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Interview with Jean Kracher

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Jean Kracher: and my name is Jean Kracher

MJ: Date of the interview

JK: March 31st

MJ: Wednesday

JK: 2010

MJ: Place of the interviewee

JK: The Cross roads Fund in Chicago

MJ: And Years of Apartheid activism

JK: I started learning about Anti-Apartheid Activism in College in around 1977, I believe 6 or 7

Okay can you state your year of birth

JK: I was born in 1957 in Chicago IL

MJ: What was the place of your father birth

JK: My dad was born in Chicago and lives in Chicago his whole life and my mom moved to Chicago when she was about 17 or 18

MJ: Okay, Okay Can you tell me your earliest memory, again
JK: Earliest memory was have living my grandparents tavern-- we, my grandparents lived in an apartment with us, with my. I slept in a bed with my grandmother, in fact cause it was a pretty small apartment and we had a great happy childhood. I had a happy childhood. I lived in a—the tavern was used for family events, so we had a lot of great parties and got to use the jukebox and the pool table at those parties, so that was fun.

MJ: Okay what was your father's occupation

JK: My father was a Chicago Policemen

MJ: and your mother

JK: My mom worked in my grandparent's tavern for many years until they sold it and then she worked as a clerk in a drug store

MJ: okay, can you tell me of experiences growing up in your neighborhood, you mentioned the swimming pool

JK: Yeah Yeah Yeah. So I grew up in Chicago in the sixties and the everything that was on television, everything that was sort of in the civil rights movement. The initially ad I was very very upset. My mother always talk about how upset I was as a 6 year old—even, about with the images on T.V. Of you know dogs being sent out on kids in the South and fire hoses and I didn't understand why they were treating Negros this way and we had a pool in the neighborhood that we would go to and at some point they had started, it was an all white neighborhood, so we were all white kids in the pool and at some point they started busing kids in for like summer camps that were black and suddenly my friends couldn't go to the pool anymore and there moms start calling my mom and saying Helen why are you letting your kids go to the pool. My mother was really furious about this and said I grew up in Detroit Michigan, in Michigan we, I grew up with everybody, every race, every ethnic group people who didn't speak English people who did speak English and I don't believe your being so prejudice and this is a horrible and you call yourself a catholic and this kind of stuff. so we were really raised in a—the majority of the kids in my neighborhood were no longer allowed to go to the pool. We were still going and so we really raised with this idea that everybody should be kind to everybody and it didn't matter the color of your skin was.

MJ: Okay You mentioned you father and the neighborhood being made up of COP kids and things of that nature

JK: I lived in a neighborhood with lots of—because we lived on the out, you know in Chicago Policemen have to live in the city. So we first lived in Jefferson Park and then we lived in Norwood Park and those are sort of like the furthest out neighborhoods on the North-westSide. A lot of police officers live in those communities because that as far as you can go before getting to the suburbs and so there were a lot of kids who were growing up in Cop families and had a really different, came with a
really different certain vocabulary around race and racism and were really being a different message than what's happening in my home, around questioning the police for instance. My-- I had an older sister who was seven years older than me and was very active in Sixt-Eight wanting to go to the demonstration, wanting to be apart of the movement against the war in Vietnam and we have very heated debates at the dinner table, So I was like ten or eleven years old and my Dad and my sister were really arguing and his perspectives was these kids shouldn't protest and throw things at the police but he wasn't forbidding her from going he was also kind of interested in the debate, where as the other kids I grew up with-- the kids come home with-- who were my age-- came with these horrible language about protesters and they where just hippy scum and there a bunch a communist. My parents really had a much more open open view of it. So in other words-- I don't think my father loved the fact that we were questioning the authority of the police but I think he understood people have a right to protest.

MJ: During 68 in your-- What was your experience with the civil rights movement going on at that time at such a young age

JK: For me it was more about-- I didn't have anybody in except my older sister who I mentioned was trying to be involved as much as she could as a teenager. But I didn't have anybody protesting in my family. It was more about the images on TV for me and so I think a lot of people who are younger don't understand is you literally come home from school turn on the T.V. The news come on and you would see these images, you'd see images of what was going on in the Civil rights Movement, you saw images of what was happening in Vietnam. You saw footage of people in battle in Vietnam or people carrying dead children of that kind of thing. They learned from the war in Vietnam that you never show that stuff anymore as you know there was a whole debate about showing bodies coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan and who are they, the state, who ever is in charge of showing images, releasing images learned that people are moved by seeing that kind of turmoil and of course people were coming home and telling stories what they experiencing in Vietnam -- soldiers who were like unbelievably damaged by the war-- So that was part of our daily cultural experience of just mass media and you couldn't ignore it in your life. An the movements were really, the protesters all of that was sort of in the news.

MJ: What Role did religion play in the house hold

JK: My parents were Catholic. My mother in particular (moves in chair) was an active Catholic and we went to Catholic School. I went to 12 years of Catholic education and I think my mother in particular because she was more religious-- was as I said before, kind of Catholic with a small c instead of the big C. Whatever the church was teaching about peace and justice, loving your and caring for your fellow man she was embracing and trying to teach us. What they were sort of teaching about women's oppression or you know what ever she just kind of rejected that and we didn't have to pay attention to that. So she was really-- I think she really embraced and nurtured us around the best parts of Catholicism an so if a nun later on in my early years-- I went to school that had really progressive nuns they were great then later on-- there probably none of them are nuns anymore-- Later on I went to a school that was conservative. And when those conservative nuns would come down on me for something I said in class, my mother totally stood up for me and said you have a right to this opinion and you know sister whoever you cannot persecute my daughter for having this opinion so she really stood up for us.
MJ: How did this support influence you and your siblings?

JK: from my mom

MJ: Yes from you mom

JK: I think she, both my parents were very interested in other (clicking noise) kind of experiences. So they encouraged us to travel. If we had an opportunity -- we weren't rich by any means it was a big sacrifice from them for us to even go to college or to catholic school. I think their thing was like if we had an opportunity -- like in high-school I had an opportunity to go to England and so they helped me, they encouraged me to get a job, to save money, here's someone you can borrow money from you have to pay them back but go do that, go see someplace else. Hey were always telling us to go. My sister was active in high school in program that went to these like social service agencies in communities around Chicago -- like on the South Side or far Westside and my mother was really happy she did that because she sad it 'll get you out of your neighborhood, you meet people who you wouldn't normally meet and she would allow my sister to bring us along-- So we spend the day at the zoo or at the beach or such and such a place. MY brother and I being the only two white kids with this whole bus full of black kids and play with them all day long and we had many experiences like that because my mother would say you should go out and do these things and you should learn from other people experiences.

MJ: You mentioned previously the influence of your sister, can you tell me more about that.

JK: Shewas very influential because my sister Judy becuae she was very interested in the emerging movement of the day and was reading material that shae would receive, like underground newspaper, The Seed, stuff like that. I would go and read them, when she wasn't at home I would pull it out of her closet and read them and she was also very open about who people were and explaining -- she would things to me about, you know, I saw -- why did they kill Martin Luther King Jr and she would give me her analysis of why that happened. Why are we against the war in Vietnam, cause what ever she was against I was against (laughing) and she'd explain to me why we were against the war in Vietnam. She'd take the time -- I was only 10 9 10 11 when she would do that, so she -- really -- it was really important she was there and I had her as this little coach.

MJ: The experience at Lincoln Park Zoo?

JK: With Her

MJ: Yes

JK: O-Okay, we didn't get that

MJ: its a little scratchy

JK: Okay

So another way she was really improtant to me. Probably from the time I was 6. I realized I was different and I wasn't like a normal girl in the sense I wasn't into boys and I wanted to be a boy and so there was something up. There was no real word for it because the Gay Movement had not progressed in
the same way as it has now. So I remember being on this bus – at some point I learned what homosexuality was but again I wasn't totally clear on it. We were on a bus coming home from the zoo on day and we were around Fullerton and Clarke street or something. This guy gets on the bus and he's this total poofter, completely gay man but very effeminate, purse, very frilly outfit I guess someone would call it feminine in its construct and he gets on the bus and everybody starts making fun of him and not everybody but a couple of people an people were laughing. I looked at my sister kind of for the cue like why are they laughing and she looked at me and she said There nothing, really loudly matter of fact she said there nothing to laugh about. There is nothing wrong with that man. He is a homosexual and its perfectly fine to be a homosexual kind of that what she said and my whole kind of reaction was like Oh my God this is so fantastic—yes I can pursue this it was a huge moment for me to experience that with her. I've thanked her on multiple occasions for that.

MJ: To conclude what was you sister's role later on in your life in your activism

JK: It is interesting that you should ask that because when I was trying to be a film maker she was very supportive for instance I went to film school and film school is really expensive-- you have to pay for all your film-- back in the dya there was no video it was all-- where you got shot 16 milimeter film got them processed. So it was really expensive you'd say 400 feet, you send it to this lab and You'd say hold on to it until I got enough money to pay for it and look at it. So she wound up having a pretty good job. She helped --my parent couldn't afford that and I had jobs trying to pay for myself. She loaned me the money essentially yo go to Film School and loan me the money to make my first documentary. She was really supportive in finding my own expression for how I sort of wanted to live my life in general. I think she was really supportive of – I think I think she was afraid of how leftist I became but ultimately wanted me to explore in ways I needed to explore. I think she was real helpful in terms of being a voice of reason in my life. Somebody I could come back to and be honest about the things I was exploring and maybe never totally embracing all the things and the extent I took them to but I think she was always open to hearing what I was doing and what I was thinking

[The previous transcription was acquired through a supplementary interview to make up for lost material in the initial interview, it's inconsistencies in method as well as reference made by the interview are in part due to that]

[The following remarks are the from the original interview already in progress, In this recording JK has elaborated on her involvement in Anti-Apartheid movement being limited to Southern Illinois University where she helped flyer as well as deal with gender biases in the school's film program and upon her graduation going to New York ]

[Beginning of recording 2]

MJ: Sorry about that

JK: We were aware of the Springboks- not because of the Olympics but that became a big story that became a big way and you ask that you would hear activist were trying to stop the Springboks from their tour. I told this to the last. I can't remember the guys name. There was someone before you who was trying to interview me but it didn't work out. I told Prexy this. There is a woman in town, one of you guys should really hook up with her, Mary Paton, who was an ex-Girlfriend of mine and she spent a year in jail in NYC for trying to stop the springboks from getting on a plane at Kennedy Airport and this riot sort of ensued, a cop got thrown through a plate glass window and she wound up doing a year
in jail for that action. They were literally trying to stop the Springboks from walking up a ramp to get on a plane or something. That is what people were doing. I wasn't like that-- doing that but that what people were doing.

MJ: You were in New York for this time or not

JK: I was not. I just missed that I think I came to New York after that action because I think that action occurred in eighty or eighty-one. Sometime in eighty-one or eighty-two and I arrived in New York in eighty-three.

MJ: Were you involved in any other activist groups in New York.

JK: No. I was again trying to make a living and worked on my own film. So I was trying to get done I was again starting. That when I was doing my period of recording exploring I would go to talks about topics. I'd go watch a movie, hear somebody speak about a variety of topics. But I really wasn't hooked into a group until I came back to Chicago.

MJ: Which group were you hooked up with--

JK: When I met my friend Ferd at this mailing party. He was involved with a group which was doing-- It was the New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence and Socialism. It's a long name. (Laughter) Do you want me to repeat it (scribbling in note pad)

MJ: Yes

JK: Okay. New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence and Socialism, New Movement for short. So that group and the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee were both groups I got involved in organization. That was sort of that these groups came out of and that was called Prairie Fire Organizing committee. It was named after a quote by I think its Mao a, a single spark can start a Prairie Fire. They were the groups that created these other groups and so I started going there study groups. That was when my real education, my deeper education in Marx Gromchi (vacuum cleaner?) Kabral (clapping noise) Malcom X, were I started having deeper discussion about what is the debate between Martin Luther King and Malcom X, what was the difference between Civil Rights and human right. Where does feminism, racism anti-imperialist, homophobia, where does all these things all hook up. What are the contradictions. I was starting to get involved in that kind of leftist study. And that is where South Africa started to elevate itself again. Because again as a feminist we would organize an annual International Women Day events various kinds of events. Everything from we'd show a movie and have a talk-- so now I'm putting on the things I was going to. Or an Annual International women's day protest Downtown. Where we would go pick different targets of women's oppression and we would go and do a little action in front of each of them. So South Africa was always one we were elevating. We were big into recording different essays from South Africa. We were reading Bessie Had(???) and trying to think of some-- some of the other writers we' read. And you know the famous quote Now that you have touched the women you've struck a rock you have dislodged a bolder and you will be crushed. That was one of the famous quotes from South Africa women. That we would repeat over and over again at our demonstrations.

MJ: Can you describe one of the demonstrations
MJ: ca you describe one of the demonstrations

JK: Well the one I worked a lot on, was the one I got arrested at the South African Consulate for changing myself to the door of the South African consulate. (laughter)

I got arrested at that. We were protesting the apartheid, that particular demonstration. The way apartheid directly affected women. I don't know what else to say about it but it was one of many of a menu. We'd go to—I don't know let me think of what we would do. We would go to a symbol of Catholicism and we'd protest against the church and there role around abortion. We'd go to— let me think trying to think—Oh of the Central American Movement we were all involved in anti-intervention in Central America because the Contra War was happening. So we would go to some embassy of el Salvador, go to the federal building— The federal building always a big target we would stop traffic in the middle of the street at the federal building. So they would be these little actions along the way. We would protest the role of the U.S. In Central America at the Federal building in this particular action we went to the South African consulate some of us chained ourselves others just tried to blockade the door to protest the U.S. Role in its relationship to South Africa and the Apartheid government of South Africa.

MJ: How did— what years was this— was it during the Reagan administration

JK: It was 80, I would say it was around, I'm thinking around 85, 86, 87. I'm very bad at dates Michael I wish I was better but I'm not

MJ: It's okay

JK: It was all like that

Mj: How was the particlur group you were working with to protest the South African Consulate—America at the South African Consulate organized

JK: How did we get people to come

MJ: Yeah how did you get people to come and how was the group organized and in like disbursing information and things of that nature.

Jk: Yeah, kind the ways I've already talked about, we would have little events, Maybe a movie or a talk or a cultural event and we would invite people to come and they come and we do education about a variety of topics including lets talk about women in South Africa It wouldn't be necessarily specifically on South Africa, it might be on international womens day and lets prepare for International women day by understanding the particular situation of women around the world and what U.S.role visa vi those women we would hand out leaflets or we'd go to campuses and hand out leaflets. It was different than now because we didn't have the internet. We would go and try to meet with different collectives that might have existed at the time. And there might be something like the Chicago Woman Health Center or different groups of women who were meeting and we'd go try to talk to them about-- we are getting at this demonstration do you want to have a contingent in the demonstration. That kind of thing. It was very white anti-imperialist. I don't think we had-- we were all come out the same politics-- I mentioned Prairie Fire-- we were coming out a politics that was about-- it was our role and our responsibility to organize white people. So which you know has some merit, it also has some problems in that you are then only working with white people – How much do you really learn from people who are struggling around other issues and other identities and other realities. We did a lot of work around international
women thing ther would be something that would be an anti-racist thing so you'd go to the police station and talk racist cops that kind of thing There was always some multiple stops in one demonstration.

MJ: You mentioned protesting at churches and police stations. What other companies and officials did you aim for or target.

JK: Well the U.S. Government always being a number one on our list of being anti-imperialist (laugh) later on, not in that particular grouping, I became involved, I don't know if I'm jumping ahead. Do you really want a specific answer for that one

MJ: No anything you can think of.

JK: There would be companies, like people- there was a whole thing at Marshall fields because they were selling cougar rands(???) So there was a whole thing at Marshall fields on some big protest about trying to get them to stop selling the cougar rands(???)-- what other companies? Military bases out in Arlington area. (Laugh) There was a base out in Arlington area there was the naval base up-- which no longer -- up on the Northshore there was a U.S. Naval base and then there was a base out there near Arlington Heights so that would be a target of some of the protest -- the airport sometime-- if like Bush was coming in and public officials-- If Bush Reagan or somebody like that was coming into town you'd go out there-- the popular thing was to try to dress like the people in the fancy event and insinuate yourself and get up and yell. That kind of thing

MJ: How -- I may have mentioned-- How did you feel about Reagan and his politics

JK: I remember I went on a trip after -- Europe for about 9 months-- Traveled with my friend Barbara Lang who I mentioned — went and visited my relatives in Chekoslovakia and went to a lot of different places and its during the primary for the election-- that election-- he was not yet President. I remember European saying to me-- what do you think about this Ronald Reagan guy. I'd go the guys a joke-- I mean – He will never win, he was a cowboy, he was on T.V. When I was a kid selling detergent-- there is now way this guy could be president-- which just goes to show how keenly in tune I am with the poepl of this country (coworkers in back ground) I was in shock about Reagan . I think later it became a bigger soure of shock for me-- I started again with my friend Ferd (???) who had been such an influence on me, Ferd got diagnosed as HIV positive and many of us started to have our friends around us who were becoming positive and—we had never been politically Gay-- I don't know if you – let me try to flush that out a little bit. We were anti-impereilist. We did solidarity work with struggles of people locally and globally-- we were white people in solidairty with struggles of people of color globally and locally-- we were dealing with our own identites as political beings-- we weren't really fully politicized around our queerness at the time—okay-- I mean we were but we were usually pissed that people usually wouldn't include gay and lesbian stuff but was really understood that had to take – at that time we felt it had to take a back seat. So we would always sort of shutup about it eventually, ultimately. And much more so about sexuality than about gender, than about feminism-- okay-- when people started becoming positive-- it really shifted for us because the rhetoric of the Regan and our government was well it's just a bunch of degenerates. This population we can see die and don't really care about them. Its abunch of homosexuals and drug addicts. So really who cares about them—you know in Illinois the Governor at the time Thomson was trying to quarantine people with AIDS . So when that --Boom-- Oh my God-- we have to have a politics about being queer. You know we started meeting as gay people—like this— like group of anti-imperialist who-- we've known eachother for year and have gone and protest about the Klan organizing in uptown around the Puerto
Rican independence Movement. We started saying we have to talk to each other about is going on around HIV and AIDS and that gay men are becoming target for the governs and we know this is happening in communities of color we know a couple of people had know poepl—had known –like my friend friend who was in jail for a year on Riker(???) Island-- a couple of her friends that she made on rikers were dying of some like cough and some weird thing no one was really pin pointing what is was, so we were really suspesious that this was—you know-- gonna be a huge problem obviously and people were starting to organize nationally around HIV and AIDS in thr gay communites. So we started shifting our activities started saying how do we start thinking about building a politics that-- I get back to this because one of the first marches we had- which was a national march-- Reagan was in the Whitehouse—it was a national march on Washington of gays and lesbians. One of the first banners I ever carried in a march like that was a banner of Africa with targets on it—because we were already hearing from people who were doing solidarity work nurses-- that kind of thing—who were gay --that epidemic was happening in those places. We are talking eighties late eighties early nineties. There was no real discusion going on yet. We were starting toform our politics locally and natinally but we knew there was a whole global dynamic to this. The first banner we made here in Chicago-- we had a bunch of banners-- we made one that had African Continent with these targets because out thing was we got to deal with our oldarity glabally as well our merging internal politics but sort of wjat we understand about our identies and our own lives it was the moment where we undersooof what ever we learned as anti-imperialist had to embrace a global perspective as well

MJ: How did that carry you back to South Africa and Anti-Apartheid

JK: For instance we organized some of us here in Chicago were part of organizing the first teach-in of the AIDS movement --a national teach-in – in Washington D.C. And so right away we had workshop, we started phoning around-- whose been in these countries, whose been to Central America, who knows what going on their, who can we get to talk abput HIV and AIDS are starting to affect thes countries. So South Africa was one of the first countries we included in that teach-in-- So people started being – I wasn't personally – but people I was around and people who all were in organizing in leadership of the emeging AIDS movement in the states. We were in coversation very early on with activist in South Africa and South Africa was one of the most organized – It makes sense—of-- internationally-- South Africa, Nicaragua, there were activist who very early on were talking about HIV and AIDs and it relationship to homosexuality and drug use and everything in those places. Now whether or not leadership in those struggles were listening to them or embracing that , was another story. But there were a lot of dialouge from the start about that.

MJ: Can you tell me more about the HIV?AIDS activism you were doing.

JK: We started an organization in Chigao-- pretty early on-- These leftisht got together and said we got to do soemthing we started a group called C.F.A.R. Chicago for AIDS Rights and as the emerging national movement started it became clear that there ACT UP chapters, Aids Coalition to Unleash Power was the name of this group that was forming around the country-- so we just changed our name to ACT UP because it made more sense to have it national . We formally went to various-- I was working with the Puerto Rican Independence Movmeent. We went and said this is what we have to do now, we have to do this-- we see this is who we are – we have to do this – we see this is who we are – we have to – no one else is going to do this for us and the Puerto Rican Inependence Movement also took on the activites of trying to deal with HIV and AIDS and we all had an influence on each other. I think it was a good thing and they did amazing work, they continued to do amzing work here in Chicago around that issue. We organized this group and we did local demonstrations, national
demonstrations – participated in global art conferences – All of the above for a number of years

MJ: How was the role of religion in this period

JK: For me personally

I stop being religious -- it was mandated in my home growing up that as long as we were living -- as long as we were in high school and living at home we had to go to church on Sunday and the minute that was over with we didn't have to go to church anymore. So out of the four kids of my parents only one of them still goes to church -- and it's not me (laugh) -- So I had no religious-formed religious activity during that time.

MJ: What were your parent response to the activism you were doing at that time.

JK: It was mixed -- my father was a policeman -- we talked about that — my father learned I was a lesbian by seeing in a demonstration on T.V. Yelling at the mayor -- So in some regard -- yeah -- it was interesting -- I wanted to -- I had come out to my mother at some point along the way in the my twenties or something and then I said should I talk to Dad about it she said don't tell your father about it -- it gonna really upset him (laugh) -- So I didn't and so then I'm on this T.V. -- they keep showing it over because it was this crazy thing the major came to the Gay community and everybody sort of shouted him down. And my fathers was so sweet -- my mother called and said honey we saw you on the news like three times. You were on every single news show -- I said how was that -- and she said well I think you should talk to your father, so I get on the phone and say -- you know -- Dad I am sorry you had to find out this way and he said What, What, look, look I just want to make something clear, I don't have any problems with you being Gay, I just want you to be happy. Okay, here is my problem my problem is you don't get up in front of a bunch of people and yell at the mayor (laugh) -- So I said well dad I wrote letters and made phone calls (laugh) and I did everything and he just wouldn't listen (laugh) So anyhow -- but he was I have to say — they were amazingly -- they said all the things parents say like what did I do wrong and stuff(???) like that but they didn't -- they were fairly accepting and certainly I think have grown and did grow in our process together. I think of politics of -- my father thing was -- he was a police man and you don't break the law and that really bothered him that I was breaking the law. He knew I got arrested on a number of occasions and he knew I got arrested on a number of occasions and he knew I was breaking the law and for him was sort of -- I think he enjoyed the fact -- to the day he died he loved having political discussions with me and he enjoyed the fact I was engaged in ideas and were like that we all had minds of our own and were trying to negotiate the world -- he really didn't like the fact I was breaking the law. My mothers concern that I was going to get hurt. Which is a classic motherly concern -- you gonna get hurt

MJ: How was the police response to you activism

JK: Do you mean how did the police behave

MJ: Yes(paper shuffle)

JK: It was interesting -- so I had gotten — I had been arrested — I told you about the South African. The international Women's Day arrest -- I had been arrested actually prior to that around an action we did around Central America. I was arrested during an AIDS movement. We had a major action in downtown Chicago about 20 people got arrested in San Francisco and I was -- This is going to sound crazy and I was arrested in Washington D.C. So I’ve been arrested by different Police Departments
Okay and the least professional of the Police department in these arrests for me were the Chicago Police Department. I think the Chicago Police Department had a mentality and sort of-- somebody gave them permission, a license to do what every they wanted to -- to people and they didn't care. I never got beaten up. I certainly got smashed into the wall and certainly got thrown -- Oops-- I missed the door-- I'll hit the wall instead, I ot walked into the elevator and smashed into the back of an elevator-- handcuffed with my hands behind me and smashed. That was nothing compared to some friends, my friends really got brutalized by the police-- a woman my size stepped on—broken ribs—and in the beginning of the AIDS movement they were afraid of us. They thought we all had HIV-- so they wouldn't touch anybody and then as those year went by -- as they became educated more and more they became more and more willing to start pounding you with clubs and doing all that kind of stuff—so I was arrested in San Francisco by the police who were like unbelievialbly professional on how they did it. It was amazing to me I remember thinking if this was Chicago they would be wailing on us. They didn't-- nut it was an international AIDS conference-- they were trying to put on a --like-- we are in a space, we people have a right to protest and we are going to be very diciplined. Chicago Police—Oh my God—They would pull you off the sidewalk-- you are completely legal-- your moving—you're picketing and they would pull you off the sidewalk and just start wailing on you—if they want to-- they don't care. So I don't have a lot of respect for the police professionalism or dicipline that they show in demonstrations and lately what I've seen --it just this crazy show of Millertism and force with these outfits-- I don't know if you've seen it—if ou evert been down town as t -- they ot these things on-- they look like somekind of crazy cyborg or something. Its intimidating and crazy.

MJ: What do you feel challenges were building community and getting people active.

JK:Challenges?

MJ:Yeah

JK: In all of this

MJ: You can pick what ever your particularly

JK: I think some of the challenges are the ability to sustain long term dialogue with people and really the ability-- this is true of all of us-- to have really the opportunity to talk to really deepen all over analysis together of how these things are interconnected. So what happen to a lot of in general, it may be particular thing that moves us like becoming HIV positive and that a really frightening thing for somebody. Certainly back in the Eighties when it was happening, it meant you were gonna die. That kind of what it meant in your head and in reality many of those people did die. So its before the drug cocktail and all that kind of stuff—so how do you sort of work with—how do we look at that person who has a problem-- that maybe hier lives were just fine and all of a sudden their's something-- maybe they were gay—but they were able to manage that because they had great jobs and whatever—but now they are HIV positive and their insurance gets rejected and suddenly are becoming a target of the state in a way they never imagined. Their either going to do something with that and deepen their analysis of how that happened to them and how its happening to other people and go out and make those connection or their just gonna deal with themsevles. So I think that one of the challegenes is how do you-- how do we all sort of deepen our understanding of how issues are interconnected and a lot of the things-- that a number of the problems of a latina single mother—latina is experieencing around being HIV positive may have some connection to this better -off gay white man. How do we brings those two people together to form a movement.
MJ: Did you have experience with that happening?

JK: Yes I did have an experience with that happening and I've had experience not happening. I had both things happen-- There people-- all of us who grew politically by opening up a connection to somebody we wouldn't normally connected to

MJ: Can you tell me about this experience

JK: Well I think the one I just raised—when we started doing the AIDS work—the HIV and AIDS work-- we were able to go to those we started off just being who we were-- these white anti-imperialist and then started meeting kind of regular gay men who would come-- we had to protest outside Governor Thomson's house-- it was a Twenty-four hour protest- we announced all over the place, all these guys came from the bars-- you know because the Governor lived not that far from Halsted street and so all these bar guys came after the bars closed and joined in and sat around on the street with us-- and these guys who never came to a protest-- Mr. Windy-- like the gay Mr. Windy -city it was this title they used to give back in the day came to the protest—he was like a beauty queen. So that was one layer of people-- who as anti-imperialist we never went to the bars-- we didn't believe in drinking (laugh) Suddenly we are meeting those folks-- then some of us- some of the women had been involved in reproductive choice struggles around the city and we know this woman who was running an orgam for HIV positive women-- Chicago Women Aids Project-- we call her up and we are like --Hey we are doing these meetings it would be really important to have the voices of women who are HIV positive because all we got are men here-- gay men. So we go and start talking to the group-- it was a long process the women didn't necessarily fell safe coming-- they were barely able to come out as being HIV positive-- a lot of them in their own communities but a couple of them started going-- Hey this is great we want to be at—we want to be out—we want more women to be – to come to our project so they started coming to our meetings. So now you get a mother of three, someone who was a former sex worked, somebody who is a drug addict-- black latina meeting our predominately white gay man group with some lesbians thrown in and suddenly we started expanding. What are the issies affecting people differently in different communities who are HIV positive and we started expandin our political agend with ACT-UP Chicago Some of th men who thouht this was about me and drugs in my body and I want drugs in my body were not happy with that and didn't understand why all of the sudden we were talking about women with chidlren but some of them did-- thou embraced it and said of course we have to deal with all people who are HIV positive. How do we deal with this. It was a struggle—I don;t want to paint a rosy picture. Then we started to be in relationship to the black forces in Chicago. There was aa group called ALCOPONA (???)network and they were trying to get adds that were specifics to African-Americans around HIV on the buses-- on the CTA. So we did a campaign with them-- we go to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center where we had all been solidarity workers-- some of us-- so we start expanding out—the idea if how do these things intersect-- what are some of the—from this we rapidly became this in not just about HIV this is about our national health care, we need nationl health care in this country-- again expanding the political terrain-- an then the intrusion question-- what are the relationships to our forces in South Africa or Nicuagrua. How do we support material aid to go to those places for people who are HIV positive, that kind of thing.

MJ: You mentioned the lack of-- you mentioned a lot

JK: I'm sorry

MJ: That's why its recorded so we can always review back-- no problem. Yo mentioned it being mostly male dominated orignially-- How did gender play play into your activism.
JK: For me it's a very complicated question because I think the whole way we talk about gender now—as a feminist it was about woman liberation for me—to some extent it's still about woman liberation but in a different way—I admire some of the younger activist who are really trying to complicate gender and for me as a self-discarded butch lesbian—I think the whole idea of gender has always been complicated for me. I really deep believe that when I was a child I wanted to be a boy not in any kind of way that I want to have—take hormones or have an operation but just from the perspectives boys got to do much more stuff, back then. Hey had more power—my brother go to go on an airplane—went to a soccer tournament with my dad and I couldn't go because girls weren't allowed in the locker room. I had to wear a dress—I hated wearing dresses—I felt like I was being tortured everytime a dress was put on me. Those are simple but they form your identity—form—I think gender and the role of gender in movements that I was apart of was really complicated a number of things I was involved in—the women were really really powerful—like in some ways more powerful than some of the men who were around me. Good?, Bad? I don't know that just an observation. What was great was the queer politics I got involved with—that suddenly people could express themselves more in terms of who they really were around gender politics and certainly around gender expression and so—that was freeing to me, to be able to—again express gender and express sexuality in much more open way—I think what's appealing to us, in a romantic and not necessarily—I'll never know the truth—I think we had a romantic notion about revolutionary struggle around the world and the role of women in those struggles and we really—a lot of us would have photos, posters on our walls with women carrying guns all the time, you know like you'd have African women carrying guns (laugh) Central American women carrying guns—with a baby on one arm and a gun in the other—this is what meant(???) Particularly the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua that had all these women in the leadership of that struggle—who were very very visible and when people did solidarity trip to Nicaragua they would be meeting these women and they were Comindante Dora Maria, Comindante Gladis Bayezz (???) They were comindantes in the liberation army {paper shuffle} I think there is a way that we embrace that as the strong image of women but I don't think we really know the whole truth of what—How much of that was really absorbed into the ultimate struggles of these revolutionary movements and the outcome—for instance now I would be interested in knowing the role of women in South African politics. I don't really know and there was a lot of talks about that back then and—I think it really organized a lot of us who were feminist and not quite sure where it all stands now.

MJ: This is a little skipping around— you mentioned Prexy Nesbitt—How did you meet Prexy

JK: I had heard about Prexy for many years before I actually know him. I think my getting to know Prexy was reaching my job here because Prexy was real good friends with—Prexy's a bit close to—Prexy was on the first board I bleeve of the Cross Roads fund, se he goes back with the Cross Road Fund before I worked here. He was real good friends with a former staff person here—Karen Candelaeria(???) so he started calling up more and more and stuff and I started talking to him—we just sort of became more friendly in the last 10 years.

MJ: You mentioned you heard whispers of Prexy previously—what was the context of that.

JK: I think everybody understood there were people at the time who were—we all understood they were—we all understood they were the leadership of the effort in Chiago around South Africa and Africa—issues around Africa and there was sort of like—I worked with a guy who was involved with a more nationalist—tendency around—he was a teacher where I was working—I taught at an Atlantic Highschool—we sort of represented some sort of African Nationalist incrumaue (???) kind of nationalist faction. And then there was Prexy the more internationalist approach I think. So he was well
know in his profile in leadership and his relationship to struggles in South Africa—Another thing I want to say about South Africa that really had a big impact on my generation—who were coming up activist-- was the cultural-- like the Artist Against Apartheid stuff was really big and I grew up—just because I was interested in music knowing about Miriam Makeba and about Hugh Masekela. In fact Hugh Masekela—my grandfather— we had this tavern and my Grandpa was like pretty strict about what songs could be on the juke box—so no Beatles—no rock and roll. You could have like Trindy Lopez(???) Which you have no idea what that is— do you ?— she kind of soft pop stuff or like the Polkas, Eastern European Polkas: Who Stole the keshka, Franky Yankovich and the Bear Barrel Polka—so the jukebox was really kind of his terrain and he would pick, like play the music then put it on there— the one song we all loved, that he on the jukebox was Grasin in the Grass which is Hugh Masekela, so at a young age I sort of knew a little about his— but when all that stuff came out like [begins to Sing] Bring Back Nelson Mandela, Bring him back home to Soweto— do you know that song. All that kind of stuff came out and we were all listening to that— any sort of activist movement Bruce Coldburn (???) around Central America— what his name?— Jackson Brown were these kind of like artist of my generation— he was doing stuff about Central America and then this Artist against Apartheid thing. It really resonated with us. That was a mass a mass—a more mass manifestation— kind of like stuff around Haiti— we were people responded to it a little more. Stevie Wonder refused to play in South Africa— that kind of stuff- You'd pay attention to that.

MJ: How was— were you involved in divestment and Boycotts in South Africa.

JK: Just the stuff in College and then of course paying attention to the way it would roll out in the newspaper about this group of students or this group of corporations— about putting pressure on— just really as it appears in the news.

MJ: What were—I'm sorry lost my place— How did you feel about the sports— The South African sports boycott.

JK: You mean about— describe what

MJ: The Springboks

JK: I think I thought it was cool that people were trying to get them to— trying to use these sort of popular— pastime of the masses to elevate the issues about South Africa. It's even now— the soccer player who are doing these protest on the field around racism— I don't know if you (???) any of this but you got all the black players from various pens of the world playing like in England and you got fans or you're in Italy—I Italian or English teams and ou got fans making ape noises and monkey noise in the stands in this horrific racist way and so you get a bunch of players—who are either wearing protest sighns to stop the fans from doing that—all that kind of stuff I find anyway using a mass activity— like sports—if there is a way that sports can elevate some sort of politics. I kind of see it as a good thing— it get people to thinking a little about — what are we all engaged in here and how what we are engaged in— How does this relate back to the politics of the place. I think it is a good thing.

MJ: Where— First— Where you in Chicago for Harold Washington election

JK: You know I wasn't, I was here when he died and I actually went to this amazing event that took place at the UIC Center which was public—it was an amazing experience to be in there.

MJ: Can you tell me about the experience
JK: It was just—the sort of—first of all it started with people singing the African National Anthem—which you know I don't know the words—but I know the melody. (hums African National anthem)—do you know the song—so-- I was like holy shit—this is really about—this is a national—this is the biggest national display of Black nationalism I ever seen— and I've been around Black Nationalist but this is mass-- it's like however many people fits inot that arena as it started with that tone and people weee really in morning—in a kind of a way I had never really seen—so there is more to the story but I rather not tell it—but--on tape.

MJ: Okay—alright[laugh] - No problem

JK: But was everybody from very leftist folks who were on the stage, who were participating in ti to Dorthy Tillman and that sort of range—as sort of-- I was sitting there going man the possibilities around this sort of level of mourning and grief could be channeled into something really positive right now. This is a movement in here-- but I think it was more of an opportunity to mourn and grieve which is fine too.

MJ: Defintely

JK: But I wan't living here when he was alive

MJ: Where were you at that time

JK: Newyork

MJ: You were still in New York at that time

JK: I was here while he was major for a while but O wasn't here during the elction

MJ: Did you find any changes happened in Chiago at that time-- like the politcal sphere

JK: Yeah sure -- I worked at that time-- I was working when I came back—I was working at the --for a while at the at an alternative Highschool in Uptown which was part of the Alternative High school movemtn at the time and so we met with folks who were at alternative High school all over the city we have regular meetings around bench marks and what we were doing and it was because of harold Washington and a level of ability to sort of rise to leadership who would have never have risen to leadership in communitues and programs that would again be able to get resources they weren't getting before.

MJ: Did it affect your activisn, like with ACT-UP

JK: He wasn't, that was prior to Act-UP. What it affected in terms of my activisn was a different understanding of the relationship-- look I gonna be really honest with you --I came out when I was involved with anti-imperilist politics we had a position around voting—we didn't vote, we thought it was—like voting was a colonial—someone like Harold Washington might be seen as a neo-colonial tool—like you don't participate in mainstream politics—you only participate in revolutionary politics—right and I think Harold Washington—what that whole thing for me-- was a real education about the importance of being able to do both and the importance of being able to do both and the importance of
having insider and outsider politics in some relation between the two and the ability of the two to have an influence on each other. I think Harold Washington would have been the first person to say I need these groups on the outside to protest, to come down to City Hall and raise a ruckus. Because if I walk into city council and say I want this thing that's about me. If these groups come and tell about it—they got my back, they are the ones who are gonna push these other politicians and push me into doing what I said I'm gonna do—so I think I started to understand that relationship of insider outsider politics in a different way— a more maturing politics for me.

MJ: I guess my follow up question—not follow up—Leading to Nelson Mandela election what were you feelings about that period.

Well I couldn't believe—look its a funny thing—I really feel like one of these people who does not believe in the cult of personality. I've tried to do this thing about—its nuts about this particular leader, its about the whole thing—I got to tell you when I'm asked that question about, who would you ever want to meet—Let me—I've met a lot of famous people in my life—I have a brother in law whose a film critique so I've met Hollywood stars— I'm like one of those people whose like their just like you and me you shouldn't be impressed with these people—I mean they're just—we all—there are no exceptional people. It's the circumstance that lead us to do exceptional things— Nelson Mandela [laugh] is somebody I have such a huge—I'd got to say he like one person whom I'm like—when they say who would you like to meet or who do you admire most and I said Nelson Mandela is like one of those people for me because of the times that he lives in. He is a revolutionary in my life time who has figured—has had to make compromises and be a leader in more ways— I think he's amazing— the guy—I fell sort of a bad for him actually because I think he's like—he means so much to people at this point—My greatest hope in the last period of time is that he would live to see the World Cup—like I got to the point were I just wanted Nelson Mandela to have the World Cup in his country and live long enough to see the World Cup because I know how much he likes sports—so I want him to have a nice thing to happen in his life—I know that sounds crazy—why—who am I to come up with that for Nelson Mandela— that was my little thing with Nelson [laugh] I just want him to be able to sit at the World Cup games and enjoy a good game but—so what did I think of him—I think he came out of this like extraordinary—The funny thing about Nelson Mandela is he has manged in the mainstream politics public eye to be a freedom fighter—which is what he was—but its kind of that—some how the United States decided they could be okay talking about him now—when we know in fact that he was actively engaged in revolutionary actions and politics that on any given day would put him on a terrorist watch list in the U.S— so world opinion and world—and movement forced that to be true about Nelson Mandela is like this symbol of defeating a racist system—I'm not saying its perfect but he's a symbol of turning a system around—which doesn't happen that often in our lifetime— I think the idea that somebody could come out of prison, endured what he endured and then still be able to lead in a way thats about—we still need to include these people in our lives—who held us as captives—and who does that

MJ: During—I guess—between the 85 and 93 did he really rise to become an icon for—let me rephrase that question—What were your feelings and action Anti-Imperialist or HIV/AIDS of South African experiences with Nelson Mandela and things.

JK: I think he did become an icon in good ways and bad but I think that is true of all leaders Malcom X is an icon in good ways and bad ways. Martin Luther King is an icon in good ways and bad ways—there just men—I think Nelson Mandela probably had the opportunity in different ways like Malcom X and Martin Luther King—I just bringing them up—or Ho Chi Min or—I don't know I'll think of some other—because of the times that he lives in—because of the nature of media and communication and
people's proximity to him in a different way I think has more of an ability to clarify that he is just a man—I think he tries to do a good job of that and he tries to do a good job of that—I kind of think he's a—I don't know him—I've never met him—have you met him.

MJ: No

JK: He's kind of interest—He seems like an interestingly humble dude but I don't know if that's neccesarirly true but that's my impression of him. But I do think he is an icon to a lot of people.

MJ: Just to et into—What were your most challenging and inspiring conversations during—even—What were your during that time during your activism period

JK: Like?

MJ: I would say during your HIV/AIDS, your Anti-Imperilaist involvement with SIU

JK: Well there were so many—I can't—they continue to be challengeing—right—the idea—I don't even know how to pinpoint one—I think this stuff around—who is—how oou—This whole idea of the hierarchy of oppression and when you start talking about the intersectionality of issues—how do you find leadership amongst a complicated—how do you find leadership amongst a complicated—how do you find leadership and clarity around somebody who may have a complicated set of identities or in a group where there is a complicated set of identities or in a group where there is a complicated set of identities and this idea that Audry Lorde talked about the hierarchy of oppression but when you sitting in a room really coming in from different realities—where do you look to for leadership and experience in that—I don't want to use it again—clarity I think that is a huge question—how do you again—how do you sustain lengthy and complicated discussion that lead toward analysis that then lead toward tangible action in day to day solutions for peoples— for people lives—there are the big picture systems and then there's today— I can't get this for family and I need it—or I can't get the health care I need at county because they are back logged systems bad—so how do I do that, compared to how do we get single payer health care and how do you as an artist organize some set of activities toward both of these things because people need something today but they need something bigger years from now—I don't know what to me is like the ongoing challenges about sustaining—the sort of level of strategy in organizing it takes to do the immediate and the future dream.

MJ: Let read another one. How was being active in the movement changed your life in a way.

JK: I think its just been—it just lead me down—being active in—you know—all the way from my sisters early comments to me that opened up my thinking and being aware, just being exposed to places I wouldn't normally have gone to—given where I came from the northwest side of Chicago in a working class neighborhood—white neighborhood—it's just taken me down many many different paths and I don't think I would have gone down and given me a lot of privilege in the sense of just having access to people who I wouldn't normally have access to.

MJ: Okay—How does the spirit of activism with you today.

JK: How does it what

MJ: live with you today
JK: Live with me today—well that a tough one there—Michael (laugh)—well this job I have an amazing job—because I work hear at Crossroads fund and we give money to social justice groups in the Chicago Metropolitan area—so again I'm given the amazing experience to meet people who are trying to think of all these issues and trying to come up with all these answers for their particular issues in their communities—my job is this amazing sort of place where I came into contact with activist—so that's one of the things—I'm less—which is my frustration personally less of an activist myself these days for a variety of reasons that I'm oribabalu not gonna go into on tape but—I see opportunities that allow me to still—luckily know when to show up— if then something—an activity that I want to participate in and so that how—where I'm at right now

MJ: what would you consider to be your biggest contribution to the movement

JK: Well currently right now—it's trying to raise money and increase resources for activism so that's what I do here—try to increase resources—raise money so that some reason—some activist—will have resources to do the work with. So I think that is my current contribution.

MJ: What—I didn't ask this one—what were the music played at eventually

JK: Oh yeah

MJ: This is sort of going back.

JK: Well I remember we had on event about (paper shuffle) the Congo and—God it was some anti-imperilist and myself and we sang that song—which was— I don't even know where it came from but other people will know it and it goes—its a song about imperilism and it comes from Gueinea Bissau—I don't know— it goes (sings) Imperilial— you sing it in rounds (sings) Imperial, Imperial imperial is mun(???) and that's all I can remember—(sings) Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial is mun (?) and we would do this and we would teach everybody the song—there was a song we all use to sing—which cracks my co-worker Jane up-- Janes is from Kenya and she thinks its hysterical cause you know-- it goes(sings)-- The children of Africa—they are determined to be free—og Africa—they are determined to be free—a heavy load, a heavy load, a heavy load and it will take some read strength—a heavy load, a heavy load and it goes on it has all these verses like (sings) we don't care if we go to war— it is for freedom we surely go and it goes on like that. We had these little movement sings we sang. Harriet Tubman a song about Harriet Tubman songs about—from the old days. The old labor days-- like the history of leftist song—I have a very funny stroy—I remember getting arrested and being in jail down at State street-- downtown and we were there over night-- there was like a gaggle of us and this woman O was was in jail woth—who was from our group— we were all in different cells—weren't in jail and thire are all these other women in jail—who are in for what we called social crimes and this woman I am in jail woth whose from my group starts singing this Harriet Tubman song (sings) One night I dreamed I was in slavert about 1850 was the time and all these women who aew like in for procession, drugs or whatever there in for—started going —shut up we hate those songs (laugh) that was really funny and then we-- I mentioned all the songs of the time-- all the popular-- Artist Against Aparthied we play that music you know the music of South Africa, the township- Hi-Ly(???) or what ever it is called and their would be bands that specialize in – we would have them playing—some other African– But much of it— when ever we did like—there would be a lot of singing on buses and stuff-- all the kind of movement songs-- Is that were you were getting at-- You don't know what you getting at (Laugh)

MJ: (???) any information you have—here's one — what carried you through you toughest days of activism
JK: Thats a really tough question-- I think having a real desire to see change made-- you know-- I think I am one of these people who really—somebody could probably a pyscharistriest would analysze me as being-- having some sort of problem or something. I kind of-- I'm one of the people who has to read the newspaper while I'm on vacation cause I would like to know what is going on in the world-- not in an obsessive way-- but well something bad could be happening and we should know about it. I bleive you should have a T.V. Becaue then you can understand what they are saying on the news and that the popular cultural trends are—which we should know about as leftist—I know there are these leftist that think-- you shouldn't have a T.V. Cause it's bad for you but I think you should know what going on in T.V. And have some relationship to it—so you know what regular people think so I tend to be fixated on amybe this perpetual how do we make it better thing.

MJ:What event or person was most influential in you expereine [paper shuffles} -I know you mentioned

JK: I'm sorry an event or person what?

MJ:Most influenceial in your expereinece as an activist

JK: Well a lot of different people from the early days—I mentioned my parents my siter, I had a couple of nuns-- before I had the bad nuns-- I had good nuns-- when I was little kid I had these progressive nuns-- they were great. They said good things in school. They said the right things-- later on I mentioned my friend Ferd-- different people-- informal collectives-- I had people who I studied with over the years, people in ACT-UP who were hugely influential to me. My current partner is hugely influential to me around politcal thinking—collegues here, lots of people-- people I have regular conversation about life (???)-- the people I met in ACT-UP were really struggling around their own issues around HIV trying to broaden their analysis —those were really important examples and people for me to be around.

MJ: Actually can you tell me more about-- I'm not sure if I explored this deeply enough—tell mem ore about ACT-UP- like how the group was organized activties and agendas.

JK: We were organized as the handful of Anti-Imperilist who were doing anti-imperiliast work-- we started having conversation at my friend Ferd house about we need to do something about HIV and Aids and the fact people are being diagnosed people are dying and this-- people are taking about quaritining gays-- people are really talking about-- this is really onna come down on the gay community in a way that is going to be really oppresive-- we need basic services within the gay community that don't exist yet-- So we started talking about that and then we put together a couple of actions got ourselves in the Gay press-- had the acton at the Govenors house-- where all the guys from the gay bars came—started having weekly meeting and then had like any organization had meetings, regular meetings had work groups comittees, started getting involed in national work-- had people who were repreentative who went and did that natinal work. Deos that make sense

MJ:Yes make sense-- How od you feel about Souith africa having the World Cup this year

JK:I am crazy about it – I know its complicated I have been reading it in the paper. You know about the fact so much money is going towards the world cup. The same issue we had here about the Olympics-- I'm happier—This is the contradiction of me I'm happier about-- the World Cupis in South Africa than I am about the Olympics coming to Chicago and I'd proabalu-- if I was living therein South Africa I'd
feel opposite—I think everything I read about Nelson Mandela—he loves sports he really wanted the world cup in South Africa for him and I love soccer and I love the idea people will go to OSUth Africa and be in South Africa at the very basic level spend money in South Africa—Hopefully become more engaged in understanding more about South Africa because they go there—I have no illusion that soccer fans will do that but some might and I hope the African teams do well in the tournament—although Brazil is my favorite team (laugh)

MJ: Is there anything you would like to add

JK: No-- I felt like I went on and on—I appreciate you trying to coral me with your good questions—so thank you for that—I hope I didn’t exhaust you

MJ: No no problem, So I guess this will be wrapping up

JK: Okay