

## Interview Summary – Trans Activism Oral History

<b>Interviewee name:</b>	Ben Power Alwin
<b>Interviewer:</b>	Evan Taylor
<b>Date of Interview:</b>	February 18, 2020

### Summary:

The interview opens with a discussion of the video background behind Ben - which is Leslie Feinberg's personal library. As the interview begins, there is some discussion of demographic and personal identity information. However, there are some technical issues with the connection - Evan remotely troubleshoots on Ben's desktop. The demographics continue, but so do the technical problems, and Ben relocates to another room.

Ben came out as trans after meeting Lou Sullivan in 1982. He talks about his involvement in various types of activism over the years: feminist, anti-racist, trans, anti-classism. In some of his earliest activism involvement at 15 years old, he remembers getting gassed at the 1968 Democratic National Convention and watching cops beating people's heads in. Some of the activist mentors he looked up to were Reverend Martin Luther King Jr and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

Ben talks about the importance of archival work as activism and about the process of moving his archives recently. He discusses the general history of the Sexual Minorities Archives and the politics behind the way it is labelled and organized. He also started the first FTM support group on West coast and facilitated it from 1992-2014.

More troubleshooting with sound issues.

Ben talks about early lesbian activism, the corporatization of Pride celebrations away from their protest roots, the roots of Stonewall, civil disobedience as an approach to activism, and marriage equality issues. The archives are his life's work and the core of the legacy that he wants to leave. This is based in his value in the importance of education and knowledge, and making these accessible outside of mainstream institutions. Ben discusses the need for federal legislation and protections for trans people and integrative education.

In discussing space, Ben identifies the internet as replacing the need for physical space: i.e. gay bookstores and bars and changing that culture. Relatedly, he then reflects on different types of words and discourse and language that have changed over the years, i.e. stone butch, transsexual. Going further, there is discussion of early trans and LGBT history – including contexts of different social movements in Europe and North America. Going back to the impacts of the internet, Ben reflects on the role of instant communication on LGBT organizing and community-making. One of the drawbacks he sees is that it also contributes to loneliness, and isolation.

Ben talks about creating a non-profit to cover his house and the mortgage so that it can continue to function as an archive when he dies and will be a community owned archive. He has assembled a board and ensured it will continue.

He offers some advice to self and other activists about using what you have and starting where you are and can and talks at some length about his hopes for the future, and for a more social just world for oppressed people.

As the conversation turns to wrapping up, there are few more contextualizations with historical references to World War 2, and then an offering of future hopes. Ben and Evan discuss the space of the library as a safe haven from dysfunctional childhood environments and the spiritual importance of the archives to Ben.