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AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES SILVERSTEIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Charles Silverstein, in Manhattan, New York, on February 18, 2019 with Kate Rizzi. Thank you so much for doing this interview.

Charles Silverstein: You're welcome.

KR: For the record, can you tell me where and when you were born?

CS: April 23, 1935, in Brooklyn.

KR: What do you know about your family history, on your mother's side of the family?

CS: My mother was the oldest of seven children, born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. She was very close to her mother, but her father was a bit of a gambler and so the children never liked the father very much because he didn't support the family. On my mother's side, I can't go back further than that.

KR: How did they end up settling in Newark, New Jersey?

CS: I don't have a clue.

KR: How about on your father's side of the family? What do you know about your father's family history?

CS: Well, my father had two sisters, one that he was very close to and the other one he was not. My father's side is a little complicated because, here I am, Charles Silverstein, and Silverstein is a German name and all of my grandparents came from Russia. How do you get Silverstein from four Russian grandparents? The answer is it's very common, in those days, to change people's names, for a variety of reasons. It's rather complicated, but it got changed because my grandfather on my father's side, according to family history or family mythology, whatever it is, he was the draft dodger, was afraid that if he gave his real name that they would send him back to Russia. So, he adopted the name of the family he rented an apartment from, who were German Jews by the name of Silverstein. That's the story. What the true story is, I have no idea.

KR: What do you know about his draft dodging?

CS: I don't know anything. I only know the stories. My mother also used to tell us he was a captain in the Russian cavalry; that was another story. Of course, that's a bald-faced lie because no Jew in Russia could be even in the army, no less be a captain in the cavalry. There was always a certain protectiveness about the family ancestry, so I can't answer those questions.

KR: How was your family affected, being Russian Jews?

CS: I don't know what you mean, how they were affected?

KR: Did they face any persecution?

CS: I haven't a clue. I only knew one grandparent--that was my mother's father--and he came over here when he was eight. He didn't remember much about Russia, and he was the one that had seven children who he didn't think necessary to support. So, no, I never had a discussion about it. I have no idea. There's lots of historical record of the Jews in Russia and what they had to suffer. I can't even tell you exactly where both sides of the family came from in Russia. The place changed from time to time.

KR: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

CS: I was born in '35, so I have no idea. I have an older brother, and he was born in '28. The depression is on, but, otherwise, it didn't affect us. I think that the reason's because the job my father had was delivering newspapers. That was unaffected by the depression, so he continued to work. The newspaper was a penny or two cents in those days; that, most people could afford. He worked. It didn't affect us very much.

KR: How did your parents end up settling in Brooklyn?

CS: I don't know. [laughter] I was born in Brooklyn. In those days, children didn't have a good geographical sense. [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.]

KR: I will pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

CS: Children didn't have a good geographical sense. Their world was the playground and the streets they lived on. Certainly, we didn't think of going to other cities, no less other countries. I mean, we were in Brooklyn, and Brooklyn was our lives. Under rare circumstances, we could go into the place that was called the city. The city was Manhattan, but we rarely had reason to go into the city. Everything remained on your street and what you did on your street. About other countries, that would be a better the content of a geography class in school. It had no meaning to us besides that.

KR: What neighborhood did you grow up in, in Brooklyn?

CS: East Flatbush. East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Those were the times of the neighborhood schools. You walked to school, always walked to school. We walked to elementary school. We walked to what was then called junior high. In high school, I decided to go to an art school. It was called the School of Industrial Art and that was in Manhattan, but I was already of high school age.

KR: What was your neighborhood like?

CS: It was Jewish and Italian with a smattering of Irish, and that was the neighborhood. What did kids do? They played games. I was in school during the Second World War, and we would play games walking from home to the school or walking from school back home. We had all

sorts of kids games. They're very different than today. Today, for Christmas, you get this surplus of gifts of all sorts of electronic equipment. We didn't have that. We used to play games that you could put together. We had something called packs that used the heel, the discarded heel of a shoe, that you used on the sidewalk, with baseball cards, or because it was the war, the airplane cards or ship cards, whatever. There are a bunch of other games that we played. The interesting thing about children is that they could invent. Our neighborhood invented games, like every neighborhood did. We used to play chestnuts, which was putting a leather thong through a chestnut and attacking another chestnut. I won't go through with the rules; it had all sorts of rules. These are the things that kids did. We played slapball in the street, punchball. We didn't have money for things. No one owned a football or a basketball. You would have to be considered a millionaire in my neighborhood. We had a spauldeen, so that you could play slapball or punchball, that sort of thing. I don't even know whether people know what a spauldeen is anymore. It was a different kind of situation than today. [Editor's Note: The Spalding Company sold the spauldeen, a hollow spongy ball, in five-and-dime stores.]

KR: What do you remember about the war, about World War II?

CS: The most poignant thing I remember about the war is when a neighbor of ours received a telegram that her son was killed. His name was George. I remember him before the war, and he was a very nice kid, obviously, much older than I. When the telegram came and the screams started from upstairs, I remember that quite vividly.

The other thing, all the different kinds of cards connected to the war, or the ration books. We had a ration book, and I think there were tokens or something like that, that when my mother would go to the butcher, she would only be allowed to have a certain amount of meat or a certain amount of something else and you gave in your token and that was that. That's about it.

KR: What do you remember about the end of the war?

CS: Not too much. For some reason, I don't remember much about the end of the war.

KR: You described some of the games that you played in your neighborhood in East Flatbush. Describe overall what your childhood was like.

CS: Not something I would want to relive. I was not good in sports, and that, of course, is a black mark on a boy. I think that also within me were some characteristics that would later come out, in terms of being gay. I don't mean that I was effeminate, I was not, but I just had different values. I remember, for instance, the day a couple of the kids in my neighborhood decided to play football, and there were three of us--they roped me in. One of them actually had a football. I don't know where he got a football. He must have stolen it. They knew some rules, and we played football. It was a total bore to me, but they were having a lot of fun and I couldn't understand why they were having fun because I was not. That's a story you'll hear a lot from gay men. I mean, it's just sort of common, but I don't remember Brooklyn fondly. It was not a good marriage between my mother and father for a variety of reasons, and I think we all suffered because of it.

KR: What other of your values that you mentioned did you hold that you felt that other people did not?

CS: I just know that I was different than the other kids, and I wasn't sure why. It certainly was not a time that I was thinking of sexuality, but I was just different from them and I can't explain how. I had friends. I didn't lack for friends. As I look back, I think today I would've been diagnosed as having ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] because I was a very jumpy kind of kid, hard to sit down and study. That never changed, except the hyper stuff did. Even right through graduate school, [I had] much trouble studying, the problem being able to concentrate on the material while blocking out ambient sound, I could never do that. I never understood people who listened to the stereo while studying. This was a mystery to me because I could not do that. I still can't do that. I would say that even today I suffer from ADHD. I think it's a lifelong thing, but you learn to adjust to it and I did. While the teachers would say to my mother that I was very mischievous, and she would use that word a lot, the fact is I really think I really suffered from ADHD, but there was no sophistication about that sort of thing in education in those days. They didn't know how to handle kids like that.

KR: What schools did you attend for elementary and middle school?

CS: P.S. 235 was my elementary school. We didn't call it middle school; we called it junior high in those days. That was P.S. 135. Both of those were in the neighborhood, and we would walk to school and back.

KR: Are there any teachers or mentors that stick out in your mind?

CS: Yes, some I hated, mostly. I don't think teachers were very well trained in those days, and in elementary school, I had some run-ins with teachers who were just very nasty unnecessarily. I've taught elementary school, much after that, and I taught elementary school for six years. How bad can a kid in school be? I mean, kidnapping, rape, murder--if he doesn't put down his pen when you tell him to or he uses a dirty word, or she. There were a couple of teachers in that school who just didn't understand kids, and I felt that.

Junior high was different. Junior high, I thought the teachers were more sensible and better able to relate. I would say that in junior high, well, from one point view, it was disastrous because that's the grade that [kids] invest themselves in sports. On the other hand, there were things that were humorous and we sort of enjoyed. I'll give you an example. I still remember Mrs. Walsh. She was the English teacher in seventh grade; I guess it would be seventh grade. We used to believe that Mrs. Walsh instinctively knew when some boy in the class had a spontaneous erection, because that's the exact moment she would ask the kid to come to the board to write some very important thing. Of course, the way any kid like that deals with it, he takes a book and covers himself up. All the other boys, of course, know exactly what is going on because it happens to them too, and they're making comments about the book, "Take the book away. What are your reading?" There were some funny things like that.

Then, I went on to high school to study to be a professional photographer. For the life of me, I cannot, at this moment, tell you why I wanted to be a professional photographer. While we lived

in Brooklyn, the school was in Manhattan. I would take the trolley and subway into Manhattan every day to go to school. It was the School of Industrial Art, we called it SIA, and I liked that, SIA. It was a good school for what we were doing, but it didn't have the pretense to academic excellence. We spent half the day on our major and half the day on academics. I went there [and] made friends, some of whom I'm still in contact with today from high school. When I got out, I started in the field of photography, and I found out it was really not for me.

From there, I started to become a teacher, and I went to the State University of New York at New Paltz, where I spent four years. That was very interesting because besides early education, they taught art education, and many of my friends there were majors in art education. I think it contributed to my appreciation of the arts. When I got out of there, I started teaching in Larchmont, which is part of the Mamaroneck school system, where I taught for six years, and that's when I went back to graduate school.

KR: Going back to School of Industrial Art, you did this photography course of study. What were your academic interests at that time?

CS: I didn't have any. My interest was photography. [There were] certain academic courses we [had] to have and the school had them, but I don't think I had any academic interests whatsoever. It was about photography, period. My academic interest came later in life.

KR: Did you do any clubs or extracurricular activities when you were at School of Industrial Art?

CS: Yes. I was a member of the rifle team. That was the only team we had. SIA was housed in old dilapidated Civil War buildings; I mean that literally. It didn't have a gym. It didn't have a swimming pool, and the only team it had was the rifle team. I was on the rifle team [and] eventually became captain of the rifle team. We would occasionally go swimming in the YWCA that was just a couple of blocks away from the school. They had a team-club sort of thing. I would go, I think it was, once a week and I would go there after school and go swimming in the pool and rough housing with the other kids and snapping towels on their asses, as kids do at that age. I enjoyed that, and then afterwards, they had a little punch-and-cookie sort of thing, a social. It was very nice.

KR: Before I go on and ask about your college years, is there anything you want to add about your childhood? Are there any memories that we skipped over?

CS: I think it was in high school that I first fell in love with a boy. Now, those were the days when that was a very painful thing to do. High school kids falling in love with each other, of course, for heterosexuals, this is something that goes on constantly. I mean, the high school is probably the most eroticized environment that there is in the country, but for gay or lesbian kids, that's not so because you would suffer quite a bit. You might be thrown out of school. You'd certainly be beaten up; they'd beat the shit out of you. My falling in love with a boy was very painful. There was no sex. The story is actually banal because it's one that virtually every kid can tell, everyone that at a young age falls in love with someone and for whatever reason can't express it. That is very painful and it was for me, so that's the only other thing.

That continued in college. When I went to college, I spent four years in college, I never had sex with anyone. Fortunately or unfortunately, the school I went to, New Paltz, had a ratio of seven women to every man. It was a heterosexual man's dream [laughter], and all of my friends in Brooklyn, they patted me on the back and said, "Oh, wow, you're going to get laid constantly," little knowing that that's not what I wanted. When I got there, those were times, they were much more restrictive than today. There was even a rule against coed sunbathing. I had lots of women who wanted to date me. Occasionally, I did, but I just sort of suffered with my interest in other guys that could not be expressed.

KR: You wrote, years later, "To suggest that a person comes voluntarily to change their sexual orientation is to ignore the powerful environmental oppression that has been telling him for years that he should change. To grow up in a family where the word homosexual was whispered …"

CS: That is much later. That's about '72 or something like that.

KR: "… To play in a playground and hear the words faggot and queer. To go to church and hear of sin and then to college and hear of illness and finally to the counseling center that promises to cure is hardly to create an environment of freedom and voluntary choice. What brings them into the counseling center is guilt, shame and the loneliness that comes from their secret. If you really wish to help them freely choose, I suggest you first desensitize them to the guilt. After that, let them choose, but not before. I don't know any more than you what would happen, but I think the choice would be more voluntary and free than it is at present " These are very eloquent words, what I consider poetry of oppression. What was your experience that led you to later write this? [Editor's Note: Charles Silverstein wrote this statement in 1972 and delivered this speech at a workshop at the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy (AABT) convention at the Hilton in New York City on October 8, 1972. It was at the same conference that Silverstein met psychologist Gerald Davison for the first time. In 1974, Davison read this speech at the AABT convention in Chicago. The AABT has become known as the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT).]

CS: That was '73-'74, something like that. I was just finishing my Ph.D. at Rutgers, where no one knew that I was gay. Even in graduate school, I was in the closet and don't regret it. There certainly would have been consequences for coming out, but I lived in New York City. In New York City, I had my gay life and my gay-political life, and so people at Rutgers didn't know what I was doing in the city and that's the way I preferred it.

At that time, we had already organized Identity House [in 1971], which was a peer counseling center for gays and lesbians. In '73 was the Institute for Human Identity, and by that time, I had already been asked to be editor of a new journal called the *Journal of Homosexuality.* I had all of these activities and all of this experience working with this rejected population. I was the director of the Institute for Human Identity, which was around the corner by the way. I was doing administrative work. I was doing political work, and I had a good idea what people experienced.

By the time of that presentation, which was before AABT, I can't remember whether I already had my degree or not. I got my degree in '74, but I assume because I was quite open there, and some of my professors at Rutgers were there, I assume I already had my degree or had defended my dissertation. The thing to remember is once you get your union card, which is what I called the Ph.D., they can't throw you out. That was the time that I was most public.

At that program, there were two presentations about homosexuality. This one comes from a panel. It was the first time at the organization that gay people talked about gay life. In the past, it had always been straight people that talked about them, and gays were never represented. So, this was quite revolutionary idea to have this panel. There were three people on the panel. We had a small auditorium, and the auditorium was packed with people from the convention who wanted to hear. That was very good to see so many professionals who wanted to hear a different voice.

KR: What do you remember about that panel? What did you talk about?

CS: I remember those comments. [laughter] I don't remember. I have a copy somewhere. I don't remember exactly. I talked about not making our lives miserable. There were two other people on the panel, and I think it was chaired by Helen Singer Kaplan. Bernice Goodman was another person who spoke and I don't remember the fourth. I've made a lot of presentations. Sometimes, they sort of meld into each other. [Editor's Note: Helen Singer Kaplan (1929-1995) was a pioneering sex therapist. Social worker Bernice Goodman co-founded the Institute for Human Identity (IHI). Goodman and Silverstein were the first two openly gay professionals asked to speak at an AABT convention.]

That was a time when we were fighting for our lives, which is different than today. At that meeting were a lot of people who--that was '73 [1972]--I think I remember why. A lot of people at that association were making presentations about how they're curing homosexuality. I appeared there twice. One was that presentation, which was part of the association, but I was also there at a different meeting to break up the meeting and take it over. One of the treatments that was very common at that time was aversion therapy, and the most important type of aversion therapy is electrical aversion, where a guy gets a shock if he has a sexual response to pictures of naked men, for instance.

I had convinced the Gay Activists Alliance, a radical gay organization, of which I was a member, to zap the convention, and zap was a demonstration. There was someone from Ireland called [Richard] Quinn, who was coming over to make a presentation about his work curing homosexuals with aversion therapy. We decided to zap him, and essentially, what that meant, I walked over to him at the beginning, just before he started presenting, and I introduced myself as a graduate student of psychology, a member of the association and a radical gay man. I said, "We're going to interrupt your presentation. We'll give you ten minutes to speak, and then we're taking over." I said, "Please don't make a fuss because it's going to happen anyway." Now, professionals are big cowards. They're very big cowards. Professional associations, they're easy to manipulate because they all act exactly the same way. They circle the wagons and deny everything, and that gives the underdog, like we were, a certain advantage because you know

how they're going to be. [Editor's Note: The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded in 1969 in New York City.]

In any event, after ten minutes, someone else named Ron Gold got up and said, "We're taking over now," well, whatever he said. Then, some people in the audience were furious, and they started [arguing], which is just what we wanted. When they get furious, what happens is that you start arguing, and arguing becomes dialogue and that was more than we ever had. We wanted them to hear the gays and lesbians who were in our group. [Editor's Note: Ron Gold was a gay rights activist who lived from 1930 to 2017.]

It so happens that also in the room at the time was Bob Spitzer, who was on the Nomenclature Committee of the American Psychiatric Association. He came to us afterwards and said, "Why don't you make a presentation before the Nomenclature Committee about removing homosexuality?" We thought that was a grand idea. Now, I don't know how much you want me to say about all of that and about the progress of that.

KR: I want to hear it all, yes.

CS: Okay. We were from Gay Activists Alliance, GAA. Getting this invitation from Bob Spitzer presented us with an ideological conflict, because the psychiatrists were perceived as the enemy and you do not cooperate with the enemy. This is the ideology. You do not cooperate because if you do so, you will be co-opted by this group and your goals will be watered down. We got this invitation for GAA to make a presentation. If we made a presentation as GAA, we would be violating our own ideology because what you're supposed to do is fight them, not cooperate with them. The board at GAA came out with a novel idea. They decided there would not be a committee of people from GAA. There would be a small group called the Ad Hoc Committee. Now, the Ad Hoc Committee of what? They left that part out. [laughter] That was ingenious. The Ad Hoc Committee would meet with the Nomenclature Committee, so that the onus did not fall on the GAA as cooperating with these horrible people, the psychiatrists.

We were a committee. We did meet. I had conflicts with Ron Gold, who was the chairman of the committee, because Ron wanted a typical gay activist attack upon the psychiatrist and I thought that that was the wrong approach. At each meeting, when I was asked to present my speech, I refused to give it to them. [laughter] I hadn't written it yet, in fact. I wrote it the night before, after having studied diagnostic systems, other diagnostic systems. What I did was write a parody, a satire, of all the absurd things that the American Psychiatric Association had diagnosed, and some of them were embarrassing. There were silly things. At the end, I said, "These are the mistakes that you made before. You're making the mistake. Now, correct it." It seemed to have impressed them, and this came back to us in a number of publications. That was in February. In December of that year, homosexuality, per se, was eliminated from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.* [Editor's Note: On February 8, 1973, Charles Silverstein made his presentation to the Nomenclature Committee of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). In December 1973, the APA decided to change the diagnosis of homosexuality in the second edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-II*). It was later in *DSM-III-R* in 1987 that homosexuality was completely removed as a mental disorder.]

A lot of people misunderstand what happened in '73. They think that homosexuality was removed as a diagnostic category. It wasn't. They decided there were two kinds of homosexuals, those that were ego-syntonic and those who were ego-dystonic. This is all jargon. The ego-dystonic are people who are very unhappy with their homosexuality, and if you got such a person, it was okay to treat them and try to cure them. If a person was ego-syntonic, that means that he was happy about his homosexuality, and it was not a disorder. What I was trying to say in that presentation that you quoted was, "This was absurd. You teach people to suffer so that the distinction between ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic is artificial." They're virtually all going to be ego-dystonic because you make people suffer. Homosexuality completely disappeared in, I think, *DSM IV*, I think, *III* or *IV*.

KR: *III*.

CS: This is *DSM II*. Then, they had *DSM-II S* or *R*, or something. Anyway, so that's what happened.

KR: When homosexuality received a change in diagnosis in 1973, in *DSM-II*, did you feel that was a victory? Was that a small victory on the road to what you saw as eventual progress? How did you feel?

CS: I felt it was a big victory, but the battle wasn't over. See, the Nomenclature Committee and the Board of Directors of the American Psychiatric Association faced an internal problem. That is that their psychiatrists were making a lot of money treating homosexuals, and if they came out with some declaration that homosexuality was no longer a mental disorder, that members would lose a lot of money because gay men--very few women went into therapy for this--gay men wouldn't feel it necessary to be treated for it and therefore, the psychiatrists, particularly the analysts, would lose a fortune. The Board of Directors had to come out with some kind of compromise between the positions of liberal psychiatrists and those that were conservative. As it was, after they made their decision, there was a petition to canvas the membership on whether they approve of this decision by the Board of Directors. There was a vote. There were a group of analysts, and the analysts lost.

KR: I want to talk more about your activism.

CS: Okay.

KR: I want to go back and fill in a few blanks.

CS: Go ahead.

KR: You went to SUNY-New Paltz.

CS: Right.

KR: You studied education and art.

CS: No, I studied early education. I didn't study art. I was exposed to a lot of art. My best friends were all there for art education, but I studied early education.

KR: While you were at New Paltz, did you get involved in any activism on campus?

CS: Yes, the activism on campus was letting us have coed sun bathing. I guess the short answer is no. I can't remember anything like that.

KR: You talked about teaching elementary school for six years. How did you get interested in a career in psychology?

CS: Well, I'd been teaching in Larchmont, enjoying it immensely. I had a very good relationship with the kids and their parents, but I felt I wasn't getting enough for myself, that it was fine to teach kids, but I had some intellectual needs that couldn't be supplied that way. In some ways, it's perfectly natural to go from teaching kids to a different kind of service. I decided to become a psychologist. It wasn't easy because I didn't go to an undergraduate school that prepared you for graduate study in psychology. While I was teaching, I had to make up some courses, which I did, and I was accepted at the City University of New York in clinical psychology, and that's where I went for three years, full time. Then, I failed my comps [comprehensive exams], which I did twice, and that was the end of my career at City College.

The next year, I worked as a psychologist in a hospital, while deciding what to do with myself. I was going to go to England and get a psychology degree there. After I learned what doctoral programs were in England, I decided against it. What I did is apply to Rutgers for a degree in social psychology. I didn't see any sense in retaking clinical courses. I already had them, finished all my coursework, but social psychology is a field that is allied with clinical and I thought that that would be a sensible thing to do. I applied there, and I was admitted in social psych. That's where I finally got my Ph.D.

KR: Why Rutgers?

CS: Well, I think there were [others]; I'm not sure that that was the only school I applied to. I really don't remember, but Rutgers was close enough. At the time, I had a car, a little Volkswagen Bug, and I could be at Rutgers in forty-five minutes from my apartment in Inwood. So, it was very easy. Rutgers was a state university, so the tuition was much different than--I couldn't go to any other City University school, so it would have to be a private school in New York, which would cost a lot in tuition. So, Rutgers, I think, was the obvious choice.

KR: Before you went to Rutgers, did you do a program in Gestalt Therapy?

CS: When the hell did I do that? I don't remember exactly when. I was in a therapy group with Laura Perls, wife of Fritz, and another group with Isadore From, here in New York. Both of them were in the neighborhood, and so I trained in Gestalt Therapy. Just when I did that in relationship to Rutgers, I don't know. It may have been afterwards; I don't know.

KR: You have on your webpage that it was from 1967 to 1969.

CS: It's perfectly possible. That would've been before Rutgers.

KR: Can you say, for the record, what Gestalt Therapy is?

CS: Gestalt Therapy is a form of therapy that uses a therapist who is active in the therapeutic process, in contrast to psychoanalysis, where, at least in the old days, the analyst was supposed to be a blank screen and not say very much. In Gestalt, we're very active. The basis of it is a dynamic one of figure and ground, rather than [Sigmund] Freud's concept of, I think it was called the, economic system [psychic apparatus], I may have this wrong, of id, ego, superego. There are similarities and differences, but the main differences, the acting out of fantasies, the therapist as being very directive about what the patient should do, right in the therapy room, so that they might act out roles and things like that. It was a first sort of role-playing system in therapy.

KR: What was it like studying under Laura Perls and Isadore From?

CS: Well, Laura, she had long since separated from Fritz. Laura was very nice. She was really delightful. We had a therapy group with her. Very interesting, her payment system was, she said, "I don't want to have a lot of accounting. The fee is so much per month whether you come or not." Whether there was a holiday or not, it was same price per month, and in those days, it was reasonable. I don't remember what it was. With Isadore, in some ways, it was a little more intense, because it was a smaller group, [and] he and I would clash occasionally. That seems to be a characteristic of mine that I clash with people. I suppose it's a part of my character that is rebellious. I don't mind who I clash with. Within those clashes are an attempt to dialogue, and I think I had a lot of respect for him and what he went through, being one of the first Gestalt therapists in the country, trained by Fritz. It's a way of saying, "I like you," which may sound strange. I trained with them, and there's no--you don't get a piece of paper. You just get competence or you don't get competence in what you're doing.

KR: During this time, what was going on in your life? You mentioned you lived in Inwood. What was your life like?

CS: I moved to Inwood, when I started studying at City College. I would say the most important thing about my life then was meeting William Bory, who would become my partner for twenty years. He was with me the night I wrote the presentation to the Nomenclature Committee and corrected my grammar. He was a master of language. He was absolutely a master of language. There seemed to be some innate ability he had that he understood language in a way that most of us do not. He understood its structure. Of course, most of just think about translating. He understood what the intention [was].

I often tell the story, we were in London, and we were at the British Museum in the Egyptian area. He saw these letters from Ramesses the Great on clay, and he was so excited he started to translate them to me. He had taught himself ancient hieroglyphics. What happened is that there were other people in the room. They were all like that [watching with wide eyes], because there's someone who understands what the hell he's looking at. [laughter] When he turned

around and he saw all those people listening, he felt insulted and he left the museum and wouldn't come back that day.

I would say the major thing was surviving at City College and my relationship with William, who, of course, continued. He stayed with me through Rutgers and getting my degree and my work in gay liberation and the *Journal of Homosexuality* and some of my books, which he would correct.

KR: What career field was he in?

CS: Through much of the time that we lived together, his career was reading. He would get up in the morning and sit on the couch surrounded by a bunch of books. He would read all day until it was time to go to sleep, and he'd go to sleep. Then, one night, many years later, he said to me, "What kind of retirement plan do you have?" Now, of course, gay liberation didn't have a retirement plan. I said, "I thought it was going to be you." The next day, he went to Fordham and registered. He had studied Russian and Chinese at Queens College. This is obviously a sign of insanity to study those two languages at the same time as an undergraduate. He was doing fine with them, but the last semester he decided to drop out. So, he didn't have a degree. When I told him, "I thought it'd be you," he had to go back to school and get his undergraduate degree, which he did at Fordham. Then, when he finished at Fordham, he decided that he wanted to be a legal aid lawyer. He wanted to be a defense lawyer, because he hated the police. He got his law degree at Rutgers, Rutgers-Newark. He became a lawyer defending the guilty. Each morning, I would kiss him goodbye, and I'd say, "I hope you have a good day and lose." [laughter] He understood. It was a joke between us.

KR: What was the gay community like in New York City in the late 1960s?

CS: Well, you have to remember that I didn't come out until later. It was a fractured community. It was one that took place in the dark. People would go to various sexual venues to have sex, places like parks. There were a few bars, but all the bars were controlled by the mafia. It was a terrible time. There was also entrapment. The fact of the matter is [that] while we can't put a figure to it, clearly, most of the people who were gay, who were lesbian were not out. When I say not out, have dated and had sex. So, it was a dreadful time.

I was not at the Stonewall. I don't know where I was. Well, I was in Inwood. I was in psychoanalysis to be cured. I was in psychoanalysis a total of seven years, and I was probably thirty, thirty-one before I did anything that was gay. I had my own experience, my own problems, that I could talk about in that presentation. Before I came out, I was not very brave. When I came out, I came out all the way, not just sexually but politically. [Editor's Note: On June 28, 1969, New York City Police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village that was owned by the Genovese crime family. As the police arrested over a dozen people and beat one patron, the crowd outside of the Stonewall grew, until patrons and locals began rioting in protest of ongoing police harassment. The rioting continued for the next five days, galvanizing support for the gay rights movement. The so-called Stonewall Riots were a defining moment in the struggle for equality waged by members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and gender non-conforming (LGBTQ+) communities.]

Also--and this is something that is not appreciated by a lot of people when they talk about the social movements that occurred--I was an advocate for the student rebellion against the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was very important, and the importance is that there were a group of students all around the country who organized and fought against the Vietnam War. I was one of the leaders in New Jersey in fighting against the Vietnam War. We believed then, and I still believe, it was immoral. We had no business being there, and only bad things could come of it.

Now, to take you back in that history, Johnson decided not to run or re-run for president. We believed, right or wrongly, that we were the influence to get him to decide not to run, so that from our point of view, we had changed policy in this country. It was from those leaders against the Vietnam War that the women's movement, the black movement and then the gay movement. A lot of the leaders I met in New York, the gay leaders, already had experience fighting against oppression by being leaders in the Vietnam War. That was our training ground. That's where we learned how to fight. [Editor's Note: Lyndon B. Johnson served as the vice president in the administration of President John F. Kennedy. Johnson took the oath of office and became president on November 22, 1963, after the assassination of Kennedy. In 1964, Johnson won a landslide victory over Republican Barry Goldwater. Under the Johnson administration, American involvement in the Vietnam War escalated. On March 31, 1968, Johnson announced on live television that he would not seek reelection.]

KR: Anti-Vietnam War activism was your first activism that you engaged in.

CS: And very heavily into it.

KR: You said you were a leader of anti-Vietnam War activism in New Jersey.

CS: In New Jersey, right.

KR: Was that at Rutgers?

CS: That was at Rutgers.

KR: Talk about your activism and what you did, some of the protests, some of the other leaders.

CS: There were three of us at Rutgers who got together to fight against the Vietnam War, and we were able to secure a small building for graduate students that was right next to the Student Center. This building was--we used it as our office and for activities. It was from there that we organized demonstrations. We had immediate contact with Rutgers Law School students, so that when any of our people were arrested by police, we had a tie line, so a direct line to Newark, so that we could talk to law students who would advise us on things to do, give us information about the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union]. We would have people who would actually go as observers to demonstrations. It was that sort of thing. Of course, we had demonstrations on campus.

There was one event where the governor was going to bring all the schools together and representatives from all the schools in New Jersey for a meeting with him where he was going to explain why the Vietnam War was a good idea. When we found that out, we immediately--we really had balls when it comes down to it--we contacted representatives from all the schools, and we had the meeting at Rutgers. You have to understand, the meeting with the governor was the next day. We got everyone together, and we wrote out a series of demands. Demands were very popular in those days. Also, the system by which I would get up, no matter who was called on, we were going to stock the audience with our people and whoever was going to call on was going to give the floor to me and then I would read the demands, all of that. So, all of that worked, and it completely undercut anything the governor--I don't even remember who the governor was--it completely undercut whatever the governor wanted to say. We took over, but we were pretty tired. We were up all night writing out this shit. [Editor's Note: In May 1970, a meeting was held in Trenton between New Jersey Governor William T. Cahill and two hundred student leaders. *The New York Times* reported on this event on May 16, 1970 in an article entitled "Cahill Terms an Exchange on Students 'Educational'" by Frank J. Prial.]

In many ways, there were a lot of fun things that we did, and successfully fighting the system made us feel good. I don't think that could happen today. I think that students are too self-obsessed, self-absorbed, and they don't have the same feelings that they have to do something to change society. Some stuff about gender and sexual harassment and stuff like that, I'm not putting that down. As for changing the country, as for standing up and, "Why did we go into Iraq? What was the point?" you don't get much of that. You get some of it, but not as much as you did in those days. I think that students today are too interested in monetary issues about their graduating. Maybe I'm an old fogey; I'm not giving them enough credit.

KR: This sounds like your anti-Vietnam War activism was graduate-student centered.

CS: Yes. Well, that was our headquarters because we had offices and phones to use and mimeograph machines or whatever the hell we used then. We were supported by some officials at the school, of course. That's where we organized all these things, and there was always at least one of us there all the time. A lot of students got arrested and beaten up by cops in those days. It was the Vietnam War was very popular amongst a certain segment of the population, just like Trump is very popular with a certain segment of the population today. We needed to deal with--some guy would get arrested by the cops and we had to get lawyers there to deal with the legal system. It really made a difference. If you don't have legal support for yourself, the system has a way of treating you badly. We saw guys that came to court and had bruises and whatever; they got them in jail by the cops.

KR: Do you happen to recall the name of your organization at Rutgers?

CS: Yes, I do. The Mobe. We called it the Mobe, M-O-B-E, which represented something vaguely about Mobilization Against the War or something, but we just used Mobe. It was the Mobe. Everybody knew what that was, except science students. They didn't know anything. [Editor's Note: The National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam was known as the Mobe.]

KR: What other protests stand out in your mind that you did on Rutgers campus?

CS: That's about it.

KR: Did you travel?

CS: At Rutgers? Where would I have had the money to travel? I don't think so. I have done a great deal of travel in my life, but I think that almost all of it is after I got my degree. Now, that's not exactly true. I went to Europe. My first time in Europe was, I think, 1969. No, wait a minute. It was when I was at Rutgers. I spent six weeks in Europe, and it was my first trip to Europe. Everything was exciting. I came back in this wonderful mood and remember the first meeting of staff and graduate students in social psychology, feeling wonderful, feeling at one with the world, only to find that everybody else was exactly the same as when I left. They were, at the time, they were fighting over, the faculty was saying, "Students should put more into the coffee money than they're putting right now." I mean, this was the subject of the staff-student meeting. There was a coffee machine, and I think students paid fifty cents per week or per month and the faculty paid a dollar. The faculty were arguing that the students drink more coffee than the faculty. Therefore, the students should pay [more], and I'm listening to this. So, I was terribly disappointed, but I think that's the first big trip I made. Yes, it was then. I was going to go skiing. I did go skiing. I went from skiing in Austria and then went to Sicily and spent two weeks in Sicily. That started my love with southern Italy and with Sicily. I've been to Italy many times, and I particularly like Sicily. Because I'm Jewish, I don't have the same association, see, like friends who are Italian whose family came from Sicily and that's low class and mafia and all that sort of thing and they don't want to go back because of that, but I'm not Italian. To me, it was just a new place to go, and I had a wonderful time. I was there last year. I like to travel. All the artwork that you'll see around the apartment are things I bought in foreign travel.

KR: What was your course of study like at Rutgers in social psychology?

CS: I can't remember--it was so long ago--the names of the courses. Social psychology looks at behavior in a different way than clinical does. Social psych looks at the social processes that go on that influence people's behavior, so it's different than the standard clinical point of view. I went into social because I thought it would be a good combination with clinical, but I don't remember that much about it. I had trouble with some people. At the time, Rutgers was divided into schools. It still is now, but [it was] Rutgers College, Livingston College ...

KR: Douglass College, University College.

CS: Douglass were women, right, University [College]. It didn't have a graduate building. It does now. It didn't have a graduate physical institution. When I was interviewing for admittance to Rutgers, I met someone who said he was the chairman of the psychology department. What the hell do I know that there are six different chairmens of psychology? I didn't know any of that. I mean, here was this man, I was in his office. I believed him. He and I got along, and he admitted me. [Editor's Note: During the federated college period at Rutgers-New Brunswick of the 1960s and 1970s, each of the undergraduate colleges, Rutgers College, Douglass College, University College and Livingston College, had its own psychology department. Graduate

education emanated from the college departments. The federated period lasted until 1981, when the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) formed by consolidating the departments of each of the colleges. (For more information, consult Seymour Rosenberg's "A History of Psychology at Rutgers University")]

A couple days later, I get a phone call from a secretary who says, "Dr. Krauss would like to see you. Will you come in today at the following time?" Now, the guy who I had interviewed with was named [Peter] Suedfeld. Here this guy [Robert] Krauss is calling me in. "Who is Dr. Krauss?" I had no idea. Dr. Krauss. Suedfeld was at University College, and Krauss was at Livingston, but first I had to find Livingston College.

I get into the office, and you have to imagine this. Because of a broken leg, I was on crutches. I walk into this man Krauss' room on my crutches, and he had polio, so he had crutches. Here were these two people with crutches in this room. I sit down. I knew he was someone important, because he had a big office with windows. He has windows. It's obviously more important if he has two windows, my god, exceeded only if he has a rubber plant. So, I sit down, and he says to me, "I want to talk to you, Mister …" he looks down to see what my name is, "Silverstein." I have no idea who he is, and these are virtually a quote, he said, "I didn't know that you were being considered for admission here, and if I had known, I wouldn't allow it, and I'm going to get rid of you just as soon as I can." I still didn't know who he was, [laughter] and here this man is threatening me. He tells me, "I worked out a program for you for your first semester," and he hands to me this list of courses I'm supposed to take. He said, "You're going to take the comprehensives the first time they're offered." I said, "Well, when's the next time they're offered." He said, "In three weeks." I am totally thrown. I have no idea. I don't know why this man hates me. I've never met him.

What do I do? I get back in my car, and I drive over to the University College to see Suedfeld. He laughs. He said, "No, he can't make you take that." I said, "What's this about?" It turned out these two men hated each other. Suedfeld was head of the University College group, and Krauss was head of the Livingston College group and also director of the social psychology program. I didn't know there was such a thing called the director, that there was someone over the chairman.

In any event, what happened at that point is that Krauss, who was devoted to getting rid of me, and Suedfeld, who was devoted toward keeping me, so I found myself in a position where I had to be on the Suedfeld side of the conflict. I didn't want to be on anyone's side. I had no choice. He became my defender. He was my rabbi, so to speak. That's the way it went until I passed my comps. Then, I went into Krauss' office, and I called him every filthy name that I could think of. [laughter] I told him what a son of a bitch he was for doing that. He didn't get upset at me about that. I can't say we were ever friends. Anyway, to do that to a student, that was awful.

Besides that, I ran graduate student group therapy and stuff like that there, and that was good. Because of that experience, I don't have good feelings about Rutgers. That was tough.

KR: Was Suedfeld much of a mentor to you?

CS: Yes, he had to be, and he was the chairman of my dissertation. He had certain theories that he needed graduate students to do research about, and I, at that point, had to do my dissertation with him. Only a tenured faculty member could be the chair of a dissertation, and so it had to come from a University College person and he was the only tenured person at the time. He was my protector, so of course I did it.

KR: What did you do your dissertation on?

CS: It was the effect of depravation, sleep deprivation, on information processing theory, long and complicated, twelve groups, eight of which were control groups. It was with Suedfeld. I can't say I was terribly interested in it. It doesn't make any difference. He had to be my chairman, because, at that point, the University College people couldn't do anything. Then, I did a study and got my degree and began working in gay liberation here in New York in organizations. Pete [Suedfeld] tried to publish his paper. Of course, his name had to go on it. This is something that goes on in graduate study. It would be Silverstein and Suedfeld. He contacted me and said that the paper needed further analysis and wanted me to do whatever re-analysis. Those were the days of IBM cards. We had thousands of IBM cards. I'd thrown them away, and I said, "I can't do it." He got very pissed off. I said, "Look, Pete, I worked for you, did everything I had to do for my degree. Now, I have a different life. I have different goals and I'm working on these goals," and he hated me for that. He was furious. *C'est la vie* [that's life].

KR: At the time that you were at Rutgers, there was a budding gay rights movement. The Student Homophile League was founded by an undergrad, Lionel Cuffie. What do you remember about the gay rights movement at Rutgers?

CS: Not much. They were all undergraduates. I did volunteer to run--I don't remember whether it was a coming-out group or a therapy group for them for a certain number of sessions and I did that. The odd thing is I hadn't come out yet, I don't think. I'm not sure, but I'm sure I told them that I was gay. I did that. There weren't a lot of people in that group. The ones that were there were very loyal to it, but there weren't a lot of people because it was not, those were the days, it was not a good environment to come out. They would certainly gossip about others students or faculty members who they suspected were gay, and I know for a fact that a number of them were. I found this out afterwards. One of the nice things about it is that they were supported by the student--I mean, there were recognized organizations. They were a recognized organization. They had the same rights as every other one, but because of the times, it remained very small. I do remember, in my last year, their having one or two dances at what was then was the graduate center. That's the place where we used to work organizing the Mobe. There were a couple of dances there, and that was nice. In those days, it would have been very brave to do something like that. I cannot for the life of me remember if I went to any of them. Not surprisingly, they were undergraduates that did that, not graduate students.

KR: Did you know any of the undergraduates?

CS: Did I know them? I don't remember how I made contact with--there's the small gay group, and, of course, I knew some of them, but I only knew people who were in the group who came. I wasn't involved for that long, I think only because of the demands of the graduate program. That

was very brave for kids to do that. The graduate students, being a little bit older or a little more timid, and one of the things you do find is that the gay and lesbian people that you talk to, the older they are, the more cautious they are. I worked with Columbia students in my practice, and they're quite open about everything. You could ask them anything. You don't have to ask them, they'll tell you what they want to know or not. That's very different than, say, their parents or certainly my generation of people, who were secret about the things they do, the wishes they have. It's very different with kids today, and it's a wonderful change.

KR: What was your first involvement with gay liberation in New York City?

CS: It was Identity House. I cannot for the life of me remember whether that came before GAA, no, it couldn't have. GAA would have to have been the first one, Gay Activists Alliance, and then Identify House very soon afterwards. GAA was a political radical gay group. Identity House was a group of volunteers; everybody was a volunteer, devoted towards service. As groups, they were very different. GAA offered peer counseling on West 28th Street in the rectory of the Church of the Holy Apostles.

Two years later, there was a political split [at Identity House]. This is so true of all left-wing organizations, all right-wing organizations, too. You get a group of people together, and there's a saying Jews have, "You get two Jews together, you get three synagogues." They each have to have their own, and then two of them might go if they want. So, you get these political splits, and we had a serious political split at Identity House. The split was between professionals and non-professionals, and the particular issue was that the peers wanted to work as therapists and be paid without getting the proper training. The few professionals that were there, me, Bernice, were against that. We wanted, "Go back to school and get your training and your license." This became so acute that we decided that we had to leave.

We left, and we organized the Institute for Human Identity. I hate that word institute. That was staffed by licensed therapists. It opened around the corner, on 83rd and West End. It was open five or six days a week. We had a secretary. Gay and lesbian therapists volunteered time--they usually volunteered three hours a week--to work at IHI and see people in need, with all the money going toward the organization. No one got paid. I was there I don't know how many years, and then it passed to someone else because I was getting paid but so little money, I couldn't support myself. So, I had to do something else besides that. In any event, IHI still exists today. It's on 26th Street. It has a large staff of people. Identity House is still around, but I don't know just what they're doing. What was your original question?

KR: To ask you about the IHI, how did you go about founding it originally?

CS: Well, what we did is we found someone, I don't know remember how we found him, who was willing to give us some money to get started. His name was Steve Temmer. He would give us some funds to get a place, be able to put the deposit in whatever. We're not talking about big money. It was probably around five thousand dollars or something like that, but it was enough to get us started. We looked for places and finally found this place on the Upper West Side that had enough room so we could use them as a therapy rooms. William and I slept in one of the

bedrooms. That was okay for a while, but, obviously, you want to have your own place. So, we got out of there.

KR: What were some challenges at the Institute for Human Identity in those early years?

CS: Well, money. Money was the prevailing issue, and it always is in organizations like that. We had a guy who was our secretary or whatever, and he got a hundred dollars a week. I got a hundred dollars a week. It's very hard to live on money like that. So, money was the issue.

We found that we opened June 1st, I remember that, and by the end of June, all of our therapy hours were taken because this was a place that didn't say, "Come in because we're going to cure you." We said, "This is a place you should come in because we're going to deal with the problems that you have." No other therapy group had made such a statement, and, of course, there were lots of people that wanted that and we were completely booked up.

Besides money and staffing, I would say we really didn't have any trouble. Why the landlord gave us the place, I don't know. I don't know what lies we told them. We were completely booked up, and I think we had Saturday hours at one point. I'm not sure. It was just money. We received non-profit status, and we were 501(c)(3) organization. So, people could make contributions to us and take it off their income tax, but we couldn't find many people who wanted to make contributions to us, not in those days. It's very different today. I think that people were simply too frightened. Now, one of the reasons it was called Institute for Human Identity was to get the word sex out of the name and certainly homo out of the name, but even with a tepid name like that, we couldn't get contributions. We had a party, a fundraising party. We invited some businessmen in, and at the end of the party, one person had promised to give us twenty-five dollars. He never did. [laughter] So, it turns out the party was loss. Today, it's very different. Service organizations, you take GMHC, or you take the community center downtown or Callen-Lorde, they have piles of money and they get government grants and things like that. No one had a government grant. They would never give a government grant to us. [Editor's Note: GMHC is an organization dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and advocacy. Callen-Lorde is a health care organization that is focused on LGBTQ communities.]

KR: I wanted to ask you something to follow up on something you said before. You mentioned that you went through psychoanalysis for seven years. What were your experiences? Did you go through aversion or conversion therapy?

CS: Very few people went through aversion therapy. Mostly, aversion therapy was part of studies that were done by researchers. It was not a treatment that was for the general population. This would be a matter of mostly college students being subjected to various forms of aversion therapy because the study was being done in that college. Most of the therapy that was going on to try to convert people was standard psychoanalysis, and that's what I did. I went to be cured of my homosexuality, and, as I said, I was in psychoanalysis for seven years. I would have relationships with women, but they were fraudulent and it's really too bad because they were very nice women. They didn't know that in a sense they were pawns to this unfortunate system, where I was going to therapy and the therapist wanted me to go with women under the

misapplication that if a gay man goes to bed with a woman that he'll be cured. That has nothing to do with it. It has to do with his romantic and sexual interest in men.

One day, that year after I got thrown out of City College, I was a staff psychologist at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx, and I was over a colleagues house, who was having a party. Her husband was writing an article about sex ads in some of the weird newspapers on the left, like *Screw* and *EVO, East Village Other*. I started reading all these ads, and I started to go nuts, reading about all these juicy things people wanted to do to each other. I said, "I've got to do something." I excused myself. I went home and showered. I was still on crutches and drove downtown to the Village because I knew there were gay bars in the Village. After I parked the car and got out, me and my crutches, I realized I didn't know where they were. [laughter] I had no idea where there's a gay bar. In any event, I found Julius' and that's where I met someone and enticed him home with good pot. That's where I had my first sexual experience, crutches and all and a cast all the way up to my hip, and I had a wonderful time.

Between that and participating with the Gay Activists Alliance, that's how I came out. It was really GAA. Many people will tell you the same thing, that GAA sort of saved their lives because it was a joyous sort of thing. One of the things that was making gay people so depressed was the idea that society kept them from each other, which was one of the reasons we came out against individual therapy. At the firehouse, there was a collection of hundreds of people. Sometimes, at the dances, we'd get over a thousand and this sense of unity and strength, and you found out what other gay people were like and they weren't like what the books said. This fellow, his name was Don, the first one, and he was very sweet, very nice. [Editor's Note: The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) used a former firehouse at 99 Wooster Street in SoHo as its headquarters from 1971 to 1974.]

KR: What was it like when you came out to your family?

CS: This was bizarre. My father had already passed away. It was, I think, early '74. It had to be early '74. I was director of the Institute for Human Identity, and they wanted to run a *60 Minutes* program on the nomenclature change. Because of that, they had to interview me. At the same time, my mother, who was living in Miami, was coming up for the annual pilgrimage to her sons, and she was going to stay with me while she came to New York. It just so happened that the *60 Minutes* crew was coming on the same day as she was. She came in. She arrived late. I knew the *60 Minutes* crew was going to arrive soon, and I told her that *60 Minutes* was here to interview me. She said, "Well, what are they going to interview you about?" I said, "About homosexuality." She said, "Why are they going to interview you?" I said, "Because I'm a homosexual." She gasped, and the door opened and cameras were schlepped in and huge cables, completely taking over the room. My mother walked out, of course. [Editor's Note: *60 Minutes* is a CBS investigative news television program that first aired in 1968.]

Barbara Gittings was also there because Barbara was very important and very successful in the movement and really a nice person. My mother decided to go over to Barbara and say--oh, I know what it was. Barbara went over to her and said, "You must be Mrs. Silverstein because I see the resemblance," and this was typical Barbara. Barbara always was very good at forming some kind of emotional bridge with another person. The error she made is that my mother's

name was not Silverstein, it was Karfield. She had remarried. In any event, my mother responded by saying, "Are you a lesbian?" [laughter] So, Barbara said, "Yes." My mother said, "Well, you're sick, too." My mother wasn't shy. What eventually happened was my mother said, "I'm not going to put up with this. I'm going to your brother's house in New Jersey." So, she packed her bags and went to my brother's house, much to his chagrin. That was the day the *60 Minutes* crew arrived, and it was absolutely bizarre. [Editor's Note: Barbara Gittings (1932-2007) was a pioneering activist for LGBTQ equality.]

Afterwards, [my mother] became good friends with my lover William. She liked him. That was mostly because he listened to her complaining, whereas I wouldn't do that anymore. They had bonded on that. So, that's *60 Minutes*.

KR: The CBS news program *60 Minutes* interviewed you.

CS: Yes.

KR: What was that like, and what was it like when it aired?

CS: I actually have a copy. There were two different sessions, one in my office and then I went down to their office to be interviewed, I think, by Morley Safer. Virtually anything they would say was good because it was publicity, because it was throwing light on the subject that always had been kept in the dark. What they did, I think, was something fair. They wanted to present all sides of the issue, about why homosexuality was and wasn't a mental disorder. They interviewed both me and Ron Gold, who was at GAA as well, and I think they put in a good clip of the two of us. I was quite happy about the thing.

My mother, back at her condominium, when I told her when the *60 Minute* clip was going to air, by that time, she had become accustomed to the whole thing and she told all her girlfriends to watch *60 Minutes*. *60 Minutes* was one of her favorite programs, but now her son the doctor was now going to be on television and she was very thrilled about that. She didn't care about the homosexuality thing.

KR: You mentioned the firehouse before and people coming together. What does the firehouse mean?

CS: It was [the GAA headquarters] on Wooster Street. It was a fire station, a building with a bunch of floors and where they used to keep the firetrucks. Somehow, I don't know how, a bunch of guys who had been in GLF [Gay Liberation Front] were unsatisfied with it and wanted to organize an organization devoted solely toward civil rights for gay people. Somehow, they got the money to rent an old firehouse that was owned by some man. I have no knowledge of how they arranged that, and the firehouse I think it was 80 Wooster Street. It was this building that was a firehouse, and so we just called it the firehouse. We didn't give it another name. [laughter] It was the firehouse. That's where, I mean, you have this building of four floors, and the Saturday night dances were held there on the first floor. The second floor is where we used to serve coffee and things, and there were some old beaten up couches and chairs where people

could schmooze. The third floor was where there were offices for various executives, whoever the president was and various officers. The fourth floor, I think, was just junk.

It was very important because there were meetings that were held. Were they held every week, every two weeks? Something like that. At the meetings, that's where policy was decided. There was an executive committee of officers. Everything worked on the basis of Robert's Rules and procedure, which broke down often, but the executive committee was very business-like. There were a bunch of committees that did various things, like Ron Gold was the chairman of PR [Public Relations] Committee. He had spent a life in public relations. So, there were people there who knew how to write press releases, and people knew how to make contact with other correspondents and with police and various city agencies and things like that. It was really more professionally run than a lot of people are aware. We weren't just a bunch of crazies in the street. We were a bunch of crazies in the street, but we're much more and things were very highly organized. There was even a political action committee. It wasn't called that. I forget what it was called, but demonstrations had to be organized by them. They would plan it out very carefully.

We were fighting for a civil rights ordinance in New York, and there were people on the City Council that were against it. I remember the chairman of that committee was Saul Sharison. We decided to wake up his neighborhood. All of this had been arranged in advance. After a dance, everybody, over a thousand people, went to Saul Sharison's neighborhood. Now, dances ended at 1 a.m. We walked through his neighborhood. It had to take an hour to get there. The idea was for a thousand guys be standing in the streets shouting gay slogans and wake up the neighborhood. Some guys went in with stickers and put it all over the lobby. Now, Saul Sharison, it turns out, was not in the city that day, but it didn't make any difference. We wanted to wake up the whole neighborhood. [Editor's Note: On September 30, 1971, members of the GAA protested outside of Councilman Saul Sharison's home.]

Well, what happens when you have a thousand guys in the street screaming? You get police. Now, you see, the police coming in is a problem because if you only have the demonstrators and the police, they're going to beat the shit out of you. Whenever we had a demonstration and certainly with that one, a press release would have gone out to all the media in New York to tell them about the demonstration, what it's for and where it will be and what time, because it was very important for photographers to be there. If you had the photographers there, the police would not beat people up because there would be pictures of it. I remember, [at] that particular demonstration, there was something we called the Suicide Squad, our terms were very vivid, and the Suicide Squad, the cops put up some, you know those barricades they put together, like horses and then a piece on top, and there was a group of guys that were going to jump over the barricade. On the sides of the barricade would be reporters and photographers to take pictures of these gay guys jumping over the barricade, and at the other side of the barricade would be the cops who would then [say], "You're under arrest." Now, we were doing what we wanted, which was to get publicity. The photographers and correspondents got what they want, pictures for the newspapers, and the police got what they wanted, showing that they would arrest lawbreakers. Then, everyone said goodbye. The guys who were arrested were released. The photographers got their pictures. That was the Suicide Squad. You had to have publicity. If you don't have publicity, it didn't happen. I probably over-answered your question.

KR: No, thank you. When did you start to take your activism into your career field?

CS: Virtually immediately with Identity House. I had not yet completed my Ph.D., but it was immediate. It was a natural. It was doing what I wanted. As you might expect, there was a lot of organizing that had to be done, and I used to enjoy that, not so today.

KR: At that early stage of the gay liberation movement, when you were working with the Identity House, what were you thinking you could actually accomplish in changing the paradigm in the psychiatric community? What were you hoping to accomplish at that point?

CS: We wanted to eliminate homosexuality as a mental disorder, period. That's not exactly true. We also wanted civil rights legislation in New York. We did not want people thrown out of their apartments or have apartments refused to them because they were gay. We wanted to challenge the law that said that it was against the law to serve a drink to a homosexual. There were probably some other things too, but the nomenclature was the most important. The feeling was that there are gatekeepers of social values in society and that psychiatrists was one of those gatekeepers, and if we could get them to change, that we can then go about and fight laws against homosexuality. That's what happened.

[In 2003], the sodomy case where the Supreme Court held that sodomy laws were unconstitutional, a terribly important issue. What happened [was that] the cop came into an apartment concerning some guy and noticed that two guys were romantically involved in the bedroom, and so he arrested them. They were accused of sodomy, and that was the case that went to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court said that these laws were unconstitutional. We saw that case as being directly influenced by eliminating homosexuality as a disorder. Step by step, it went to the marriage equality, which some of us think is not such a good idea. [Editor's Note: In *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), the Supreme Court ruled that a Texas anti-sodomy law was unconstitutional based on the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of privacy and liberty. In *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), the Supreme Court ruled that the due process clause and equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed same-sex couples the right to marry.]

At that time of GAA, the ideology of the day was that homosexuals are not like heterosexuals, and we don't want to be like you. We are different, equal but different, and that marriage was an example of a patriarchal, paternalistic system that we did not want to participate in. When we go back to the '70s, no one wanted to get married because we didn't want to be part of that patriarchal system. It was the civil rights agenda versus the assimilationist agenda, and the civil rights agenda was a matter of changing laws and fighting for rights. The assimilationist agenda was exactly as it says, to assimilate into and be part of this patriarchal, paternalistic system. What happens in this battle, the assimilationist have won, as it always does. In every social movement, you get a battle between those who have a radical point of view and those that have a moderate point of view and they hate each other, but eventually the American system is such that all movement moves to the middle.

Now, we have what is in our country a system where homosexuals are accepted. Of course, they're now called LBGT. I refuse to add any letters after T. I will not. We're now this big

combined group. We can get married. Of course, the two people most in favor of gay marriage are caterers and divorce lawyers, and they're making a bundle, both of them. William and I would never have thought of getting married, but now that issue was settled. The assimilationist agenda has completely won, and guys and women are getting married all over the place. Lesbians are having babies by the bucket, usually with sperm from male friends, and the gay men are adopting children, all over the place. Is that good? It depends on your point of view. The Hasidic Jew says Silverstein's not a Jew. He doesn't wear a yarmulke; he doesn't go to *shul* [synagogue]. It's part of the struggle of all groups in social change. Gay people can be just as horrible as straight people. That's one of the things that's been proven.

KR: I want to ask you about your interaction with Gerry Davidson, the leading proponent and practitioner of conversion therapy.

CS: He was not the leading proponent. He never was. Gerry did one study, and it was not about homosexuality. It was trying to cure a guy--this is when he was at Stony Brook--cure a guy of sadistic fantasies. Gerry used a different system than aversion therapy, which came to be called *Playboy* therapy. Being a behaviorist, what he wanted to do was instead of punishing a negative response, he wanted to complement a positive response. Now, the idea of *Playboy* therapy was you get a guy to be looking at pictures, maybe videos--I don't remember what he used--of gay men having sex and masturbating at the same time, but right before he was going to ejaculate put in pictures of women, so you ejaculate while looking at a woman or a woman having sex with a man, whatever it was, under the pretty naïve assumption that that would be, in the jargon, a positive reinforcer and it would get rid of the bad responses. He didn't do a study trying to cure homosexuals but talked about it. For some reason, it became very famous, this *Playboy* therapy, because I think he gave them copies of *Playboy* to read, big bosoms, women, which were rather mild by comparison to what we have today. [laughter]

He was doing this, and then we met at an AABT convention. It was the same convention [in 1972] that I gave that speech, and we had the zap. It was here in New York at the Hilton. A former student of his told me about him and what he was doing, and so I wanted to meet him. My approach has always been to try to make contact with someone who's got a contrary point of view before I start attacking him. Gerry had a small session--and it's where he talked about *Playboy* therapy--I went up at the end of the session to meet him. I introduced myself, and he said, "Oh, yes, I know about you." We talked for a few minutes, and I don't even remember what happened. Gerry remembers better than I do exactly what happened. The point is we started to become friends, and we talked about the issues. He says that he had to catch a train and missed it and had time on his hands, so he came back to the convention and then went to this large meeting, where there was this panel that I spoke and where I spoke those words. He was very touched by it, and he started to rethink what he was doing.

Since you've obviously done your homework, you probably know he was elected president of the association. In his presidential address, he came out against trying to convert homosexuals, not on therapeutic grounds but on moral grounds. No one had ever said that before. He's talked a lot about that meeting. I know beforehand, we had had lunch one day, and he told me what he was going to do. I said to him, "You know you're going to pay a price. Some people are going to think that you're gay, that's why you're doing it and you were in the closet. People will think all

sorts of thing but that you'll become an untouchable." He says that afterwards he didn't have any problems, except that at one convention, a man came over, a colleague, and kissed him on the cheek. It really pissed Gerry off, and Gerry said, "Screw you." [laughter] He didn't say, "Screw you." He said, "Fuck you." He says no other things happened to him. I know that with the case of Bob Spitzer, who was at APA at the time, he helped write the change about homosexuality that lots of his colleagues questioned whether he was in the closet himself. [Editor's Note: Gerald Davison is a psychologist and professor. In 1973, Davison became the president of the AABT. At the AABT convention in Chicago in 1974, Davison delivered a speech in which he read Charles Silverstein's statement first given at the AABT convention at the New York Hilton in 1972. Davison and Silverstein are both featured in the episode "Dr. Davison and the Gay Cure" in the Radiolab podcast *UnErased*.]

KR: That you were able to get Gerry Davison to change his mind, to declare that what the whole psychiatric community was doing was immoral, do you think it is amazing that you were able to accomplish that?

CS: Gerry was not the only person at AABT that had such views. You have to remember, they were different than the psychoanalysts. The psychoanalysts believed in the theory. They were in Freudian in one way or another, and there was this theory and this theory was right. The behaviorist had a different point of view, and that is that you have to have data. You have to do some experiment. You have to take a look at it and that the data has to lead you to what your conclusions were. It was very empirical. There were lots of people there who knew that there was no justification for homosexuality being in the nomenclature, and I met a number of them there. Where Gerry was particularly brave is that he made that speech, that he made it public. That made all the difference in the world. He was able to do what a lot of gay people couldn't do. It's often that way. Some of the leading defenders of gay people in New York City were straight. They didn't care if someone called them gay. They knew they weren't. So, that's where Gerry was very brave. He and I have been friends ever since.

We were filmed just a few weeks ago. There's a producer out in LA who also heard that podcast [*UnErased*] and was very touched by it and wanted and is making a documentary about the relationship between Gerry and I during that period. They flew me out to LA, and one Saturday, a few Saturdays ago, they filmed Gerry in the morning, me in the afternoon, and then the two of us together, and they're working on this documentary about it. There's another documentary called *Cured*, which is also being made at the same time about that whole period and about how that change came about. It doesn't focus on Gerry and I. It focuses on many different people. That's called *Cured*. I'm going to be in two documentaries, and I don't make a dime. [laughter] Not a dime. I've been very good about not making money.

KR: It is all for the cause.

CS: All for the cause, and I can really say I wouldn't change it. If someone said to me, "You can be a stockbroker and I guarantee you after twenty years you'll have three million in the bank," I'd say, "Forget it." That's not what I want to do in life.

KR: You talked about giving your talk in front of the Nomenclature Committee. In 1973, in the *DSM-II*, homosexuality received a change in diagnosis. It was not until 1987 in *DSM-III* that homosexuality was removed as being a mental illness. Describe those intervening years and what the process was to get homosexuality removed.

CS: Well, I wasn't involved in that at all. At that point, I really didn't give a shit what the psychiatrists said. We had made our point. All the publicity was about homosexuality being removed, which, as you've just stated, it was not, but we didn't care. We were off on other things, and that was the providing of services like Identity House and IHI and like the service organizations of today. I was mainly involved, at that point, in service, rather than advocacy. If you're involved in a service organization and you get 501(c)(3) or similar status, you can't advocate for political change. You can't be in favor of a candidate or laws, for or against laws, and I accepted that. The next radical group was the AIDS organization. I forget the name. Do you know?

KR: We can fill it in in the transcript.

CS: The one that Larry Kramer helped start. It just occurred to me and I forgot the name. It was after AIDS began and then GMHC started, but GMHC was a service organization. ACT UP. ACT UP became a civil rights organization, fighting for the rights of people with AIDS and pushing for medications and things like that. ACT UP, I don't even know whether they were incorporated. If you want to have a group for something, you don't have to incorporate. You just get it and fight for it. GAA, I don't think it was incorporated. GLF wasn't incorporated. The next radical group was ACT UP. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1987 in New York City, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) is a direct action advocacy group.]

To the best of my knowledge, there are no radical groups anymore. No one's fighting for anything about LGBT rights. The only limitation to that statement is about the transgender issues, where a lot of trans people are being persecuted in various ways, but there's no real organization against it. We have these people that we call trans-activists, which is a pejorative term, but there's no movement, which is unfortunate because they're a group of people that are being discriminated against very badly and there're lots of cases of being murdered.

There's no grassroots advocacy. You could say that genderless bathrooms are an important issue, but I don't think so. The period of radical movements is over. There's a lot of stuff going on in colleges about gender. There's a lot of stuff in colleges going on about sexual harassment, and we can argue the pros and cons of them. In terms of anything about gay rights, lesbian rights, that sort of thing, there's nothing going on. Maybe there doesn't have to be.

Clearly, when we talk about all these rights, we're not talking about the country as a whole. In New York City, no one cares what you are. No one gives a shit what you are. This will be true in lots of other places, out in California, Miami, Chicago. If we start to talk about some of our more conservative states, it's a little bit different. Go down to Mississippi and Alabama and Louisiana, if you to go to those places, go to rural areas, things are quite different. It's not so free. It's strange that there are all sorts of contradictions to that.

I wrote a book about gay couples, and it was published in '82, called *Man to Man* [*Gay Couples in America*]. One of the things I did is I went to some rural areas, and I went to the Ozarks or part of the Ozarks and found there was quite a bit of gay life there. I found, outside of Missouri, fifty miles out there in some small town, two guys that have been together for twenty-five years. One was a reporter for the newspaper, a local newspaper, and the other one was vice president of the bank. They decided they would have a ceremony for their 25th anniversary. Here are two guys celebrating their 25th anniversary, and they invited all their friends. They invited the president of the bank, the editor of the newspaper, whatever, and they actually built a little bridge over, I don't know what it was over, and they symbolically represented their union by walking over the bridge hand in hand to the applause of all the other people. I said to them, "Did these people know that you were gay?" They said, "We don't have a clue." They had to know, right? I mean, this is their 25th anniversary. I suppose you could be really naïve and say, "25th anniversary for two men who have never gotten married and they're just friends and they're just celebrating their friendship," but that's pretty stupid.

On the other hand, you find, in the same area, kids getting beaten up in schools for being gay. I'd find lesbians that were thrown out of the house. I came across some of them who were, literally, just thrown out of the house. So, you get this crazy mix, but the point I want to make is that we shouldn't interpret New York to be America. There's still lots of discrimination against gay people. You find in some states, like Missouri, a very conservative state, a state not welcoming to gay people, but Columbia, which is the capital and has the university, Ole Miss, is there, that's very liberal. You find these islands of liberal thought in a lot of states today, surrounded by discrimination. That, too, that's not new. I'm sure any woman who stands up at some meeting and argues against something, the school board wants to probably accuse her of being a lesbian just because she's acting like a man. It's a mixed bag all around the country.

KR: You brought up your book, *Man to Man,* that you wrote in 1982. In the late 1970s, you wrote *The Joy of Gay Sex* along with Edmund White, and then you wrote *A Family Matter: A Parent's Guide to Homosexuality*.

CS: Right.

KR: What was your impetus for writing these books?

CS: I was sitting at a meeting at IHI with my staff, and my secretary walked in and said, "There's a man who just came in and wants to know whether you would like to write a book." At the end of the meeting, I went out to my office, and I met him. He was not a book publisher, but he used to be. He wanted to have a book written for parents [when] they find out their kid is gay. Now, he came to me because I was sort of the only person who was openly out. I was appearing on radio and television and I was a psychologist and I was called doctor. These are very important things to them. I had never written a book, but I couldn't think of a reason not to. So, I said, "Sure." At the same time, he was the editor, the New York editor, for British publishers who had put out *The Joy of Sex*. They had made a bundle with *The Joy of Sex*. So, they thought maybe they could make as much money putting out *The Joy of Gay Sex* and *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*. He was the editor for both. [Editor's Note: *The Joy of Sex* written by Alex Comfort was published in 1972.]

After I had put out a first draft of my first book, *A Family Matter*, he wanted me to do *The Joy of Gay Sex*. I said, "Sure, but it's not the kind of book that one person can write. It'd have to be two people." They started what Ed White called the "beauty contest" of interviewing various people and having them write something about sex, and they're choosing, finally, Ed White. The backstory was that Ed was a patient of mine at the time. I knew what was going on and he was telling me in therapy about being interviewed for this book, and he was broke. Now, I'm not divulging anything because Ed had written about this himself. At a certain point, when Ed came and said to me, "Oh, I've been chosen to be co-editor of the book, and now I have to meet my other co-editor," that's when I had to tell him. I said, "We can't do both things, co-write the book and be in therapeutic relationship." Ed has always said that his need to pay his rent was first, and so we dropped our professional relationship and we worked on the book. It was a wonderful collaboration. Ed is very smart. He is very knowledgeable. At the time, he only lived a few blocks away up here. Those were the days where there were just typewriters, no computers. We wrote the book, and they were both published the same year, '77.

KR: What was the reception of the book?

CS: Most booksellers had it undercover. If you wanted a copy, you had to ask for it. There were stores that would not sell it. The book was banned in England, which is funny because the publishers were English. It was burned in France. I've had three of my books banned. I consider that an accomplishment.

In Canada, it's complicated. There's a board that judges books, and books about homosexuality were okay. So, if you wanted to publish a book in Canada about homosexuality, you could. However, if you imported a book, it came under the jurisdiction of the customs office, and the customs office would not allow any book that had pictures of sex. It had this weird division of authority, where you could publish and read a book in Canada, but you couldn't import it into Canada. Since Canadians speak English, it was the English version that was there. There was also a French version. That was the one that was burned. The books were held up at customs. They were meant for the Glad Day bookstore in Toronto, and Glad Day sued to get the books back. I testified that to trial. At the end of the trial, his name was Judge [Bruce] Hawkins, he made a brilliant statement. He determined that the books should be allowed, and he said, "To write a book about homosexuality and leave out sodomy would be like writing a book about music and leaving out Mozart." I thought, "Wonderful."

Then, there were lots of little cases all over the United States. I remember one--I don't know where it was--some woman claimed that she went into a bookstore to buy the *Joy of Cooking* and by accident she picked up and took home *The Joy of Gay Sex*. Now, this is nonsense of course. The bookstore was raided, the books confiscated, the owners arrested. There were a bunch of little incidents all over like that. There were libraries where the book was confiscated. There was one library, I think, in California where two women stole the book because they're afraid that children could see it. It was the subject of a TV comedy sketch. What happened is that when it became public that they had stolen the book, they got contributions of books from other people. They ended up with a whole bunch of books, including one from me. So, there were a bunch of little things with it.

There was also a lot of censorship about the book. The actual publisher was Crown in New York. It was this complicated book contract thing. Everything that we had to submit had to be sent to them, and they would give it to their lawyers to look at. Since the real publisher was Mitchell Beazley in London, Mitchell Beazley had their lawyers looking at it. Everything we wrote had to go through all these people, and all of them are worried about legal issues. Contrary to what most people believe, writing a book about sex is not popular. The controversy does not make you money. People sort of think that, "Because of controversy, more people will buy the book." The publishers avoid that like the plague because they lose. One day, the editor-in-chief of Crown called me in. He said, "I want to ask you about some things that you have in the book, all right?" He said, "I noticed you used the word, 'cock.' Why don't you use penis instead?" I said to him, "Look, a cock and a penis are different." Well, he bit. He asked, "How?" I said, "A penis is part of your anatomy, but your cock is what you fuck your wife with." Cock stayed in. They objected to the word, "Shit." There could not be anything about S/M [sadomasochism] in the book. Ed and I wanted a section on diseases, whereas they didn't want that. We won on that one. We had in the book, since it's supposed to be a book about sex, why don't we make it sexy? We made three masturbation fantasies, you know, have fun. They went crazy, everybody, on both sides of the Atlantic, and we lost on that one. There were frequent attempts to censor things in the book. That was '77. In the next two editions, there was no censorship.

Another thing was we couldn't write about teenagers. They wanted us to write that anyone that had sex with a teenager was sick and you could go to jail and stuff. We wouldn't do that. In the end, we decided to leave an entry on teenagers out because better an omission than to put in lies. In the next editions, there were no attempts at censorship. We could write about anything we wanted. Times had changed.

KR: What diseases did you write about?

CS: Pardon me?

KR: What diseases did you write about in the first edition of *The Joy of Gay Sex*?

CS: Well, the main diseases, at that time, were syphilis and gonorrhea, and I'm sure we wrote about other things as well. The big change, of course, in the next addition was about AIDS, the virus, where we included the things about [AIDS]. Some people said, "Well, do you think you contributed to the AIDS crisis by writing that book?" We said, "No." That was silly. AIDS was certainly a thing that had to be written in the second edition and also the third.

KR: What two other of your books were banned?

CS: *Man to Man* was banned, *The Joy of Gay Sex*, and I think the second issue of *The Joy of Gay Sex*.

KR: Okay. Is it okay if we take a quick break?

CS: How much longer are we going to be?

KR: Let me pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: We are on the record and now recording.

CS: Okay.

KR: What are your memories of the early part of the AIDS crisis, from 1981 to, say, 1984?

CS: I was not a member of ACT UP, but I had patients who had AIDS or at least the virus. I had colleagues who had it. I supervised students who were working with people with AIDS. I supervised one student who did have AIDS. It was a dreadful time because there was dying going on all over the place.

At the time, there was a question about what to call it. In addition to that, there was the belief that there was a way station between being perfectly physically normal and final AIDS with HIV, so that people thought, at the time, that it wasn't necessarily a death sentence. In the '80s, it became apparent that it was a death sentence, and so everyone who had the virus assumed they were going to die. Now, there were some treatments, and I can't put the years to them. AZT was the most common, and there were also treatments against pneumonia by inhaling some stuff. I don't remember what it was called. There were treatments, and it was a time when guys were trying to heal themselves with various concoctions. It's really sort of like, you know, the legs of spiders and the nuts of something, by which I mean they would make these concoctions that they believed, at least hoped, would change the course of the disease. It did not. [Editor's Note: Azidothymidine (AZT), the HIV drug produced by Burroughs Wellcome, came to market in 1987, at which point it cost ten thousand dollars a year. One of the goals of ACT UP was to force down the price of AZT. There existed underground distribution networks to provide AZT at affordable prices and other treatments that were not approved by the Food and Drug Administration.]

All around was dying, and the deaths were terrible. I don't know if there are good deaths. [There were] all sorts of diseases that people got that no one should get. My lover William got AIDS, and I saw his deterioration and finally death. This is all in the period before they discovered the cocktail that changed the landscape completely. I know people that made lists of friends that had died, fill out one side of the page and then turn it over to go on the other side, that so many people were dying. The doctors, at least some of the doctors who were treating these patients, died themselves of the disease. In my desk drawer, I still have some of the programs from memorial services. [Editor's Note: The cocktail refers to HIV treatment that includes a regime of three or more antiretroviral (ARV) drugs from at least two different HIV drug classes. The purpose of antiretroviral therapy (ART) is to reduce a person's viral load to an undetectable level.]

I had a supervisee, when he was in the hospital, the physician refused to come into the room. He would stand at the door and ask him questions, but he wouldn't come in and examine him. There were funeral homes in the city that refused to bury someone who died of AIDS. There were dentists who refused to treat anyone if they had AIDS. The emergency services, if they were brought to a house of an AIDS patient, might not handle them. There was a kind of attitude, even in New York City, as if this was like the real plague, bubonic plague, or like measles, when measles swept the world, and that to be in proximity with a person with that disease would be to put your life in danger. Even though at the time we had a fairly good idea how AIDS or the virus HIV was transmitted, people felt, "Well, I've got to be safe." There were children in schools, in various places in the country who were not allowed to go to the school because the school system had found out that they had HIV. Now, obviously, they got HIV in a different way than most of the others, but they were completely rejected by their town, their city, "You can't come to school." God knows what damage they have today. So, it was an environment, I suppose, similar to the plague.

It's interesting. While that was happening, I read two books about the plague. I read Ken Liu's book called *The Plague*, and I forget, someone else's book, I forget which one. It really felt that way. You never knew who was going to be next. I went to many memorial services at St. John's the Divine because they would allow it and many memorial services at the [Society of] Friends meeting place downtown because they would allow it, but many places would not allow a memorial service for someone who died of AIDS. There were stories of particularly horrible things that happened in hospitals. Who knows whether they're true? There's a story of one hospital, I think, in Texas, where someone showed up with AIDS, and they flew him to California at the hospital's expense. I don't know whether that's true, but it was a very terrible time. The cocktail changed everything. Today, guys who are sexually active are on PrEP, and PrEP is very effective. It really is. I would say most of my patients are on PrEP. [Editor's Note: PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a daily HIV medication taken to reduce the chances of HIV infection.]

KR: How long did William live with HIV/AIDS?

CS: Three, four years, something like that. His first sign was KS. We were in Puerto Rico, and he noticed a purple spot on his leg. He showed it to me. We both knew what it was. He died in this apartment. His doctor said to me, "Would you rather he die in a hospital surrounded by strangers or die at home with people who love him?" The answer was obvious, so I brought him home. I still love him. [Editor's Note: Kaposi sarcoma (KS) is a disease affecting the skin and mucous membranes, characterized by the formation of lesions and associated with immunodeficient individuals with AIDS.]

KR: You mentioned before treating patients who had HIV/AIDS. What was that like for you as a therapist and how did it change things as a therapist?

CS: Well, first, they didn't come in with AIDS. They came in saying that they had been tested and found out they were positive. This is before any symptoms occur, so that we're talking about two or three years from the time that they're diagnosed to the time that they would die. At the same time, I was working under a grant doing consultation with staffs in hospitals and clinics

around the city who were dealing with AIDS patients. So, I was sort of surrounded by it, and it was very difficult. I remember one group, I don't remember what hospital it was, and they were talking about working with patients and children saying, "Is Mommy going to die?" or daddy, and thinking to myself, "I wish he would shut up. I don't want to hear any more." I didn't say it; that's what I thought. It was very difficult, but I carried on. I took off a month after William died. There's been no one quite like him. He was a unique person, exceedingly bright. AIDS is almost history, almost history.

KR: What professional associations have you been involved in, in the psychiatric profession?

CS: Well, I'm not a psychiatrist, and I'm not a member of the American Psychiatry Association. I'm a member of the American Psychological Association, and I don't do anything with them anymore. I was one of the founders of Division 44, called the gay division, but I don't relate to that anymore.

Most of my work is with the New York State Psychological Association. I'm a member there. I'm an official. I'm on a couple of boards, some committees, that sort of thing, and I organize and run programs about human sexuality that we put on in the association. That's mostly what I do. I have friends there and they're also colleagues, and I would say that my professional stuff is limited to the New York State Psychological Association.

I also mentor students, a mentoring program, where I have a student who's outside of New York City. The current one I have is in Albany. I have one in Delaware and one in Kentucky, and we get together via video conferencing, we talk. I also am a supervisor for NYU, Columbia TC [Teacher's College], and what's the other one? I always mix it up, Pace. Anyway, I supervise a Ph.D. student there. I supervise and have to make reports and all that silly stuff. So, all these things combined together with my practice, which is small, keeps me busy enough.

KR: In terms of your gay rights activism and service-related advocacy, what were you involved in as we get into the 1990s and the 2000s and up to today?

CS: I wasn't doing any of those things. What was the bottom year?

KR: In the '90s.

CS: The '90s?

KR: The 1990s.

CS: I haven't been involved at all. I've just been involved in professional stuff, obviously, some of my writing, which I've stopped. It's been publishing and professional stuff. I'm obviously a representative of what a gay man can be, a gay psychologist, in my association and helped to educate them about gay life, but I don't do any advocacy.

KR: Which of your other publications, books and articles, stick out in your mind that you would like to comment on?

CS: My last book was called *The Ferryman*, which was a book that was about my relationship to William and my advocacy from the very beginning. I point that out because I thought it was the best writing I ever did. [Editor's Note: Charles Silverstein wrote *For the Ferryman: A Personal History*, published in 2011 by Chelsea Station Editions.]

KR: Where did the title come from?

CS: The ferryman is the man who would take you in the boat over the River Styx when you died to the underground.

KR: From Dante's *Inferno*?

CS: Pardon me?

KR: From Dante's *Inferno*?

CS: I guess so, yes. It's called *For the Ferryman*, and I subtitled it *A Personal History*.

KR: What awards have you won that you hold in particularly high regard? Which is the most important to you?

CS: I suppose that one over there. It's a gold medal. It's a gold medal for the practice of psychology given by the American Psychological Foundation, and I suppose that one because there's a lot of competition to get it, one each year. I was very touched by getting that.

KR: The Stonewall Rebellion happened fifty years ago this June.

CS: Yes.

KR: Here we are, fifty years later. What reflections do you have?

CS: Do you know there's an exhibit about it at the public library?

KR: No, I did not know. [Editor's Note: *Love & Resistance: Stonewall 50* is open at the New York Public Library's Stephen A. Schwarzman Building until July 14, 2019.]

CS: The New York Public Library has an exhibit. It's called *Stonewall 50*. I went to the opening night. It was a big mistake. They expected eight hundred people; they got about two thousand. It was incredibly crowded. It was an exhibit mainly of photographs. I saw lots of photographs of lots of people who I knew fairly well, who are now dead for various reasons. I was with a friend when I came across these photographs, and I would tell him who he was, or she, and things about them. It was nice both reminiscing and feeling a little sad, because they're dead. They're dead, for various reasons, but mostly AIDS.

I was not at the Stonewall. I was not a member of GLF, but I was an early member of GAA and that's where I cut my [teeth]. Well, see, I had come from the Vietnam War advocacy. When I went to GAA, it was very easy for me to step in and be an advocate there. I liked doing that.

I don't have quite as much energy now. I'm about to be eighty-four, and I don't have quite as much energy as I did in those days and I sort of pick my own battles, but there's no place to battle. There's no issue. Everybody's waiting to see what happens when the abortion rights gets to the new Supreme Court. Everybody's waiting for that. I am, too, but it's not a gay issue. It's a good issue, not a gay one. I don't know of any gay issues. I don't get involved in the transgender stuff, and there are lots of important issues there. The trans-activists will make you believe that everything is clear cut. We know that's not true. There are women who are de-transitioning. The use of puberty blockers is not quite as clean as they would have you believe. A lot of viciousness is going on there, and I don't want to be a part of it. It's not my issue.

KR: What major changes have you observed in your field in psychology over the course of your career?

CS: Oh, well, tremendous. I can't think of a colleague in NYSPA, the New York State Psychological Association, who believes that it's legitimate to change someone's sexual orientation. I can't think of a person. I can't think of a person who would reject a couple, two lesbians or two gay men, who want to come in for marriage counseling. In the old days, that would be unthinkable. I feel completely accepted as a colleague amongst my colleagues in NYSPA. That's very different.

Kids today are also different, dramatically so. I mentioned this before. They come in. I say kids, I'm talking about college students. I don't work with children. They come in, and they open up immediately with the issues, what the sexual issues are, the romantic stuff. I mean, in some ways, you can't shut them up, whereas in the older generation, you can't get them to open up. If I have someone who's older who comes in and want to talk to him about sex, I may have to ask his permission because otherwise, I'd get, "Why are you asking me that question?" A younger one, I don't have to ask; they just come in and they talk about it. From that point of view, they're terrific. That's completely different. Obviously, they're more liberal as well, at least here in the city. I don't know what would happen, if you went to some ecumenical university. I don't think they have a gay club there, but they have gay kids there. There are gay kids everywhere. Whether they're having sex or not, who knows. The ones who are working in New York, yes, they're having sex, why not?

You no longer get fired from a government job for being gay. I don't think anyone in government would care. Now, I can't say that the Congress of the United States is very generous about talking about the sexual interests, but if they found out that Senator So-and-So would be gay, well, I guess it would depend on where he comes from, but I don't think it would be a story. All that's good and boring, intensely boring.

William and I went up to Canada on one vacation. We went to Lake Louise. Now, Lake Louise is supposed to be this gorgeous lake. Have you ever been there?

KR: [No].

CS: It's as beautiful as the postcards. It is gorgeous from every viewpoint, and there's a trail that goes around the lake. William and I walked the trail and went all around the lake. We got back to the starting point, and we said it was so fucking boring. [laughter] From every viewpoint, it was gorgeous. That's the way I feel about some stuff in Hawaii. I've been to Hawaii a couple of times. Hawaii is pretty. If you want a pretty place to go, go to Hawaii. It's gorgeous and boring. I guess that's a way of saying I like a little conflict in my life. I like a hot sauce. It makes me feel more alive. I'm currently evolved in a little tiff at the New York Psychological Association; it's not terribly important. It's how much to charge graduate students to attend our convention, which is going to be in Glens Falls, all the way up in New York.

KR: Yes, Upstate New York.

CS: They want to charge them 150 dollars, which graduate students don't have because they have to schlepp up there and they've got to sleep somewhere, plus 150 dollars, so I'm in a little trouble there. There aren't issues. There are political issues, about our country, about Trump, but there aren't gay issues. The battles that have to be fought in Alabama, for instance; that has to be done by people in Alabama. I can't help them because if I open my mouth, they will identify me as New York and it has to be Alabama. It has to be locally done. They have to put their necks on the line. It means life is a little more boring these days.

KR: You mentioned before breaking your leg and being on crutches.

CS: Say again?

KR: You mentioned before breaking your leg and being on crutches.

CS: Yes.

KR: How did you break your leg?

CS: Skiing.

KR: In Austria?

CS: No, it was in Mount Snow, in Vermont.

KR: Vermont.

CS: Yes. I was stupid and paid the price, but that's how it happened. It was interesting how people react to it. I found, around here, around the city, if you tell people you broke your leg skiing, they laugh. [laughter] Even though I was on crutches, I decided to go to Jamaica for a week with my crutches. People there would ask me how I broke my leg, and I would tell them skiing. They would have no idea what I'm talking about because they don't know. They wouldn't laugh. They would ask, "Is it healing?" It was totally different. My first semester at

Rutgers, I was on crutches, and it was not easy because some of the classes involved walking down steep steps, which was hazardous, but I did it.

KR: What are your greatest accomplishments?

CS: Well, obviously the nomenclature change. Books are terribly important, but only if they sell. *The Joy of Gay Sex* made a big splash. There was a lot of publicity about it. As I said, the places that banned it, and that was. Helping to train a group of people about how to deal with gays and lesbians in therapy because when I ran Identity House, we would have training programs. I would say that those are my greatest accomplishments. I cannot think of an important political issue right now. Everything has moved over to gender issues, not that they shouldn't be fought, but that's very different than sexual issues and gay rights and lesbian rights and that sort of thing.

KR: How do you think the AIDS crisis impacted the gay liberation movement?

CS: Well, it suppressed it because a lot of the people who died were part of that movement. Now, clearly, there weren't many women who died of AIDS, except for IV drug users, but very few if any lesbians died of HIV, but so many gay men did.

KR: I have reached the end of my questions. Is there anything we have skipped over that you would like to add?

CS: I was just thinking of that a moment ago. I wrestle with whether I like the idea of gay marriage. This is over and above the issue about its being inevitable. I've seen so many people get married. I recently officiated a marriage ceremony with friends. Partly because I still believe that there's something very paternalistic about it, but I've noticed that people continue their lives as before. What's my objection? There is something pleasant about being naughty. There is something about maybe I'll smack your lips, about putting your finger in the eye of the "oppressor" and meeting similar people like that who have values like you do. It's very enjoyable, and I miss those days. It's not that we didn't have fights. We fought like crazy, but they were over issues. They weren't over money. They were over issues about different ways of doing whatever.

When I went to this *Stonewall 50* demonstration at the New York Public Library, where I'm depositing all my materials, I reminisced about those days, met a few friends there, who were also involved. That can't happen again. Unless something happens to call gay marriage illegitimate and the Trump administration wants to invalidate all the [policies], then we have an issue, but that's not going to happen. I do my work on the computer, and I organize things. I organize programs, and I enjoy my art collection. I enjoy all those things, but I don't have a cause. I would like to; I don't. That's about it.

KR: Okay.

CS: Would you like to see more of my stuff?

KR: Sure, yes.

CS: Why don't your turn off your machine?

KR: I will, thank you, okay. Well, this concludes the interview. Thank you so much, Dr. Silverstein.

CS: Charles.

KR: Thank you.

CS: Even my patients call me by my first name.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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