SAVING PRESERVATION STORIES:

DIVERSITY AND THE OUTERBOROUGHS

The Reminiscences of

Anne Maguire and Maxine Wolfe

2017, New York Preservation Archive Project

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Anne Maguire and Maxine Wolfe conducted by Interviewer Liz H. Strong on November 5, 2017. This interview is part of the *Saving Preservation Stories: Diversity and the Outer Boroughs* oral history project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

The Lesbian Avengers, founded in the early 1990s, was an action group that worked to raise public awareness of lesbian issues. The first action the new group took was to advocate for rainbow curriculum in New York Public Schools by organizing a march and event at a public school in Queens. Alice Austen House was brought to their attention by Amy Khoudari who was at that time writing her Ph.D. dissertation on Alice Austen. The Lesbian Avengers staged a protest on the day of a nautical festival, dressed in old-style bathing suits as lifeguards, bearing life preservers with "Dyke Preserver" written on them. They stated that the board of the Alice Austen House was denying Alice Austen's existence as a lesbian and were advocating for the museum to tell the whole story of her life, including her partner Gertrude Tate who was unmentioned at that time. Both Maguire and Wolfe comment on the erasure of lesbian's contributions to the modern LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer] movement and in history. They also speak about the importance of visibility of lesbian and gay history in general, and lesbian figures and history in particular, which has been under-represented, noting that the Alice Austen House is the first queer national historic landmark to be given to a woman.

Political and lesbians activists, Anne Maguire and Maxine Wolfe founded the Lesbian Avengers in the early 1990s. Anne Maguire, originally from Dublin, Ireland, came to New York City in 1987 and was one of the founders of ILGO, the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization. Maxine Wolfe, a native of Brooklyn, was a professor at the City University of New York for over thirty years and before she retired. She now volunteers with the Lesbian Herstory Archives and previously was active with ACT UP.

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey | Session: 1

Interviewee: Anne Maguire, Maxine Wolfe | Location: Brooklyn, New York, NY

Interviewer: Liz H. Strong (Q1), Anthony Bellove (Q2) | Date: November 5, 2017

Q1: All right.

Q2: Lights on. Watch your eyes.

Wolfe: Okay.

Q2: And it is November 5, 2017. We are at the home of Maxine Wolfe with her dear friend, Anne—

Q1: Maguire.

Q2: Maguire, a nice Italian name. And we're at Park Slope, Brooklyn. And here we go, clapping.

Q1: Anthony Bellov is the videographer—

Q2: Yes, Anthony Bellov—

Q1: Liz is the interviewer; this is for the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Q2: That's all right. Now I'll clap again.

Q1: All right, thank you so much for being with us. As I said, we like to learn a little bit about who you are to get started. So each of you in turn let me know when and where you were born and a little bit about your life growing up.

Wolfe: Okay, I'll start, Maxine Wolfe. I was born—you asked me where I was born. I was born in Brooklyn, New York in Maimonides Hospital, which is not too far from here. I grew up in Brooklyn and I've lived in Brooklyn all my life except for two years when I lived in Copenhagen actually.

So I moved to Park Slope in 1970. Otherwise I lived in Borough Park, Flatbush, Midwood, everywhere in Brooklyn you could live. And I moved to this house thirty-three years ago. Before then, I was a renter who was gentrified out three times as Park Slope got gentrified.

I've been a lesbian activist for a very long time. I've been a political organizer for a really long time in lots of different movements. I have two daughters who are now in their—one is fifty and the other is forty-seven. And that's about it. I guess it's good enough unless you need more information.

Q1: I'm going to ask some follow-up questions. How did you—I guess to go back further, just tell me a little bit about your family life as a kid and what your life growing up was like.

Wolfe: My mother was an immigrant. She came to this country when she was fourteen years old in 1927 and she was the first person—her father was here beforehand. He came somewhat earlier, like seven years earlier and sent for her as the first person. And then when Hitler was elected in 1933, he borrowed money and got everybody else out. So her mother, my grandmother and my two uncles and one aunt came in 1933. We grew up in Borough Park. My father's family was originally from Austria and then moved to England and then came here but they were here in the early part of the twentieth century. He was the only one of his siblings that was born here. His other siblings were born in Europe.

I grew up in Borough Park and I went to PS 131 and I went to [John J.] Pershing Junior High School [I.S. 220] and New Utrecht High School. And then I went to Brooklyn College and I stayed at the City University [of New York] and got my Ph.D. Then I became a professor at the graduate school of the City University in 1969-1970 and I taught for thirty-some odd years and then I retired. And put my full time into both the Lesbian Herstory Archives which I started volunteering at in 1984 and I still am a volunteer there and a coordinator and doing all kinds of other political work which I've done since I was a high school student.

Q1: Talk to me about that transition in high school of getting involved in activism and politics.

Wolfe: I always tell this story, which there was a girl that lived in my neighborhood whose parents were very political and she invited me one time to hear Pete Seeger sing when he was blacklisted. And he sang *This Land is Made for You and Me* and I believed him. Seriously, that sounds stupid but it was true. I always—my family was not political at all. My mother and father were not formally political or even at all political in the sense that people think about it. Although from what I understand my grandfather was but I never knew him. My grandmother just became more religious as she got older but he died five years after he brought everybody to this country. So she was alone most of that time.

But they always had basic politics, in the sense of sort of very common sense working class politics. For instance, once I asked my mother who she was voting for. I think I must have been eleven. It's when Adlai [E.] Stevenson [II] was running and she said she wasn't voting and I gave her a big argument about being an immigrant and why wasn't she voting. And her answer was, "Because none of them are for us. None of them are for the working people." That was my mother, okay [*laughs*].

My father just never basically said much about it but she had those kinds of basic understandings of the world. And she made us stay out of school when it was the Jewish holidays even though she wasn't religious at all in the sense of highly religious because

she said, “You always let people know you’re a Jew.” So that was the sort of legacy of the Holocaust and losing so many people in her family. You always let people know you’re a Jew.

So those kinds of basic politics and I always felt—I think the first stuff that I got involved in was about the Civil Rights Movement. Well, actually [Joseph] McCarthy probably because I remember watching the McCarthy hearings at a neighbor’s house, but also anything that had to do with civil rights. It just seemed like totally natural to me that something was wrong with the world, that people of color were not—especially African-Americans were not being treated right in this country.

So that’s sort of my history. Then I just went from there to everything else. I did anti-apartheid stuff, I did work about unions. I always feel like I have to be out there doing something. It’s basically my modus operandi. I just feel like with the world being the way it is, people have to speak up. And I think that was one of the premises what I learned from my family, was that people have to speak up.

Q1: Thank you. I’m going to ask you to go on the same journey. Start telling me when and where you were born and just a little bit about your life.

Maguire: Okay, I was born in Dublin in Ireland in 1962 and grew up there, left when I was twenty-five and came here to New York in 1987. So I’ve been here for thirty years this year. October 1 was my thirtieth anniversary which I had forgotten until now.

So I grew up in Ireland, attended Catholic school, Ireland's version of public school, on the north side of Dublin, the eldest of four kids and also it's interesting to hear the stories. I also started to become kind of political or aware of politics in high school. It was around the prisoner, Irish Republican prisoner stuff and the Dirty Protest or the Blanket Protest as it was called because prisoners wanted to be treated as political prisoners—Irish Republican prisoners in the north of Ireland, not in the south where I grew up. And they were not being treated as political prisoners. They were in the regular criminal status.

It culminated in what was called the Dirty Protest. So basically they weren't allowed to clean out their cells. I mean I'm not going to go into details because it was so kind of disgusting but I was in the city when I was about fourteen in Dublin on a Saturday and there was a big protest going through the streets. There were people just wearing blankets because that was another term for it, it was also called the Blanket Protest because they refused to wear prison clothing. So the authorities decided no clothing then. These prisoners wore blankets.

So it was the Blanket or the Dirty Protest and I do very clearly remember standing and not being able to cross O'Connell Street and being furious that I couldn't go about my business because of this stupid protest. What were they doing down here anyway? It had nothing to do with us in the south of Ireland.

Then just for a split second, I thought, you actually don't know anything about this, so until you learn a little bit about why these people are marching in the streets in blankets when it's freezing cold, go off and like read about it or learn about it. I also had the thought at the same time of, uh oh, this is not good because if I think this now and I go and do the reading and figure out what's going on and I think it's wrong, then I have to do something.

So it was kind of like uh, oh, this is trouble. I know this is trouble. I can already tell this is trouble. I guess that was the beginning of my road to trouble [*laughter*]. I'm causing trouble and feeling like this is what you have to do sometimes. You should probably ask a follow-up *[unclear] [laughter]*.

Q1: I will, yes. I'm just wondering—I'm waiting for you to finish your thought if you had more but from there, tell me how you went about causing trouble. What were some of your first engagements?

Maguire: So the first demonstration I went on, I was still in high school and it was during the hunger strike. This was under Margaret [H.] Thatcher, same battle more or less, but the next phase of it. It was when Bobby [Robert G.] Sands died. So he was the first of ten political prisoners who died on hunger strike. When it happened, the country was kind of waiting and waiting and waiting and not actually believing it would happen and thinking Thatcher would have to figure out something. Then it came on the news that Bobby Sands had died.

And I think I was fifteen and my brother was a year younger than me and we just sat at home, looking at each other and then thought we need to go into the city center. It was just an automatic thing. We went into the center of Dublin, outside the general post office, which is kind of a spot—you just knew to go. We knew to go there. There was a big demonstration. We were still very young. We didn't understand everything but it was a feeling of absolute rage and disbelief, and needing to do something, needing to be able to put all that fury and confusion and grief into something.

So we showed up at this thing and that was basically for both of us. He also got personally involved and that's where I started. I started with going on demonstrations, going on marches, going to meetings. Then from there, I eventually found some people that I was interested in hearing their point of views.

So I would go to things that they were doing in particular. That's where I learned about feminism. There were a huge amount of feminists involved. So it was really political prisoner stuff where I started and then the rest of my work in Ireland really was around reproductive rights, abortion stuff, very little lesbian and gay stuff.

I also worked on two general election campaigns for the civil rights leader, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, who ran against the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), and leader of the Fianna Fail Party, Charles Haughey, in the early 1980s. Haughey happened to be running in the constituency I grew up in, Dublin North-Central, which included Donnycarney. His

mother and two sisters lived on the street next to the street I grew up on. Since then I have never worked for a candidate in an election in Ireland or in the US.

I came out when I was in Ireland but didn't do—besides letting everyone know that I was a lesbian, doing this work and doing this work. I was not involved in any kind of gay rights movement. I feel like that really solidified when I came here. I mean I went on Gay Pride parades, like the first one in Dublin in 1985 or 1986. But the AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] activism was just starting before I left. So basically I came to New York and it was where I really met what I consider to be absolutely ferocious lesbians and gay men [*laughter*]. That like blew my mind. I thought okay, this is the right place at the right time [*laughs*].

Q1: How did you come to the United States? What was that transition like?

Maguire: I won a green card in a lottery and was basically desperate to get out of Ireland. It was really—I mean the political stuff that had been going on had been horrifying. The misogyny and the Catholic Church and it was totally homophobic and there was a whole set of cases where a young fifteen-year-old died giving birth in a grotto in Leitrim, like in the church car park. A teacher had been fired from a school because she was involved with a separated married man and she had a child.

There was just a whole series of absolutely horrifying political things going on. And I felt like I just needed to get out of here for a while, just to get out. I just wanted to get out. I

did not want to come here. I didn't want to go to England. I had been to London a few times and found that anti-Irish stuff because it was extremely political and the IRA [Irish Republican Army] were quite active. The anti-Irish sentiment in London I would not have been able to handle it at all. It was really awful. Like for example, every time we went, only Irish people had to fill in a really long form, which was called the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It's the kind of thing that's going to be happening here soon. But Irish people on the plane or on the ferry were the only people who had to fill in this form and hand it in at customs or the passport check going to England.

So there was a lottery and the whole country came to a standstill. There was very high unemployment. Almost fifty percent of the population was under the age of twenty-five. The unemployment rates were skyrocketing. I actually had a job but this was a whole move here, which has now been discussed again. What is the visa, they're calling it?

Wolfe: Diversity.

Maguire: Diversity. This happened in the '80s and it was really focused on Irish people. So it was Irish politicians worked this whole Donneley visa thing. You sent your name, your date of birth—your name, address and your date of birth to a P.O. box in Washington, D.C.

And the country came to a total standstill because there were so many people applying. I think the odds were a couple of thousand—couple of hundred thousand to one that you

would get it. I didn't really want to come but as soon as I got that piece of mail from the embassy, I was like I am so out of here. So I was one of the lucky ones and came here. Within three months, I was gone.

Q1: To New York?

Maguire: Yes.

Q1: What was New York like? Was it your first visit?

Maguire: Yes. I had a sister here. My younger sister was a nanny in Larchmont. From high school, she had gone immediately out of high school to Larchmont and I had two friends that I kind of knew, that I had gotten in touch with. So I moved in with them—one, and she was moving right around the time that I was planning on coming. She said, "You want me to look for a place for the two of us?" I said, "Yes."

So I moved into Park Slope actually, Tenth Street and Seventh Avenue for a year and my sister eventually moved as a live-in nanny in Brooklyn. So we were like a little posse and there were lots of Irish people here. Marie [Honan] knew Maxine already. This was the woman I moved in with, the Irish woman, who I ended up being with and have been ever since. But Marie had already met Maxine at an Irish political event. But there was also the lesbian stuff. I think Maxine gave Marie her first ever tickets to the dance on the pier around Gay Pride. So that connection was made immediately. And this Thanksgiving, I

went to my first ever Thanksgiving meal here in November 1987 and this year, I'll be back for my thirtieth at Maxine's house. So I've basically known Maxine since I came here.

Wolfe: Yes.

Q1: You were having Thanksgiving here in this very house?

Wolfe: Yes, in this house.

Q1: Tell me about that night if you can remember.

Wolfe: I just remember Anne and Marie coming. We always used to have a big crowd and I asked them to come because I met Marie at some political meetings and we hit it off. And she said that Anne was coming and I said, "Well, bring Anne." And that was it.

Maguire: It was amazing. I mean I had been here a month and most of the table besides Karen and Amy, Maxine's daughters, were lesbians and gay men from ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power].

Wolfe: ACT UP.

Maguire: Feisty and ferocious and—

Wolfe: Loud *[laughs]*.

Maguire: And loud and opinionated and out there. I didn't open my mouth for the whole meal. It was just like oh, my god. It was culture shock. I also got quite a shock because I thought, I've been out. I've been out in my life and I thought oh, my god, I so have not been out. I don't even know what that is anymore. So it was such a big deal. It was kind of amazing.

Wolfe: It was a lot of people too.

Maguire: Huge.

Wolfe: Probably fifteen people for dinner and it was all people from ACT UP other than my daughters. Yes, people were just going on and on and on and having opinions about everything. When Anne told me afterwards, many years afterwards, what a shock it was. I was like, right, it must have been horrifying [*laughter*]. She didn't know anybody except for Marie and everybody was blah, blah, blah which was the way Thanksgiving always is here, which is that people just talk forever, cover every topic under the sun from anything political to anything anything. Sex, politics, art—

Maguire: Art, books.

Wolfe: Books, whatever.

Maguire: Family, everything.

Wolfe: Everything.

Q1: How did you become connected with ACT UP originally?

Wolfe: The way I became connected with ACT UP was in 1984, which was when I went to the archives, in the early ‘80s, almost every group that I belonged to had fallen apart. When [Ronald W.] Reagan was elected—people don’t really get it. So the way that I got connected to ACT UP was that nothing was going on and I kept looking for something to do politically. So I did individual things like there were demonstrations against *Cruising*, the movie, and there was some bars in Times Square that had been raided by the cops. There were just sort of these disparate demonstrations.

Meanwhile AIDS had started but at that time, I was not really focused on that. The men that I knew, I had been active in a couple of different mixed groups, men and women, gay men and lesbians, and the men were not talking about AIDS at all at that time. In fact, fortunately for them, most of those men never were infected.

So I kept looking for things to do. Then this group started at the City University that I was part of at the beginning which was called CUNY Lesbian and Gay People. I had also

done some things around the sodomy rulings and this incredible action, I think it was the Statue of Liberty Centennial where we sort of busted downtown without a permit, to protest against the sodomy ruling by the Supreme Court. That was when they upheld it.

Then I went to some meetings of the Gay and Lesbian—what's now called GLAAD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] which then was called Gay Anti-Defamation Group. But it was very top-down and I didn't love it [*laughs*]. I had also gone to Democratic Party things. I was just looking for what I could do that I would feel good about.

Then I was in this CUNY group and we went to Gay Pride that year as CUNY Lesbian and Gay People and we were behind ACT UP on the march. I saw ACT UP and it looked amazing and a friend of mine had also said, "There's this new group that started that's meeting at the center. Do you want to go?" And I said, "Yes." We said we'd go that Monday. And this was Sunday.

They were in front of me and they had this amazing tableau that year. It was the first year of ACT UP and they had this concentration camp because it was at that time what's his name, Bennett—was it Bennett? No, it was—the other right-winger, who had sort of suggested that gay men should be tattooed? Okay? It was sort of this whole concentration camp mentality. There was a huge amount of homophobia around the AIDS stuff. And they had built this concentration camp. They were wearing gas masks and they were

handing out these leaflets. And I went over to a woman and I said to her, "Are there women in this group?" And she said, "Oh, yes, definitely." I said, "Okay."

So Monday, I went to this meeting and I walked into this room and there were like four hundred gay men and like four visible women [*laughter*]. I said, "Well, whatever." I had done some—and I didn't know—one of the things that people don't know about ACT UP is that originally the group was not made up of people who had been active in New York City lesbian and gay politics, at least no one that I knew—radical politics. Nobody that I knew was in that room.

So I just sat there for a month and I didn't say anything. I just listened to what was going on. I really thought it was a great thing because anybody could do anything. People had a lot of energy, a lot of anger. If you had a good idea, you could do it and you could get up and speak your mind.

In fact, one of the first things that I did was to speak against something that Larry Kramer said and I had no idea who Larry Kramer was at the time because I had not been involved in kind of the mainstream gay part of the movement. And he stood up and we were doing this action. He said something and I stood up and disagreed with him and everybody gasped. I thought, "Oh, my God, what did I say?" I must have said something terrible and no, the only thing was that I disagreed with him.

And he never cared. He liked that people disagreed with him. Even if he would yell back at you, it was only because he was arguing. I just felt really comfortable in the place. I just felt this was a place that I could do something about something I cared about which was AIDS and I stayed. I was very active in ACT UP for ten years, organized a lot of actions and stuff. That's how I got involved in ACT UP.

Q1: Now you guys are part of the founding core group of the Lesbian Avengers here in New York. Tell me what led to that. What were some of the conversations that made you think this group would be necessary?

Wolfe: Well, you also ought to ask Anne about ILGO because she was one of the people who started the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization—

Q1: Oh, yes.

Wolfe: That did all the protests at the St. Patrick's Day parade. That was sort of dovetailed with ACT UP.

Maguire: And the Avengers.

Wolfe: And the Avengers, yes.

Q1: Thank you. Let's get those stories first.

Maguire: Well, the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, we started that in 1990 because there were so many Irish immigrants here and it turned out a lot of people had fled because they were gay or lesbian. And we started this group, met at the center. The vast majority of the people in the group were undocumented and totally and utterly closeted. Because I was such an experienced political activist at that point given that there were very few people in the group that were, so there was a bunch of us who wanted to do stuff.

Basically the first political discussion we had was over naming the group, which happened at our very first meeting. And there were a lot of people who wanted to give it a Gaelic name like cairde which is friends in Gaelic. We're like, uh-uh, nobody's going to know what that is. It's so closeted, you know? So that was the first battle, whether we were going to use a Gaelic name or say who we were.

Then when it came to saying who we were, we wanted lesbian to come before gay and that was a whole other battle. We wanted to be the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization and not the Irish Gay and Lesbian Organization. So we had a little battle and at but one meeting, after the very first meeting, we had a name. So I thought it was really important one, that we were not going to be closeted and two, that lesbians were going to be welcome in this group and were definitely going to be part of the leadership.

So I think the kind of tie-in between that and the Avengers was the lesbian thing being part of the leadership, saying we are here, we're not going anywhere. We're feisty. We're interested in power. We're not backing away. So the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization was very much like that. We had policies, like if anyone is invited anywhere, it has be a gay man and a lesbian. Gay men do not go anywhere on their own representing us. There's always going to be a lesbian. And it turned out that most of the work in the group was done by lesbians anyway.

So at one point within our first year, somebody brought up at a meeting, "Wouldn't it be kind of funny if we marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade?" Most of us were like, "Are you kidding me?" But anyway, we sent in an application and it just completely blew up. It totally blew up. Including ACT UP and AIDS, it was so totally and utterly homophobic in the '90s. It was a massive wave and I think a lot had to do with the AIDS crisis.

So we sent in an application. It was rejected. We were on a waiting list but Joe [Joseph] Nicholson [Jr.] who was a gay reporter at *The New York Post*; he didn't work as a gay reporter. He was a gay man who was a reporter at *The New York Post.* And feisty and willing to do the work. He tracked us down and the next day, it was on the front page of *The New York Post*, "Irish Gay Furor", or "St. Patrick's Day Furor". And the whole thing blew up.

So basically the group, we had to meet and decide are we going ahead with this or not? And the people in the group who were quite political and active were saying we're not

backing down. This is like they want us to be closeted. They want us to go away. We cannot back down now, despite the fact that eighty percent of our membership were completely closeted and terrified and also undocumented.

So I stayed in that group for ten years and we marched in the first and only parade ever in 1991 with Mayor [David N.] Dinkins as an invited group, not as the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, and were pelted with stuff, had people throwing beer cans and screaming at us for the whole thing. Dinkins actually said it reminded him of Selma. He never expected to experience anything like that in his life in New York City. He was appalled by it.

Then it turned, the group got quite radical. A lot of people totally came out of the closet, told their family in Ireland so they could work on this. The Avengers started. The Avengers got involved, people got involved in different stuff. And basically I stayed with this for ten years and then it went on for twenty-five years. The first group got to march—the first Irish gay group got to march this past March. So that's twenty-five, twenty-six years later. That's how long it took them.

So I think the Avenger thing tied in for me with the fact that a lot of lesbians were really shocked that a lesbian was like so upfront in a group that was for gay men and lesbians and it was a big deal. It was a big deal to have like an opinionated, tough, strong, very political lesbian being a spokesperson for this group. It was quite unusual at the time for a

mixed group. So I think there must have been something simmering underneath, Maxine, with the Lesbian Avengers and the timing.

Q1: Give me a little bit—both of you can help me with this, a little bit of context on that. What were the expectations for women in queer rights organizations? What were the dynamics that you were coming into in the '90s and why was it so unusual to see lesbians in leadership?

Wolfe: Well, for a long time, if you read histories of the lesbian and gay movement, first of all, they all focus on electoral politics and very few lesbians were involved in electoral politics. Lesbians were involved in radical politics. So in organizing against the war, like lesbians surrounded the Pentagon while other people were marching. So it was that kind of thing or they formed like the peace camps or Greenham [Common Women's Peace Camp], where lesbians climbed over the fence and tried to destroy missiles.

This is what lesbians were doing. They were part of the feminist movement and the women's movement, but the radical end of that, not the National Organization for Women although there were lesbians there as well. I always—on the left, I had been involved with mixed groups, it was never an issue but they were never like big mass organizations. They were small ones, like a group called CRASH, which was the Committee Against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, and Heterosexism and it was like a leftie male and female group. But it was never anything that was visible or that was in the newspaper or anything else.

Most of the other groups because of finances and also the difference in politics, were run by gay men. They never gave any attention—and also the mainstream media, to them, gay means men. They can't pronounce lesbian. Getting the word out of their mouth doesn't work. If they described any organization, they would say it was gay. Even if people eventually wrote about ACT UP, they would say all gay men or mostly gay men. Well, the leadership of ACT UP was largely lesbians. We were the people who organized, taught people how to do civil disobedience, organized the marshalling, did the logistics of the actions and got arrested. My affinity group had loads of women in it and we were organizing all the time. But originally that was not the way.

So when you read the history, it always sounds like it was gay men. Then when people describe what did lesbians do in the '70s, well, they were cultural. They did cultural work. Yes, we had to start our own publishers, our own record companies, our own everything because gay men wouldn't publish our books. The straight press wouldn't publish our books and they wouldn't publish our music.

So yes, we did that but we also did stuff about the murder of children in Atlanta because we also didn't only do lesbian and gay politics. We did other politics. We did civil rights. People marched at Selma who were lesbian. People did a lot of stuff around the murder of the black children in Atlanta in the '80s and other kinds of issues like that. So in the same way that in the Vietnam War movement, eventually women left to form the feminist movement, lesbians left both of those to form a lesbian movement because none

of them were giving any play, any perspective on lesbians. So that was one of the biggest issues.

So everybody always talks about ACT UP as being one of—the AIDS crisis actually as being one of the only times that lesbians and gay men worked together or one of the first times that they visibly worked together in some kind of a radical movement. In ways that's true because beforehand, it was lesbians who were radical, not gay men, with radical politics. So I think that was the big difference.

But we also, when we started the Avengers, we felt, even though we had worked with gay men and I kept working in ACT UP and Anne kept being in ILGO, we also felt really strongly that we wanted to work with other lesbians to focus on lesbian issues because there were lesbian issues that nobody was dealing with. Even in AIDS, people would make fun of the fact that there could be lesbians who had AIDS and we knew lesbians who had AIDS and they didn't get it from a needle. But nobody would ever talk about lesbian sex, so people couldn't imagine. Like how could lesbians spread AIDS? Well, they could spread AIDS because they have blood and other bodily fluids that are involved in sex, if they're not just doing sex the way people think that lesbians do it but they're actually having sex the way that lesbians have it.

So even in the AIDS crisis, that became an issue. And also as lesbians in the AIDS crisis, we did a lot of stuff about women in AIDS and that's the other thing that people never talk about when they talk about ACT UP, they always talk about drugs into bodies and it

was all about that—no. We also did work on changing the Centers for Disease Control [and Prevention] definition to include women and poor people and the people who spearheaded that were lesbians.

We had these groups that worked together and my affinity group which had sixteen men in it and eight women—I think it was sixteen and eight—those men worked on getting the definition changed. They spent—and several of them are dead. They didn't work on drugs into bodies for themselves. They worked on making sure that other people could get access to medication who were not even thought of as having HIV.

So I think that those ideas and the idea of trying to work also in an all-lesbian group—and also at that time, I should say that at that time, this group started—what was the name of it? The one with the—the women's group that you went to the meetings of?

Maguire: WAC, Women's Action Coalition.

Wolfe: And they started doing stuff about abortion again. People called me and said, "We're going to start this group." A group of lesbians called me to say, "We're starting this group." And I said, "Is it a lesbian group?" They said, "No, it's a women's group." I said, "Been there, done that." Fifteen years of working on abortion and then tried to get people to deal with lesbian issues and they threw me out *[laughs]*. So I said, "I have done that already. I'm not doing that again."

So then I wanted to do some kind of an action group and I was friends with Sarah Schulman at the time and I said to her, "We need to do something about getting lesbians to do some actions." There were those two women that I think were attacked on the Appalachian Trail and nobody did anything.

Maguire: Yes.

Wolfe: Nobody did anything. And I said, "We've got to do something that's like that." And she knew that Ana [M.] Simo who is a lesbian who was out for many, many years and ran this theater company called Medusa's Revenge, this theater group, the first lesbian theater in New York, that she was interested in doing something as well. So Ana and I met for lunch that May and we talked about different ways, different things that we could do and we decided that we would each invite some people to a meeting. And so we each asked our friends to come and the end result of that was Anne, Marie—her partner Marie—Sarah Schulman, myself, Anne-[Christine] D'Adesky and who else?

Maguire: That's it.

Wolfe: That was it?

Maguire: Yes, six, only six of us.

Wolfe: Six of us, yes. So we met at Ana's house and we decided that we wanted to do something and somehow we came up with the name, Lesbian Avengers. We said, "What about the Avengers?" And somebody said, "Lesbian Avengers." We said, "Great." And Ana's son is the one who came with the logo, which was the anarchist bomb. He was the one that suggested it. And we decided as a group that we wanted to do something.

At that time, a big issue in New York was the rainbow curriculum. Well, we decided a couple of things. We decided that we didn't want to integrate gay bars, that we wanted to do serious politics but in a really good way, a fun way and not like dour, but in some way that would involve people. But it had to be not minor issues. Like sometimes people do things, like oh, it's an all male bar; we should go there and make them take women. We didn't care. That was not important to us.

The rainbow curriculum was important. They were going to create this curriculum for the public schools and it had three lines in it about gay people, three lines. And already these people, superintendents and stuff were lining up against it. But really what they were against was not just that it had three lines about gay people, it also had stuff about people of color and it had the truth about Native Americans, minor things that had not been included in the curriculum beforehand.

So we decided we would do something about that. We decided that we would do it on the first day of school but other than that, I think that the thing that made it work—and we made up a club card, a little card that basically said—I have one inside. It said something

like lesbians, gay men, dykes; cold-blooded liars are in the White House, what are you doing about it? Help us take revenge. Then it had a phone number. The phone number was the one that was upstairs that was my daughter's extension, their phone, because I was getting phone calls. They were getting phone calls when they were teenagers. So I got them a phone. The message said, "You have reached the Lesbian Avengers. We are doing an action on the first day of school. We're having a meeting on July sixth. Come to the meeting and leave a message."

And the first message was from Lydia who left this message saying, "You are either my dream or my nightmare. I hope you are not the sergeant behind the local desk." And that tape is at the archives. Anyway, so we decided that we'd hand out those at Gay Pride—

Maguire: Thousands of them, six of us.

Wolfe: Yes. But we would not give them to any one that was already in a group, that we would only give it to people on the sidelines because they were not committed to anybody else. And we decided that—we also decided that we would not create the whole action, just the concept so that people could own it.

All of us were incredibly democratic and we did not want a top-down organization. We wanted one from the bottom-up. But in the lesbian community at that time, when we had tried to do that, it never went anywhere. If we called a meeting, everybody had their own interests and nothing would happen.

So we decided we had to make it fait accompli. The group existed and by giving these out, the women who came were taking a risk because who were we? We didn't have our names on it. It didn't say who we were. It just was a phone number and telling people to come to a meeting. So the women who came were definitely risk-takers, which is what we wanted. What else did we do that was—I think that was it.

Maguire: That was it. It was really the palm card, like thousands of palm cards at Gay Pride.

Wolfe: We gave them out the entire time.

Maguire: Yes.

Wolfe: So the first meeting was on July 6 and sixty lesbians showed up. And we each took a head—ran a committee. Like I did the logistics and Ana did—well, Sarah did media. And who did research? I think you did—

Maguire: I did research on the rainbow stuff—

Wolfe: Did you do research?

Maguire: Yes.

Wolfe: Research and then somebody did props or something like that. Then other people in the room joined those committees. So by doing that, it wasn't us running it—and we didn't even pick the place. The research committee, totally luck involved, ended up picking this district in Middle Village, Queens where nobody goes to do actions because most of the people who do organizing, they don't go to places where they're not wanted. They go to the [Greenwich] Village. Who wants to give out things in the Village? It's like speaking to the converted.

So this was Middle Village and the woman who was the superintendent was a homophobe par excellence. She had basically said that would be no rainbow curriculum, over her dead body *[laughs]*. She was like so amazing. Mary Cummins was her name.

Maguire: Yes, she was pretty bad.

Wolfe: She was terrible. She was the worst and she was getting all this publicity. So she basically gave us publicity. So we arranged this first action out in Middle Village, Queens. We arranged to do a march through the village, through the main street to the public school and to do something on the first day of school. And we ended up having a band, a women's band was in the front singing, *We Are Family*. And then we had a big banner that said "Teach About Lesbian Lives."

Maguire: And t-shirts.

Wolfe: And t-shirts that said, "I Was a Lesbian Child." And then we had balloons. The balloons said, "Ask about Lesbian Lives." I think that one of the interesting things was we decided, the six of us that we would do this if nobody else wanted to. The six of us would do it. So when we had at the first meeting, as I said, were the risk-takers and they were all totally behind it. But at the second meeting, other people had come who had heard about it and they were the naysayers. So they would say things like—

Maguire: "Stay away from children."

Wolfe: Right.

Maguire: "We cannot be near children."

Wolfe: Right, and they would say, "This is the first day of school and you're going to make it terrible." I said to them, "Do you have any kids?" I said, "I have two kids. This is going to be the best first day of school they have ever had. There's going to be a marching band and balloons and everything." [*Laughter*].

Wolfe: I said "And the second day is going to be totally disappointing and depressing." Then they would say something like, "Well, but the balloons, it's like manipulating kids." I said, "If it said, Save the Whales, would it be okay?" It's like homophobia and fear which people have—because we were going into this hostile environment basically.

Well, we went to Middle Village, Queens and we marched down that street and there were loads of people supporting us. They came out—

Maguire: The children took the balloons. Some of them didn't have parents saying, "Don't give my child a balloon." They walked to school holding their balloons and asked about lesbian lives.

Wolfe: One woman made her kid—

Maguire: Yes, one out of all of them.

Wolfe: One out of all of them and nobody got arrested. The cops were there finally when we got to the school and of course, they tried to tell us that we couldn't march on the sidewalk and we told them what the law was. They had to let us do it. And then it was all over the newspapers and that sort of launched the Lesbian Avengers.

So those were the kinds of actions that we tried to do the whole time. We did a lot of really wonderful—we actually worked on Boycott Colorado stuff and prevented the mayor of Denver from continuing his economic development tour of New York. He left because every radio station he went to asked him questions about the anti-gay proposition because we did demonstrations in front of everyone while he was there. We called in on the phone. We followed him around, including to the Plaza Hotel. We were just fearless. We really didn't care.

Maguire: I wouldn't say we were fearless. I always have a tremendous amount of fear and anxiety going into these things but fearless in a different way. Doing all those actions, it can be—I guess part of it is you never really know what's going to happen and if some maniac is going to be there. There's always an element of fear and anxiety—

Wolfe: Which is good.

Maguire: Yes, I think it's normal. But I also think people don't get that about activism or activists. We're just out there shouting our heads off, waving banners and never about the thought that goes behind it and what it actually means for a person to go out there with our bodies and do this thing.

Wolfe: We always plan things very, very well. We always had somebody who was there, a legal person. I mean I agree, when I say fearless, I mean we went and did it.

Maguire: I know.

Wolfe: But you always have to be anxious enough to be careful and to see what's going on. So we did things like that here and also one of the things that grew out of the Lesbian Avengers was a civil rights organizing project. In 1994, there were all these bills around the United States that were anti-gay bills. There was a proposition in Oregon that would make it legal to discriminate against gay people and these two people were killed. A

bomb went off in their basement apartment, a disabled gay man and a lesbian of color and both of them were killed. And people didn't get that. This was the same kind of stuff you were seeing during the civil rights movement.

So we got in touch with people across the United States—lesbians across the United States to ask them if they needed help. In all of these different states, we traveled. Usually two of us would go to introduce ourselves because we knew that we had resources and in a lot of the smaller places, they didn't.

So we did some work first with some people in Maine about an anti-gay resolution or bill there and then we ended up doing a big action in New York around the anti-violence march that pointed out the information about all the anti-gay bills that were in the United States and the killing of these two people.

That was when we started eating fire which was our trademark and people always think that that was a joke but we did that because on this anti-violence march, one of the Lesbian Avengers gave—the anti-violence project asked people to do something at different places. So we set up a shrine and we actually slept out there for four days from the night of Halloween to the election which was the following Tuesday. And people could bring candles and people brought candles for people with AIDS and not just for the people who were bombed in Oregon. So it became a shrine to all the violence that people in our communities had experienced.

And one of the things, the first night there was a march and you stopped at each of these places. And we stopped. This woman, Lysander gave a talk and basically one of the things that she said was that people, that you're are afraid and there's a reason to be afraid but what you should do is take the fear and put it in you and then make it your own and have it come out as anger and determination to do something.

So we had one woman who taught us how to eat fire and a group of women stood in a circle and swallowed the fire as other people chanted, "We take the fire within us and we take it and make it our own." And that was the point of it. It wasn't like a joke. It was to basically say you can be afraid but you need to do something and not let people's fear get you to run away. Instead you should come out and do something.

Q1: On that thought, I kind of wanted to go back. It struck me that you said a lot of people don't understand how activists feel. You mentioned fear but we didn't really get to go into a specific experience and I was wondering if you could say a little more about that and draw out that experience and what is important for people to understand about how you feel going into a situation like this.

Maguire: Well, I guess every action is kind of different. I think the thing with direct action in particular is that everything is involved. You are going out with your body and I think for groups like the Avengers and for ILGO and experience direct activism makes it easier because you know everyone has your back. While you can never predict what's going to happen, the great thing is—I mean I always have anxiety. I'm always scared.

I'm always worried that the thing I'm supposed to do with the banner is not going to happen and very recently I did have a whole banner thing that didn't happen and it's disappointing but we got to keep our banner.

But I think it's just being aware of everyone around you, being aware that people have your backs. While I am always scared, I'm also always like totally, full on for it. Okay, I'm going out here and all these people are with me. We also have support and if something goes wrong, I kind of know we're all going to figure it out together. It's not going to be I'm going to be left here on my own because I fell or I got thwacked or something went wrong, I went in the wrong door, where we're supposed to be going somewhere else.

It's a commitment. I mean it's a commitment everyone makes. We make it to each other. We make it to this action we've all been working on for quite awhile. I do know that people think, oh, also now we're paid. We don't have jobs. We're like on George Soros' payroll. In fact, no, I've had a full-time job all this time for the last forty years. I have always had a full-time job. I take my vacation time. I take my personal days to do actions. And most activists are like that.

I don't think it's people who don't agree with your position. Sometimes it's people who feel guilty because they feel like, "Oh, I should really be doing something but I go on one march a year and I know it's not enough." So I think sometimes there's a kind of attitude about out there, shouting your heads off, waving your placards, blah, blah, blah. But you

know, you've been doing it for your entire life. I've been doing it for my entire life and there's a reason why we're doing it and it's valid and it takes guts and it takes a huge amount of commitment.

Wolfe: I would also say that there's real fear. I have been pushed around by the police. I have been handcuffed too tight and my wrists have turned blue. I've been on a bus in South Carolina with a cop who had a knife in his boot. The very first ACT UP action we did at *Cosmo [Cosmopolitan Magazine]*, the women's committee, there was a cop that came after me with a club.

It's also, there are actual reasons to be afraid about the possibility of physical harm and it's often coming from police. But it can also come from counter-protestors as we saw in Charlottesville and so when you go out and you make a commitment to do this, you have no idea who's going to be out there. One of the things that we do when we teach civil disobedience and teach marshalling is to teach people how to handle hecklers and people who come after you, so that you don't engage them and you don't escalate it but sometimes you don't do anything and they do it.

And if you're going to resist arrest, if you're going to do civil disobedience and resist arrest and police pick you up, they throw you into the van and they don't care if you hurt your back. And there are people who have hurt their backs. There was a woman at the Matthew—what was his name?

Maguire: Shepard.

Wolfe: Shepard, a very spontaneous action that happened in New York where thousands of people showed up and nobody originally organized it. It's just like thousands of people showed up. And it's sort of like the first Occupy [movement] thing. So some of us who had experience as marshalls, we just immediately—it kicked into gear even though we hadn't organized it. One woman got hit by a horse and to this day, she limps. There's a guy that I know who got a concussion. So there are things that can happen that are actually physically terrible. Most of the fear is about what can happen that you have no idea what's going to be out there. So you have to sort of go—and that's why what Anne was saying is true. One of the best ways to do it is be with a group of people who you know and you know you can count on.

So in ACT UP, we had an affinity group structure where small groups worked together. So you knew those people really well and whatever you organized to do together, you knew that they would be there. It's also how you organized support structures, so somebody who's going to follow, find out what jail you're taken to and be there while you're there and when you come out. One action that I was in ACT UP, we were strip searched, which was illegal. We knew that was illegal. When we came out, there were lawyers there. We said we've got to do something about this, this was illegal, and we ended up suing the city.

So there's actually the possibility of physical violence as well as just the pumped-up-ness of the fact that you're going into this situation that you have no idea and also, that when you're in those situations, you have to be self-confident because the police lie. No offense to the police, actually, in that sense. We have a job to do. They have a job to do.

Now that's not excusing physical violence but I'm saying even in general when they're not physically violent, when we do the Dyke March, the cop will say—I'll say to one of the police, like, "We need to stop because there's a gap in the march." "Oh, no, there's no gap in the march." I never believe them. Okay, it's just something you learn. It's not to do that. So that's what the physical—just the courage that you need to do things and the confidence.

Q1: It's significant then that you target specifically bringing in people that have never been involved or not currently involved in anything before. So talk to me about working with people you personally didn't know. Talk to me about training people who didn't have the skills already. Do people stick with it after this initial onboarding? Was there a lot of turnover? Just talk to me about that whole process and experience.

Maguire: You have more to say. You were more involved at the beginning of the Avengers and I was back with the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization.

Wolfe: People stayed. ACT UP had people come and go but a huge number of people stayed and a huge number of people kept doing activism when they left ACT UP, other

kinds of activism. That is one of the points but one of the things is we did trainings. One of the things again that people don't know is we did teach-ins first of all. When we did work with—

Q1: As ACT UP or as the Lesbian Avengers?

Wolfe: Both. So if we were doing something about an issue that we wanted to target, we learned everything we could about it. So in ACT UP, one of the things we did was, we did teach-ins about the [United States] Food & Drug Administration, when we did a big action there, about the National Institutes of Health, about the Center for Disease Control's definition of AIDS. We wrote booklets. We wrote books actually. The ACT UP Women's Caucus wrote a book about women in AIDS but before we wrote the book, we did a teach-in and we made a photocopy booklet which ended up being—we made fifteen hundred copies and not only did we give them out at all of our teach-ins at ACT UP but we sent them all over the world.

And eventually when we needed support from people in other parts of the world to get that definition changed, they came to do it because they understood how it affected them. So the teach-ins were one way that people learned but we also did trainings. We did civil disobedience training. So whenever we had an action, we asked if there were any people who hadn't been trained and if they hadn't been, we did civil disobedience trainings. We did marshal trainings. We did facilitator trainings, so that if you were facilitating a meeting, you were trained. We did those in the Avengers; we did those in ACT UP.

Maguire: And then the booklets.

Wolfe: The booklets, yes.

Maguire: The booklets, the Lesbian Avengers have a handbook and it is just the best thing ever. It's the A to Z of how to have a direct action group, what you need, if you're doing an action, a check-off list of all the things you need to have covered, running a meeting, facilitating, organizing outside—

Wolfe: Examples of leaflets.

Maguire: Leaflets, yes.

Wolfe: Press releases.

Maguire: Press releases, everything. And part of it came from an ACT UP handbook and we did the same thing in the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization. It's like okay; this is your first year doing this. Here's a history, here are the players, here's what we do. This is when our trainings are. So those things get moved around from group to group. And now the Lesbian Avenger handbook is being used in Rise and Resist which formed after the election of Donald [J.] Trump and people open it up and start reading and go, "Oh,

my God. This is the best thing I have ever seen." So it's like okay *[crosstalk]*. Here you go. It's fantastic.

Wolfe: And one of the big things that we did in the Lesbian Avengers was the civil rights organizing project and we ended up in Idaho because there was a group—we wanted to make sure that we were invited somewhere. We didn't just come somewhere. And there was a group of Lesbian Avengers that formed after—we did the first dyke march in Washington, the night before the 1993 march on Washington and twenty thousand lesbians showed up without a permit and we marched to the White House. And from that, all these chapters started and they started all over the country.

So this group in Idaho invited us to come and help them because there was an anti-gay amendment in Idaho. So six lesbian—we raised money from our friends and six Lesbian Avengers went and lived there for ten months. And then ten of us came on weekends, various weekends and we organized. And we organized direct action in Moscow, Idaho; Boise, Idaho; Sandpoint, Idaho, all over Idaho to get—not just to be against the anti-gay amendment but to organize people there to come out. And we got support. We did actions. We also wrote stuff up for people there.

So we ended up finding one lesbian who lived in a small town that was sort of a center for the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] because they had logging unions. And she ended up getting—we ended up going with her to the local AFL-CIO chapter. They wrote a letter that we put in a

brochure. Then we went door to door with her and gave it out and we had the support of the AFL-CIO. We went to the Nez Perce reservations and worked with Native Americans. We went to Sandpoint and worked with the local librarian because part of this law would have eliminated gay books from the library. This was a straight man and he had no problem working with the Lesbian Avengers. We did a march in Sandpoint, Idaho.

So eventually the proposition was defeated and one of the things that was in the local paper was that the most surprising thing was that the rural areas that we worked in, voted against the amendment and that that was something totally surprising that nobody expected. The mainstream lesbian and gay groups that were campaigning were doing all top-down campaigning with videos and television advertising and whatever but they weren't going to these places. We went to these places and also in one of the small towns, a group of lesbians and gay men who had never been out, came out. They did a panel at the local community center and then eventually when we left had formed a group to continue the work.

So when I say that we wanted to do serious stuff, that's what I mean. What we did there was fun. We had things like we went to the county fair and did all kinds of actions that people could relate to but they were about a serious issue and we followed through on it.

So those kinds of things, for instance being in Idaho, that took courage because a lot of the—Sandpoint had a big right-wing community. A lot of places have that and we just

said, “If we’re not willing to go there, then what’s the point?” Every movement teaches another. One of the things that the civil rights movement made clear is that you need to go to the belly of the beast. If you’re not going to go there, what’s the point?

So that is something that ACT UP did, that the Avengers did, that ILGO did which is you don’t just stay in your neighborhood. You don’t just go where there are people who agree with you. You have to go to places where people don’t agree with you. And the one other thing that I guess where we differ from as just sort of a—I don’t even know the word for it but kind of this touchy-feely thing, is that it’s not about having to just have dialog with people. It’s showing people that you are someone to be reckoned with.

And that was always especially important for the gay movement because the image of the gay movement and especially of gay men but also just of gay people in general was that we kind of were like these sort of flimsy faggots and dykes who really weren’t going to do anything because we didn’t have any courage. So Stonewall [riots] started the image of no, don’t screw with us. But it’s a very important thing to say to people, “You cannot tell me that I am less than you and you cannot do something that makes me less than you. So I have to be here as a full human being. I’m not going to stand for certain things that you’re going to do and I’m not going to be nice about it.”

I’m not going to be violent about it. Everything that we’ve ever done has been non-violent but it was strong and definite and courageous, I think. I met some wonderful people. I mean the people who did all this were just amazing people. And you wouldn’t

meet them on the street and say, “Oh, that’s an amazing person.” But they were amazing people. They basically did things that were way out of their comfort zone.

Q1: Thank you for that. Let’s take a short break.

Q2: Perfect.

Q1: And then we’ll move on and talk about the Alice Austen House *[laughter]*.

Wolfe: When we went to the middle of the belly of the beast.

Maguire: Yes.

Q1: Yes.

Wolfe: The women with rolled gloves who were so nasty.

Q1: Oh, my God, I can’t wait for that story. How long does it take to change your battery?

Q2: Oh, I don’t have to change the battery out. I actually—I need to break just to create a new file.

Q1: Okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Okay, and this is the November 5, 2017 interview with Maxine Wolfe and Anne Maguire.

Maguire: Maguire. I'm going to give you my name, the spelling too.

Q1: I have it. He doesn't.

Wolfe: And it's Wolfe with an "e".

Q1: Yes, it is.

Q2: Anthony Bellov's videographer, Liz Strong is the interviewer and I'm going to clap.

Q1: So tell me a little bit about how you heard first about what was going on with the history of the Alice Austen House, whoever wants to take that away.

Wolfe: Do you want to start?

Maguire: I think you probably heard first from the academic.

Wolfe: [*Laughs*] So how did we hear about the Alice Austen House? This researcher, Amy [S.] Khoudari, is how I think you pronounce her name, came to an Avenger meeting. She had also been at the archives doing research but she came to an Avenger meeting and she basically said to us that she had been doing research about Alice Austen who was this very famous photographer. And that she had been doing her research at Alice Austen House and it was for her Ph.D. dissertation.

And she did a talk in Staten—so the Alice Austen House is in Staten Island and she did a talk in Staten Island. She was invited to do a talk, not at the Alice Austen House but somewhere else and I don't even know where and she gave that talk. The next time she went to the Alice Austen House, she sort of was cold-shouldered and they started telling her that she couldn't have access to everything. And previous to that, she had gone there and done a lot of research but suddenly they were restricting how often she could be there and what she could see, et cetera. And she knew that it had to be about the fact that when she gave this talk about Alice Austen, she mentioned that she was a lesbian, that she had lived in the Alice Austen House with her partner, Gertrude Tate for more than thirty years. And that they must have been homophobic and they really didn't want this to be the perception of the Alice Austen House.

And she also kind of implied that it was a very conservative board that ran the Alice Austen House and that they were never going to be happy about it. So she told us that they were having this nautical festival that they have every year and that it would be a

good place to leaflet people because the whole board would be there and then all these people who come to this festival and some of them are members. I guess there was a membership thing that you could be at the Alice Austen House.

So we got together and we decided to leaflet—we don't just want to leaflet. What can we do that's more interesting than just leafleting? So do you want to pick it up from there? Go ahead.

Maguire: Well, we both went out to Alice Austen House. We thought we should go out and check out the whole place, how to get there and what was there to see. And we found they had a video, so you could sit and watch this little video about her life and her work. The house had a name, it was like Sunny—I can't—

Q1: Clear Comfort.

Maguire: Clear Comfort, that's it. So basically a little bit of history about the house but absolutely nothing about Gertrude Tate, her partner and nothing about the fact that she was a lesbian. And this is a fake of the brochure they had. So they had a brochure in the little store where they also showed the video. So we bought a copy of the brochure and then we made our own. And decided because it was a nautical theme and there would be song, that we needed to write our own songs and that we should go dressed as turn of the century, so it would have been turn of last century in the funny bonnets and stripy—*[crosstalk]*.

Wolfe: Like lifeguards, we were going to save her.

Maguire: Lifeguards. So basically we were going to come and save Alice Austen from the board of the Friends of Alice Austen House.

Wolfe: And the homophobia, right. So we sort of had these shower caps and we wore striped tops so that we looked like we were from the turn of century, bathers or lifeguards. Then we made these life preservers from the inner tubes of tires and we wrote Dyke Preserver on it. Then we made up this brochure. Anne wrote everything in this brochure. It's funny. I don't know if you want me to read any part of it.

Q1: Sure, if you have a favorite piece. Go for it.

Wolfe: I'll just read the end of it. The end of it says, "We have come as lesbian lifeguards to rescue Alice Austen from the homophobes. Too often our history is denied us. Our papers, diaries, photographs and letters have been destroyed, lost, buried and deliberately misinterpreted. Here at the Alice Austen House museum, there is a wealth of lesbian herstory. Because Alice can't tell the liars on the board to take a hike and to get the hell off her lesbian land, we're here to do it. We demand that Alice Austen's lesbian identity become an integral part of the museum's interpretation of her life. If the board refuses to embrace the real Alice Austen, they should resign and take their sinking ship of lesbophobia with them. We are dyke preservers and we know all about Alice Austen. We

will preserve and celebrate Alice Austen's life long after the liars and the homophobes are gone. This here is a lesbian museum."

And we called it a national historic lesbian landmark. The thing that was interesting, I think, besides the thing, she was an amazing photographer and she took photographs of many, many parts of the city. She was amazing, A, that she was a woman photographer at her time. She carried around heavy photographic equipment. It wasn't lightweight and she took it to the Lower East Side. She took it all over the city.

But she also took these amazing photographs of her friends in these very funny tableaus that were kind of in drag. She has one where three women are dressed as men. She has women dancing with each other in couples. One of her most famous ones is this one of women couples dancing. She had them dressed as Romeo and Juliet characters. She just used her friends to make the most funny, lesbian, gay photographs. And they're historic because they were of that moment which is from the turn of the century really. And none of that was there.

None of those photographs were there and no mention of it and no mention of Gertrude Tate and it's a sad story because Alice Austen was a spendthrift. She threw away her entire family fortune and at the end of her life was a pauper. And the only place that there was for her—for years, she and Gertrude Tate lived in an apartment of their own and they couldn't afford it. Then Gertrude had relatives out on Long Island, but they didn't want the two of them to come together.

And so Alice Austen ended up in a poor person's—a pauper house and died there alone. Gertrude would come and visit her but she was alone. And then this entire history was erased. It was so sad and angering that she would get no—that Gertrude would get absolutely made invisible and that no one would know that these people were devoted to each other, these two women, for thirty years.

So that's why we wanted to do something, but in the typical Avengers fashion. So we made these brochures, which by the way, at the end of our action, we went into the bookstore and put them in every single book in the bookstore. So that anyone who bought something would find the actual—

Maguire: The real story.

Wolfe: The real story of Gertrude. But we also—it was a nautical day and we wanted to engage the people that were there. So we started by walking down the street with—oh, we started on the Staten Island ferry and before we got on the ferry, we sang all the songs waiting for the ferry. Then we sang the songs on the ferry which believe it or not, turned out to be the Alice Austen ferry which we were just like oh, my goodness, we got the Alice Austen ferry. Then we marched from the ferry to the house and we came down the block and we marched into the nautical thing singing, *[singing]* "*Ho, Ho, Homo Sex, Homosexual. Alice and Gertrude were lesbians and we are as well!*" [*Laughs*].

Maguire: Over and over.

Wolfe: Over and over and over. And by the way, these songs were written by Anne and myself and my friend, Ed [Edward T.] Rogowsky who is no longer with us. He died some years ago, but who loved music and he was so happy to write these songs with us. And they were really great and some of them were exactly about what it was. This one was about the photos that she took.

Maguire: Oh, yes, so we made blowups—

Wolfe: Blowups of her photographs.

Maguire: —of her photographs. So we had these big black and white blowups of her photographs and then we had a song to go, so we could hold up the photos we were actually referring to. We did this because they had singers there. So what actually happened was they sang one song—and we actually worked this out with them, under their little tent and then it was our turn. Then they sang one and then we sang our next one. So it actually got completely incorporated into what was going on at the time, which was great.

Wolfe: Yes. This one—you just have to read this. Okay, *[singing]* "*Alice Austen was a dyke, Alleluia. Alice Austen on a bike, Alleluia. Alice Austen dressed in drag, Alleluia. Alice Austen with a fag, Alleluia.*"

Maguire: It goes on.

Wolfe: So we had all of these where we pointed out all her different photographs—

Maguire: Her work. We had Alice Austen drinking beer.

Wolfe: Right and Alice Austen, you were queer. "Alice Austen, your lesbian life was not in vain because we'll come back again and again." Anyways, it was about preserving history, *Yellow Submarine*. We used a lot of songs. And they were all water songs. It was amazing and then we also had like a dance routine that we did.

So after we did our whole thing and we tried talking to these women on the board and they were just, get out of our faces. They were just so nasty and there was a gay man who was on the board, one gay man who was on the board actually supported us. The other gay man who was on the board was the director and he was totally closeted and he was furious. So these two young women who were not lesbians, they were just women who were there with their families. They were maybe fourteen or fifteen, those girls, they came over and they said, "We understand why you're saying this but maybe if you were nicer about it, maybe if you sent letters." So we said, "We sent letters and they just don't pay any attention to us. So we need to do something for them to get their attention."

So we didn't know this but she had gone over and spoken to this guy on the board, the director of the board. Anyway, we did this whole thing and then we marched through the whole thing. Then we went into the bookstore and stuffed every book with the brochures that we made.

Maguire: And we left a life preserver on—

Wolfe: On the front fence.

Maguire: On the picket fence before we left.

Wolfe: Then we walked out and these two young women came up to us and they said that they had gone up to the guy who was the director of the board and told him, that he should listen to us because we had something important to say. He gave them his card and said that they should bring it to us and tell us to call him and come and meet with him. So that was just nice that they actually were moved to do something because that's why we do stuff, right? It's not just to do it; it's to have an impact. So we did that and then we went home on the Alice Austen ferry. It was there again. So actually Alice Austen was with us all the way. Then we tried to get in touch with them.

Maguire: We did write a letter. We had a follow-up letter—

Wolfe: A lot of people, yes.

Maguire: And other people wrote letters and the offer of the meeting disappeared immediately. I mean those two girls said he's going to meet you. It didn't happen. We were stalled. We were told it wasn't going to happen. And my recollection is we got really busy doing other stuff—

Wolfe: Other things, yes. And we dropped it.

Maguire: Yes. We didn't keep—

Wolfe: We were going to go and do a protest at the board meeting—

Maguire: A follow-up thing.

Wolfe: But at that point, we were doing this work in Idaho and something about the radio station, MEGA KQ which had a very homophobic guy who did the morning program and we did stuff there. So it just never happened. But there were articles in the paper. So it became known that Alice Austen—who Alice Austen was. It was in Staten Island papers. So everybody there knew. And eventually what happened was they kept—the board composition changed and people wanted to make it known. So now it was made a national historic landmark and so the people there decided that they had to take her out of the closet and make it—so now all the information is there about her and Gertrude Tate and the fact that they lived together, et cetera. And so twenty-five years later but this is

the way activism works. You don't always know what impact you're going to have and when. You just do it.

Q1: What happened with the woman doing her Ph.D.? Did you ever hear her story?

Wolfe: She did her Ph.D. She got her Ph.D.

Q1: Did she ever get access to the archives again?

Wolfe: I don't know if she ever did. She did her thesis so she obviously had enough information. So I don't think they let her back in. But she had enough information at that point to write the paper because there had been one other paper that was written in the '70s that I have a copy of. And she obviously by that time had enough to write about.

Q1: So tell me about your own rediscovery of this history. Had you been aware of the Alice Austen House and that story before this woman approached you and if not, after she approached you, how did you go about rediscovering the history and doing the research yourself?

Wolfe: Well, I am a coordinator at the Lesbian Herstory Archives which is the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world and I've been there since 1984. And we have a file called—well, first of all, we have people there who are photographers but we have a file called biographical files. So actually when she came, she came to the archives to do

research. So when someone does that, you can't possibly know everything that's in the archives. And I'm not an art historian. Now we have a coordinator who is an art historian. I'm sure she knew who Alice Austen was before then.

I had seen this photograph, which is very famous and a lot of lesbians know it because there used to be historical postcards made that you could buy and this was one of the things that was always—you could always get a postcard of it. So I'm sure that somewhere in my head I had her name but not really knowing what all that she did. But when this woman came, I went upstairs to the biographic files as I would do with anybody, and I said, "Well, let me see what we have." And sure enough, we had two folders on Alice Austen. So from that point on, I started finding out about Alice Austen. So I think that that's the other thing about when I said you do research. We couldn't have written this brochure. There's much more inside about who Alice Austen was and what she did and that came from research that we did in order to do the brochure.

Maguire: I didn't know her at all. The same thing, I recognized this photograph. I had no idea who Alice Austen was. No idea she was so close by, like Staten Island. So it was only from that woman coming to the meeting, that I discovered who she was really. And also realized after doing some research, I actually recognized a lot of her photographs, including the photos of newsboys on the Lower East Side, like lots of her photography was very familiar. And I had no idea it had been a woman in the first place, never mind Alice Austen. So that was kind of fantastic.

Wolfe: Yes.

Q1: So rediscovering her story, somebody who was openly long-term coupled in that particular period in history, what did rediscovering that kind of history mean to you?

Maguire: Well, I think at this time, I was just completely appalled that they were covering it up. I can't believe they're doing this. That was really appalling because it was so obvious. Once we started doing the research, I think they had been together for forty years. It was more like forty years and Gertrude Tate broke an engagement to a man to be with Alice Austen. And Alice Austen was clearly—they were devoted to each other. Their friends and their family knew that they were in a relationship, that they were lesbians.

I think part of what was going on at this time in the '90s too, horrifying statistics coming out about gay teens killing themselves. So one of the things was if you're a kid, your family in Staten Island is going to the Alice Austen House on a Sunday afternoon to have a look at her photos, her house is beautiful and the situation is gorgeous. That was also a really nice surprise. It's right on the water.

So it's probably the kind of place families would go and you go into the museum and there's a little videotape. It would be really nice for your children and yourself and especially your gay children that nobody knows they're gay yet, to be told that Alice and Gertrude were together for forty years and here are her gay friends and some of her

photographs. Here are some of her photographs on the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century. But she also documented her life as a lesbian.

That kind of thing would have made a huge difference to me as a kid, going oh, okay, that's interesting, good. I mean I was appalled by that, that they had totally, totally closeted her. It was really shocking.

Wolfe: I think I was more aware because of working at the archives, I know what people have done. I have so many stories of older, especially about older lesbians whose families have thrown out their stuff or don't like their—there was a labor organizer whose name was Eleanor [G.] Coit. Her papers are at Harvard [University] and Radcliffe [Institute for Advanced Study] in the Schlesinger Library and they never mention that she was a lesbian.

But there's a guy who was an archivist, his name is Bert Hansen and he was walking down the street one day and he saw this paper on the ground. When you're an archivist, you pick up paper on the ground. You pick up paper everywhere. So he picked up this thing and it was a love letter. And so he picked them all up and they were a whole bunch of love letters that she and her partner had written to one another over the years. And she had just died and her family was throwing it out.

That happens all the time and it still happens. It's one of the things, like at the archives when I take people on tours of the archives and especially when I get to the individual

files because we have organization files. We have a lot of things at the archives. When I get to the individual files, one of the things that I say to women, young women, old women, it doesn't matter who, "Your life is important. People are going to want to know about it. They're going to want to know that you were here." So if you have things, start a file.

We are not an archive about famous women. We are an archive about any lesbian. So we have lesbian secretaries, we have lesbian strippers. We have lesbian writers, we have everything. So send us ten pieces of paper about your life. We'll give you a special collection. Then from then on, you can keep adding to it all the time and someone can come because we tell them stories, which we have several of, of people whose families threw all this stuff away. You don't want that to happen. You want somebody to know you existed and this is a place, which will honor the fact that you existed.

So a story like Alice Austen and this thing about the Alice Austen House and how they had to be pushed into acknowledging who she was, is a way of saying to people, see, this is what could happen. So you need to be somebody who puts your life somewhere that somebody can find out about it because everyone who comes into the archives should see an image of themselves. That means a whole range of people. In this case, it's a famous photographer but it can also be a secretary that nobody knows was ever around.

So that's one of our principles at the archives. I've been living with that kind of concept for a long time because I've been a volunteer and a coordinator at the archives. But it is,

it's always shocking. It's still as shocking to me that people throw away somebody's life like that, not because they're just getting rid of things but because they don't want somebody to know. During the AIDS crisis, if I tell you how many families destroyed any evidence of their sons, didn't want anybody to know they existed, didn't want them to know they were sick, horrible stories.

So it's across the board in the gay community for different reasons. It's always shocking when you find out about it. Then when you can do something about it, it's great. When you can be one of the people who makes sure that somebody remembers them, it's really—

Maguire: I'm so glad they didn't destroy her photography.

Wolfe: Her photography, yes.

Maguire: I mean these were not even family. These were friends of Alice Austen who had decided—they had decided they were going to tell a version, which was not the real version. And they could have decided they were going to destroy the photographs.

Wolfe: Well they didn't have a lot of the—she sold a lot of the plates that she had in order to have money. So actually, the Staten Island Historical Society had more of her stuff than the Alice Austen House did.

Maguire: Good.

Wolfe: I think that was one of the reasons that—well, I think it was one of the reasons that some things got preserved.

Q1: In this context of preserving history, I wanted to ask you about your thoughts on the relationship between survival and visibility.

Wolfe: I have a pin that says lesbian visibility means lesbian survival. Okay, that was from a group that I belonged to a long time ago but I think it is a big thing.

People—one of the other things that I often say to people on tours is that everybody thinks that we're so far advanced and we have gone so far that life is wonderful. And I say to them, "You know, there are kids in Brooklyn that are still killing themselves." In Brooklyn. We're not talking about some rural place somewhere that you think from your own—I don't know—superior attitude are backwards. We're talking about the City of New York, okay, that people think of as being sophisticated and advanced and everything.

Yes, we have definitely made strides and definitely many more of us are out and many more of us lead lives that are good and supportive and we have friends and our families haven't thrown us out, et cetera. But there are still kids being thrown out of their homes. There are still kids being abused because they're gay. There are still people being killed

because they're gay or lesbian or trans. The world hasn't gotten that good yet. And there's still a huge amount to do.

So definitely visibility. Visibility exposes you to violence but visibility eventually means survival because if you're not going to be visible, if you're not going to say to people that your life matters—I always say to people, "This is not a lifestyle. This is a life." It's not a style. It means that you have to be out there in order for people to see as I said, an image of themselves, so that they know that who they are is a good thing, not a bad thing. And there are still plenty of young people and older people, there's still plenty of closeted older people who still are afraid to come out. Now there have been a lot of discussions about older people in nursing homes—gay people who are separated from their partners, who can't admit that they're gay and the need to do trainings in those places.

So across the life span, there are still so much for us to do and it's not about marriage. It's about life, it's about being able to live your life as anyone else would live their life and not have to hide and not be afraid. So I think that that's—

Maguire: Yes, I think it's still really important.

Wolfe: That's a very important part about life, survival and visibility go together. As long as we're hiding, people can do things to us that are worse than what they would do if we're out because hiding says that we know that there's something wrong. That's what hiding says. I know why people do it. That's not a judgment to these people but definitely

that's the message that comes to the rest of the world, that if you have to hide something, it must be a bad thing, a secret.

Q1: I'd love to hear your thoughts on this too.

Maguire: You've kind of said it all. I mean I don't feel like much has changed for me around visibility since I was quite young. I mean I had this thing growing up where I thought, I'm completely comfortable with who I am. It's everybody else who has the issue. It's not me, it's everyone else. But that for me, I now know in hindsight was a way for me to stay closeted.

I didn't come out to most—like my friends and my family, until I was about twenty-one. I had told my sisters like much earlier, when I was in my—fifteen maybe, and a couple of close friends. But I moved out of my family home and that was it. I mean I came out everywhere. Once I did it, I did it. I came out at work and I got transferred out of the office because people were so uncomfortable. People thought I was joking at first because it was such a funny thing to say. Yes, it was like I was hilarious. That was a really good joke I just made and I'd say, "I'm not joking. I'm serious about this." And three weeks later, I was transferred.

So I kind of felt once I had done it once, internally I had figured out, no, what you're telling yourself there is a way for you to maintain keeping it to yourself. Because you're totally fine with it. It's just like once you put it out there; all the people who are not are

going to be trouble. So when I figured out I was protecting myself because I didn't want to come out. I think that's all a visibility thing.

Then when I came out, I wanted to—basically I had a really good role model. An English woman who was in the Labour Party who came to conferences every once in awhile in Dublin that I would show up to, and she basically said that every sentence that came out of her mouth was, "As a lesbian." Then she would give her political opinion on anything and everything. So I thought, okay, this is the way it has to be now. I wasn't as in your face as Sarah [Roelofs] but I really loved that. I loved that she was political. She was working on all kinds of campaigns on women's reproductive rights, lesbian rights, disability issues and anti-racist stuff, Irish politics, everything, but everything was, "As a lesbian, here's my position on this." So she was fantastic.

So the visibility thing, now also I think it's really important to be visible as lesbians. Lesbians we're in the moment of disappearing again. One of the things I really can't stand is the LGBTQ everything because nobody has to say the words. I much prefer when I hear anything on radio and I hear people standing up at meetings. But when I see it written down, I want to hear you say every single word because you are talking about us. We are not initials or letters. You are talking about real people here. So I want to hear everything. I want to hear lesbian. I want to hear trans. But mostly at the moment, I want to hear lesbian again because we are in a mode of being disappeared. So I think visibility is always essential, always essential for our survival, totally.

Q1: It occurred to me that the first inclusion in the St. Patrick's Day parade was just this past one and the first announcement and embracing of the Alice Austen House as a national LGBTQ [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer] landmark was just this year. Why twenty-five years? Why is that a magic number? What are your thoughts on that—being involved as you have been the whole time?

Maguire: I think it's a coincidence in these things. I think the St. Patrick's Day parade was the first time an Irish—they messed it up the previous year and they invited a group of gay corporate—NBC, like we are all friends, straight and gay together at NBC basically. It's a corporate group. There were eruptions. It's like oh please, it's been twenty-five years. Just let Irish gay people march if they want at this point.

But the parade thing, my analysis of it was NBC were going to pull the broadcast. Guinness was pulling out. The sponsors were pulling out. And then it's like okay, we better let the gays in now. So that's what I think it was with them. Otherwise, they were determined. They did not want gay people in the parade—Irish gay people.

Wolfe: And I think we need to say that Irish gay people—

Maguire: It was Irish gay people.

Wolfe: Because we'd get crazed. They would say, "Gay people want to march in the parade." No Irish people want to march in the parade who are gay. They would just

eliminate the Irish part and they would make it seem like just some random group of gay people want to march in the Irish—who wanted to march in the Irish, the St. Patrick's Day parade? Why would you want to march in it, because you're gay? That wasn't the point. The point was you were Irish. And they just kept eliminating it.

Yes, I agree with Anne though, this year it was all about losing sponsorship and a lot of corporate entities have realized that it's in their better interest to support gay and lesbian people because first of all, we are purchasers and there's a certain segment of the gay community that does marketing, that has pushed out this thing that we have—

Maguire: Tons of money.

Wolfe: Tons of disposable income. Who are those people? I don't know. They're not the people I know. But still that's what the marketing shows because they go after all these high-income, mostly gay men. So I think the parade stuff—but even there, they didn't ask the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization. They didn't ask the Fed Up Queers. Who did they ask? The Lavender and Green [Alliance].

Maguire: Closet-y name, very closet-y. When that group started, people thought it was an environmental group. This was the argument we had at the first meeting and the guy who started the Lavender and the Green was at the first meeting and he wanted the boys to be upfront and he wanted a closet-y name. It could be very safe. The message was it's safe to be in the closet and basically the other crowd was, no, the message is here. We all left

Ireland and now we are coming out and we are not going back into the closet. It was just so interesting and the contingent was mostly straight people. Irish writers and politicians and people who think they should have gotten a clap on the back for marching with Irish gay people, twenty-five years after the fact. To me it was like twenty-five years too late. You can stuff it.

Wolfe: Yes, yes.

Maguire: Really. It's like everyone else has moved on and you think you're being magnanimous now. I don't think so. Stuff your parade.

Wolfe: Yes, right. The Alice Austen House—I think what might have spurred that is that this year, there was a whole move to create national lesbian and gay monuments, historic sites.

Maguire: Landmarks, yes.

Wolfe: It didn't start with the Alice Austen House. It started with a group of gay people who decided to make a list of spaces across the country that were known to be lesbian or gay or trans spaces. The Archives is one of them but there were others. They picked the Alice Austen House.

So basically it was defensive for the Alice Austen House to name themselves, rather than to have somebody else name them that because they were going to be on a list anyway. So if I had to pick why it was now—and I think also to their credit, I think that there are people now who are involved at the Alice Austen House who actually want this to happen from their own point of view, not just because of that. I think they can get support for it because it was going to be out there anyway. It's kind of like if you know your enemies are going to come after you, you might as well put yourself out there first. But I definitely think on the positive side, that there were people in the Alice Austen House who decided that it was time and that they knew all this stuff and this was a good time to do it.

Q1: Did you have anyone from the original protest who wanted to go down and see the proclamation or be involved in any way?

Wolfe: You know, they did it so fast.

Maguire: It was very fast.

Wolfe: I couldn't even go. I couldn't even go. First of all, they did it during Gay Pride.

Q1: That's right.

Wolfe: They did it the week right before the march, a few days. I think it was the Thursday of the week that the Gay Pride march was on Sunday. I didn't get a notice of it until a day beforehand.

Maguire: Yes, I think the day before it, I think we heard.

Wolfe: I couldn't go.

Maguire: No, me neither.

Wolfe: There was no way. Nobody from the archives could go because the month of June, we have a zillion events, not just things that we go to but things we do ourselves. And nobody could go. I would have loved to have gone.

Maguire: I got to put up a Facebook post. That was it. Going back to the action that we did and some photographs, because when we heard there was a copy of the proclamation. So to be able to say it's now a landmark, look, this is so many years later. But no, we couldn't go to that.

Wolfe: They really did it like in an instant.

Maguire: Yes.

Q1: Do you think—?

Q2: Liz, just to let you know, it's four o'clock.

Q1: Oh, it's four o'clock. I'll just ask you a few more questions then. But do you think your action and actions like it started to push people to think about making lists like this? What is the line between what you did back in '94 and what's happened just this past year?

Wolfe: I think there are a couple of reasons. There is an association of lesbian and gay archives. There have been several theses that have been written in the past couple of years. Like for instance, I know two that are about lesbian spaces in New York and I'm sure there are more. Those are women I know that came to the archives to do their research.

Maguire: And then there's stuff like Barbara Hammer's movie. She has a retrospective. Someone has a retrospective—

Wolfe: She's having one now.

Maguire: Yes, exactly. It comes up again and people would be like, oh, my god, this place in Staten Island.

Wolfe: And I also think that there's a feeling in the lesbian and gay community that it's time to mark these spaces because people are dying, older lesbians and gay men who managed to survive the crisis, that their people are dying of natural causes. And their memories are going to be gone.

I know for instance that there's a group of women who have done—it's called the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. So I think people are starting to realize—I mean we've done oral history—we have three thousand oral histories at the archives. People are starting—it actually started with ACT UP, this whole focus on history, on documenting your history. It was the first organization that I was in where people actively made videos about the actions and who was involved and what was happening, there's the ACT UP Oral History Project. There's a Lesbian Avenger project. There's just a lot of these that are happening now because people realize unless we do it, it's not going to be out there.

So I think that there's a whole move to document the history of the community because we've been out. We weren't out for a really long time. It's been only since the '60s, the end of the '60s that there's been a visible community. And people are starting to have anniversaries that are meaningful in the whole world. Like for instance, the Pride march. It's coming up on its fiftieth year. The archives, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, we're going to be our forty-fifth year.

So the things that have survived, people want to make sure that they're documented and that we document the history of the things that didn't. People coming to the archives this

year, there's been a lot of theses on the Lesbian Avengers. ACT UP again has sort of reemerged. My friend, Avram [Finkelstein], just published his book about the oral history of the images in ACT UP. People are doing histories of the movement in various ways, videos about it, the one about Sylvia [R.] Rivera, the one that's out there, that was done a few years ago about Blue London *[phonetic]*, about individuals.

I just think it's a moment where people have been out long enough, that they feel that it's time to say we're here and we've been here. I always think that takes time because people always feel, well, how can I write a history one year afterwards? But now it's thirty years after the beginning of the AIDS crisis. It's twenty-five years after certain other things. So people feel it's enough time to look back and be able to document it before the people who are involved disappear.

Q1: I also want to point out just as we're wrapping up that the Alice Austen House site is the first queer national historic landmark in New York State to be given to a woman.

Maguire: That's right.

Wolfe: Yes.

Maguire: That's one of the things I put in my post when we heard that was happening. Yes, it's just interesting. Is it the only one that's been dedicated to a woman anywhere though? Not just in New York?

Q1: I'll have to check.

Maguire: I think it was the first one—

Wolfe: Anywhere.

Maguire: Across the board, yes. I think it was. Yes, that's good we did that action twenty-five years ago. We can say we did that action. We knew about her then.

Wolfe: [*Laughs*] Yes.

Q1: But I think it just speaks to this idea that you were saying, that lesbian needs to be underscored—

Wolfe: Yes.

Maguire: Absolutely.

Wolfe: It's always true. When we get asked about things—I'll just give you an example. When the New York Public Library did their first exhibit, it was called *Becoming Visible: [An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth Century America]*, which is really funny because it was becoming visible to them. But anyway, most of the

information they had in the library at that time, were what we call our enemies. In order to do that exhibit, they had to borrow things from everybody because they didn't have any of that information.

One of the things that happened was this person came to the—had a meeting at the community center. Like three hundred people showed up. And they had five people from the New York Public Library and one guy stood up and he said, "It's really important. We definitely need material but we specifically—" and this is what everyone says "—we specifically need lesbian material because we don't have lesbian material. It's very difficult to get lesbian material." And a woman stood up in the room and said, "Come to my basement."

The truth is that most of the archives, even the gay archives that exist, they say that they are LGBTQ but they are really G and T. And the L and the B are gone and that is true. So there are only two—well two big women's archives, lesbian archives. There's the June Mazer [Lesbian Archives] collection in California and the Lesbian Herstory Archives. There's the Cincinnati Ohio Lesbian Archives which is a small one but it's there. And there's a couple in Europe. There's Spinnboden which is in Germany but that's it. All of the other archives, most of their material is from gay men. That's number one. Secondly, most of their material is about famous people, which is not true of either lesbian archive or any of the ones that I know.

So definitely that's part of the issue is that is missing and people say that they don't know where it is. I say, "Come to the archives. We have twelve thousand books." Twelve thousand books that are by or about lesbians. I bet you had no idea there were twelve thousand books by or about lesbians and that's what women say when they come in, visitors. They go, "Oh, my God, these are all about lesbians?" Because who knows? It's not stuff that's around, where there's so much more about gay men out there then there is about anybody else really.

It's just a statement of the way the world works, which is the patriarchy. That's what we're dealing with here. It doesn't matter whether it's straight or gay. It's not any different. It's who has the power in the world and the people with the power define what is history.

Q1: On that thought, I'd love to get both of your thoughts on the meaning of a physical space, not just an archive, not just a history but a space that is rooted to a person and to a place in time, you can visit with your kids. Talk to me about the meaning of that site being recognized as openly lesbian.

Wolfe: That's incredible. That makes it so—obviously it's material. It's real. It's something that somebody can touch. It's not just an idea. That's why I think it's so important that they have information of the relationship between those two women, because it's something that you see where they lived and then you read about them, it

makes it real, whereas just reading about them, you have to kind of imagine what was their life like and stuff. That way they're in a place.

So anything like that—that's why people wanted to make Stonewall Inn like a national spot and the Lesbian Herstory Archives and other spaces that the community has used in the same way that you make that about straight people. If you know where Audre Lorde lived, why shouldn't there be a plaque on her building? She was the Poet Laureate of New York State besides being an amazing lesbian poet. Or Adrienne Rich or any of those people. They lived places. And I think that's—

Maguire: It's really important. One of the first things I thought when I heard it got the landmark—I have a niece and nephew here and I thought fantastic, now I have a place to bring them. I don't need to give them the streets. It's going to be there. But it's like she walked around and she saw the river from this angle at some point.

That's so important and I was thinking that when I told you about one of the first things I did when Bobby Sands died, and my brother and myself, we knew to go to the general post office in Dublin. We knew that this was a place because it had history. It had meaning. It was where the rising, the people who revolted in 1916 took over this building. So it has meaning. You know that these people were in this building trying to rise up against British rule.

I kind of feel the same about Alice Austen House. This is where she lived and we are marking it. We are saying this is really important. It's important to us. It's important to everyone to know this and here it is. It's like, you can touch it.

Wolfe: Well, what you're saying about the post office, in New York, whenever anything goes down, any kind of Supreme Court ruling, where do people go? Stonewall. You don't even have to ask. Show up at Stonewall after work and there are going to be people there.

Maguire: I don't think Alice Austen House is going to become a place like that but it might be like you want to go do something. You think you might have a gay nephew or a little—

Wolfe: Or just to tell—*[crosstalk]*.

Maguire: Let's go out in the ferry and go visit Alice Austen House.

Wolfe: It's a beautiful place besides—

Maguire: It's gorgeous. Yes, it's really gorgeous.

Wolfe: It's a really nice place to visit.

Maguire: And great photographs and great history. So yes, it's really important.

Q1: I'm just going to say thank you very much. Is there anything I should have asked you during this time that we spent together?

Wolfe: [*Laughs*]

Maguire: I haven't talked so much in a long time.

Wolfe: Me neither [*laughs*].

Q1: I really appreciate all the memories you guys shared today, absolutely beautiful. Thank you again for the work that you did twenty-five years ago, making many things to be accomplished.

Maguire: Thinking up funny songs. That's what we love doing.

Wolfe: We had such a great time.

Maguire: Yes, I really like fun actions.

Wolfe: We had such fun doing this. It was really—that's what I mean, doing serious things but in a way—

Maguire: You need to have fun every once in awhile.

Wolfe: And it gets to people when you do something like that. They get it in a way they don't otherwise.

Q1: Well, a revolution without dancing.

Wolfe: Thank you for asking us to do this.

Maguire: Exactly, yes, not interested.

Q2: I'm going to stop blinding you now.

Q1: Thank you very much.

Wolfe: Thank you for doing this.

Maguire: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]