you have to have rules and regulations and things of that nature, and I can reform all the by-laws in the process. So I was around to write the by-laws. The actual fundraising was done by lawyers. One of the greatest was — John Paul Barnish was good at fundraising, and he was the first Chair of the KS/AIDS Foundation Board, was John Paul Barnish. John was just a saint, sainted person.

TAPPE: Was Gary involved with those?

HILL: Later. Gary did not get involved in the AIDS stuff until his own HIV diagnosis, and then he reported for duty.

TAPPE: During that time, I know that a lot of people, men, were concerned about their

status becoming public, understandably so. Do you recall if there was any discrimination within the community?

HILL: No. Montrose Clinic, which is now Legacy Healthcare Center, were the last people in the world to even consider anything but anonymous testing. Montrose Center was known throughout the country as the holdouts. The government wanted to know who was infected, and Montrose Center said, “We can’t tell you because we do this by numbers, not by names, and our numbers are not traceable.”

Montrose Clinic held to that, and I suppose you can go to Montrose Clinic to this day and get an anonymous test. That’s important. It may not be as important now as it was then. In those days, if you were known to be gay — and if you had AIDS, you were assumed to be gay — you faced such a level of discrimination for the other aspects of your life that we decided that we would always provide — because, see, I’m also over here dealing with Montrose Clinic. I had been a cofounder in 1978 of its founding at Houston Town Meeting I, and so we built our organization around medical privacy. We had people that came here from all over the country so they could be anonymously tested. They wanted to know, but they didn’t want it to be known on a record.

TAPPE: Yeah, their name out there or in their medical records.

HILL: For whatever reason. We didn’t ask the question, “Why are you doing this?” We just said, “Here’s your number, and if you come back on this date, you’ll get the results for this number.”

TAPPE: They did not publish numbers, or did they? Do you recall any publishing of numbers in *TWT* [*This Week in Texas*]?

HILL: Oh, yeah, we kept internal statistics.

TAPPE: Within the organization. But like in *TWT* or anything like that, I don't recall that, even though it would be anonymous.

HILL: No, I don't recall that. *TWT* became the obituary.

TAPPE: Yes, it did.

HILL: I remember celebrating the first issue of *TWT* without an obituary in it.

TAPPE: It took a while, didn't it?

HILL: It took a long time, and that issue was celebrated.

TAPPE: Pages. I remember pages.

HILL: Yeah, sometimes. And J.D. Doyle has got all of that. He's got all those records.

TAPPE: I had the pleasure of meeting him the other day.

HILL: Yeah, and J.D. Doyle's page on HIV and AIDS, part of his archive, is wonderful.

TAPPE: When testing was going on, the anonymous testing, were you a supporter of that? Did you encourage people to become tested?

HILL: I was tested. I was tested, and I got tested several times, and then I got a positive reading back on my ELISA [enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay] test, and so I went in for some more testing, and that didn't prove to be positive, so I've struggled with good and bad information along that process, and I found that fascinating. I needed to go through that, if for no other reason, to check my own emotions: What does it feel like to be told that you're HIV positive? How do you react to that? What does it feel like to find out that that may have been a false positive or a misreading, and then you worry about what caused that?

TAPPE: And was it really true? Is it really false?

HILL: Yeah, right. Was the subsequent test screwed up? You deal with a cacophony of

emotions.

For what my people were going through, I needed to go through there. It is important for me to have gone through this so that I had a better understanding of what the struggle was like for those, even though my test proved first positive, then inconclusive, and then negative.

My companion at that time was Patricio Domingo Bravo. Well, HIV status is an important thing, because he was an undocumented immigrant from Chile. I carried him over to Montrose Clinic to get tested by number, and we came back to get the results, and he came bounding out of the clinic. I was in the parking lot, waiting for him. I was reading something at the time. I had to prepare for a speech. He came bounding out, and he said, “I failed the test,” with this big smile on his face, because failure was a win in his Spanglish mix thing. It brought tears to my eyes. It still brings tears to my eyes, just reliving that, people you love going through those struggles.

I saw him last night. I was up at The Woodlands, and I stopped by to see him, his wife, and their baby. Their baby is 13 years old, not a baby anymore. Their baby is the age I was when I had to go to church by myself.

TAPPE: That’s right, 13. How is he doing?

HILL: He’s in middle school, and we talked about that for a while. He speaks very good English to me. He speaks broken Spanglish to his father and Spanish to his mother.

TAPPE: And his father, how is he doing?

HILL: His father is wonderful. His father is an artist. When I met him, I got him a job with Boterio over at the Brownstone Gallery, and he was Bo’s antique restoration

artist for, like, 25 years. Right now, Bo has closed his Houston operation and moved away, so Patrick has got his unemployment check, but you work for some place for 25 years and pay unemployment insurance all those years, it's your money.

I went with him last week to get Erica some additional income on food stamps, but there's the baby, and so they score like a bandit on food stamps. Actually, he's got more income coming in now than he had when he was working full-time.

TAPPE: You had two partners that passed away from —

HILL: Four. Four partners died of HIV. I'm an old man. I've had seven wonderful men in my life. If you go to my bio, you find seven men listed. Four died of AIDS. Two were murdered. Only Patrick survives.

TAPPE: And here you are negative. That's great. Any explanation for that?

HILL: Yeah. For a long time after I got the positive test, they concluded that I had been exposed but my own immune system had handled the exposure. So then it was why? Now they've identified some several thousand people who have been solidly exposed that the virus did not take in. Most of us are Anglo-Saxon, and most of our ancestors survived the Plague; had the Plague but survived it.

Way back in Hill history, there was the Plague. It was a little town called Eire where the Hills were settled. We were farmers. Eire was one of those places that you had to be going there to get there, because you go there, and when you get through, you've got to turn around and come out the same way you went in. They had the Plague, and so people just forgot about Eire. But they were farmers; they didn't need anybody else. Then a decade went by and they went to check on

them, and they were hale and hearty. All of them had survived, and I came from that bunch.

TAPPE: It's paid off.

HILL: I may be one of the few people you'll meet who is literally immune to the pandemic, and that's come in handy.

TAPPE: Oh, my goodness, yes. Good for you.

Do you recall when KS was first diagnosed, they ended up being treated, I believe, at M.D. Anderson to start?

HILL: Well, at first, we got treated at Larry's office. Larry had everybody we knew that had KS.

TAPPE: So he was actually the first one?

HILL: He was the first physician, but Larry died of AIDS. Larry had a little office over there, and Larry is a little younger than me, and so he was healthy, and he started the treatment of people with KS. There wasn't much you could do for KS because it was an immune-deficiency thing, and if your immune system is deteriorated, how do you fight an incipient disease that is parallel to that and you have it for that reason?

Apparently what causes Kaposi's sarcoma is around us all the time, but our immune systems ward it off. Now, if you're going to be the town drunk and you're going to be intoxicated and leaning up against a wall downtown, and when you get to be 60 or 70 years old, your immune system is gone, that's when — until the advent of HIV and AIDS, those are the people that got Kaposi's sarcoma.

How do you treat it? You start treating it as skin cancer, but it is an incipient disease and it will attack organs, and so you treat it on the leg with

salves and things of that nature, but it can attack you internally and kill you. So you do die. People do die of Kaposi's sarcoma.

Well, we had other friends who were dying of pneumonia. We thought we knew what that was about. Pneumonia has been around forever. Some people get pneumonia and they die. Other people get pneumonia and they get better. It was known in the gay community that several people had died of pneumonia, and we didn't know the difference between pneumonia A, B, and C and pneumocystis pneumonia. Pneumocystis pneumonia is immune-system-related.

That's the next step after Kaposi's sarcoma, is one of Dr. Carlton's patients got pneumonia, and then that had to be treated, and I think that's when he got involved with Dr. Awe, A-w-e, over at Ben Taub Hospital. Dr. Awe over at Ben Taub Hospital started taking these people into the hospital and treating them inpatient. Larry had treated them outpatient.

When he started that, they had what was then vacant, the old Jeff Davis Hospital. The emergency room was operated. The rest of the hospital was vacant. He went over there and got a couple of floors cleaned out, and he started an enclave of AIDS treatment in old Jeff Davis Hospital on Allen Parkway. That's the evolution of all of that. The physician that did that was Dr. Robert Awe.

They made a documentary about the Fabian Bridges story, and Robert Awe is in there. Robert treated Fabian until he died.

TAPPE: Tell me about Fabian Bridges and the documentary.

HILL: Well, Fabian Bridges is one of those things that just fall out of the clouds. You don't expect it. You're not ready for it. AIDS is beginning to enter the national

consciousness, not to the degree that it's in my consciousness. I mean, I'm down here dealing with people with Kaposi's sarcoma and people with pneumonia and all of that until I get the hand-to-hand combats made, but the rest of the world is catching up at a slower pace.

Meanwhile, what's going on in New York and Los Angeles and Miami — Miami was a major center of infection, and there's a reason for that. But the national consciousness about AIDS is evolving, and so they started to make a documentary, the title of which is *AIDS: A National Conversation*. It is built around a young man who had lived in Houston, been diagnosed with HIV, went home to Cleveland and made application for disability, and he didn't get his check for a long time because the disability people didn't know what to do about HIV and AIDS. They weren't sure that they even wanted to go there and all of that. They were talking about the evolution of the understanding of the social service law that dealt with it, and Fabian was caught in that evolution. It was some time before his check was actually approved, but when your check is approved, you get paid back to the date you first applied.

A nice, large check came in the mail, and by the time it came, his mother had claimed to be his guardian. She wouldn't let him live with her because he had AIDS and she had grandchildren in the house and she thought that just having him in the house was going to kill her grandchildren.

He went to get his check, and she wouldn't give it to him. She said, "No, I'm saving this to give you a nice funeral."

A documentary crew got wind of that and started filming it at that point, and then they started exploiting Fabian by carrying him to various cities. They

would check into a nice hotel as they traveled in their rented Lincoln and throw Fabian on the streets and call the health authorities and the police and say, “You’ve got a person with AIDS hustling on your streets.”

TAPPE: So they would do this to set this up?

HILL: Yes, they were creating the topical nature of their documentary, and that is so incredibly beyond allowable ethics, but that’s what was going on, and that happened in several cities until they got to Houston. Something they hadn’t thought about in the journey is that in Houston, things are a little bit different. Our community is better organized and had been since 1977, and here we are in 1983 or 1984.

The police are dispatched to watch this homeless person with AIDS hustling on their streets, and the cops take one look at it and said, “We don’t know what to do about this. Ray Hill knows what to do about this.”

So they call me and say, “We’ve got one for you.”

I went down and took him off their hands. I also protected him from that documentary crew.

When you see the documentary, you think that Ray Hill is this savior. I came up on a white horse over the horizon and scooped him up and saved him. He was going to die, but I gave him a more comfortable life and absolved him.

No, I protected him from the crew that was making that documentary.

They hate my guts, but they didn’t have any choice but to make me a hero. They wanted to finish their documentary.

[END OF AUDIO PART 1]

TAPPE: And that’s how they finished it?

HILL: Yeah.

TAPPE: I bet they didn't like you very much.

HILL: They don't like me to this day because not only that, I went after them. We had a talkback following the PBS broadcast of it. You got to see him. The documentary flashed to Houston, Texas with the Design Center. Remember those decorators I've been talking about? They had a knockout space for our set. We went in there, and I had Queer Haters, Demon Hotze and all that, and the Health Director. I don't remember his name. He was a black man, and he had a white wife. He walked into that set with his wife. He was going to be on the set; she was going to be over here in the peanut gallery.

The people, homophobics, are so also racist that it took all the wind out of them. Suddenly his having a white wife was a topic of discussion. They had not known that before.

TAPPE: So that was their concern?

HILL: Well, that may have been by design because it was my intention to walk on that set and knock them off balance and make them look like idiots.

Did you see the debate? I was Hillary; they were Trump.

TAPPE: Of course I saw that debate, yeah. We did a great job.

HILL: Oh, yes, I could have taught Hillary how to do that. With that split screen, she knew how to use it and he didn't have a hint.

TAPPE: Pretty interesting, wasn't it?

HILL: It was wonderful.

TAPPE: The town hall should be interesting, too, coming up next week. I think it's a town hall forum.

HILL: You throw in a few civilians, and it gets even better.

The net result is not only that, but WCCO, from whence they originally came, was so embarrassed that I flew him to Minneapolis to be on WCCO and pick their ass to pieces in front of their own audience. Of course, I was the nice guy.

TAPPE: How did they deal with that? Did they apologize or try to explain their way?

HILL: They thought they were going to win all kinds of Emmys and awards and things of that nature. My job was to keep that from happening, and I succeeded in my job. I was on the set in Minneapolis with Dick Salant, and you don't know who that is, but he is the guy that helped found CBS News, the guy that said, "What we need to do with this McCarthy fellow is put him in front a camera with Edward R. Murrow," and that was the end of McCarthy.

TAPPE: I would somehow think you enjoyed doing that.

HILL: That is what I do. I'm an activist. The nice thing at my level of activism, I don't have to consult with anybody on what my priorities are. I'm perfectly capable of deciding them for myself. That's why I've got to be very careful with my ethics, and you just saw a movie about why I'm careful with my ethics.

TAPPE: That movie was just outstanding.

HILL: The whole movie is about my ethical dilemma.

TAPPE: And that is, for the record, *The Guy With the Knife*. Very interesting.

HILL: I thank you for coming, you bet.

TAPPE: Nancy and I talked about it all evening, actually. We went over to JR's and had a drink and discussed it. It was very good.

HILL: Nancy is a piece of work. She's a serious sister of mine.

During the end of the 1990s, there came down a federal mandate to prisons all over the country, and it was a piece of legislation that said you've got these people locked up. They need to know about HIV and AIDS, and you are required under law to teach them.

I'm aware of the mandate. I've got *The Prison Show*. I'm on the air. And so I go to the Director of Prisons, and I said, "You're not spending money on this, are you?"

And he said, "No, there isn't any way I can add this to the budget. This is absurd."

I said, "I wonder about your friends over at the University of Texas Galveston, the Medical Branch? Are they going to spend any money?"

"No, no, no. They claim they're losing money on our budget now. They're not going to spend any money."

I said, "Well, I'll solve your problem."

He said, "What do you mean, you'll solve my problem?"

I said, "Well, you've got inmates in here with HIV and AIDS, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Give me those inmates. I will bring trainers in from the AIDS Foundation Houston to teach them what they need to tell your inmates about HIV and AIDS. You'll be able to fulfill your obligation. You've got to change your culture a little bit and give inmates the authority to teach other inmates important information, and you've got to do that at minimum supervision. I get to pick them. I get to decide who's on the program."

TAPPE: So you brought the AIDS Foundation in?

HILL: I went in, and I went to the Wynne Unit, which is kind of the administrative unit. They've got the warehouse for the commissary, and they've got the offices from the administration, and the inmates serve those. It's kind of their business headquarters. I went in and asked for the guys that I'd sent to prison, The Woodlands Ten [*The Guy With the Knife*]. They gave them to me. I brought in trainers from AIDS Foundation to train them, but I went to every session. I'm sitting there. They trained them how to teach other inmates about HIV and AIDS.

While I'm there, I run into the lady who is in charge of the alcohol and drug abuse counseling, and she asked me if I'd come speak to her group.

I said, "Sure, I'd be glad to."

My leg was sour. It hadn't been amputated, but it was bad.

I came in to do that, and I had to climb this steep set of stairs, and I couldn't do it, so they organized a committee of four inmates to carry me up those stairs. Those were my trainers. Those were people I had sent to prison.

TAPPE: Full circle back to what happened the other night, in a sense. How interesting.

HILL: No, it continues. Jim [father of Jon Buice] is Tea Party, far right wing, probably going to vote for Trump, but we bonded because we have a common interest in something else, and I spent yesterday — Alison's next project is youthful offenders in adult prisons in Texas. Jon was one of those at one time, so she had to talk to him about the ins and outs, and meanwhile I kept Jim inside. Jim and I were out of the discussion.

TAPPE: So Jon will be involved with this other project?

HILL: Of course. Jon will be involved in whatever Alison wants to do, and Alison will be involved in whatever Jon and I want to do. You make friends over these

projects, and those friends last forever.

TAPPE: I bet they've developed a close relationship.

HILL: Of course. And just to be sure that Alison didn't get out of line and get Jon into trouble, his stepmother sat with Jon and Alison and chaperoned them, and I kept Jim in the house. We talked about our growing up, our youth, and all of that. In spite of the differences, a lot in common. I went to Vietnam as a journalist. He went to Vietnam as a soldier. He killed people. I got shot at.

TAPPE: What did he end up doing as a professional?

HILL: He's a petroleum engineer. His father is a petroleum engineer. Jon is an electronics engineer.

TAPPE: Waiting to be able to work.

HILL: Yeah, waiting for an opportunity.

Okay. Back to the salt mines.

TAPPE: Yes, sir. When we met earlier, you told me about back in the 1980s when Harris County created the umbrella organization, the Greater Houston AIDS Alliance, and they were overseeing some of the federal money for the AIDS programs.

HILL: Yeah. Well, we had to have it because everybody was involved in that. Carolyn Farb was involved in that. Oscar Wyatt's wife. We had socialites in that because we needed money and we were after the hospital, which is now the Thomas Street Clinic. It was owned by Harris County. They had inherited it in some kind of settlement with the Santa Fe Railroad. It was originally built to be a hospital for the Santa Fe Railroad employees, so that's why its architecture is kind of Spanish. You know, Santa Fe.

We looked around for properties. They were going to tear down Jeff Davis on Allen Parkway. There was another Jeff Davis, which had been Jeff Davis before they built that hospital, and it was over on County property, but it was in such shambles. It's now an artists' loft residential area, and there should be ghosts in that building, which is fascinating; give the artists something to talk about.

The only other piece of property that would be suitable for our purposes was Thomas Street Clinic, and it had a couple of problems. Bus service didn't go there. That was a problem because people with AIDS are frequently poor and frequently shouldn't be driving, and so access is that, but that was a problem we could work with Metro.

Carolyn Farb and Eleanor, who was the founder of — what's Eleanor's last name?

TAPPE: I know who you mean.

HILL: Yeah, she is the founder of the hospice.

We were all in a coalition to get that building. Jon Lindsay is the County Judge, and Jon's a Republican, but he's kind of like Ed now, Ed Emmett. He's not hardcore Republican, but he's somebody we can deal with. So we were dealing with Lindsay and all of that to convince him that that hospital is a dog. In the first place, it's full of asbestos. You can't use it for anything else. Asbestos abatement is going to be so expensive.

We finally got him to say, "All right. We're not responsible for the asbestos, but you can use it."

Then I go to Santa Fe, or what's left of Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and I

said, “You built that hospital, and it’s full of asbestos, and we’re using it for an HIV and AIDS hospital, and we need you to pay for the removal of the asbestos.”

They said, “Why should we do that?”

I said, “Because when people with AIDS reach the point where they have greater life expectancy but your asbestos cuts it short, you’re liable,” and they bought it. Literally a con job. Santa Fe Railroad went in there and abated the asbestos in that building.

TAPPE: That’s great.

HILL: Isn’t that amazing? So I’m not just involved around the periphery. I don’t have any titles or anything, but I’m in the negotiation team, and I negotiate well.

TAPPE: Getting things done. I would say that was a great negotiation.

HILL: I could do that because I’ve got a poker face. If I were like Trump, I couldn’t do any of that. You saw that in Trump at the debate. How can you be a great negotiator if you don’t have a poker face?

TAPPE: No, you just blow up. That’s not a negotiator.

HILL: But the coalition was formed around that and broader issues at the time.

The other problem we had, I call them the body snatchers. Gay couples had been together for decades and decades and decades, and one of them dies of AIDS and the other is infected, waiting to die, and then the blood kin of the person who died comes in and takes everything and puts the companion out on the streets, and the law will back that up. So I met with the Probate Court judges. There are only four. I walked in that room and saw those old frogs. I thought, “Oh, Jesus, this is a losing cause.”

But see, they all knew me. I don’t do business with them, but they all

know Ray Hill. I'm a courthouse creature. And I said, "This is a problem," and I break it down. I said, "What if the law was such that if you died and your relatives came in, your blood kin came in and took everything away from your wife? This is the same thing, but only because we don't exist legally under the law. That can happen to us. It can't happen to you because you've got a marriage license. Whether you've got a will or not, you've got a marriage license and you know what's going to happen to that estate, but you don't know what's going to happen to the estate."

And those judges adopted a local rule among the Probate Courts that when that situation arose, they were going to grant life estates for the surviving companion. And then that moved the fight over who divides up the goodies until after the last one dies, and it's between his family and the other family.

TAPPE: So the surviving partner was safe as long as he was alive?

HILL: Was safe, yeah. And the property included the property, the vehicles, and the bank accounts.

TAPPE: That's great.

HILL: But it was a life estate. You couldn't sell it.

TAPPE: Right, but they could live there and use the materials.

Now, of course, that's different if people are married. But at the time, that was unheard of.

HILL: Right, absolutely. There were no common-law marriages for queers. Even if they're not married now, there are common-law rules that kick in. Texas is a common-law state.

TAPPE: Do you remember the struggle between the County and the Alliance in terms of

allocating money and who was going to run it?

HILL: Oh, yes, of course. There's always that problem, and that's a difficult negotiation problem. But who we had on our side with that was El Franco Lee, the County Commissioner in Precinct 1. To a lesser degree, we had Precinct 2 up to and including Sylvia Garcia. We had those negotiations.

So we had a couple of votes, and who's the tie-breaker then? If you had two votes, the tie-breaker becomes Ed Emmett. You can have worse tie-breakers.

Votes were usually not taken in those struggles. It was just, "Either we're going to change this kind of by agreement; or we're just not going to change it, and let it continue." There were several of those struggles dealing with funding and things of that nature, but most of them were resolved behind the scenes and with negotiations. I wasn't involved in all of those, just a couple. I was the heavy weapon. Until you had a real problem, you didn't even bother Ray Hill.

TAPPE: The Whitmire administration, many people believe the gay community put her into her office.

HILL: That's an exaggeration, but yeah. And a lot people said she was gay, and I knew what her sex life was really like, and it's incredible.

TAPPE: What is your recollection of her involvement with the community and HIV/AIDS when she was in office?

HILL: There was not a lot of understanding, because like the rest of us, we were all learning. Kathy Whitmire was the Mayor for 10 years, I don't know the exact years of which.

TAPPE: It was early on.

HILL: Yeah, it was early on, very early on. Anything we needed from Kathy, we could

get from Kathy. But we didn't even know what we needed, was the deal. The Health Department appointments, she does appoint, hire, the head of the Health Departments, the Division. Those are not people who put in application and get hired; they're — the Mayor.

In the City of Houston, we had a strong-mayor form of government. The Mayor reaches over, picks up a telephone, and stuff happens. That's not true of Dallas, which has a City Manager. The Mayor is basically symbolic, the managers running the city in most other cities. But in Houston, the Mayor — Sylvester Turner today — is running it. Don't make any mistake. It's a whole different dynamic, and from an activist standpoint, really makes life easy as long as you can participate in the choice of that Mayor.

The way the political winds have been blowing since Kathy Whitmire's day is that I've been able to be a player in that decision. Even if I support the loser, the winner is going to run again, and so there's this path to my door, and I am the guy that deals with officeholders at that level.

Kathy gave us anything that we wanted. That didn't mean that there weren't people on the streets screaming and blaming her for things that she had no control over, but I liken that unto Annise Parker and feeding the homeless issue. Annise didn't have any choice in there. The people from the Star of Hope Mission and the Salvation Army and all of that had the votes on City Council. The Mayor couldn't have stopped that train. The same thing through a Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart came in ahead of time, got the votes on Council. Annise Parker could not stop that train. She did one clever thing. She was making them build a bridge.

TAPPE: Yes, I remember that. So she would do what she could.

HILL: Politics is inherently a game of compromises, and it is played on the field of possibility. We have not had a Mayor that has been hostile to our cause from the very beginning. I have worked with every Mayor since Louie Welch. And even if Louie had won, which he didn't have a chance of winning against Kathy Whitmire, but even if he had won, we wouldn't have had a problem.

TAPPE: I'll have to believe you on that one.

HILL: Yeah. Louie, when he was in office, he used to hang out at a gay bar in the afternoon. Not that he was gay, but he and George Howard were friends, and the Red Room is convenient, over there on Webster Street, not far from City Hall.

TAPPE: It's convenient. It's in the neighborhood.

You told me when we met earlier, which I found it to be an interesting, kind of a fun story, that you organized an event at the Centers for Disease Control.

HILL: I didn't organize it. We were at the Democratic National Convention, the Jimmy Carter, honorary guy of the ring of the National Democratic Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. That was Jimmy Carter's show. We were all there. I looked around, and there were a lot of gay people there. I was there as a delegate. I was a Harkin delegate to the National Convention, and Jack Campbell was a Dukakis delegate. I was going to throw my support to Dukakis. That was the way the Democratic Party is. You need to go in there for your man, and then run it through the slicer, and you-all join together.

But all these gay people, I didn't realize there were that many gay people. It had been a while since I had been to a National Convention, and there were just

gay people everywhere. So Jack Campbell, who is the owner of Club Baths and a big, four-star Democrat from Miami, Jack and I were talking. I said, “Jack, the CDC is here, Centers for Disease Control. Why don’t we see if we can’t throw together a demonstration?”

So we started looking at the schedule, and there was a hole in the schedule one afternoon, weekday afternoon, and so we checked with MARTA [Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority], which is their Metro, and MARTA has a line that dead-ended at the CDC headquarters. Well, hell, we can all get on the MARTA — surely we’ve got train fare — and go out to the CDC and have a demonstration. And 1,200 or 1,300 people would show up in the parking lot of the CDC, and we got a demonstration going with hand-painted signs. We didn’t have time to organize and print any formal signs or pictures of it. We’re out there.

So Jack and I sit down, and what are we demanding? We have three demands:

That we’re dying anyway, so we want fast track to use experimental drugs. Fast track. If we weren’t dying, you can take your time to find out whether or not the drug is going to kill us. But since we’re dying anyway, give us a chance to survive. If we stumble on something that works, give us early access to it. So, drugs are one of them. That’s an NIH, National Institutes of Health, issue, but CDC is a subdivision of NIH, so we’re going to take our NIH problem out there.

We want community input on prevention. The reason we want community input on prevention is because we think we know better than a bunch of straight bureaucrats what we need to do to fight a disease within our own

communities. So we want to have what they call Community Planning Groups, so that's an issue.

And the third issue deals with disability-related issues. We want to advance the availability of disability support for people with HIV, and we want some allowance for people that have not been diagnosed as full-blown AIDS. Remember, there used to be this arbitrary line. He's got HIV but he doesn't have AIDS, and all of that. It had been our empirical observation that some of those people are not work-worthy, even though they haven't been diagnosed with AIDS. Some of that is psychological, but we don't care. There should be some disability.

Those are our three demands, and you never go into a situation with fewer than three demands. So when we got those together, we decided that's the demands we went out there to do that.

We get out there, and the building is interesting. It's got a portico in the main administration building so that executives in NIH and CDC and the physicians can pull up under the canopy and get out, walk in the building without being exposed to nasty stuff like Atlanta heat or cold or rain or snow. Whatever they've got there, they've got protection.

TAPPE: Or demonstrators.

HILL: Well, it turned out to be pretty handy for demonstrators. The way that's built is, it's got this canopy that comes over this circular drive, and the canopy comes out and dead-ends into a lattice. It's actually poured concrete with a design, holes in it, but you can climb up it. It's got vines on it, but you can still climb up it, and climb up the end and get over on top of this thing.

Jimmy Flowers is kind of a good-looking, wiry, blonde Brooklyn kid that I met during the March on Washington planning. When I'd make trips to New York, I'd stay at Jimmy's house, Jimmy's apartment. That's a gay male story. He said I was the first man in his life that actually stayed all night, and the implications of that just haunted me for years. He was a cute kid and he was good-looking, and his picture is in all of these demonstrations because he carried the biggest sign, the biggest sign. That way, he was sure to get his picture in the coverage. Jimmy was a sweetheart, and Jimmy said, "You know, I can climb up there."

And I said, "Yeah." It looked like that would be easy to do, because the guards were back here at the building, under the canopy, and there were armed guards back there, but there was nobody out here at this end of the canopy, so you could climb up on the canopy.

And down the front of this building is, like, this aluminum blaze from the roof down to the canopy. I said, "Jimmy, what's behind the edge of that?"

It was a ladder on both sides.

So we got people with AIDS who were emaciated but physically able to climb up and get on the canopy climb up the ladder, walk out on the little ledges in front of the windows — they weren't balconies; they were just a ledge — so that when people in the building came to the window to look out at the demonstration, there was a person with AIDS looking at them right through the glass.

They were out there looking for somebody to parley with in 30 minutes. I can tell you, in 30 minutes the demonstration had succeeded in a parley session.

Well, naturally, since I was a guy with the megaphone, I was part of the parley. We got agreement on all three issues. It would take a while to effect the reducing on limitations on experimental drugs, but they would certainly fight our cause, and I was dealing with physicians. This isn't the secretary thing. They would certainly appeal to the NIH and see if they could break that up.

They set up Community Planning Groups in five major cities. We're the cream of the crop: New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston. The only reason Houston is on that list is, I was a negotiator at that table. To this day, you've got Houston Health Department out there close to the Astrodome where their headquarters are, where they've got the vital records and things of that nature, and there's a Planning Group meeting in there every month.

TAPPE: That still continues, doesn't it?

HILL: That still continues. You walk in that room. You can look at that room and see where the disease is, because the first decision we made when we organized in Houston is this table must look like the demographics of this disease. Must. No exceptions, no excuses.

TAPPE: So you have HIV clients?

HILL: We have women of color, childbearing age. We have Hispanics. We have Asians. We have gays.

TAPPE: That's great. Love that story.

HILL: That's good organizing. That's good organizing. That's no BS.

TAPPE: Now, the Planning Committees, they came from that meeting or negotiation?

HILL: They came from that negotiation. Yeah, Community Planning Groups in those five cities and with the AIDS organizations, which are usually by states and

subdivisions of the states or the cities. Texas has a statewide organization of which Dallas and San Antonio are part. Houston is independent.

I had forgotten the name of the Director of the Health Department under Kathy Whitmire, but a first flash. The first thing we knew is that New York and Los Angeles and San Francisco were closing the baths. Well, that's fine for me. I'm not a baths kind of guy. I'm sexually pretty active, but that's not my style. The problem is, if you close the baths, you're not doing anything about the compulsive population. So I sat down with the Health Director right here in Houston, the same black guy that we talked about earlier.

TAPPE: I'll research his name.

HILL: Yeah, research and find his name. He's wonderful, because I sat down with him and we talked about bars and baths and all of that, and I said, "You're not doing anything about people who are very sexually compulsive and prolific. If we close the baths, that population is going to move. It's not going to die. It's not going to disappear. It's going to move. Would you rather have these people in the men's room at the park or in the downtown businesses like Foley's and places like that? Or let's consider the possibility of leaving them where they are and creating a culture of safer behavior."

I'd already written *Sound Advice for Sexually Active People*, so we called it the safe-sex pamphlet. It is a risk-reduction pamphlet, and it talks about having sex without the exchange of body fluids. It talks about condoms. It talks about finding alternatives to the exchange of body fluids, where you get gratification without exposure. I had carefully worked on that. I wrote it. CHE, Citizens for Human Equality, published it, and it was available. The City itself started

carrying that advice in their pamphlet. Our pamphlet was the same advice but a little more racy. Since I had written that, I had credibility in dealing with him.

He got to thinking about it, and he said, “I think you’re right. I think we don’t want to close those places down, but how do we go in?”

I said, “Well, you don’t understand. I’m Ray Hill.”

So I just went to the managers. The owner was that same Jack Campbell I was talking about at the Democratic Convention from Miami. He owns it, but he has local managers. I went to the local managers. I said, “Call Jack. Get him to give you a reference on me. We’ve got some things to talk about here.”

We talked about building a culture. In the first place, free condoms are everywhere. Put that up, and warning posters, and all of that.

The best sign I ever came up with: “Men,” big letters, “use condoms or beat it.”

TAPPE: I like that.

HILL: Yeah. It was a very persuasive, simple poster.

TAPPE: So the baths remained open in Houston?

HILL: They’ve never closed.

TAPPE: And in hindsight, do you still feel that was the right decision?

HILL: I still think that’s the right decision. As a matter of fact, they do community anonymous testing inside the clubs, inside the baths, to this day. As long as bookstores and arcades were lucrative — that whole industry died because of the Internet. Hookups on the Internet is the great risk now, and we’ve got no way to interfere with it. If they were coming to a place like a bookstore, arcade, or a baths or something, we can catch them and train them and teach them and reduce

the risks. But if they get hooked up on the Internet and they meet in a parking lot somewhere, we're not part of that process.

TAPPE: That's one of the things I wanted to ask you about, is the education. Years ago you saw signs everywhere, you saw billboards, some things in bars.

HILL: Well, there was a time, if you wanted to prevent the spread of AIDS, you'd just put up a poster at Mary's and reach three-quarters of the at-risk population.

That's not true anymore.

TAPPE: I don't see anything like that anymore.

HILL: Oh, yes, Montrose Center. Get on the elevator at Montrose Center.

TAPPE: Correct, but I mean for the general public. My memory is that educational information was more visible back then than it is now.

HILL: Yes, it was, no question about it. That was back when I was on the Community Planning Group and I made a priority about reaching, and probably overkill, to the arcades and the bars and all of that, but the people at the table, where the disease actually is — typically, a newly infected person with HIV is a woman of color of childbearing age, her husband, sex partners, and children. There's no reason for transmitting AIDS from mother to child. There's just no excuse for that. That's poor natal care.

TAPPE: In doing some research, you have talked about raising your children — not biological children, but the young people in the community — to understand what's going on and to take leadership roles. You lost many of them.

HILL: Well, the whole generation of people that I raised to replace me as an activist — and granted, I held, in electronic terms, a greater amount of bandwidth than other activists because I've been involved in it all.

Well, if you're going to know that time moves on, things progress, you start thinking about people to divide up your legacy to. I raised a whole generation to take my place, and almost all the males died. Survivors: Greer Price, Larry Bagneris, Lee Harrington; so few. And then I had grandchildren that I began to prepare, with a higher survival rate. But the generation immediately following, the generation that would now be in their fifties, they're just not there. Survivors have got names like Annise Parker and Sue Lovell, and they're women.

TAPPE: When these men were ill and struggling with this illness, I believe you played quite a role in many of their lives.

HILL: These were my organizational children, and of course I played a role in their lives.

TAPPE: And they were your friends. How does one deal with so much loss?

HILL: There are wrinkles right around my eyes to this day, yeah. There's a lot of sadness in my eyes. I look in the mirror and I see it. I don't know if other people notice it or not, because I'm a pretty bright-eyed fellow, but I've seen so much death and so much suffering.

They used me shamelessly because I was the one person in this community that everybody knew, and so when people were in the hospital struggling breath to breath and their relatives and their companions are saying to them, "Hang on, hang on, hang on," the objective eye would see that suffering. The subjective eye never does.

Somebody would say, "Let's call Ray," and I would show up in T-shirt and jeans, bare-armed. Everybody else would be gloved up, masked up, wearing gowns. None of that. I'd go in and take them in my arms, just me and them, no

mask. They'd be sweating, perspiration would be dripping, and I'd tell them it would be all right to give up. It's not easy work, especially if you're dealing with somebody you know.

Randy Fields, so many other young activists that I admired, had worked with, had laughed and joked with, drank coffee until the wee hours of the morning and plotted and planned, and I'm the guy that comes by and tells them it's okay to die.

TAPPE: It's a lot of responsibility.

HILL: And then if they're secular, I'd do their funeral. I buried a bunch of them.

TAPPE: Were these funerals at a variety of cemeteries, bars, homes?

HILL: Ashes in the back of Mary's, gardens, scatter their ashes out at the Monument, scatter their ashes amongst Texas heroes. That's a good one, especially for the Mexicans.

TAPPE: I suppose they varied, but the funeral services for these men, were they different than what you might have for a family member? Some were funny? Some were not?

HILL: No, no. What can you do? The person was a person. A lot of them are funny. I'm a funny kind of guy, and if I had a funny story to tell, I always told it. That was the story I told first, because that's what their life was like. You don't do funerals for the dead. You do funerals for the living. Funerals, if anything else, they've got to be uplifting. This is the end of somebody's life. Everybody is suffering. Well, lift their spirits a little bit.

I didn't do, I don't do, and won't do religious stuff. I mean, if they want scriptures read and things of that nature, you get somebody else to do it. Fine, I

know a bunch of people that are willing to do that. If it is a secular fare thee well, more than glad to serve, more than glad to serve.

TAPPE: Tell me about your resume, because I do want to get this in.

HILL: I mean, I'm very honest. I list going to prison, for instance, as a convict, and put the dates down. I list things that I've tried and failed. I list things that I've tried and succeeded. I list all the awards, and there have been so many awards.

Eleanor and I used to go receive awards on behalf of Omega House, and she had this great line. She said, "I appreciate this lovely piece of paper, but what I really wanted was your money." That's a great line. She was a great gal to organize.

TAPPE: She was with the Omega House; is that correct?

HILL: Yes, she was actually the conceptualizer of Omega House. I was so lucky to be able to just be around to work with her.

TAPPE: Munger? Was that her last name?

HILL: Yes, Eleanor Munger. She was wonderful. Glad you did that. I've been trying to do that. I remembered Midge Costanza, because one of the things we didn't get into was the Cuban thing.

TAPPE: Exactly. Please tell me about that. How did soldiers end up here?

HILL: Well, you had the Mariel boat people from Cuba. We didn't know. After the fact, it was the people in Cuba that were for the most part infected with HIV, and they had locked them up in Cuba. Some of them had been combatants in the war in Angola, in Africa. Castro sent a bunch of people over there to fight that war in some kind of Communist plot or something, and the people he was getting back had HIV, because that area is the incubator for the disease. When they started

coming back, Castro and his physicians realized they had a problem.

Well, what do you do with it?

Well, let's just ship it to the United States.

So they said that they were releasing people from Cuban prisons. Well, we didn't even ask what they were in prison for. They were Cuban expatriates, and we have special laws for Cubans. I mean, you get in, you get food stamps and welfare right away if you're coming from Cuba.

So Midge Costanza calls from the White House. We had met her while we were at the March on Washington in 1979. We met the organizers. The executive committee went to the White House and met Midge. Jimmy Carter came in and went out, but we spent our time with Midge. So she called, and I was on that conference call with Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York. They didn't call Miami because they were already in Miami. That's where they were coming in. Chicago. And it was the people that she had met that had organized the march. And she said, "We've got a problem."

I said, "What's your problem?"

She said, "A lot of these people coming out of Cuba are gay, and we don't know what to do with them."

I said, "Well, what are you doing with them?"

She said, "Well, they're in a camp."

And I'm thinking concentration camp, and I don't like the idea of gay people being in a concentration camp. So we started accepting different numbers. San Francisco accepted a whole bunch. New York accepted a whole bunch. Los Angeles accepted a large group. Chicago did.

And I said, “I’ll take two dozen. Let me see what this is like. We’ll go through this in an increment. I may come back for some more.”

So the next thing you know, a bus pulled up in front of Mary’s with two dozen people in it. We were having a party. Come in and meet an exile from Cuba. We need to find housing and assistance.

TAPPE: You mean they literally were on a bus that came into town?

HILL: Yeah, they literally came in a bus as a group from a concentration camp in Arkansas. They put them on the bus and sent them to Houston, and the bus didn’t go to Greyhound Bus Station. It came to Mary’s. They got off at Mary’s.

[END OF AUDIO PART 2]

TAPPE: At Mary’s.

HILL: At Mary’s, yeah, sure. They piled in. There were people there to meet them and couples to give them housing and guys looking for a husband and those looking for companionship. At the end of the party, nobody was left. We managed to find accommodation for every one of them.

They were all kinds of people. I suspected from the very beginning a lot of these people are not gay, but if you’re in a concentration camp in Arkansas and somebody says, “All right. We want the gay ones over here. They get out. The rest of you have got to stay here,” guess what happens.

That’s fine. They may not be gay, but they’re Cubans, and Cubans get along with everybody. They’re a friendly, warm, loving group of people, and so we accommodated them. In two years, they were all dead except three, and three lived on for a long time. They were the effeminate ones. The transes lived.

TAPPE: Is that right?

HILL: Yeah. That was interesting.

TAPPE: And they have since passed away?

HILL: Everyone is dead now. Everybody is dead now.

TAPPE: Now, all of these people were HIV positive?

HILL: I suspect all of them were HIV positive. And I suspect they infected people
without even being aware of their status.

TAPPE: I didn't know we had had the concentration camp type of situation.

HILL: Yeah, study what happened to the Mariel people. That's an interesting study.

Few of those people nationally are alive. There have been books on it.

Maryknoll is an order of nuns which facilitated the boat people, and nuns are
good about keeping records.

TAPPE: Rap your knuckles.

Thank you for your insight, Ray. Thank you so much.

HILL: Thank you.

[END OF AUDIO PART 3]

[INTERVIEW CONCLUDED]

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