

Bob Kafka and Stephanie Thomas

Disability Rights Advocates

Interview conducted by

Trevor Engel & Sarah Rose

July 11, 2018 in Austin, Texas

Disability Studies Minor

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Biography

(Brief summary of the interviewee's life)

Topics discussed

- Philadelphia court case and Revolutionary War costumed protests
 - Relation of HIV, AIDS, and transsexualism to the ADA
 - ADAPT organizers
 - History of the ACCD
 - The Crawl-Up at the Capitol
 - Backlash of the Crawl-Up
 - Goals of individual actions
 - Protest in the Rotunda of the Capitol building
 - Process and development of police arresting disabled protestors
 - ADAPT's issues with paratransit
 - Accessibility today compared to before the ADA
 - Response to Rotunda Protests
 - Lack of cooperation between disability groups today
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Rose

Okay, this is Sarah Rose.

Engel

And Trevor Engel.

Rose

Interviewing Bob Kafka and Stephanie Thomas on July 11th, 2018 at ADAPT headquarters in Austin. So, we've gotten up to the Capitol crawl and Rotunda protests.

Thomas

<topic>Philadelphia court case and Revolutionary War costumed protests</topic>

Okay. Well I can't remember, last time did we talk about the court case?

Rose

The one in Georgia?

Thomas

No, the one that went to Philadelphia. Because ADAPT was also suing...

Kafka

APTA. The American Public Transit Association.

Thomas

APTA, well the DOT I think.

Rose

Okay, was that one with the really dramatic protest?

Thomas

Where we dressed up in Revolutionary War costumes and...

Rose

No. No you did not mention that. Talked about other dramatic things.

Engel

I saw a picture of that. We were looking at it earlier.

Thomas

Okay, that's...it's all around the same time. The ADA was coming along with hearings and so forth. People were working all around the country to get it passed with Justin having these hearings around the country and all this. But, we had a lawsuit that was against the DOT rules that had rescinded, which basically means repeals, the original rules which said that when people bought busses with lifts with federal dollars then they had to buy busses with lifts...I'm sorry, when they bought busses they had to buy busses with lifts.

Rose

Do you know when that happened? When it was issued?

Thomas

It was issued in the...

Kafka

Mid- '80s. '88?

Thomas

No, no. The early regs were probably very early '80s or late '70s.

Kafka

Yeah.

Rose

Building off 504?

Thomas

Yeah, it was from 504. But then APTA sued...countersued basically and said, "we shouldn't have to buy busses with lifts."

Kafka

The American Public Transit Association.

Thomas

So that's why we protested all of their conventions. And so we sued again. Tim Cook was the attorney and he was... We didn't sue the first time, somebody else...I don't know who...but anyway, Tim Cook was our attorney. And it had been working its way up through the courts slowly and quietly in the background of everything. Right around...like in '89 it went to the third Circuit Court of Appeals, which is the one in Philadelphia. We decided that we were going to go up for the trial. We did some protests in advance of the court. We blocked some busses. We also had a parade where we dressed up in Revolutionary outfits with three-cornered hats and frilly shirts in the front. I don't think...nobody wore those kind of those dresses that women wore then, but we had vests and stuff like that; and wigs, the whole deal. There's a great a picture of Mark Johnson where his ponytail is sticking out of the side of his head.

Kafka

Well it's tilted, yeah.

Thomas

But it was very... And we marched through the streets of Philadelphia. We took over the Liberty Bell at one point for a while. Then we got thrown out of there. Then we went over to the courthouse and we spent the night outside, we camped out outside. Then in the morning we went into the court and listened to Tim argue the case. And the court decided in our favor, that they were going to have to buy busses with lifts. But, it was then going to go further on in the courts.

Kafka

Yeah I was going to say, the shorthand was that APTA wanted local option and we wanted it to be federally mandated. That's the short jargon about local option which...that's what APTA wanted. Which meant most of the transit systems...

Thomas

Every city could make up their own mind about what they wanted to do, but that was already the case and what they were all doing was nothing.

Kafka

And its analogy is the whole battle about states' rights versus federal...the ADA. The concept is the civil rights aspect of transportation, which is a subset of the larger ADA.

Thomas

<topic>Relation of HIV, AIDS, and transsexualism to the ADA</topic>

So then shortly after that then the ADA...I believe it was like in March of 1990, the ADA started to slog down in congress and the support was getting a little softer. There were a lot of weird things that were brought up as problems. Jesse Helms had all these isms that were supposedly going to be considered disabilities and it would be so horrible. I can't remember...people with AIDS, people who were queer. I mean he didn't put it that way.

Kafka

Transsexual, those who dressed up in women's clothes. I mean it was a whole list of things which were in there. The one that was most opposed by the disability community was the HIV/AIDS one, but that one was a battle in and of itself.

Rose

Yeah.

Thomas

And that was one set of problems that was coming up. Then there was another set of problems of other people's support softening as it got closer to becoming reality. So, the idea was that we wanted to give it a shove to get it going before everybody crumbled at the last minute.

Rose

Can we just go back to one thing before you...?

Thomas

Yeah, yeah.

Rose

What was the reaction to people in Philadelphia with you wearing all these Revolutionary War costumes?

Thomas

Well, we got some of our best ADAPT members from that action ever. Philadelphia ADAPT is an amazing chapter. Some of the local people agreed to come out with us and they were part of Disabled in Action, which is another network of disability organizations in many places around the country. They came out and, at first they were like, "well we couldn't get a permit for this and for that," and we were like, "well we're just gonna have to do it without the permit," and they felt the urgency of the situation to the degree that we did, to where they agreed with us. And they actually turned around and became some of our...one of our best local organizations. Even to today, they are still strong and good.

Kafka

Like we have mentioned, in other cities we didn't quite get the support of the disability community like we did.

Thomas

This was really a unique kind of thing.

Kafka

Yeah, this was...it was very uplifting that we were welcomed. And one of the people who came, one of the longtime leaders of ADAPT, was a transsexual. And through the whole protest, he avoided getting arrested and his big fear was that he didn't know if they would put him in the male or the female...

Thomas

Jail system.

Kafka

Yeah.

Thomas

And it was a big deal! I mean...

Rose

I know, safety!

Kafka

And at the time, he was newly...

Thomas

It was a very different feeling about those issues back then too, really different. So, Jesse Helms' s stuff had more support probably than today.

Rose

Well, I had student last semester write a paper on the attempt by the National Restaurant Association...

Kafka

Right.

Thomas

Oh that was another...

Rose

That amendment, chapter amendment.

Kafka

Oh yeah, that was the whole HIV/AIDS.

Rose

And then also how people actually covered in the court decisions later. Could you talk more about that?

Kafka

Oh the HIV/AIDS...oh it was a major...it almost lost the ADA. The disability community was extremely focused on...

Thomas

You see they were afraid...the argument was that people with AIDS would handle your food and give you AIDS, that was the fear that they were fermenting.

Rose

That was a Texas congressman, right?

Thomas

Maybe so, but it was...

Rose

Who sponsored it?

Thomas

Restaurant associations across the country.

Rose

Yeah. And Helms was involved.

Kafka

And, on that specific it was the restaurant. But, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, NFIB, which continues to be anti the ADA, was also part of...it may not have been as specific as the restaurants on the **HIV/AIDS**, but they were totally against the passage of the ADA from the beginning.

Thomas

Oh yeah. And the Chamber of Congress.

Kafka

And, to this day, the Conservative movement has defined...and still blast George H. W. Bush as passing the worst piece of legislation in U.S. history in the ADA. They still have that feeling about it.

Thomas

<topic>organization of actions in Washington D.C.

And when you look at the...because I was looking at some of the articles for the online museum. You read them and they're talking about how all of these people in congress had family members with disabilities and that is why they were so supportive and blah, blah. And I'm sure that's true, but they weren't that...I mean, there was

a loft of softness in a lot of that support and that's why we felt we needed something to give it a strong, strong push. Because, you could just see it sitting there starting to get stale or ripe or whatever image you want to pick.

Anyway, we organized this action called the Wheels of Justice. We went to D.C. and we started out where we went in front of the White House and we'd wind up there. And then we marched from there to the Capitol. And we had all kinds of people that would join us on that march, people that never would come to actions and we people that weren't...bought into the stuff that we were doing. And people that were very supportive but were also very systems kind of people like...I think I told you about the head of the President's Committee for people with disabilities, the executive director was a guy named Jay Rochlin. He came, and he actually pushed Justin in the march. He was a real suit-and-tie type of guy but he really believed that the ADA needed to pass and things were getting really squishy and all that.

Rose

How did you get all these people involved? Was ADAPT leading Wheels of Justice?

Thomas

Yeah, we organized the whole action. We told people what we were doing. We shared information with all the other groups and stuff like that. Sometimes, many times, when we are doing an action, we need to be secret. Because, what happens is that when you start telling people what's going on, the police get wind of it and then they try to stop it in one way or another. So we learned years ago, basically since Phoenix, that we needed to be secretive. **Inaudible*** 12.37-12.40**

Kafka

Strategic.

Thomas

But things like marches and stuff like that, we were always trying to get people to come to them. And this was going to be a march and so what we did is we marched to Pennsylvania Avenue to the capitol. We marched...and we did actually get permits and things like that which is not always what we did, but this time. On the south end of the Capitol, which faces the mall and the Washington monument, they have these stairs that go up and then there's a plaza. On that plaza we had a big, big rally. And we had people speaking like, I. King Jordan spoke and we had...

Kafka

I think we had the student...didn't we have the student that led the Gallaudet protest as well? I. King Jordan became president as part of the Gallaudet protests.

Rose

Yeah, yeah.

Kafka

I'm not sure if he spoke or not. But, there was a whole, very broad base. The backdrop...if you ask me the question "why?"...like Steph had said earlier, in the beginning the ADA was being pushed through like a knife through butter, you know that it was all the inside Washington people. And it was only the inside Washington people. And it was only when they started to hit a roadblock, that they all of a sudden started reaching out to the grassroots. And again, even though we had relationships with all the national groups, we were still sort of the stepchild, the crazy aunt in the...

Thomas

I wouldn't use those handicap...

Kafka

Oh I'm sorry, handicapped...X that. But no, I'm just talking about the stereotype. So they were doing it in the suit-and-tie type of...

Rose

Who reached out to you, or were you just following.

Thomas

<topic>ADAPT organizers</topic>

We were just following, we were involved...a lot of people that were in ADAPT were also involved in some the organizing that was going on.

Kafka

Yeah

Thomas

Marilyn Golden did a lot of work on organizing people. She's a woman from Texas originally, by the way.

Rose

I think you mentioned her.

Kafka

Pat Wright who was known as the general of the...

Thomas

She was doing more of the lobbying sort of stuff.

Kafka

Oh yeah, she was in the ADA yeah.

Thomas

She's the unsung hero of the ADA. But, Marilyn had been specifically tasked with going out and working with people in different organizations around the country.

Kafka

And Liz Savage at the...

Thomas

And also, Justin did a lot of that kind of thing. He did the 50 state tour and he got the list of organizations in every state and he stayed in touch with them and kept them... And we knew Marilyn, we had helped her with Texas stuff. And Justin we knew, he worked with ADAPT a lot.

Rose

Had Marilyn been involved with CTD?

Thomas

I don't think...no I don't think so.

Kafka

No, no. Marilyn had her accident, went to rehab in Houston at TIRR, and that's where we met her. She was originally from San Antonio. She had done a little bit—that's when I lived in Houston—so she did a little of

organizing for the Coalition of Barrier-Free Living, which evolved into the Houston Center for Independent Living. So, she did some housing stuff there. But, then she went to quote-unquote “the land of milk and honey,” she moved out to California in the Berkley area, where she remained. But she’s another one of Texas history that’s unknown about.

Rose

Because, I know that you’ve mentioned her before.

Kafka

Yeah, yeah Marilyn...because she was savage, did most of the contacting of the state to build that. But that again, happened only after the ADA.

Thomas

And what was the guy from Mississippi?

Kafka

Oh, Smith...

Thomas

Mark Smith.

Kafka

Mark Smith.

Thomas

He was another person that was...

Kafka

He was for...coalition...

Thomas

He was with the coalition of citizens with disabilities in Mississippi or whatever their name was.

Rose

Oh, okay.

Thomas

He was an amazing man and an amazing organizer and he did a lot of keeping in touch with everybody and we were in touch with him. And Wade talked to everybody under the sun all the time, I don't even know who he talked to.

Rose

So what about...you worked with Justin Dart during the '80s?

Thomas

Oh yeah, Bob and I have known him since...long, long, long ago.

Kafka

Oh yeah.

Thomas

And we worked with him on different things. In the beginning, he wasn't that big on ADAPT, but he slowly became more and more of a supporter and a believer and so forth.

Kafka

But everything Justin did at the national level, when it was he chairperson of the National Council on the Handicapped doing reports stuff, he basically did the same thing here in Texas when he was chair of the Governor's Committee. He developed a report...so a lot of the stuff is sort of the same, laying the groundwork.

Thomas

But the national level, he based it on work he'd done here in Texas.

Rose

Okay, so why don't you talk about that on Friday?

Kafka

And like we've said so many times, not only was Justin here, Lex was here, Marilyn Golden.

Rose

Pat Wright you mean?

Kafka

Well, Pat Wright is from California

Thomas

She's from California.

Rose

Did you know her at all or not?

Thomas

I just kind of knew her.

Rose

Okay.

Kafka

<topic>History of the ACCD</topic>

I knew her through the 504 trainings that DREDF, the Disability Rights Education Defense Fund did trainings in 504. And again it's not a Texas history, but the 504 training money is what fueled the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities. Which...that group is the one that spurred regional coalition building which caused the five-state meeting in Houston that ended up creating the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities.

Rose

Inaudible*19.17-19.18** later on is the ACCD

Kafka

Because the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities is mostly forgotten. Frank Bowe was their executive director. And everything just thinks of the 504 protests in California, but there were protests all over the country. And it was organized, not by the California people, but by the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities.

Thomas

But, the California people did a more extended protest.

Kafka

Extended, yes.

Rose

Yeah.

Thomas

But they actually... Atlantis, before ADAPT became ADAPT, they did one in Denver with some of their other people from the Denver area. And there's stuff about it on the online museum. But it's funny because if you didn't know that's what it was then you wouldn't know that that's what it was.

Kafka

Right. And ACCD was the forerunner, every one of the organizations that belonged to it were all consumer driven. And like I said, the history is mostly forgotten. But like I said, it spurred not only those protests but there were a lot of state coalitions at the time.

Rose

And there are only like four now I think from what CTE says.

Kafka

Yeah, and they're all evolved...Texas is one of the longer standing ones that stayed the same. The one in Tennessee is mostly a parent group. There's some others. Again, it's a missing piece that most people don't

realize and they actually ran out of business because when Ronald Reagan became president, all the 504 training money and all that basically disappeared. And ACCD had a long-term lease in D.C. and an office space, and they didn't have any ongoing funding so they went out of business. I can't remember what year that was. But that was really, from a national perspective, one of the first cross-disability national groups. And even though...I mean Lex played a role in that, he wasn't on the board of it at any time but Lex is always an inside player of that type of thing. But most of it, like I said, ADAPT...we knew all those people, they knew us, but direct action was a style they...it was a thing we heard a million times continue: that they agree with our goals, they hate our tactics, we are ruining the disability community. That has been consistent about that. But they actually...even though sometimes ADAPT gets credit for passing the ADA, we were part of it. But what it did do-ADAPT's chant "access is a civil right"-did actually come from our thing. It was on busses and stuff like that.

Thomas

It got broadened out to all kinds of stuff. People began to feel that it was a right to be part of society. Because, back in the day that was not necessarily the attitude. That was kind of radical. Which might seem weird now, but at the time that was definitely not...that was the way a lot of people felt.

Kafka

But the communication and the partnership did...during the Wheels of Justice and then the crawl-up and the Rotunda takeover there was communication. When we start talking about the Rotunda, it was a cooperative strategy. Once we went into the Rotunda, we threatened to get arrested, that we weren't going to leave, Pat Wright...

Thomas

Let's just go in order.

Rose

And one other thing, just for the transcriber, Savage? So that was one other person?

Thomas

Liz Savage.

Kafka

She's now, we think, still working for the Department of Justice.

Rose

Okay. And how did you know her?

Thomas

From all these...

Kafka

The ADA.

Thomas

Organizing for the ADA.

Kafka

She was on detail. She worked at that time for Tony **Cuelo**, who was head of the Epilepsy Society, and he detailed her to work on ADA. Tony was then the executive director of the epilepsy...I don't know if it's...

Thomas

Foundation.

Rose

Okay. So he wasn't in Congress?

Kafka

Not at that point. I think he was...you know, I'm a little confused...

Thomas

He was in the beginning and then I think he left.

Kafka

I think he might have introduced the first ADA, I'm a little...

Thomas

It fades as time goes by.

Rose

I don't think from what we've done...**inaudible*** 24.32-24.34** talks about him even being involved with epilepsy organizing. So it's just interesting...

Kafka

Yeah, I could be mistaken but I thought he was the director and then detailed Liz

Rose

We'll check.

Kafka

Yeah, check on that.

Thomas

But he has epilepsy and he was very involved in getting the ADA passed, that's for sure. And he was in congress and when he was in congress, he worked on it very, very hard.

Kafka

Right.

Thomas

<topic>The Crawl-Up at the Capitol</topic>

So, we had that big rally. There were legislators flocking there. Pat Schroeder and probably...I don't remember who they all were. It was just a big, broad spectrum of organizations and congress people and so forth talking at this thing. And then, at a certain point in the rally—Justin spoke there—but at a certain point in the rally, Mike—I can't remember what it was—but he gave me a signal. Then I started...I had gotten a whole bunch of ADAPT people that I knew were very hardcore and were willing to do whatever. So, I told them to come with me over by the stairs. And then, he gave the signal and that...

Rose

That's Mike...

Thomas

Michael Auberger. So then, we started to climb up the stairs. We got out of our wheelchairs and started to crawl up the stairs. And then everybody just...it just spoke to everybody in the crowd and as many people as could crawled up. There were little kids. There were people in suits. There were, you know, ADAPT maniacs. There was just every kind of person. And then there was a lot of other people that were like...people who couldn't crawl they were carrying them up. I mean it was this big thing of "damn it, if you don't understand it this is what you are making the disability community go through to just be part of society." And it really spoke to a whole ton of...everybody that was there got it and went with it, as far as I know. I mean, there was so many people that were not in the original group that was starting it, they were just taken up in the moment and went up. And it was a very long, hot climb but nobody died.

Kafka

People said there were 70 or 80 steps. I can't remember somebody counted them, I can't remember. 82?

Thomas

I think it was like 87 or something like that.

Kafka

87 or 82. Something like that.

Thomas

But it just went on and on and on.

Kafka

And a lot of people focus a lot of the picture design on the young girl, Jennifer. She was the...but there were a whole slew of...

Thomas

And there were other kids too that were climbing. And also obviously adults and old people and all that.

Rose

Did you do it too Bob?

Kafka

Yeah, yeah. We both did it.

Thomas

We were in different shape back then, you know!

Kafka

Yeah, we were both in manual wheelchairs at that time.

Thomas

A lot stronger and thinner and...

Kafka

We were able to get out of our chairs and...you know, we weren't bouncing really easily. Some people actually pulled their chairs up with them. Not many, some of the para, stronger types. But most people who got up there, their chair was brought up to the top.

Thomas

Yeah, other people helped by carrying their chairs up.

Kafka

But some people did. It was pretty impressive in terms of people's commitment. You can imagine the reaction, you know, people getting out of their chairs who really...it's not like they were faking being in their chairs. It just showed that commitment and passion.

Thomas

And along with that attitude about disability back then, there's a lot more people who can walk but maybe have difficulty that use wheelchairs. But back then, that was very rare. Very, very rare. It was just...people just didn't do that.

Kafka

Yeah, and you also had to put in the context of some of the other stuff we talked about earlier. You know, the meek become militant, “we’re not Jerry’s Kids any longer,” you know it’s all this you’re questioning authority, you’re standing up. It just breaks this whole stereotypic of being taken care of and not fighting for your civil rights. And that was obviously the “access is a civil right.” It got sort of lost a lot because the general line was it was going to get us all employed, the ADA. And to this day, people still think it’s an employment bill, but it has always been a civil rights...it went through the civil rights. But ADAPT, I think more than any other group, epitomized the fight for civil rights in disability rights. Because the other groups...except for that one 504 protest and the Gallaudet there’s not a lot of history of direct actions.

Thomas

There were some things that happened locally, but you didn’t hear about them very much.

Kafka

Yeah it wasn’t coordinated.

Thomas

<topic>Backlash of the Crawl-Up</topic>

The Disability Rag wrote a piece, saying that the crawl was demeaning or that some people thought that. They were always writing things about us that kind of...they didn’t want to...

Kafka

It was love-hate.

Thomas

Yeah it was love-hate. I guess they didn’t want to seem like cheerleaders for us. But at the same time, sometimes they would do these pretty anti things. And I wrote back to The Rag and I said, “you know, people all over the world have to crawl because they’re disabled and who are we to be so high and mighty that we can’t crawl when it comes to something as important as this.” Because the idea was that you would be demeaning yourself to get down on the ground and crawl. And that fit really well with the old attitude about disability. It was sort of, at first there was, “go ahead and crawl if that’s how you get around, we don’t care, we don’t want to think about you, we don’t want anything to do with you.” And then there was, “you belong in the chair, don’t do anything to...” the counter to that attitude about running around on a skateboard or however you could get around. Well they probably didn’t have skateboards then, but you know what I mean.

Kafka

Well and I think...

Thomas

But wait, wait. The counter to that was, “Okay we’re in our chairs and this is how we belong and blah blah,” and this was like one step beyond that. Because, really if you think about the world, all over the world that don’t, even today, have any means of getting around like that. You know you’re just lucky to have something. I think it’s wrong to think that you’re too good for that. And I think that if people have to do that to get around then that’s what they do to get around. It’s not...I think they deserve a better way to get around but if they don’t have it, don’t sit at home and cry, be out there and do things, you know.

Kafka

And I think some of it was, even though we didn’t do it for publicity, I think there was some jealousy that we got a lot of attention. It wasn’t the main reason for doing it but...

Thomas

Well, I think there was the reason of wanting to get attention to get people to pressure to push for the bill to pass.

Kafka

But what I was talking about was some of the backlash. And you know Mary, who was the editor, wrote some positive stuff. But, the crawl and again sometimes she used...and again that young girl, Jennifer, you know “we were utilizing children,” I mean it was cheap shots.

Thomas

And why shouldn’t kids fight for their rights? What about the children’s march in the civil rights act? I mean come on! Let’s get real!

Kafka

Well, it’s sort of like...at some point ADAPT got accused of being all male and no women; totally discounting only the leadership only because, at the time, Wade and I were the most visual. But forgetting about Babs Johnson, Stephanie Thomas, Diane Coleman, I mean all the...they conveniently dismissed them in saying it was male-dominated. So people were looking, at times, for shots...within our own community. And the other thing was radicals, they didn’t use the word terrorist in those days, but radicals was enough at the time. Now it’s convenient when you do a direct action to be described as a terrorist, because it’s really pejorative and gives everybody this thing, that you’re violent and everything else. But again, it’s what the purpose of direct action is and it motivated people. That’s why marches and... And we have seen over the years in every action—there’s a lot of talk in the disability community about empowerment—but we’ve just seen changes in individuals when you’re really confronting authority, when you’re standing and demanding something

rather than saying, “mother may I?” or “please,” you know, that kind of thing. And it really gets into those that, and I was this way in the beginning, if we could just educate you...this was sort of like now what are you going to do when they say no? What are you willing...? We get sort of angry because everybody uses the civil rights analogy, which it is. But what are you willing to do? They got fire hosed, dogs biting. So, is it going to jail one time? Are you willing to do that or do just sort of want to use the civil rights analogy? And that’s why the numbers of ADAPT folks may not be as large as we would like, but they’re committed back then as well as now. And the numbers obviously have grown over the years, but they are still smaller than we would like only because confrontation is not something that people feel comfortable with. And we’re seeing today full circle, if you just educate them...

Thomas

Hey if it works. But the numbers of times...I have a picture in my office somewhere of this little woman. She looks perfect 50s, housewife, older woman. And she’s going to D.C. to educate people about disability and she’s going in her wheelchair and her daughter is helping her by pushing her. It’s like...she went and educated and...it’s like, people have been educating for so long. I mean sometimes you have to just...

Rose

Push.

Kafka

Yeah.

Thomas

Use a different kind of form of education.

Rose

Yeah.

Kafka

Yeah.

Thomas

Anyways, that was the day of the crawl.

Kafka

Right, and then the next day...

Thomas

And the next day we...

Rose

<topic>Goals of individual actions</topic>

Did you end up talking to anyone? At the top of the crawl?

Thomas

There really wasn't that many people up there, there was a few. The people that were up there were like "whoa, what is this?" There was a lot of media around, but the general public wasn't right there. It's not a very, even then not a very well traveled part of the Capitol. Because we didn't go inside, we just went to next level of...like a terrace that was up there. But it wasn't isolated. Now, you can't go up there anymore. They...everything is all sealed off.

Rose

Any congress people or staff?

Kafka

No not at the...no.

Thomas

That came? Some people spoke at the rally and they were around.

Kafka

Yeah, but not at the...

Thomas

It wouldn't be a place you would go to get in and out or anything like that I don't think. Maybe.

Kafka

Yeah, that action...I mean, the end of that action, we didn't have...well we had demands but they didn't result in...it was sort of a larger...it leads to the next day. And that just speaks to, when ADAPT goes into any town it's three or four days so it's not just any one action. And that's another thing that a lot of people don't understand is, "Oh we did it." "well, they didn't say yes so why did you do it?" And even within an action, it was a long-term strategy but even every action had some thought about what you wanted to get out of it knowing...

Thomas

So, you have a unified message to push for.

Kafka

Yeah, yeah. And you could then say, "this is our demand there," and if you thought even one four-day action was going to change it. We wish it would, you know. Everybody says, "you're doing it just to get paper or just to get arrested." If they said yes, we would...

Thomas

Be happy to stop.

Kafka

We told you the story about when we slept over...Anne Richards was the governor.

Thomas

Yeah, you already told that one.

Kafka

Well after it was done, we were meeting with her after we spent the night. She said, "all you had to do was pick up the phone and call me, we would've done it," and then we had that guy James Templeton go over and bring her a phone, "next time call us." I mean, she wouldn't have done it, I'm just saying it's not an uncommon thing to say, "oh, you didn't have to do that."

Rose

Yeah, that makes sense.

Kafka

Yeah.

Rose

So basically the goal of the Capitol Crawl was media coverage to raise awareness and also to really show, “okay, this is what we really go through every day.”

Thomas

And the unified...all the groups that came together for the rally, there was many. And that’s what made it be big too, you were asking that before. One of the reasons was that so many groups were going to be represented at the rally and everybody knew the idea was to have a lot of people there. Then the next day...

Kafka

<topic>Protest in the Rotunda of the Capitol building</topic>

We had scheduled...

Thomas

Someone had scheduled a tour of the Capitol.

Kafka

When you could do that.

Thomas

Back in the day.

Kafka

Back in the day before you had to go through armed secret service—whatever the Capitol police—in those days you could get into the Rotunda even without the tour.

Thomas

It was part of the tour.

Kafka

So had this large number...

Thomas

So we went on this tour and it was very awkward because there's like, I don't know, a couple of hundred of us in chairs. And their elevators were like one or two chairs in each one so the whole thing was ridiculous to begin with.

Rose

And normally how many people do they have on a tour?

Thomas

I don't know. They might even have 200-people tours, but they would just go up the stairs and we couldn't do that. So, then you had to go through this rigmarole with these tiny little elevators and all that. Eventually, everyone gets up to the Rotunda and then we fanned out across the Rotunda and this poor little tour guide was trying to give her spiel and it was becoming more and more apparent that the tour had ended.

Kafka

But we also, before we went up, there was this whole plan that you had the inner circle and the outer circle, the inner circle with people that were willing to get arrested. And there was sort of consensual...I mean they weren't circular. But the people who didn't want to get arrested were on the outside so they wouldn't get trapped in because it's pretty hard to move with a bunch of chairs. So people on the inside were definitely knowing that they were putting themselves...

Thomas

Gonna stay...

Rose

And was this primarily ADAPT organizing?

Kafka

Oh it was all ADAPT. All ADAPT.

Thomas

That was all ADAPT because we knew that was going to be definitely, very likely to be an arrest action and we knew that we didn't want to have a bunch of people that were like, "Oh wow! This is not what I wanted," so we wanted everybody to be pretty in tune with what was going on.

Rose

Okay, so the core was ADAPT but what about the organization?

Thomas

Even within ADAPT, not everybody gets arrested.

Kafka

Right, it's always a choice. I mean that's a...

Rose

And what about the rest...I mean, was the whole 200 ADAPT?

Thomas

I think pretty much...the 200 was ADAPT.

Kafka

Oh yeah, all ADAPT.

Thomas

I don't know, I can't remember the numbers exactly because we grew a lot over time.

Kafka

There may have been an individual or so from some of the Washington crowd.

Thomas

But if they came with us they were ADAPT!

Kafka

Yeah, yeah.

Thomas

I mean it's not that hard to be an ADAPT member: you have to come and participate.

Rose

I don't know that we ever knew that that was organized by ADAPT.

Kafka

Oh yeah.

Thomas

The Rotunda thing?

Rose

That it really was clearly...

Kafka

Oh it was totally yeah.

Thomas

That happens to us all the time.

Rose

Inaudible*** 42.49-42.50

Kafka

Oh yeah. No, the Rotunda was just part of that larger action. It was always...

Thomas

We demanded for the leadership of the House and the Senate to come and meet with us. And they did, Steny Hoyer came and Michels.

Kafka

Yeah, what happened was—and I'm not exactly sure when the communication—but...

Thomas

We were chanting. It was very loud.

Kafka

I believe it was Wade or Mike got in touch with Pat Wright. And Pat Wright brought down, it was Bob Michels who was the Speaker of the House, and a Republican, and Steny Hoyer who was the minority leader for the Democrats. That was part of the demand as we were chanting. And there's some footage of one woman from Chicago.

Thomas

Well, they were...I don't know if you've ever had the pleasure of one of these conversations with politicians but they start going on and on telling you things and on and on and on about why things are the way they are and we have to wait and we're trying to get this and you have to be patient, be patient. And you could feel it in the country that it was kind of getting older you know, and it was just not a good thing. So people in the group started to speak up because they'd been through this with other people before and blah blah blah. It just only goes so far. So she said, "If you could just walk for one day in our shoes..."

Kafka

An older African-American woman

Thomas

"...and if you could understand our lives and know what we went through, you would really support it." I'm not doing her justice of what she said, there's footage of it, it's really good. It just really stopped them in their tracks and it really... I think the whole event stiffened the backs of the people that were supporting us to where

they really decided that they were...I'm not going to say that they weren't going to do it before, but they kind of got a little extra oomph from it. You could feel it in the room.

Kafka

And I think the specific demand, if I'm not mistaken, was that the bill had just been sitting in whatever committee and we wanted it marked up. And that was the coordination with Pat Wright. Because Pat Wright was the one that got them, she came down with them when she got Bob Michels and Steny Hoyer to come down. There was that coordination and that's where that basic coordination between direct action and working...and like I said, that evolved over time. Because in the beginning, we were protested but when the bill stopped, that's when...I mean everybody knew everybody but there wasn't that cooperative "don't mess up our political work, you're gonna piss them off or do something." Obviously, they were in a situation because Pat is extremely knowledgeable politics in D.C. at the time.

Thomas

Yeah she's...

Kafka

Yeah, she's known as the General. Everybody gives her credit, though history doesn't. The inside people who read the details...everyone will remember Evan and Justin and maybe Lex, but Pat is not a name that rolls off people's tongues.

Thomas

Could that have to do with gender? (Sarcastically) I don't know!

Kafka

And she had a disability herself, I think she was low vision or she had other health issues. But, that was where the cooperation and working strategically...but they didn't commit. And I don't know how people got arrested that day.

Thomas

Well I believe what we did is we said we were going to wait until they marked it up. Of course, that could not be stood for so they came in and they took everybody one by one by one by one by one by one.

Kafka

No but you're forgetting Pugh. What was his first name?

Thomas

Tom Pugh?

Kafka

Tom Pugh. And I don't know how this...

Thomas

He's from Texas.

Kafka

He was from El Paso.

Rose

How do you spell his name?

Thomas

P-U-G-H.

Kafka

P-U-G-H. He had-and I don't know if he brought it in or if we had it-but we had these heavy chains.

Thomas

Motorcycle.

Kafka

Motorcycle chains. So when the time was when people were going to be arrested, people started wrapping themselves in the chains. And I think you were right there in the center with Tom, in terms of that. I mean the times are so much different now, that you could get a motorcycle chain through security in today's world. They probably didn't even have metal detectors obviously back then.

Thomas

No, they didn't need them.

Kafka

They probably didn't even think of that. And that was '89 I suppose, or the early 1990s.

Engel

The next...the year after that they had metal detectors.

Thomas

No, it was 1990.

Kafka

So that was dramatic. That's when people knew, that's when the champions...I mean it was real that Steny Hoyer and Bob Michels...

Thomas

They left.

Kafka

Yeah they left, they weren't gonna commit, they left. And since they wouldn't commit to anything, or at least to us...

Thomas

Well, they really couldn't commit to anything right then, but we really wanted to keep the push strong so we...

Kafka

Right, and I don't know how many people got arrested.

Thomas

101.

Kafka

101?

Rose

Wow!

Thomas

Because Victor Ramirez, who was also from Texas he's from Austin, he was locked up in the Austin state school for probably 30-40 years and got out under the Wells lawsuit. He was living in a group home here in Austin and was trying to get into his own apartment and was working on that. But he was one of the people involved and he was the last one and he was real proud of that.

Kafka

No I mean it goes back to that whole thing of: what really is empowerment? A lot of the people who had grown up with their disability and, whether it was their parents, educators, rehab professionals, they've all been squished down and told what to do. So, you can imagine how taking positive action for your civil rights could really do that. And we see that still today with young people who are involved. Again, that was 28 years ago so, it's a different era.

Rose

So what happened next?

Thomas

We all got hauled off to this little jail thing they had on the side of the capitol grounds. I didn't know what happened with everybody. I mean I know it must have taken forever to process everybody. But the guy who took me over was a policeman who had some type of mobility impairment. Because he was pushing by the shoulders cause I was in a manual chair at the time, and you could feel his limp when he was pushing because of just the way his body went. And he told me he had a daughter with Cerebral Palsy and that he was ashamed of us being so unruly and rude and all that. And I was talking to him about, "we're trying to fight for your daughter's future," and I was thinking about how this guy has obviously been hurt, probably in the line of duty. There's just disability all over and even though he didn't count himself as a person with a disability and he didn't think his daughter should be involved in such an activity, it was for them too! And it would benefit their futures, whatever anybody might say! And that was really a very intense type of thing. And very typical too.

Kafka

<topic>Process and development of police arresting disabled protestors</topic>

Also, the thing that has evolved over time is that because police departments share information, they became more and more knowledgeable about how to handle people in wheelchairs. Because in the early days, you turn off your joy box and they'd try to push you, they couldn't figure it out. Then even if they turned it on they didn't know how to disengage your clutches so they could push you. So it really ended up...over the course of time they learned how to disengage, they learned how manual chairs...so if nothing else, we've educated various police departments on how to handle. And it also became less a stigma of arresting people with disabilities. At first, that was a very major problem for the police department.

Rose

Great for you I guess.

Kafka

Well, it was part of the strategic thinking. But over time...and that's why in D.C. they usually didn't load us up in vans and take us places, which in some places happened.

Thomas

Well also, at that time there were so many of us.

Kafka

Yeah, right. It would be almost...

Thomas

Cause in the very early days, remember you guys were loaded up in vans.

Kafka

Yeah, yeah I know and taken time...and that's where the difference between a national action where you have large numbers of people willing to at least commit to getting arrested, it doesn't always happen at the local level. Because if you have 75 people in wheelchairs that are willing to get arrested, they have a quite a daunting thing. Because in all honestly, it has taken like 10, 12, 14 hours just to process us, just to do the paperwork to get us in. Then, because it's a misdemeanor most of the time.

Thomas

Every time.

Kafka

Yeah, and then they have to do almost the reverse process and get you back all your belongings. Then, they have to categorize your medicine and if you're in ventilators. And they also like to keep us off the street. So if they arrest us at four in the afternoon and they let us go—not unusually—at four in the morning then they figure, “they're not gonna do a protest again.”

Thomas

Often they figure wrong. **Inaudible***54.58–54.59**

Kafka

Well, that's why we've surprised them over and over again because people would be back on the street at seven in the morning to do whatever was the plan. I mean, that's the commitment. That's where, “I'd rather go to jail than to die in a nursing home,” and all those chants. Those people...and many of the folks...

Thomas

But you know, for all of the logistical problems, they always could find lift-equipped vehicles to take you away in.

Kafka

Right.

Thomas

Not to take you to school! Not to take you around town! Those lifts were just too difficult but it was not too difficult to find one to take you to jail!

Kafka

Then ironically, they would take off-the-line paratransit vans that we were protesting about only having paratransit. Because we wanted the mainline busses so we didn't have to use paratransit. The whole thing was ludicrous in terms of...

Rose

So they transport you in paratransit vans?

Kafka

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Thomas

Or, sometimes in some of the protests in the early days, they would take a city bus that was part of the protest and they put everybody on the city bus that was too dangerous for us to ride on as passenger around town. And they put everybody on there and ride that bus to jail and then take you off of it, that was not too dangerous.

Rose

Without a lift. Without a lift?

Thomas

Yeah, without a lift. And sometimes the hypocrisy of it all was just unbelievable. But that was, I think, the point of 90% of the protests was like the Emperor's New Clothes, it's obviously real but they're not going to admit it so we have to force the picture.

Kafka

<topic>ADAPT's issues with paratransit</topic>

I think we've mentioned it before, once the ADA did pass and the DOT regs had the time frame--was the first to be promulgated--I think the statistic is pretty accurate that about 50% of the transit systems were already accessible because of local protests. Like here in Austin and Houston, they had already made the commitment before the ADA. The ADA just got the rest of the country in making it...but it was the states and local grassroots stuff, mostly fueled by ADAPT in terms of that. Because here in Austin, the local group had a policy multimodal. That meant paratransit and accessible...

Thomas

Not the ADAPT group but the disability group **Might**.

Rose

Oh yeah.

Kafka

Yeah, mobility...and when we came in and created ADAPT Texas...

Thomas

Well because they said multimodal but then they never really worked on the mainline access part of it.

Kafka

Yeah, yeah. So that was pressing because we always got accused of being anti-paratransit which was the furthest thing. We just basically said that if you made everything mainline then people who couldn't use the mainline should use paratransit.

Thomas

Well the other thing was, back then paratransit was very different from today. I mean you had restrictions based on trip purpose; like you could go to the doctor or to work but you couldn't go to the movies or you couldn't go grocery shopping. Or, you had them based on the time of day; it'll run from 9 to 5 and everybody else's transit ran longer. Or, geographic area was more confined. All those kinds of...they limited it in other ways. Because it was more expensive to do those door-to-door services then it is...it seems obvious now but at the time, they kept saying it was cheaper. But the reason it was cheaper was because they...well they didn't amortize the cost over the life of the bus like they did with every other cost of the bus and then they didn't say anything about the limitations they were putting on the paratransit. So, paratransit today and then were totally different animals.

Kafka

Well, and this is not specifically to ADAPT, but it's just instructive in terms of the United States and the market-driven...1977 I think it was, advocates would come up with what would have been a federal thing called "trans bus" which was a low-floor bus with a ramp. And all the bus manufacturers-GM and all the others-killed it basically because of the market. So we went through this whole thing of different types of lifts. **Lift You** and I can't remember the other names...

Thomas

EEC was another big one.

Kafka

EEC, they all were...

Thomas

Grumman.

Kafka

They were just terrible in the sense...they worked sometimes...

Thomas

Well **Lift You** was pretty good.

Kafka

Yeah, but you know...so finally...

Thomas

People got killed. They would fall into the lift and be killed.

Kafka

<topic>Accessibility today compared to before the ADA</topic>

Yeah because you went in and saw these huge gears and if somebody didn't have good balance and it jerked a little bit, somebody fell in. The whole thing is now when you look here Austin and around the country, basically it's like the old trans bus but it's market driven instead of government driven in the sense...which is basically a low-floor ramp that comes out instead of a lift type thing, a ramp that folds out. But that is what has evolved in terms of...but the other thing that happened, we saw it when we used to go up to Denver for meetings and strategic, is you always saw a lot of disabled people on the streets in Denver. It was always really kind of exciting. And it was because their public transit was accessible.

Thomas

And they had curb cuts.

Kafka

Yeah, and they had curb cuts. So when we finally started getting lifts on busses it was really exciting—not that we knew every disabled person in Austin—but you'd see families with kids.

Thomas

People you didn't know showed up.

Kafka

And again, sometimes you feel like your rhetoric is not followed up by reality it's just...but it's really true that once you have a mainline system that's accessible—along with the curb cuts—it sort of builds then okay so curb cuts then...you get on the street, then you can't get into the business so businesses need to be...it's sort of a building block for universal design in terms of that. But, it starts with the fight to get that done.

Rose

And really it seems like the employment arm of the ADA has been so attacked and so complicated but...it will be interesting to see like say in 20 years how people...when more generations are used to seeing people with disabilities in public spaces because of the civil rights parts of the bill...like how attitudes have changed and employment may catch up somewhat because of that.

Thomas

I really hope that happens but I think a piece that really needs to happen better is education. I mean, I really haven't done very much on it, but I know here in Austin it's kind of appalling what still goes on today. They have magnet—they're not magnet, I think they call them target schools—where certain types of disabilities are supposed to go here or there because it's...they have more interpreters here. I mean, you understand the logic of why they do it but it's not what it's supposed to be about at all.

Kafka

No. I always use this illustration that you know the world has changed...we were having an ADAPT strategy meeting in Philadelphia and the hotel was right near the airport or right on the airport ramp and we went in to check in. And we had asked for an accessible room and they asked, "Do you want a rolling shower or a tub?" I just say the differences of what people offer today and what experience, even though there's tons of experience. But it's sort of like—and I keep thinking of this—we can call up and get a super shuttle that's accessible, get on a plane and have our motorized wheelchair. We can go and, if we're in Baltimore, get an accessible bus that can take us to the metro, which is accessible in D.C., and got to a hotel that is...at any one of those points, people would have been blocked from transportation.

Thomas

Well, every one of those points!

Kafka

So again, a lot of people who have benefitted from that are not experiencing quite...it's still there, the discrimination, but for some people it's different. There's a lot of cognitive/mental health. But still, even in the physical disability world there's all that... The other thing that I think we mentioned over and over again:

because lifts on busses was our main thing it was mostly people in wheelchairs Even though we had calling out stops for people who were blind and with cognitive, you know the issue was mostly with people with mobility. So when we moved, after the ADA, towards institutions, it broadened the population. Not because we were discriminating towards any particular but the issues sort of lent it for the type of disability. Sometimes people don't understand that, especially in the cross-disability world. It was just that the issue itself. It was sort of like if you wanted interpreters for the deaf, it will get you mostly the deaf community and then family and support.

Rose

<topic>Response to Rotunda Protests</topic>

Also, so what happened in response after the Rotunda protests?

Thomas

Things started to move along more. I think that was in March and it started to quickly go through and it was passed-I don't even remember exactly when it was passed-but it was passed and the signing on July 26th. I think it was passed in June. By the standard of how things had been going before, that really was a speeding up. Because you have to go through the different committees and it has to go here and...

Rose

Get reconciled.

Thomas

...Go on the calendar committee blah blah and reconciled, yeah. So it really did speed up after that and I think that all the other part was that a lot of the disability committee got revved up again too and they got where they were...people were pushing very hard. It was a huge effort by thousands of people from all over the country. And that was one of things that was really kind of cool about it was that there were little groups everywhere that were working on it so everybody had constituents that pushed for it.

And it's kind of interesting to me because Bob was talking about ACCD and CTD, and back in the early times those were organizations of organizations. They started out as local organizations and there were people with disabilities working together to make changes in the local area. Then the groups came together as groups to make a bigger group for the state and then the state groups to the national. There some national groups that were part of ACCD too.

<topic>Lack of cooperation between disability groups today</topic>

Nowadays, everything seems to be done on an individual level. Like, there's the American Association of people with disabilities, AAPD, but that's individuals and there's not those local groups like there used to be. I think that's a...what happened was that with a lot of them, they started centers for independent living and the center was supposed to be the advocacy. Then the local organization, those people were tired and they either got jobs at the center or they didn't and they went off and did their own thing. So the grassroots advocacy in these smaller groups just doesn't happen now like it used to. And I think that's a problem and I think it's really too bad. Because the centers have restrictions on their federal dollars of what they can and can't do. And then they have imaginations about the restrictions that are even bigger than what the restrictions are so that they think they can do even less than what they're allowed to do. You know, you take the king's money and you get

the king. And they're also busy providing services and yadda yadda yadda and the grassroots advocacy that started the whole thing has really been diluted, which is too bad.

Kafka

Well also, 504 and ADA everybody had a self-interest to work together. Post-ADA it became siloed around services so people did not quite have the vested interest to work together because you were vying for scarce resources. And during that period you had the development of disability community, mental health...I mean they always existed, but those became service requirements. So that's why when Steph said AAPD now is individuals, there really was no coalescing around a common goal which ACCD was built on. And indeed the original person wanted to do a model but he could not find the energy in the disability world. There is now something called the National Disability Leadership Association, NDLA, that has phone calls and stuff like that. But it's not as formal as ACCD in terms of that. My hope is that voting is where you can bring together because there's a common interest.

Thomas

And even like National Association of the Deaf and NFB, National Federation of the Blind, and ACB which is the council of the blind, they had local groups and they still may. But at least here in Austin, I don't hear about them that much. I'm not saying they're not there but you just don't hear about it like you used to. And maybe it's partly because things have changed, but we all know there could be more done better than what happens now. It's interesting to me how that has died away.

Rose

Yeah.

Kafka

Yeah and we've talked about it, there's all the people that coalesce around sports and different things like that. So there's all these different, various groups. In some ways it's like the Hispanic/Latino community: there really is not a single Hispanic/Latino community, it's Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Central. And the disability community has all those little siloes. Trying to find a common...my analogy I like to use is the tossed salad and what we're looking for is the right salad dressing to bring us all together, the tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce. And that's how it is. DD and mental health, you take a shattered glass and that's... from an organizing standpoint it's somewhat easier to do it on identity, but when you want to do something across it becomes that much more difficult, especially when you're talking about money for services. That is why ADAPT, we started with transportation and now we're working on institutional stuff, we like to organize around the issue rather than a group. And if the issue happens to hit just a narrow group it's not because...we've gotten accused over the years of not being sensitive or outreaching to the mental health community. And part of the problem wasn't that we didn't care about, it's just that we were doing mostly Medicaid-related attendant services and mental health...there's not a lot of mental health services paid for by Medicaid. Again, we have all our bills that we've proposed over the years have had a mental health component. But it was a common shot that we taken in that in terms of...

Rose

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Well then, I think we should maybe stop here.

Thomas

Yeah, I was thinking that too.