

Interview Summary – Trans Activism Oral History

Interviewee name:	Jamison Green
Interviewer:	Evan Taylor
Date of Interview:	February 28, 2020

Summary:

After introductions, Jamison begins by talking about a play called “I am my own wife” based on the life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, whom he met briefly in person. The interview begins with demographic information and Jamison shares that he has a lifelong allergy to peanuts that has not only been traumatic, but has shaped his activism in the sense that he had to learn at an early age how to advocate for himself and his health with authorities in his life - particularly those who didn’t take him seriously. He recounts an incident as a child where he ate a piece of cake after an adult pressured him to. He also recounts a story from 1973 of calling out one of his doctors about his terrible bedside manner and that the doctor completely changed his approach.

He was with the same partner for 14 years who became the mother to his children, but the relationship didn’t work out after he began transition and she didn’t understand it. She passed away of breast cancer in 2008, but before she did, she reached out to Jamison to let him know that, after her own mastectomy, she had come to understand his feelings of gender dysphoria. He talks about sexuality, and the evolution of his identity; he and his wife are monogamous, but they are both bisexual, and queer, and that is important to them.

Politically, he objects to the 501 c three nonprofit model of community leadership and their organizing strategies. He also discusses the problematics of the discourses used to identify trans people and the confusions between political strategies and identities. Jamison talks about his own techniques of what he calls “social engineering”. He talks about working in construction and growing his hair out as a woman, and how that encouraged his male colleagues to also push with the company to be allowed to grow their hair long, and he also ensured that the company called him by his first name, not last. He talks about organizing in the Obama years and how he began to be more comfortable with the label of activist as activists were invited to the decision-making tables.

A week before he died, Lou Sullivan asked him to take over his newsletter. At the time, no one published their whole names in the newsletter, just initials, but Jamison felt that visibility was a key to changing the political landscape and started using his whole name and doing gender diversity trainings. There was a lot of pushback from community members who felt their survival was connected to being hidden.

He recalls a training that he did with doctors at the Vancouver 1997 conference where the doctors all changed their language for the rest of the conference and it was an immediate shift in how medical providers talked to and about their trans patients. He also recalls different words used over time to describe trans people and specifically recalls the use of the words trans and tranny in earlier years.

He describes doing many talks and lectures in the 90s and joining a community advisory board to the Human Right Commission where it took 2 years of meetings to have trans rights included. In this same period, he also pursued complaints with his employers about the health insurance coverage for trans people. The mayor started referring calls about insurance to his home, so he started meeting with the city’s leadership board about coverage in the health insurance plans. Finally, in 2000, this coverage was in place. His priority in these negotiations was that trans people shouldn’t have to pay anything out of pocket for health care.

He was then invited to join the Business Council, which is a board level position, and along with Donna Rose, used the Corporate Equality Index to increase the coverage for trans health to about ⅔ of all Fortune 500 companies. Andre Wilson and Jamison developed all of the education stuff that HRC used to devote to train corporations and corporate benefits managers.

Jamison remembers being appointed as an advisor in 1997 to the standards of care and consulting with other trans men about the contents. However, none of his suggestions were taken and used in the revised version published. He was invited to join the WPATH board, but there was some pushback from other members who felt he was too much of an “activist”. He was elected to the board in 2003 for the first four year term - but the other board members would barely speak to him and would turn away when he talked.