

Matthew Kelly and Gabriel Taggard (editors)

Activism and Interactivism:

An Interview with Journalist Mark Thompson (1952-2016)

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Oral Interview with Mark Thompson, conducted by John Salcido,

November 2, 2011, Los Angeles, California.

Introduction

The oral history interview transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "Grassroots Politics." The interview with Mark Thompson was conducted by John Salcido on November 2, 2011, in Los Angeles, California. The interview lasted 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 39 seconds, and is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in 2020 by Matthew Kelly and Gabriel Taggard.

Mark Thompson was born on August 19, 1952, in Monterey, California. His interview discusses his upbringing in Carmel, California, and the difficulties he faced due to his parents' reluctant marriage. In high school, he had his first bout of activism when he refused to attend P.E. because the other boys were tormenting him in the locker room for being gay. This incident corroborated his experiences with Carmel's blue-collar community. The interview then turns to his exploits in San Francisco, starting with his first encounter with a gay clothing establishment and his times in a gay bar. He was soon introduced to *The Advocate*, an LGBT-focused newspaper that had its humble beginnings as a mimeographed pamphlet. After this, Thompson recalls his time working with the San Francisco State College paper, *The Voice*. His employment there served as a stepping stone for his continued activism. Another stage for his activism was the Gay Students Coalition. In this organization, he was not only able to surround himself with those like himself, but he was also able to continue his activism by means of protest. On San Francisco's gay-colonized Castro Street, he met Harvey Milk who was to become California's first openly gay elected official. Thompson discusses this colonization of Castro Street as a haven for the gay community after the 1969 Stonewall riots. After David B. Goodstein bought *The Advocate*, Thompson received an offer to write an article about him, giving him the opportunity to work for *The Advocate*. Mark continued his career there for twenty years. During this time, he did some journalistic work in Spain, where he reported on the growing LGBT Movement. When Goodstein moved *The Advocate* back to Los Angeles, which was bad news

for many of its employees, Thompson welcomed the transition as he “felt the winds changing” in the context of the emerging AIDS epidemic. It was after this move, in 1984, that he met his future partner Malcolm Boyd (1923-2015) and around this time that he had found out that he had AIDS. Thompson continued his work, went on to author several books, and served as a clinical psychologist. He closes the interview with his predictions about the future of the homosexual community, as well as his feelings regarding the treatment of the gay community from his youth until the present (2011). Mark Thompson died on August 23, 2016, in Palm Springs, California.

Mark Thompson’s story provides several insights that can be considered integral for our understanding of the gay experience between the 1960s and the 1990s. His record starts in the pre-Gay Rights era, transitions toward a time concurrent with the Stonewall riots, and concludes with the AIDS epidemic. He details the discrimination he experienced at a young age – discrimination that still happens today. With regard to his story during the AIDS epidemic, the way he elaborates on the concept of “dying in the street” demonstrates how life-changing and perilous AIDS really was during this period, while today (2021) there is a wide range of treatment options. Finally, the account of Thompson’s activism or, as he calls it, “interactivism” can aid those who are coming out or in the process of coming out. This interview can even help those who have been out, but struggle with their self-doubt and the internalized homophobia which has been planted in them by the society they live in.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 4903)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Mark Thompson [MT]

INTERVIEWER: John Salcido [JS]

DATE: November 2, 2011
LOCATION: Los Angeles, California
PROJECT: Grassroots Politics
TRANSCRIBERS: Matthew Kelly and Gabriel Taggard

MT: [audio cuts in] – and the kind of things that we still have to put up with.
JS: Okay.
MT: Uh, my partner¹ who’s a well-known Civil Rights activist –
JS: Mm-hm.
MT: – and an Episcopal priest –
JS: Yeah, I –
MT: – and author of thirty-two books, and he’s a world-famous person –
JS: Yeah.
MT: – and we’ve been together for 27 years, and we consider ourselves to be married² – but of course we can’t legally do that –
JS: Mm-hm.
MT: – but we’ve hired teams of lawyers, and we’ve had to spend thousands to do special, you know domestic partnership and wills and trusts and all that extra stuff, which has been annoying because straight people can go to a wedding chapel in Vegas and just, you know –
JS: Yeah.
MT: – do it –
JS: (laughs) Done.
MT: – in, you know, 3 minutes –
JS: – half an hour –
MT: And they – they get the whole package, and they don’t even know that there’s over a thousand legal differences between being domestic partners, which we registered, and being married, so it’s not even in people’s consciousness. So, anyway, we went through the domestic partnership ordeal a few years ago after it had been significantly upgraded to a point where it made sense –
JS: Yeah, yeah.
MT: – so we got the lawyers, and we filed the papers, and then we had to go to a county office to register, so I’m calling around and going, “Well, where, what office?” and the – “Well, what’s the closest office?” and they said, “Well, there’s one in Van Nuys.”³ And so we went to the county office in Van Nuys, and it was a place where you also register for firearms and domestic animals.

¹ Malcolm Boyd (1923-2015).

² Mark Thompson and Malcolm Boyd were married in 2013, two years after this interview, once same-sex marriage had become legal in California.

³ Neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles, California.

- JS: Oh wow. (laughs)
- MT: You know, it was this tacky little office –
- JS: Yeah.
- MT: – with fluorescent lights and –
- JS: Oh.
- MT: – linoleum floors and, you know, we're like, that made us feel real good –
- JS: Yeah.
- MT: – and she [the receptionist] said, "We'll give you a little certificate, but it'll take a while to print up," so it was late in the morning, so we said, "Is there any place we can go for breakfast?" and she said, "Oh, there's an IHOP, you know, down the corner." So we went to the IHOP and Van Nuys is y'know (inaudible) – so we walked in, and there's these big banners advertising the breakfast special –
- JS: Okay.
- MT: – so we sit down, and the waitress with the big beehive⁴ comes in and says, "Hello boys, what'll it be?" and we said, "Well, we're starved, we just got hitched," and she rolled her eyes –
- JS: Oh.
- MT: – and Malcolm⁵ said, "What's the special?" and she said, "It's the tutti-frutti, the combo breakfast."
- JS: Oh, my god.
- MT: And I said, "Well, we'll take two tutti-fruttis."
- JS: (laughs)
- MT: So, we got our fucking plaque, or whatever it is, and that was okay, then you know the marriage thing got through,⁶ and there was this huge rush, and we had been married by our bishop in a highfalutin religious ceremony, as most people also don't realize marriage is both on a civil level and on a social level –
- JS: Yeah.
- MT: – so we did the social part and as much of the legal part – and so when this big rush – everyone was rushing, you know, and camping out in the rain in front of City Hall in San Francisco⁷ to get married and all that, we said, "No, we'll just wait until the crowds thin," –
- JS: Yeah.
- MT: – well, then it was too late because then they had, within a very short period of time, they had put a kibosh on it, and very relatively few people got married, and they're in kind of this limbo, you know, while all of this gets worked out in California.

⁴ Hair style.

⁵ Malcolm Boyd, Thompson's partner at the time of the interview (and, since 2013, husband).

⁶ Same-sex marriage licenses were issued in California from June 16 until November 5, 2008.

⁷ City in Northern California.

JS: Mm-hm.

MT: Meanwhile, I'm a gay man that's been living with AIDS⁸ for thirty years of my life.

JS: Mm-hm.

MT: I'm an AIDS survivor. I've lost most of my friends, most of my colleagues, my brother, three doctors, four former partners, I mean, I'm a real survivor, and I need health insurance, but it's hard to get.

JS: Mm-hm.

MT: I could get it, though, if I were legally married and could get it from Malcolm's church plan, but there was something that—he had retired, and it took them a long time to finally figure out how to get me kind of grandfathered into the plan.

JS: Yeah.

MT: So, three days ago, or whenever it was—What's today? Wednesday? So it was Monday morning or Friday morning, was it? The nice lady from the church, she was so excited, she said, "Mark, we finally figured out how to put you on Malcolm's health plan," which, of course, being an Episcopal church is a gold plated "you're covered for the rest of your life"—

JS: (laughs)

MT: —medical plan.

JS: Yeah, yeah. You want this plan. Yeah.

MT: It's, you know—and the church would pay for the premiums, it's ideal! And she said, "We'll need just two things," and she said, "You'll need Medicare part A and B"—

JS: Okay.

MT: And I said, "I have that"—"And you'll need a marriage certificate." And I said, "Well, we're domestic partners, but we're—we can't be legally married," and she said, "Oh, well, then we can't offer you the plan." And she said—she almost started to cry. And she said, "Oh my god, I'm so sorry, I thought that gay people," and I said, "No, no, no, it was all put on kibosh," she said, "Oh, I didn't know that." She's a nice, young Asian lady that works there, and she was just devastated, and I just, just infuriated because it was that day that that, I'm sorry, that bitch Kim Kardashian⁹ got a quick-o divorce from her football husband—

JS: (laughs)

MT: —after seventy-two days, making a complete mockery—

JS: Yeah.

MT: —of marriage, and here I am, married for twenty-seven years and I can't get health insurance, now, you tell me if that is right.

⁸ Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, also referred to as HIV (human immunodeficiency virus infection).

⁹ Famous public personality, star of the reality show *Keeping up with the Kardashians*.

- JS: That is absolutely not right. You know, what's funny, my Facebook status yesterday was, "So, Kim Kardashian divorced after seventy-two days of marriage, yep, and the gays are the ones destroying the sanctity of marriage right?"
- MT: Right.
- JS: Yeah.
- MT: You know, and I just, I just lost it. I lost it. And I'm a pretty cool dude, but I lost it—
- JS: Yeah, and I—completely understandably, too.
- MT: —I was just enraged, and after all this time of trying to find a way to get me, you know decent medical coverage, and I can't because we can't get married.
- JS: If I might, what about New York though? 'Cause I know they legalized it.
- MT: They, yeah, but if you go and get married but the states still don't—if you get married in New York it stays in New York.
- JS: Okay, yeah. I was wondering if that transferred over or not.
- MT: No, it doesn't transfer. No, we gotta wait. Now presumably they'll sort this out because it's such an injustice like a—"Don't ask, don't tell" was.¹⁰
- JS: Yeah, exactly.
- MT: And what a nightmare that was. You know, what a pile of horse manure. I mean to think that there had been hundreds of thousands of gay and lesbian men over the course of centuries, documented, going back to the Revolutionary War,¹¹ who fought and died for their country—you know, I just don't know what the problem is.
- JS: (laughs) I know, right?
- MT: Anyway, enough ranting, yeah, please let's go on. I thought I'd warm up, though.
- JS: Oh yeah, I know, that was actually really good. Okay, lemme just—okay, we are here with Malcolm—er, not Malcolm Boyd. Excuse me, Malcolm Boyd is your partner—we are here with Mark Thompson. He is narrating for us today. We are at his house, in his sunroom, in Los Angeles.¹² My name is John Salcido, and it is a very sunny day, a very windy day on November 2nd, 2011, and we are going to be discussing Mark's activism in the gay community in San Francisco as well as Los Angeles, and also his work with *The Advocate*,¹³ a national gay, lesbian publication. Okay, maybe some biographical information, if you would, Mark? When and where were you born?

¹⁰ U.S. policy (1994-2011) prohibiting the military from asking about a military applicant's or soldier's sexuality.

¹¹ American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).

¹² City in Southern California.

¹³ Magazine focused on LGBT interests, founded in 1967.

MT: I was born in 1952 in Monterey,¹⁴ California. The same town, there in central California, on the coast, the same town that my father was born in, and that his grandfather was born in, I believe in 1904. So, I'm a very old, you know northern California family. My sister still lives there, and I was born in Monterey, but we lived in the Carmel¹⁵ area.

JS: Okay, uh, what did your parents do for a living?

MT: My father started out very young as a journeyman plumber, but went back to school and became a very fine contractor and did elaborate heating and systems for, like, satellite tracking stations and that kind of thing, and opened his own business, and my mother was just a housewife, and she had four children, one of whom died of AIDS in 1996.

JS: Okay, um, what was it like, growing up in your family?

MT: Well, to be honest, it wasn't much fun. My parents, um, the story goes in the family, that they were both very handsome, attractive people with a lot of charisma, and you have to remember, after World War II—

[00:10:00]

MT: —there was this great social pressure for people to get married and have kids. So, I think they succumbed to that, and I guess, as the story goes, they were on their way to Reno,¹⁶ Nevada, to get married and then all of the sudden my father began to have second thoughts. And (pauses)—but let's just say he was quickly dissuaded (laughs) of those thoughts, so he went through with the marriage—

JS: (laughs)

MT: —and then I, you know, happened and then my sister and then my brother, my sister Gail came along eighteen months later.

JS: You were the first born?

MT: I was the first born, and then my brother Kirk came along at another eighteen-month interval, so they were kind of stuck, you know? And by the time, probably when I was six or seven, it was very clear that it was not a happy marriage, and there was much, much argument, and there was domestic violence. I don't really want to go into the details—

JS: No problem

MT: It was not a happy house, and we just kept on saying, "Mom, dad, why don't you get divorced?" (laughs) and they said—you have to remember this is back in the 50s and 60s, "Well, we gotta stay together for you kids," and I think I was fourteen years old when the final child came along, quite unexpectedly, and I say that was like, "Where the hell did this baby come from?" and we always thought that, maybe, mom kind of wanted that to

¹⁴ City in Central California.

¹⁵ Beach city within Monterey.

¹⁶ City in Nevada.

happen as an insurance policy, or something, who knows? But anyway, they finally did get divorced, I think I was twenty-three, I had already left home a couple weeks before I turned twenty-one, I was going—I went through Carmel High School where I was a very good student, and I was very active, I was editor of the high school paper two years in a row, I was in the drama club, I was in the swim team, I made experimental movies, I mean, it was a liberal arts and crafty kind of place.

JS: Were they black-and-white liberal movies?

MT: Black-and-white movies and color.

JS: Oh, okay, good.

MT: We had a Super 8,¹⁷ and, you know, who knows with a Super 8. I went to the local community college for two years where I also worked on the paper, and then got a job as a reporter for the local hometown newspaper called the *Carmel Pinecone*,¹⁸ and that's when I began my professional—I was professional, at the time I was eighteen, I was interviewing famous people, and they were running—I was focused and energetic, and so I saved my money, and so when I was twenty-one, I moved to San Francisco, in 1973, to complete my degree in journalism because—at San Francisco State¹⁹—because they had a very excellent—I think still do—journalism program.

JS: Okay, when did you first realize that you were gay?

MT: Oh, quite young. I mean, who knows exactly? 'Cause you have to remember back then there weren't words for it, and the words there were for it were very damning. Like, it was a shameful thing, although I never thought it was shameful, but probably by the time I was four or five years old, I mean I'm sure by kindergarten. Honestly, I'm not making this up, it's so typical, my experience, but I knew I wasn't like the other boys, I loved playing with the girls, I wasn't into rough and tumble sports with the boys, I was always very creative. My aunt who was living in the town said—when we were still friendly, she said, “Mark I've never seen a baby like you, we could just sit you down with a pile of blocks and within five minutes you'd have a castle constructed or something.”

JS: (laughs)

MT: So, you know, I was smart, but I was very quiet. I was shy, I was—read a lot of books, that was my escape.

JS: What kind of books, just like the classics and, and—

MT: Well, of course you start out with the child books. I read all of the Oz books,²⁰ I think there're thirty-two, and I love reading books about natural

¹⁷ Type of film camera made by Kodak.

¹⁸ Carmel newspaper, founded in 1915.

¹⁹ San Francisco State University, founded in 1899.

²⁰ *The Oz series*, written by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919).

science, and when I was a teenager I read tons of science fiction, I read Kurt Vonnegut²¹ and Ray Bradbury²² and Robert Heinlein²³ and just, you know, I read everything I could get my hands on. And I read serious books too, I read historical novels and something did—changed, something did change—my perception though, we had quite a well known, kind of famous independent bookstore, called the *Thunderbird Bookstore*, in Carmel, and people would come from miles around, and you could have a little lunch there, and they had just thousands of books, and one day, they didn't call it the gay section, but it was kind of—that's when gay-ish books were beginning to appear.

JS: Okay.

MT: And I bought two books, and took them home in a brown paper bag (laughs) and read them secretly, and I read them both in the same summer, they weren't published in the same year. And one was Christopher Isherwood's²⁴ *A Single Man*, which to me is still one of the greatest novels of the English language, and the other was John Rechy's²⁵ rather infamous book about the life of a hustler, *City of Nights*. And I read both in the summer, and that just gave me a lot of awareness about what it would mean to be a gay person. It was a lot of negatives and positives in both books. So, I must have read them when I was fifteen or sixteen or something like that.

JS: How and when did you eventually come out?

MT: Well, coming out is a gradual process, and then there's the inner coming out, and there's the first, you know—if you're a gay man, if you're a Kinsey 6²⁶ gay guy like I am, that recognition that you're different, somehow from the other boys comes at an early age but of course, you know, it's hard—then there were no words except for the, for (phone starts ringing) bad words, so you kind of kept it to yourself. But I was blessed in that my brother Kirk was also gay, and we were just a little less than three years apart, and I'm telling this story (phone stops ringing), I'm not ashamed about it, I've written about it, but one night when I was about, I don't know about fifteen, he must have been about twelve, he was very handsome, he was a tennis star, and, you know, we lived on the beach, so we were tanned with blond hair and, just gorgeous, and we lived in the mouth of Carmel Valley, which is very old and semi-rural, and one warm night he came naked through my bedroom window and rolled into my bed,

²¹ American author (1922-2007).

²² American author (1920-2012).

²³ American author (1907-1988).

²⁴ British/American author (1904-1986).

²⁵ American author, born in 1931.

²⁶ Heterosexual-homosexual rating scale from 0 (completely heterosexual) to 6 (completely homosexual), devised ca. 1947/1948 by American scientist Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956).

and we held each other, and we became boyfriends for a short period of time. But we later said that seemed natural to us, and, you know, part of it was that our family was getting so disintegrated, that it was kind of like that Whitman²⁷ poem, you know, we—two boys together, one from the North, one from the South, clinging together, you know, I’m paraphrasing. And we would talk about and compare our experiences and they were very similar, you know. That we knew, we had different styles. I was more academic, and he was more athletic, but we just knew, and so, I guess it’s when I joined the drama club in high school that I came out, I was probably—everybody knew, I was sixteen whenever that happened, and I wasn’t flamboyant, but I did not date girls.

JS: No? (laughs)

MT: No. But I did go on one date once, what was her name? Evelyn Hughes, and she was in the drama club, too, and we went to see—there was a lot of local community theatre in Carmel, so we went to see a show and then, afterwards—I think I was driving her mother’s car, and she said, “Let’s go up to the high school campus,” which is just right—you know, Carmel’s not very big—and so we parked, and it was a full moon or something, and she started to make out with me, and I went, “Oh, okay.”

JS: (laughs)

MT: And I think we got to second base or something, and I went, “Oh no—

[00:20:00]

MT: —this is just not for me,” you know, “You’re a nice girl, but I’m, no,” and that was it, that was the sum total of my dating experience.

JS: To second base, that’s it? Nice.

MT: Yeah, I was a gentleman, not to get into all the technical stuff, but she would have done it right there. ‘Cause I was a handsome kid, you know? And polite and well mannered.

JS: So, you were a catch?

MT: Yeah, I mean, editor of the high school, well, I was on the staff of the paper, and, you know, and her mother really liked me, but I was a gay kid, you know, and this, like, is in the 1960s, this is probably about ‘67, ‘66, ‘67, somewhere like that, and I was probably one of the—I would count myself as one of the world’s, among one of the world’s first openly gay teenagers. And I just didn’t make a thing about it, and it was at that time that I decided to stop going to P.E. class, which was mandatory, but they would taunt me and flick the towels at me in the shower, and I said, “No,” and I went and told a couple of teachers, and I said it’s not my problem. And I still graduated, so I’m sure somebody signed off on something. I said, on that hour I would just go to the library and read and study or, you know, do

²⁷ Walt Whitman, American poet (1819-1892).

- whatever, but I will not let myself be subjected to that kind of really barbaric torture.
- JS: And that—so, in that way, you were actually kind of an activist very, very early on, standing up for your rights.
- MT: Yeah! I just said that I’m not gonna take this, you know? There’s no reason why I should. I was on the swim team, and I was very good. I was on the backstroke, and the boys there respected me, but the kids on the swim team were all kind of iconoclastic, you know—Carmel’s a very artsy, liberal place, but still, it has a real—then, not now so much—but it had a real blue-collar, working class element, you know, that wasn’t as tolerant or educated as perhaps it should be. But I never picked fights, I never got into fights, I just went by my way and did my thing
- JS: When did you meet your partner, Malcolm Boyd?
- MT: Well, when I moved to Los Angeles. Now, let me fill in the gaps. Now—I’m not talking too much, am I?
- JS: Yeah, sure, absolutely—no, this is good stuff.
- MT: This is what you want? So, I graduated Carmel High, ‘70, and from Monterey Peninsula College,²⁸ which is a very fine junior college, I say that, fine, because the Monterey Peninsula is so beautiful. I don’t know if you’ve ever been there—
- JS: No.
- MT: —but I’m sure you’ve heard that it’s just one of the most beautiful places, with Big Sur²⁹ and, you know, lots of artists—it’s one of the most beautiful places, certainly in California, if not in the United States. So, it attracted a high level of educators who wanted to live there just because it was a wonderful place to live, so I got a very good education—Liberal Arts. So, I was ready to go, and a couple weeks before—my birthday was August nineteenth, so school obviously, you know, starts in September, so, I found a little apartment off campus. I didn’t have much money, but I didn’t want to live in the dorms, ‘cause of some of the same problems we’ve indicated. So, she and her red-headed boyfriend loaded the back of his pickup truck with whatever possessions I wanted to take and moved me to this little apartment, which was not far from the campus, and moved me in, and they said, “Well, okay, take care of yourself, bro” and, you know, it was late in the afternoon. It’s only about a two-hour trip from Monterey to San Francisco, and I knew exactly what I had to do, the very first thing, not even unpacking the boxes. I had another little book, and it was a guide book to all the gay bars in San Francisco, and I said, “I need to go out and get properly laid.”
- JS: (laughs)

²⁸ Community College in Monterey, founded in 1947.

²⁹ Mountainous region along the ocean between San Simeon and the Carmel Highlands.

MT: I was just so sexually frustrated, and you can imagine, I was just like, ught. And so I found one of the most – they said it was “redwood panelled,” and I’m like, “Well, that sounds cool. I come from a place that has redwood trees,” well, little did I know that “The Stud Bar”³⁰ was one of the most notorious bars in San Francisco then, I mean, sailors would dance naked on the bar, and one of them picked me up, he was a merchant marine, and took me home and well, you know, fucked me good.

JS: (laughs)

MT: And so, I went, “Great, I’m no longer a virgin.”

JS: First day out on your own. (laughs)

MT: Now, that took care of that, and now I can get ready for school and get into gay life. It was very important, right? ‘Cause it’s a rite of passage

JS: Oh, I agree.

MT: But in my case it was delayed, see that’s part of being gay, or certainly back then, that you didn’t have the normal rites of passages. I didn’t get to go to my high school prom, because I didn’t have a girlfriend. I didn’t want to go, but that’s a big, you know, initiation ritual into adulthood. I was very mature, and I wasn’t sad about it, I just knew I was missing something. But, thank god, it’s different now with all the gay straight alliances, and they’re having the gay proms and, you know, they have come in such a short time I just couldn’t – had not been able to quite imagine it, that it would happen this quickly, but anyway, so I leave his apartment the next morning you know, with a big smile on my face and I wanted to find a copy of *The Advocate*. It was then widely circulated in coin-operated news racks, and I had first seen *The Advocate* not long after it was first published here in Los Angeles. It was like this little mimeograph sheet that was published in the basement of ABC television, which is just a few blocks from this house on Prospect,³¹ and it was where they would print the scripts for these soap operas, after the gay man who ran that – afterwards would clandestinely mimeograph this little newsletter which would circulate in all the bars in L.A. for a quarter, and then eventually it grew, but anyway, I was on a school field trip to see a French farce, we were often taken up there, you know, to see culture, and we went to the ACT³² theatre, a very beautiful old theatre, and we saw the play, it was, I think, Molière’s *The Thieves’ Carnival*,³³ I think it was in 1967 or ‘68, anyway the play ended a little early, I mean before the busses came, so they said “Well, now you can go to Union Square,³⁴ and you know, be tourists for an hour or two.” So, I separated

³⁰ Gay bar in San Francisco, founded in 1966.

³¹ Street in Los Angeles.

³² American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco.

³³ *Le Bal des Voleurs*, 1938 play by French playwright Jean Anouilh (1910-1987), not Molière.

³⁴ Shopping center in San Francisco.

myself from the pack and made a beeline for Polk Street, which is not too many blocks away from Union Square. I hopped on a bus because I heard about it as being the “gay street” then, Castro Street was not a gay street then, at that time, it was Polk Street which runs along the edge of the Tenderloin,³⁵ and that’s where all the gay clothing shops and barber shops and bars and restaurants were. So, I was there, and I was walking along, and, “Oh boy, this was interesting,” and I come to a gay men’s—well, it didn’t say it was gay clothing but everyone’s pretty obvious, everything was in pretty bright colors and paisley and, you know, clothes for a certain kind of—see-through underwear, how gay is that?

JS: (laughs)

MT: So, I went in, and the clerk didn’t notice me or anything, and I just went in a little bit and (inaudible) shy, and I saw this stack of this little mimeograph things by the door, and I assumed they were free or something, so I took one and then realized, “I have to get to the busses,” and hid it in my theatre program, and we went back home, didn’t get home until really late that night, so I didn’t get to read the thing until the next morning, but it was one of the very first issues of *The Advocate*, and in it was a lot of stories about gay men being beaten up, jailed, for trumped-up charges—

[00:30:00]

MT: —there were reviews of terrible, homophobic films, it was not a pretty picture. And, I said, “Something tells me that my fate is gonna intersect with this that I’m holding,” ‘cause I was—even then—a serious journalism student, so there I am, about five years later, and I find an issue of *The Advocate*, and by now it’s tabloid sized and thick and really, you know, lots of ads—

JS: This was after Goodstein³⁶ got a hold of it, right?

MT: Well, no, it was before.

JS: Oh, it was before? Okay.

MT: This was in ‘73, and so I read the issue, and it was still being produced in L.A. but widely circulating by then around the country, and it was now about sixty pages—tabloid, in a few years it had gotten far beyond just a little thin mimeograph rag, but the stories were virtually all the same, nothing for the most part—a bomb was thrown in a bar in New Orleans, people were trapped, eighteen people were burned alive, and, you know, suicides and illegal entrapment, and, uh, the military issue even then was, you know, men being [thrown] horribly, you know, it was just one bad story after another. So, anyway, I took the paper once again home to my little apartment and started my first semester and immediately joined the

³⁵ Neighborhood in downtown San Francisco.

³⁶ David B. Goodstein (1932-1985), publisher of *The Advocate* and LGBT activist.

staff of the San Francisco State paper, which was called *The Phoenix*, and just was a feature writer. And one day I noticed an announcement for the first Gay Rights group forming on campus, so I asked my editor if I could cover the story, you know, for professional reasons, and she smiled at me in a kind of odd way and said, "Oh, come on, just go," so I went with my reporter's notebook and sat in the back, and it was kind of a gender-mixed, which was kind of unusual, you know, equal – a few more boys than girls, but all were young, and one of them saw me and said, "Oh, come on down," you know, "join the discussion," so I put my reporter's notebook to one side and joined the group, and we quickly became a force on campus.

JS: And that was the Students –

MT: The Gay Students Coalition, we called it that because even though we did the first meetings at State, soon other gay students from other nearby campuses like University of San Francisco, City College of San Francisco, we had kids from Lone Mountain College, which I think was a Catholic college, we even had students come from all the way, from San Jose State and Berkeley and Stanford.

JS: Wow.

MT: So, you know, and we did rap groups, and we even got big enough to do a big conference, we did social things, but we did things like, I remember there was a terrible film, most of the movies then were just terribly homophobic, there was one called *The Laughing Policeman*,³⁷ that was about a serial murderer who, I think he was gay or something, so we went down to the Clay Theatre and protested its opening, and we all held hands, we made picket lines and said, "You can't go, this is, you know, homophobic." Well, it was raining, and the manager came out and started screaming, and he said, "You know, I'll call the cops," and so we moved off the sidewalk and into the street and just then a big bus came around the corner and came screeching to a halt inches within our face, I mean, we could have been killed but we didn't move, and I thought, "This is the beginning of my activist life, and we don't move." So that was a good lesson, and then around that time we said, "Well, there's so many of us, and so many of us are talented and have so many good stories to tell, so let's start our own newspaper." So I went before the Student Council and asked for Student Council funds, and they weren't gonna give us a penny, and we said, "We'll protest and boycott you, because this is illegal, you give it to every other group," and so we won again at the fight and got a little bit of money, and we produced our own, very nice, tabloid-sized, we made three editions of it, called *The Voice*, we called it that because it was the voice of the new generation. And we published all kinds of pieces, and through – I think it

³⁷ Film directed by Stuart Rosenberg, released in 1973.

was the first or second issue is when I met Harvey Milk³⁸ who had just opened his camera store on Castro street, which was then, was just being colonized –

JS: (laughs) Colonized?

MT: – by gay people, because by the early 70's after the Stonewall riots,³⁹ kind of sent out these signals that it was okay, that being gay was good, it was, you know – but if you lived in Iowa or Texas, it wasn't, we jokingly called San Francisco a city of refugees, because people were just flooding in from everywhere, and the Castro was – had been traditionally an Irish Catholic working-class neighborhood, where many of the families had fled to the suburbs or where the kids now were grown, so there were a lot of empty apartments or flats that were very inexpensive, so then, naturally, the gays moved in, Harvey opened his shop, so I went to ask for him for both an article, because then he was beginning to run, he ran in four campaigns before he was elected, and about being gay and the political process, and I said, "By the way, could you also take out an ad?" (laughs), and he did both.

JS: (laughs)

MT: So, we became friends, and I knew him almost until the day he died. And he was really great, he was just funny, smart, and he was from New York, and so he had that ballsy New York – "Nobody's gonna stop us, we can do this," he was into coalition building, he would go down to the Teamsters⁴⁰ Union, the Teamsters Hall, 'cause then the port of San Francisco was losing a lot of its work to OPA,⁴¹ which had been building up its port, you know, and he said, "Well then, let's build a political coalition, there's no reason why the gays and the Teamsters can't, you know, be friends." He was always doing that kind of thing, so that was very new. And, anyway, so I went and did my two years, and we did the third issue which was produced in the last semester that I was at State, this was the spring of '75, and I was gonna go on a little charter flight to Europe for a few weeks right after graduation, and, anyway, Goodstein bought *The Advocate* for a million dollars, which was unheard of – I think he paid about three hundred⁴² up front in cash with the promise to pay off the rest over time. And he moved it, lock, stock, and barrel, from L.A. to this really kind of anonymous business mall in San Mateo,⁴³ you know these cement-bunker-like

³⁸ (1930-1978), first openly gay elected politician in California, served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

³⁹ Series of riots (from June 28, 1969, until July 3, 1969) by the gay community, following a police raid of the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, New York.

⁴⁰ American labor union, established 1903.

⁴¹ Perhaps a reference to the Oakland Port Authority.

⁴² Presumably three hundred thousand.

⁴³ City in California, approximately 20 miles south of San Francisco.

buildings, on design he wanted to separate, take it from the streets and professionalize it, so I asked him to write this article about his experiences of being gay and political. And the article wasn't all that good, it wasn't as good as Harvey's, and it was way too long, so I had to take out my red pen, you know, and fit the copy of it. Well, we ran it, and I sent him a copy by mail with a thank-you note and, I don't know, a few weeks later the phone rings and he's—"This is David Goodstein, can you come down to San Mateo for a visit?" And I thought, "Shit, he's gonna, you know, chew me out for editing his precious copy, so I got in my little Volkswagen bug and drove down there, and all the offices were very chic, very designed and these very handsome young men with ties running around, I said, "Okay, alright," and I wait, and he calls me into the office which was all decorated in various hues and shades of paisley, it was ghastly –

[00:40:00]

MT: –and I'm from Carmel, I grew up with good taste, I'm not a snob, but paisley? Oy. And with this little yapping dog and this big, big mahogany desk, and he came in, and I-I instantly liked him. And he said, "Well, the article that you did was fine," he said, "Would you like to write for *The Advocate*, we are looking for out, open, young gay people who're just come out of college to write, to be the new generation." And I said, "Sure, what do you have in mind?" and he said, "Well, would you like to interview David Hockney⁴⁴ in Paris?" and I said, "Who's David Hockney?" and he looked at me like – well, David Hockney wasn't that famous back then, you know, he was just becoming famous, and I went, "Oh, David Hockney, of course, of course," – of course I made a beeline for the library, and I went home and read up, but he said, "Well, he's a friend of mine," 'cause I explained that I was going to Europe, and he said, "Well you can interview him in Paris," and there was a gay group forming in Amsterdam, and could I do a piece on that, and he said, "But what I would really like you to do is to investigate these reports of the gay group in Spain," you see, 'cause all the groups were just forming, being smashed and imprisoned by Franco's⁴⁵ fascist government. You might have read this already but, anyway, it took quite a bit of doing, anonymous phone calls in the middle of the night and a quick train through Europe, and I finally got to Barcelona and found what was left of the group, and there was just a handful of them that had not been arrested or scared off, and they talked to me, all night, and again, an incredible education about the oppression of gay and lesbian people, so I went home and those were my first articles, they appeared in succession, each one was on the cover of *The Advocate*, and that's how I began my career

⁴⁴ Gay English Artist, born in 1937.

⁴⁵ Francisco Franco (1892-1975), Spanish dictator from 1939 until 1975.

there, and I worked my way up, I was a photographer so I took all my own pictures, I became the cultural editor, and eventually the senior editor, and I worked there for twenty years.

JS: How did the Spanish trip change your views on the Gay Movement in America?

MT: Well, I mean, you know, in America, we're pretty culturally isolated, you know, and we're White, we're privileged, these were working-class gay people who were living under a fascist dictatorship. We have some form of democracy, they had nothing. You know, they were completely – always looking over their shoulder, afraid all the time, you know, but they were pretty out – courageous, you know, they put up flyers and things, but, you know, it was a real – a lesson in cultural difference, and I no longer felt like an ugly American, but a somewhat educated one, you know, even in a short visit, the more my empathy went up. So, how did I meet Malcolm?

JS: Yes.

MT: So, after about ten years or so in the Bay Area, Goodstein was a very wealthy man, he had a lot of different interests, he was an art collector and bred race horses, and he had businesses down here, just decided to consolidate everything, so he announced one day in early 1984, and by then I was one of the, you know, chief people on the staff, you know, and he said, "Well, I'm moving the paper back to L.A., and you can come with it or stay." For most of the staff this was bad news, most of the staff didn't want to leave San Francisco, and I didn't either, but I knew there was something in the winds, changing – course Harvey Milk had been assassinated, in '78, and that was terrible, and it was not long after that I had begun to notice old friends of mine not being around anymore, or getting these weird flus, and in some cases, dying, and I went, "Oh, there's something really nasty out there." Well, of course, that was AIDS, so by 1984, you know – the AIDS virus had been identified in 1981, and by '84 the health crisis was full blown upon us, and people, John, were literally dying in the streets, and I say that because they would get sick and lose their job, lose their health insurance, their families would have nothing to do with them, they'd be thrown out of their apartments, their possessions would be thrown into dumpsters, and they would literally die on the streets, I'm not making this up. Because there were no social services then, everyone was in shock, and I said, "Well, maybe I should get out of here," you know, a change of pace. So, I said to Goodstein and Robert McQueen,⁴⁶ "Okay, I'll come down," and so I did, and immediately met Malcolm through a mutual friend, and I said, "Well, I mean, I'm alright, I'm not really into older guys, you know, it wasn't my thing," but it wasn't the age difference, I mean, Malcolm was such an incredible force, I mean he's such an interesting person, we found that we

⁴⁶ Editor of *The Advocate*.

- thought alike and had the same interests and the same ambitions, and so we started dating, we had fun and so, that's how that happened, and a couple years after that we said, "Let's get a house together," and we ended up here and we've lived here ever since.
- JS: Ever since?
- MT: Wow.
- JS: That's a pretty good story.
- MT: Yeah! It's a happy story.
- JS: Yeah, it was very – yeah –
- MT: And Malcolm now, in June, turned 88 years old, and I turned 59 in August. I'm 59, now 59 years old. Don't ask me where my life has gone. I just finished publishing my eighth book, once I left *The Advocate* in '94, 'cause that was, you know, long enough and, also, I had full-blown AIDS. I was one of those people who contracted the virus, I now know from a boyfriend – probably which boyfriend, who died very early before anyone really knew, so I had been carrying the virus for many years before the test came out, and I got tested once it was like, '87 or something, and it turned out I had been positive for a long time, so I've done all kinds of alternative medicine and everything I could to stay alive, until, you know, the AIDS meds came out in the mid-90s, and I never missed a day taking them.
- JS: They seem to be working for you, because you seem pretty healthy.
- MT: Yeah, my T-cells are up, and my viral load is nonexistent, and I'm a survivor, and I'm going to live, it's been – I've been positive for over half my life, but I never stopped working, so, after I left *The Advocate*, I said, "Well, I want to go back to school, I'm in midlife now, and I've always been interested in how it was like for me growing up," so, I said, "wanna become a therapist and work with gay kids."
- JS: Okay.
- MT: So, I got a degree in clinical psychology from Antioch University⁴⁷ and began to work in various clinics and agencies, social agencies, that had gay kids or were for gay kids and did groups and worked with them and their issues, and then my final therapist gig was at the AIDS – Pasadena AIDS Center, where I worked for over three years, working with people with AIDS as a therapist, and then that just all got too much, and I retired from that a few years ago, got back and then said, "Well, I got to do more books," 'cause that's what I really do.
- JS: Did you ever work at the L.A. County Community Gay Center?
- MT: Yes.
- JS: Okay, you worked there, too, so you met Don Kilhefner⁴⁸ who helped start that up right?

⁴⁷ Founded in 1852, there are multiple campuses across the United States.

⁴⁸ Psychologist and LGBT activist, born in 1938.

MT: Yes.

JS: Okay, now, going back to your activism at San Francisco, the Student Coalition, did you do any – besides like, the movie theatre – do you have any other examples of your, like, activism there?

MT: Oh, at the State campus?

JS: Yes.

MT: Well, yeah, I mean we, we did a conference, we did social things, we did some staged readings –

[00:50:00]

MT: –sometimes we'd do our rap groups just sitting in the Commons, you know, with the signs, we always marched in the gay parades as a group, you know, we were always encouraging people to come out, we needed a faculty advisor, so we found someone on the faculty who was closeted and said, "You have to come out to be our advisor so we could be a legal group." You know, we just hit the problem from as many points of view, you know. But, you know, were we throwing rocks through windows? No. We weren't that kind of activist, I mean, that's kind of counterproductive, we tried to do positive things that would enforce or reinforce the idea that being gay is okay.

JS: Okay, now would you consider yourself to be an activist, like in the community? Like personally, do you consider yourself to be an activist?

MT: Um, that's an interesting word, it's a big word, and I would say, what kind of activist? I just had this conversation with a friend. There are political activists who organize demonstrations and rallies and parades, and I've done a little bit of that, but that's not my nature. My nature is to write articles and publish books and lead discussion groups, and so I call myself a cultural activist.

JS: Okay.

MT: And, yes, like tonight, Malcolm and I are going out to yet another meeting, there's another group who want to put a gay museum eventually on the Mall in D.C.

JS: Okay.

MT: I think Tom is part of that.

JS: Oh, is Tom part of that?

MT: I think so. And so, we'll go and, you know, we get interviewed for lots of documentary films, and right now I'm reediting and trying to republish this biography of Harry Hay⁴⁹ that's been out of print for almost twenty years, and I've had to scan it because there were no computer files, and I have to get up at six o'clock in the morning 'cause the editor's in New York, and we're reading every word of the book out loud to one another, and we're

⁴⁹ (1912-2002), LGBT activist and co-founder of the Mattachine Society (established 1950).

- not catching only scanning errors, 'cause that still isn't a perfect thing, but we're finding typos that appeared in the original edition. The book came out in 1990, Harry Hay died in 2002, so there's a twelve-year gap. The author, by the way, is still alive but he had a stroke, Stuart Timmons,⁵⁰ so he's unable to do this work, although, we have his full permission.
- JS: Oh, so it's Stuart Timmon's book? Okay.
- MT: Well, we have his full permission, and he loves that we're doing this. So, we're getting new foreword material, a new after—a new epilogue to update, we're doing a whole resource list at the back of everything about every book and movie and everything about Harry, and putting a new cover on it, you know, giving it a new design, well that's activism. I'm not being paid to do this—and it's hundreds of hours of work. So, I'm a cultural activist.
- JS: Cultural activist, that's a good term. With what achievement are you most proud of in your cultural activism?
- MT: Oh, I don't know, I guess just making my books, each book that I've done has been different, you know, I've done photo books, encyclopedic books, I've done—
- JS: Think you might recognize this one.
- MT: —memoirs, oh yes, this is the last thing I've done at *The Advocate*. They asked me to do this for them and they said, "Who else would know how to do this?" Isn't this a wonderful book?
- JS: That is a fantastic book. It really is.
- MT: And it took me almost two years to—'cause I had to sit there and read every page of every issue of *The Advocate*, and pull out, you know, and then we had to—
- JS: And the synopsis, yeah—I've been skimming through it, and it's not necessarily a happy book but—
- MT: No, it's not.
- JS: But it is very, just informative, and I want to say uplifting in a way that we've moved on from that period—
- MT: Yes.
- JS: —in some ways
- MT: Yes, you know, the book is about the first twenty-five years of *The Advocate*, which more or less coincides with the invention, with the start of the Gay Movement, you see, Harry Hay ended up to be a very good friend of mine, because I met him in 1979, when I interviewed him for *The Advocate*, and I liked him and his message, that being gay is different, not better, but it's a different kind of consciousness, a different gender, if you're into gender studies, and I believe that, it's just that, you would explain this in biological terms, you said, "Well, if we're not really here primarily to procreate, you

⁵⁰ (1957-2017), LGBT activist, journalist, and author.

know, children, then what are we here for, because nature doesn't keep on reproducing something if it doesn't have a use or a meaningful use for it, so what are gay people?" – and he said, "Well, we're mediators, we're often attracted to the healing arts, to religion, to forging opposites, to creating new understanding, and we create beauty, you know, we're naturally artists," these aren't cliches, they're kind of things that I've always felt, of course through my life and the life of so many other gay people. That's not to say that every gay man is a Michelangelo, but there's a certain sense of ability. And so, we became friends and, where was that taking me, and he was a real activist, and I learned a lot about what being an activist, really an activist – which is to not only throw a rock through a window that has the word fag spray-painted on it one time, but to be a witness for a cause, for your beliefs, to stand up for yourself and your community through an entire lifetime. To me that is not being a coward, but to be a witness, and that to me defines my form of being an activist.

JS: Yeah, absolutely. Okay I would say maybe one final question?

MT: Sure.

JS: How would you compare today's feelings towards homosexuality to when you were active in the 60's and –

MT: Oh well, I mean, it's such a sea change, I mean, on almost every level of society, and I mean we'll eventually get the marriage rights, we already have them in like six or seven states. My feelings are complicated, there's a big difference between being assimilated into a culture and being integrated into a culture. Integration means that we are being not given special privileges, but we're being allowed our full Civil Rights as citizens of our country like everyone else, that we are not discriminated against. But James Baldwin⁵¹ always had an interesting – he said something that I'll never forget, the great Black writer James Baldwin who was also gay, said that those people who are assimilated into the mainstream culture, you know, any minority that was assimilated into the mainstream culture is always assimilated according to the values of their oppressors –

JS: Yeah.

MT: – so I want gay people to be integrated but not to be assimilated, in other words, I want us to maintain a sense of our own, like, purpose and sense of community life and kind of our own rites of passage and, you know? Because we do come at things kind of from a slightly different – we have a little bit of a different perspective, which is good, you know, it's healthy. I think it's a contributive factor to society as a whole, and I don't want to see gay people lose that for the sake of a few lousy dollars. So, to end this, my feeling as I look into the future that – I think the struggle certainly for gay

⁵¹ (1924-1987), gay American author, playwright, essayist, and poet.

people will become one of class issue, I mean there'll be rich gays and there'll be poor gays, I mean –

[01:00:00]

MT: – we'll all be gay, we'll be out, open, but then there're gonna be issues of class difference in the community and I think that'll be a big thing to work out.

JS: In the future?

MT: Mm-hm. Does that make sense?

JS: No, yeah, that does actually – that's complete, as you say, integration then you just have – other problems will arise.

MT: And gay people are still prone to self-doubt and internalized homophobia. There's always that little bit of doubt, that little seed, even in myself, of homophobia that's been planted there. We're only about, I think, four to five percent of the population, right now, well, I mean some figures say we're ten to twelve percent, but there's a difference between sexually – or sexual behavior and going through a sexual phase or experimentation at a certain point of your life. That's different than having an identity or a consciousness, and when we say, wholly formed gay and lesbian person, I think we're only about five or six percent, I couldn't imagine more than seven – that's too high, maybe six, five, six percent of the population, so, were always gonna be a minority, and because of that, there's always going to be those inherent feelings of lesser than, maybe there is, you know? It's hard not to believe the negative PR about us.

JS: Yeah, (laughs) so even with full integration as you say, like Civil Rights and everything, you still think that there's still small internalized homophobia?

MT: Yes, and that's something I think we always need to work on and fight against and that will be a source of a new way of activism, which I call interactivism, you know, to always be looking inside and catching those demons and working with them.

JS: Okay, is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview, that you find pertinent?

MT: No, I think you asked some very good questions. I hope I haven't been too talkative –

JS: No, you've been fantastic.

MT: – but I'm very glad you're doing this.

[01:02:39]

END OF INTERVIEW