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Oral history interview with Nan Goldin, 2017  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nan Goldin on 2017 April 30 and May 13. The interview took place at Goldin's home in Brooklyn, NY, and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Nan Goldin and Alex Fialho have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

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ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Nan Goldin for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, on April 30, 2017 at Nan's home in Brooklyn, New York.

NAN GOLDIN: I just have one question: Are you doing people in Europe also?

ALEX FIALHO: No, just the United States.

NAN GOLDIN: That's too bad. I can think of great people.

I just wanted to talk about being a feminist and still being proud of it. Every day I think about it. I realized I was a feminist when I was five, and I still remember exactly where I was standing and even what I was wearing. I was wearing, like, a little cowboy outfit with pants, and this was in the '50s, maybe '59. And I was standing at the door by which my family went in and out of the house on the side, the screen door, and I thought, "My brothers will never do anything that I can't do." In other words, "I can do anything my brothers can." And it hit me like a thunderbolt, and it remained there my whole life.

And in the '80s, a woman said—in 1980, a woman who owned a bar that I was working in said, "You were born with a feminist heart," and I'm very proud of that. Feminism has been so maligned, and I remember that Cookie [Mueller] was ashamed if people asked if she was a feminist, because she thought she wouldn't be able to catch a guy.

ALEX FIALHO: Where was that childhood home?

NAN GOLDIN: Silver Spring, Maryland.

ALEX FIALHO: And tell me a little about your brothers.

NAN GOLDIN: I have two older brothers, and I had an older sister. My brothers are five and two-and-a-half years older than me. My mother scheduled each birth—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: —or whatever—however you would want to put it. But my oldest brother was always a square, as it was called in the '50s. And he ironed his underwear, and his pencils were always sharpened to the most extreme [laughs] degree that I've seen a pencil in my life. And he stayed in his room and studied all the time. He went on to Harvard, and then when he was about 19, he discovered he had a body as well as a head, and he started dancing, modern dance. And when he got out of Harvard at about 21, he went to Sweden with this dance company he liked and met the woman he's still with, in the first year. He learned to speak Swedish so fast that he had a Swedish accent within a year and couldn't speak English very well [laughs] and he's still in Sweden.

And my other brother is a troubled soul. I guess being the second son is hard in my family, and he's never really gotten what he wants or where he wants or who he wants to be. He's still struggling badly all the time.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your parents?

NAN GOLDIN: My mother is 101 and still healthy.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

NAN GOLDIN: But she's had amnesia. [Laughs.] She's had Alzheimer's for 30 years probably. And my father died at 99. He was saying, even till the end, "I still have my marbles." He was going to classes at the assisted living old-age place they were living, and he still only liked people who had gone to Harvard. My oldest sister was really beautiful physically and very high-strung in a way that alarmed my parents—but that I always admired—and was too wild for the suburbs from the age of about 13.

She used to tell me how much she hated suburbia, and this is before that was a catchphrase. This was in 1961 that she was saying that. And I think if she had met—I know that if she had met other women from that period who were strong and vital and obsessed and creative, she would have lived. I think about that a lot. And she played the piano; she was a classical pianist. She had been accepted to a good music school, and then she killed herself when she was 18. It's been the big event of my life. That's—there are, you know, these events that it's—like A-B-C-A-D, and I would say the one that's had the most ongoing effect on my life is my sister's suicide.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the ways that you felt that effect?

NAN GOLDIN: There's a whole piece about it. That book, *Sisters, Saints and Sibyls*, I just—I knew from an early age that I had to get out of the family or the same thing would happen to me. So, I got out when I was 14. And I felt very close to her, but she was in and out of institutions most of my childhood. I remember the day of her death really vividly, like—and everything around that, and everything that happened in my family. But I don't want to forget about her. I'm very aware of the effect, and how—my obsession with her, but I want to remember her also.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the ways that you were close to her?

NAN GOLDIN: She would mother me in a way that my own mother didn't know how. She would just wash my hair or hold me or these kind of things that you need when you're a kid. And she knew how to do that, even though neither of us had been mothered in that way, or not well. And she was—there were things that she said about my mother, for instance, that very much colored my view of my mother. I felt protective of my mother until she died, and that was it. That was the break for me with her for most of my life.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you feel when you were growing up amidst this family?

NAN GOLDIN: I sort of slid away—I left home when I was about five, my shrink told me. The only good shrink I've ever had, who got me clean twice now over 30 years [laughs], and he knows me better than anyone. And he said that I left home when I was a really young child because I was looking for the emotional support that wasn't in my family, so I got it from my friends. And my friends are still like a capital letter for me.

I was thinking about this last night, that people talk about all kinds of relationships with their partner, their children, their parents, and the relationships that have mattered most to me, probably my whole life, are my friends. So, I put a lot of pressure on my friends, or a lot of stress on who they are for me. And I need a lot from them, more than most people probably, because they get it from their partner. I don't do well with partners [laughs] I realize. I've had some good partnerships, but it's always been friends.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of your earliest and [most -AF] important friends growing up?

NAN GOLDIN: There was a girl named Laura Pottash, who I've seen again recently, who I was very close to when we were like 11. And we were—when I moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, she was there. I don't remember the names of my kids from Silver Spring—of my peers. I remember what they look like, but I don't remember their names. And you know how when you're a kid, maybe you didn't have this, but a lot of us have this thing of, "I'll show them." And I did because [laughs] after the—after my mid-career retrospective at the Whitney, I heard from some of these people, like Miriam Kaplan or whatever her name was, like, I don't even remember their names now, but they started writing to me. These same people who either kind of rejected me at some point or bullied me at some point or people I just fell out of touch with. But I remember that, you know, "I'll show them" mentality, and I did.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: I didn't care. I didn't even remember them by the time I showed them, but it's funny to think that way.

ALEX FIALHO: So, what city were you born in and then what city did you grow up in? And how did the environment of those cities impact you?

NAN GOLDIN: I was born in Washington, D.C., but I was an infant when we moved to—first—anyway, yeah, I grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland. It was a white suburb at the time. I had one friend who was mixed-race, but it was white, white, white. And now it's very mixed. I don't think there's too many white people left there, in fact.

But there was the Jewish area, and then there was the Catholic area. And the Jewish area was this group—my father's not alive to ask him more, but my brother probably remembers. My brother still hasn't left Silver Spring from when he was 13. Those were the best years of his life, and he lives in constant regret. Anyway, he probably remembers everything about Silver Spring. But it was a claustrophobic suburb. It was very much about the times, about—the idea "Don't let the neighbors know" was the prevalent one.

And my parents used to—my mother used to say that all the time. It wasn't just an attitude; it was a literal translation. And actually, the neighbors did know, we found out years later, because there was so much screaming in the house. And I think I actually swallowed that for a little while and became concerned with what other people thought, but I got over it quickly. I mean, I'm always concerned with what my friends think and feel, but not the public. In fact, I've hated people most of my [laughs]—I mean, I've hated or disliked the culture and the people living in any way within that American culture in the norm. I've always hated it. I've been fighting against it my whole life.

My sister was fighting against it in the '60s or late '50s. And I—you know, I—even if I felt protective of my mother, my sister and my mother hated each other, and I felt protective of each of them. But I definitely was deeply affected by my sister's version of the world. I think it shaped my version of the world.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you tell me a little bit more about that version of hers?

NAN GOLDIN: I think my sister cared more about my family than I did, or about my parents. She cared too much. I think that's what killed her. But she had no respect for conformity, and we're talking about the most conformist period in American history—that's been translated that way, and that's how I remember it. And she hated that conformity. Just her very being was a slap in the face of conformity, and she was sexual in a period when there was no allowance for women to be—girls to be sexual. And I don't think she was actually—she wasn't actually fucking, but she was exploring like teenagers do, and now it's—I mean, for the last 30 years it's been a—or 25 at least, it's been accepted and understood. And many families have been supportive of that kind of early adolescent sexuality, but in my family, it was abhorred. Hence, my brother was, you know, celibate—was virginal and good—and my sister wasn't virginal and bad. It was black and white.

ALEX FIALHO: What were the names of your family members just for the record?

NAN GOLDIN: My sister's name is Barbara. My brothers are Stephen and Johnny.

ALEX FIALHO: And your parents?

NAN GOLDIN: Lilian and Hyman. I always was amused by my father being named Hyman, but I guess in the '20s, it was a name.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the time when you ran away? How did it come to pass?

NAN GOLDIN: The first time I ran away—I was sent to a number of schools by the time I was 13, or, I don't know—so many things happened—13, 14, 15. It's hard to remember the order. I mean, I remember the order, but I don't remember what year I was still those years. At 14 and 15, a million things happened. Now I'm lucky if one thing [laughs]—one huge change occurs in, you know, 10 years. But in those years, it was constantly shifting and at 13 I had gone—I was sent to this boarding school that was all gay men, and that's why by the time I was 15 and I met David, I knew he was gay, because I had already had a year of experience around gay men.

ALEX FIALHO: David Armstrong?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. But this school was—it's been shut down for 30 years at least, maybe more. I met someone else who had gone there when I was 18, and he was 18, and he—people didn't have credibility for my stories so I never told them to anyone. I don't usually even talk about it now, but this guy had been through the same thing. And he had very similar experiences and memories of the place, except he told me even some weird details. But the teacher's mother lived there, and she censored all our letters, in and out. The men—all the kids were boys. I don't know, there was 25 boys and five girls. We were kept off campus, down the road. It was in Brighton, Connecticut, no—what's the name? Near Woodbury—Woodbury, Connecticut, something like that. And I thought a lot when I was there about running away to New York. So, I ran away—my sister and I ran away to the circus when I was a kid.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. We were in North Carolina on a family trip, and we were gone for maybe 12 hours, but that was big in those days, I mean, for kids that age. She was maybe—I don't know, she was 14, and I was maybe even—I was 7, and she was 14 or 15—no, she was probably more like 12—no, more like I was 6 or 7—

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

NAN GOLDIN: —and she was 12 or something. And we made it down the beach. We were gone, like, 12 hours. It was exciting, but she was, you know, in big trouble with my parents after—they were extremely vile, violent in their, you know, in their treatment of her when we got back. Anyway, so, running away was in my blood from an early age. My sister had run away from a school she was in, and I used to love the idea of packing a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and running away from school. So, anyway, I went to the school, and it was all men—gay men and boys.

ALEX FIALHO: Coincidentally, they were all gay?

NAN GOLDIN: No.

ALEX FIALHO: Why were they all gay?

NAN GOLDIN: Because he was gay, and he hired them. His name was Dr. Bee, and his mother lived there. He had these two big dogs that this guy I met when I was 18 told me he was having sex with. I've known a woman who was having sex with her two big dogs also. So, I don't disbelieve—I believe it. These dogs were with him all the time, two Great Danes, and he—there was, you know, it was a pederast situation. I mean, he was—they were fucking the boys.

My lover, he was 18, and I was, what, 13. And we didn't have—you know, we didn't have actual sex, but we were blowing in each other's ear. He was from West Virginia. He was the cook there, and he was the lover of the director. And we went to Europe—about, I don't know, seven kids from the school, but me and the director and my boyfriend, his boyfriend—he had a big diamond ring from the—from Dr. Bee [ph]. And the three of us went out a lot after dinner. When the other people went to the hotel, we went to drag clubs. We went to—in Copenhagen we went to the famous amusement park where it was a huge gay scene there in the '50s—'60s. And in Paris, we went to actual drag queen bars, clubs. So, I don't think there was an accident that the boys were young and pretty. And the counselors, the teachers, the staff that was living there year-round were young men. They must have been 21 or something.

Anyway, I left that school after a year. And when I left, the director says—said to me, "Wherever you go, I'll find you. And you're not safe anywhere." Because I knew too much. So, I had had—I went—I think after that, I might have gone through a period where I didn't want to be around gay people or gay men. And then I got over that quickly. And my whole life from 15 on was among gay men, my whole life. It isn't any more. It hasn't been for some years. I mean, now it's integrated, but it was a complete gay scene, and the queens lived in a world—the queens were actually not even accepted in the '70s, early '70s, by the gay community at all.

Anyway, after that school, I went to a Stockbridge School in Western Mass. That was—I don't know, like, liberal education. They were big in the '70s—'60s, '70s, these schools. Like, they didn't—they weren't—like Summerhill, like the school I ended up at. They weren't hippy free schools, but they were—I'm trying to think of something that exists now like that. Like, Oberlin College kind of—they were liberal schools.

ALEX FIALHO: And how were you and your family finding these schools?

NAN GOLDIN: I found the first school in the back of the *New York Times*, because my best friend Laura had gone away to a school that was a hippy free school, a complete free school. And she was living there, and I wanted to go there, and my father wouldn't allow it. He wrote something to the director saying that I shouldn't come, and the director was really [laughs] worried about me after reading that. But in those—I mean, there was one school I wanted to go to, and they didn't take anyone who hadn't been breastfed for a year and a half. Did I tell you that last time?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, these schools were crazy! I don't know how many people could have been going there because in those days, no one breastfed [laughs] for a year even. So, I have not—but I mean, I understand that he wanted secure individuals, but in the '60s, no one was breastfed for a year and a half, so I don't know where he got [laughs] people.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: Anyway, the school in Western Mass. was considered a good liberal education. It was a big school, and my first boyfriend there was an amazing black kid. He was 18, and we were all 14, the rest of the kids. And he was from the south side of Chicago, which is still really rough. And he was brought in—no, he was from the south side of—or whatever the area in Cleveland is, from a very tough ghetto. And he was there as a scholarship kid, and he was brilliant. Everybody loved him. He was so good, absolutely good. His name is Furman T. Byrd

[ph]. I've looked for him. I had a friend search for him, but they couldn't find him. Maybe now it would be possible to find him.

But what happened is I got thrown out of the school for pot. Lots of us were smoking pot, and I got caught with it, and I got thrown out of school. And about a year later, when I was living with—yeah, I was hanging out with David, and I was living in this foster family in Wellesley, Mass., which was incredibly rich suburbs of Boston, incredibly rich. And Furman came back to see me, and I was in the cemetery with my boyfriend, Wolfer, at the time when Furman came back, and he ran wild through my foster family's house. What had happened was that Furman started doing speed, and all that goodness turned to darkness. It was incredible. I've never seen such an example of black and white in a human being, then or ever, I don't think—not that I was aware of in that way.

Cutting back, he had come to my father's house. He had come to my family house after—I think after I was thrown out. And he had also been dismissed from the school for some reason. He was thrown out first, I guess. But he had come to my father—family's house, and he told my father exactly what he thought of him. He terrified my father. He was so articulate. He was brilliant, this kid, and so aware of things. And he just nailed my father. I wasn't even present, I don't think, when he nailed him. Maybe I was. I don't think so, or not for all of it. But he basically read my father on the kind of father he had been to me. It was unbelievable. He scared the shit out of my father, and then we ran away together.

Furman and I and this friend of mine named Karen, from school, and her boyfriend—so there were this white couple and then me and Furman. And Furman is very black-skinned, and it took us four days to get from Boston to Cleveland. Four days. [Laughs.] It takes only a, you know, short stretch of time to drive there, but it took us four days because he was black. I mean, everyone hitchhiked in those days, so that was normal, but we got picked up by some rednecks, that we were really scared for our lives. People would say the weirdest things to him about being with white women.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—

NAN GOLDIN: So, that's where I got in the habit of running—that's what—the first time I ran away. That was a long answer to a short question.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: How about hippy free school and David Armstrong and that relationship?

NAN GOLDIN: I met David—I had been at the school already one year, and at the time I didn't talk. There were, like, six months that I didn't speak at all.

ALEX FIALHO: Why is that?

NAN GOLDIN: I think my sister's suicide had silenced me, and everything I had been through after that had just shut me down completely. I was shy to the point of catatonia, until I met David. And when he talks about it in that movie I just spoke to you about, he says—

ALEX FIALHO: *I'll Be Your Mirror?*

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. He said, "When I met Nan, she talked in a whisper all the time." I only talked to my boyfriends. I had usually two boyfriends at a time [laughs]—one black and one white.

But actually, I was with Furman. I forgot that. The first year I was at school, I was still with Furman. I mean, in Massachusetts. And he was in BU, and I would go to his dorm. That's right. I would hitchhike from the school, and it was—I went to a different school called Sudbury Mass. Then there were these trials, and the director threw out almost all the adult kids and just kept the young kids. He had these trials for smoking pot that were run according to Robert's Rules of Order. And I was so shy that when I went to the trials, the director said, "Sorry, there's no visitors allowed." I only spoke to my two boyfriends: Wolfer at school and Furman in Boston. And I didn't speak to anyone else.

So, the second year at school, or the end of that—no, the second year when Satya started. Satya was a spinoff of this school in Sudbury, Mass., where the director had thrown out all the kids. It was supposed to be a free school. And actually I met a model 20 years ago whose daughters were going there, so it still exists. Anyway, the spinoff was Satya School, and it was run by some of the teachers who had left that and the parents of kids who had been thrown out. And it was a much looser, freer school.

And I met this guy named Tord [Svenson], who had a huge effect on me. He was one of the teachers, and he ran the commune in the summer in New Hampshire. And he didn't like David at all. He thought David was a really bad influence on me. But Tord was, like, the first person in my life that ever saw me, that ever really saw me.

ALEX FIALHO: In what way?

NAN GOLDIN: That says it all. Somebody to see you, to really see you. That's rare in anyone's life, but as a kid, when nobody has ever seen you except as a—the effect you're having on them or as a projection of your reality or your sicknesses, like my family. I was never—I didn't exist until I met Tord. And then David, also.

When David—I said at his memorial, and a lot of people also had this experience of David. When he shined his light on you, you came to life, like no one I've ever met—in the millions, thousands of people I've known in my life—has an effect like that. And people were very jealous of David, very possessive of him because when he stopped looking at you, and he changed his focus, you would feel lost. And this happened repeatedly, repeatedly, I watched through his life. He didn't stop looking away from me until the 2000s, so I had, you know, decades with him where he never stopped looking at me. And he remembered everything. I was going to make tapes like this of our lives together before he got really sick, and I would go to his house in Bed-Stuy, and I would bring the tape recorder, but neither of us could figure out how to use it. And Aperture already wanted to publish the book. They already had a title for it.

ALEX FIALHO: *A Double Life*?

NAN GOLDIN: No. I'm talking about a few years ago.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, oh. I see.

NAN GOLDIN: We never did it. We never made the tapes. We really didn't know how to use the tape recorder. It's serious because David held my history. He remembered everything. He remembered what we were wearing, where we were for—since we were—since—we were—I don't know, when did we meet? '69, '68—no, '69 I guess. Yeah, I don't know. '68.

ALEX FIALHO: What year were you born?

NAN GOLDIN: '53.

ALEX FIALHO: '53. We didn't put that earlier on the record. When did you get your first camera?

NAN GOLDIN: At the hippy free school, the next year, the second year of hippy free school when I met David. We got a grant from Polaroid.

ALEX FIALHO: The school?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. The teachers were—some of them were at graduate school for education, and the school was run by the model of Summerhill in England, which I heard still exists, I heard a few years ago. And there's a book called *Summerhill* about that school, about that education. And so, some of them were doing graduate school at MIT, and they got the grant for us from Polaroid, because MIT is land. So, we got Polaroids when we were 15, and a lot of kids had them, but I was—I became kind of the school photographer. For me, it was the only language I spoke at the time. So, I took pictures constantly at free school. And when I was 18 or 17, my father gave me a Nikon with a zoom lens.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of those early photographs you were taking at the free school?

NAN GOLDIN: David, my friends, you know—five days sober, just wrote to me. So, the first week, couple of weeks, I met David. He always likes to tell how we met while we were both stealing steak at this store up in New Hampshire, at this place called A Thousand Acres. It was this little house in a thousand acres in the middle of the country, a little tiny house, and we all went up there, or a number of us went up there, every year. And he and I were—that's where we got to know each other, and we met each other stealing steaks.

And when we got back to Massachusetts—I mean, back to Lincoln, Mass., where the school was, we hitchhiked to my brother's dorm room where I was staying in between foster families. I was living at my brother's. And he was away, and the first night I got into bed, and he started making himself comfortable on the floor, and I said, "Well, you can sleep with me." And he said, "No, I'm more comfortable here." And I said, "What's wrong? Are you gay?" [Laughs.] And he had never heard that word. There were no gay people in Lexington then. There were no gay famous people then. There was nothing, nothing to pave the way for him. He had always thought there was something wrong with him, but he didn't know what. This is before Stonewall, not far before, but around the same time. And so—Stonewall is 1969, right?

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. So it was around the same time. And that was the beginning of our real friendship. We went out that night and cruised. He got picked up by this 18-year-old, and he was 14, and I was 15, and it was—this

guy was a pederast. I've seen in my life, and not with him so much, that men who, like—you know, when you're the respond—responsive to a pederast when you're a boy, when you're forced or when you get involved with—you're often a pederast when you grow up. Is that still said? Because that's what was said then. Is it?

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know, honestly.

NAN GOLDIN: I guess they say that abusers often—abused often become abusers. This wasn't abuse, but the guy was obviously a kind of creepy guy that hung around looking for boys. Anyway, he ended up in a few years after that living with these people outside Boston called The Wasted Lives for Peace. And he lived with them in a commune for about a year, and then he started doing drag. Or maybe he started with them, but when I saw him again, he was in drag. He did what we called "semi," even at school. He wore, like, really pretty clothes—shirt—long embroidered shirts, and, you know, he was very feminine, until he couldn't be anymore—until he didn't feel pretty that way anymore.

ALEX FIALHO: Was he taking photographs with the Polaroids at the early time as well?

NAN GOLDIN: No, he wasn't a photographer. He got into school for drawing, and he always says that he only went into the photo department because that's where all the coolest kids were, and that was the most fun. He worked at a store called The Sphinx in Cambridge, selling old clothes, and he started a huge collection from that. He was very effeminate. There's a lot of—I found a lot of other Polaroids.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your time in photography school? How did that come to be?

NAN GOLDIN: After school I—I actually graduated, and the graduation—the diploma was written by, like, a 10-year-old—signed by—and the ink, you know, just melted away. The ink kind of got wet. [Laughs.] It was not a very legal binding diploma.

ALEX FIALHO: This is high school?

NAN GOLDIN: This is the hippy free school, yeah. I went for four years. That's why I don't have any education—educational basis in simple things like math and English. Well, we did write—anyway, then a few years passed that I lived with the queens, and I didn't go to school. And then, towards the end of living with the queens, I went to take photo night courses to do fashion work, so I could promote them as fashion goddesses because they were so beautiful. And while I was living with them, I used to be the one in charge of going to steal the Italian and French *Vogue* every month, because I'm a really good shoplifter. I always was. And we were obsessed with fashion at the time. And we—I wanted them to be on the cover of *Vogue*.

ALEX FIALHO: I like that.

NAN GOLDIN: So, I went to photo school, and I dropped out of the studio course right away because I couldn't figure out how to use the equipment. And I went downstairs to where the art photography was. And I didn't know art photography existed because I only knew about fashion photography. And I walked in the class, and the teacher showed me Larry Clark's work right away. August Sander, Diane Arbus, and Weegee, those were the gods at the time.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

NAN GOLDIN: He wanted to do a book of that early work. About a year later, he wanted to do a book, or a few—and yeah, about a year later.

ALEX FIALHO: Of your early work?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Of the queens?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, it would have been the '70s. I don't think it would have sold a lot then. So—

ALEX FIALHO: There's a great book of them already, or now.

NAN GOLDIN: Which one?

ALEX FIALHO: *The Other Side*.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that was in the '90s. But yeah, it would have been fun to do that book then. But the only book that was any precedence for me at that time was Larry Clark's *Tulsa*, and I wasn't telling the same story at that time.



ALEX FIALHO: Why was that?

NAN GOLDIN: Because that was about drugs, and that was only a small part of my story. I mean, I was doing Quaaludes all the time, but my life wasn't mostly about drugs.

Actually, between—right after school, I went to live with this junkie I met because from the age that I was at that school—the first school, the gay school, like I said, the women lived off campus. So, I lived in this house down the path with, I don't know, four other women who were retarded. And so, I was kind of in the, you know, by myself, and I listened to the Velvet Underground all the time. I read the *East Village Eye*, and I wanted to be a junkie. It was before *Interview*. Or *Interview* just started in '68, I think, so it was earlier. And I wanted to be a junkie when I grew up, and they always say—people say in the program, "I never wanted to be a junkie," and I did. They're always so shocked to hear that. It was one of my lifetime aspirations because I just wanted to be as different from my mother as I possibly could.

So, I had lived with a junkie for a year and shot dope, and I put the needle down within—like, after a year, and started hanging out at the drag queen bar. And that's where I reconnected with David after about eight months. I put the needle down, so it took me years and years, like another decade and a half, to believe that I had a problem. I thought if I could put the needle down, I'm not a junkie. So, when I lived with this creepy man, David came to see—and Suzanne [Fletcher] came to see me once, but they were sort of scared of my life.

And then, I started—I met David—when I reconnected with David, he was living with this most beautiful queen in Cambridge, and then we moved to an apartment in Boston, and I moved in with the queens. And he was up the street on Beacon Hill. He was at the top of the Hill living with his boyfriend, Tommy, who he met at *The Other Side* in the first months when we reconnected, that summer of '72. That was one of the greatest times of both of our lives. We were young, skinny, beautiful, the whole world was open to us. I met a girl, and he met a boy, and it was gorgeous. I didn't stay with the girl, and he stayed with the boy for two years or something. And then, I stayed with the queens. I worked in a pharmacy during the day, which was perfect for all of us.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: I came home with all the drugs and all the makeup. I would spend the day—when the men and women who were the proprietors went downstairs or out to lunch, I had a white pharmacist's outfit, you know, coat, and I would just stuff the pockets with Quaaludes and speed and downers, barbiturates and amphetamine, the whole day, and then I would come home and throw them out on the bed. There were people taking, like, you know, seven or—it seemed to me a lot at the time, like seven Seconals a day, and I was just doing one Quaalude. So, again—I always had people around me are doing more drugs than me.

So, then I—after a few years with the queens, I left and moved in with this crazy girl and applied to art schools. And I got into RISD, which was the best school at the time. And I got into the Boston Museum School, but I went to the Boston Museum School because David did. That was basically a theme in my life until 2000 or so, that—or late-'90s—that I did things because David did. And I passed up some great opportunities, but the art school was fine. It was not great schooling, but we had a fabulous time, and there were great people there. Mark Dirt came, I think—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: —the second year I was there.

ALEX FIALHO: Mark Morrisroe?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that's what he called himself at the time.

ALEX FIALHO: Mark Dirt?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. So, David got in on a drawing—first drawing, and then he became a photographer, just to hang out in the photo department. This movie, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, talks about all of this. You need to see it because it's the last time I ever saw Greer [Lankton], and she's had all this face work, and she's a mess, but she was—it was so good to see her.

ALEX FIALHO: How did your photography practice develop over this time?

NAN GOLDIN: I started with black-and-white, and I printed—I got all the prints from the pharmacy. And so they were, like, early snapshot size, and then I started to learn even when I was still living—still going to the hippy free school and living in this kind of suburban commune. I had a darkroom in the basement, and I was learning how to develop and process film and print. My early prints are a mess—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: —but they're kind of touching.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you still have them?

NAN GOLDIN: A few. I gave away everything, and David stole, and Bruce stole, a lot of things from me over the years, but that was the life. Anyway, I got thrown out of that family. It was a suburban commune, but the father hated that it had become a commune. And I got thrown out because I left the water on overnight in the darkroom. I got thrown out of every school I went to except that hippy free school. You couldn't get thrown out.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: You would have to set all the grounds on fire for them to even think about throwing you out, and then there would have had to be a meeting, a class, you know, school meeting. And then, I didn't get thrown out of the Museum School either. Those are about the only schools I didn't get—I even got thrown out of rehabs over the years, too.

I started doing color in the late '70s. I was at the Museum School, but I was living in the separatist lesbian community in Provincetown. David and Bruce and I started going to Provincetown for real in '75. We started living there in the summer, and then I fell in with all these lesbians. There's a lot of pictures of them I found. I've never shown that work. It's not fabulous, but there's some stuff. And I was still doing black-and-white.

And then, I didn't have access to a darkroom, and I was living there all winter, so I started doing slide shows when I came down to the Museum School. To get credit, you showed your work every few months—I think twice a year or something, and you got credit. And that's when I did my first slide shows. They didn't have any music yet.

ALEX FIALHO: How did the idea of a slide show come to you?

NAN GOLDIN: I had to show slides to get credit for the work I did, so it was that simple. I'm a pretty literal person. So then when I moved to New York, I started doing them and started putting music on them. The first few I did at the Mudd Club, for instance, there was no music. The music started in 1980. I had a boyfriend who was spinning records, and I was showing the slides at the *Times Square Show*. I think that's the first time I used music. Then, it became all about slides from then on, because I could put them in the show. I still photograph—I still use chrome, but now I'm doing—I can't even use a digital camera. My assistants have to do it.

ALEX FIALHO: How about what camera you were using—

NAN GOLDIN: Then?

ALEX FIALHO: —in your early career?

NAN GOLDIN: First, I had that Nikon and then it got stolen by that—that junkie boyfriend came back and stole stuff, and then he burned down the apartment building. There was an article in *The Boston Globe* of us on the street looking up at our burning apartment, and we were most upset because we weren't wearing good clothes [laughs] when the fire started.

But David saved my life. Tommy, his kind of crazy boyfriend, and I went down the stairs—went out—on the landing, we went down the stairs, and they were all blocked with paint cans, which the boyfriend had used to set the place on fire. And David yelled, "To the roof!" And we all ran up to the roof and then jumped to another building and ran down. That's how we escaped the fire. I don't know if we would have been killed, but it was pretty scary. And then, he burned down the next place I lived on Beacon Hill. Or set it on fire. He didn't burn it down. That's when I moved in with the queens, back then.

So, I was living with David and Bruce in Cambridge. There were like—and Tommy, David's old boyfriend. We were all living there. It was pretty wild times. And there's some Super 8 footage I shot from there that's included in *I'll Be Your Mirror*. It's pretty funny. I mean, there's a few seconds of it. And we went to Provincetown for the summer, and then I ended up staying year-round. And I was with women, but I would hitchhike down or whatever, take the bus, down to New York to see my boyfriend on the side.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: Secret heterosexuality [laughs] like we talked about before. Then, what happened?

ALEX FIALHO: How about—

NAN GOLDIN: So, we got out of Museum School. I was a year in front of David. He had moved to New York a year in front of me in '77.

ALEX FIALHO: He was a year ahead of you in school?

NAN GOLDIN: A year behind me.

ALEX FIALHO: But he had—

NAN GOLDIN: But he moved to New York a year in front of me.

ALEX FIALHO: Gotcha.

NAN GOLDIN: And when you—the last year you were in school, the fifth year, you did your own project, and then there was a show—it's probably still true. I don't know. There is a show in Boston, and some people win these traveling fellowships. So, I won it my year and went to London. And after these wild two months in London, I came back and moved to New York, in the fall of '78. David did his fifth year the year after, and he won money, and I think he just used it.

And then, it was just wild times for me, but even wilder for David. We weren't living together. Then what? What do you want to know next? I met Cookie in Provincetown in '77, and that's where I got the first idea to do a slideshow. That's where I—Bruce, our friend that lived with us—well, he was more than that. I'm still friends with him. He lives up in Maine. But this was him in those years. That was David. You know that picture.

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NAN GOLDIN: Bruce is here. That's David then—

ALEX FIALHO: This is page [... -AF] 71 of *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: That's David, too, with Kenny.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 70.

NAN GOLDIN: When Kenny went out of drag. I was really upset when he went out of drag. And Bruce—yeah, that's Tommy, that I was talking about.

ALEX FIALHO: [Pages] 68 and 69.

NAN GOLDIN: This was such a fun day. I mean, the laughs are not faked. That's Bruce.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

NAN GOLDIN: I think he's at the very end of the book.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 72 and 73 of *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: He was a nut. He's still, like—he's the—I always say he's the biggest junkie I've ever known. He's died [laughs] so many times. It's very worrisome, actually. That's David and our close friend, Rick Colon.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 458 and [4]59 of *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: And Bruce is here. That's Bruce in '92—

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 437.

NAN GOLDIN: —'93, '94, maybe, when I did this book. It's the Helmut Lang fashion shooting [laughs] I was doing. I always use my friends still—and that's David then.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 436.

NAN GOLDIN: So, that's in '94, I think. That's Bruce in Naples in—no, '97.

ALEX FIALHO: What sort of conversations were you and David having about your work?

NAN GOLDIN: That's Piotr. You know Piotr [Nathan]? You do? You've met with him?

ALEX FIALHO: Not in person, no. But I know.

NAN GOLDIN: I just want to look at the years because they're so confusing to me. Yeah, that's—'94 was a great year. '95. Yeah, '95, the picture of Bruce in Naples. So, this book, I guess, was done in '95, because these

pictures were put in at the very end. But this is the chronological story of my life.

ALEX FIALHO: The *I'll Be Your Mirror* publication?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. So, what did we talk about the practice? I don't think we talked about it.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: That wasn't our way—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: —to discuss practice. We didn't have those kinds of discussions much. Actually, I looked at his work, and he looked at my work. And we didn't discuss the practice. We discussed the images and not what we wanted to say; what we were saying. Or not even what we were saying; which pictures we liked.

ALEX FIALHO: Hmm [affirmative].

NAN GOLDIN: He was the strictest editor of his own work of anyone I've ever met. He would have—he always had these contact sheets, and he could look at a contact sheet and every picture would look the same to me, or really similar, because they would be these 6x6 portrait shooting that he did, and I wouldn't be able to tell—the differences would be tiny, like, almost not seen to the naked eye. But he would know exactly what he wanted, and I couldn't talk him out of it if I saw something else. He really liked me to edit for him, but he didn't really need it. He just liked confirmation, and I really needed him to edit. And for this show, I'll be at the Whitney Biennial—I mean at the Whitney Retrospective in '96, I guess. Yeah, '96.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

NAN GOLDIN: He and Elisabeth Sussman edited everything together. They supposedly went through all my slides and picked all the good ones, but I've started—I've been going to the studio the last three weeks, after having gone once in three years. I've been going to the studio almost every day, and I've started looking into the archives. And there's incredible stuff that no one ever saw. So they obviously didn't look through everything, but there are thousands and thousands of slides. I was really prolific for years. Sometimes there's a lot of crap, but there's a lot of stuff. A lot of crap.

ALEX FIALHO: How often were you taking pictures and—

NAN GOLDIN: Every day.

ALEX FIALHO: —what context?

NAN GOLDIN: Every day, all day, all night. I mean, we lived at night, and I lived on the Bowery, this place that should have become a—like David and Peter's, it should have become a museum because so many people lived there. And that was one of the big addresses in Lower New York at the time from '78 to '88. The last two years I lived alone, so it was no longer a big place. It was very—it had diminished, but up until that, there had been dozens of people in and out, and I mostly photographed at home.

I photographed—I still photograph anyone I have a crush on.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: It's a really seductive power, but also—so we photographed—from the early part, we—actually, David told me what my work was about. He told me that I had these specific—I guess he told me around the time of this—he told me that I had these specific iconic situations which were women in mirrors and women in bathtubs, and it had never occurred to me that I had these—that these things were planned in any way. It was circumstance for me that—but I guess they were continuous motifs in my work. And I guess they signify things, but we never discussed what they signify. He just made me aware that I had motifs. He knew—he was much more aware of his work in that kind of way. He knew he had motifs. He knew that there was one summer that he tried to photograph like me, and he took color slides, and a book has just come out—it came out while he was still alive—of his black-and-white—his color snapshots—or his color slides. Have you seen it?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

NAN GOLDIN: I'm not so wild about the book, but there's some good stuff in it. So, up until about 1990—wait, '98—'96 was the show, so I guess up until '98 or '99, he was still editing my work. Yeah. And then, he stopped—maybe up until '98.

ALEX FIALHO: When did you first hear about HIV/AIDS?

NAN GOLDIN: In '83—'80, I first heard about it. We were in Fire Island, Cookie, Sharon, David, myself, Bruce, and French Chris—this boy that both of them were in love with. Maybe it was even '79. I don't know you could find the first *Times Magazine* article about it. Have you ever seen that?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, '81.

NAN GOLDIN: So maybe it was '81, but it seems earlier. Maybe it was '81, and that's when it was called AIDS-related.

ALEX FIALHO: In the very beginning it was Gay-Related Immunodeficiency—

NAN GOLDIN: It was still that.

ALEX FIALHO: GRID.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, it was before that.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

NAN GOLDIN: It was when it was a mysterious—it was called gay cancer.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: So, it was before—so it was '79 maybe. It must have been '81 because we were reading that article and laughing because we thought it was ridiculous that it was called gay, that it would be so specific. And it just seemed like another way to alienate us, another way to pigeonhole us and keep us out of society. It just seemed ridiculous and unlikely to us.

And then, David's boyfriend at the time was the first person we knew, and he would go to One Fifth where we ate dinner sometimes. He was a male model, so he lived in another world than we did. And I think David had already broken up with him, but he was still living there at Elizabeth Street, which was also a famous place where many, many, many people lived, and lots of drugs. And I think Kevin was the outsider there because he didn't get high, and everyone was living such a wild life. And he went to One Fifth, and they wouldn't let him in because he had Kaposi's, and he was wasting—he had the wasting disease. So, that must have been '82.

And can I see *A Double Life*? *A Double Life*. No, not *House of Life*—I'm standing on it. Yeah, so that's my last year in Boston. That's Bruce and his boy—

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 55 of *A Double Life*.

NAN GOLDIN: —and his boyfriend in Provincetown. So, some of these are—that's Johnny Thunders from that incredible band called the Thunders.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 50.

NAN GOLDIN: And that's Bruce. And that's my first boyfriend in New York—or one of my first boyfriends in New York.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 51.

NAN GOLDIN: I was sleeping with a rich guy from Britain and a poor guy from northern Britain, and he's now my sponsor, one of the two of them. And that's David and Kevin.

ALEX FIALHO: [Pages] 45, 46.

NAN GOLDIN: This is Kevin when David photographed him—

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 47.

NAN GOLDIN: —in what year—I don't know if years are written here. They must be, but I don't know where—I always wrote—from the beginning, I wrote who was in—I still do—who's in the picture, where it was taken, and what year. I think Arbus does the same. Oh, in terms of my practice, living with the queens—this is Provincetown the summer we lived there.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 34.

NAN GOLDIN: At the Back Room. And yeah, this is Province—this is both Provincetown.

ALEX FIALHO: [Pages] 32, 33.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, this is David's Provincetown, Provincetown.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 28.

NAN GOLDIN: So, all of this is Provincetown. This is one of Cookie's parties. This is Caroline, who was the first one to have a facial tattoo. It was outlawed from the neck above at that time, and this is the end of me hanging out with Bea [Rogers]. This is my first color picture. And I found other color pictures from that time, and they were always—and that was my girlfriend.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 18 of *A Double Life*.

NAN GOLDIN: And they were an accident, the color pictures. I wouldn't know that I had color slides, so I would do them exactly like they were black-and-white, but earlier—that's art school. David and I. That's David's picture of me and my picture of David on the way to school.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow. That's a gorgeous picture of you by David.

NAN GOLDIN: I like the one of David. I never looked at this one.

ALEX FIALHO: Excuse me, [pages] 14 and 15.

NAN GOLDIN: I'm putting together a slide show of David now. I showed it as his memorial, but only loosely, and with no music, and just as people were coming in, but so we started one now. And my friend wants me to keep working on it, which I think is a great idea. Okay, so this is Tommy and David in Boston, and that's me when I was living with the junkie.

ALEX FIALHO: This is the first page of *A Double Life*.

NAN GOLDIN: And that's the first serious picture I took of David and Tommy with the Nikon that my father gave me, that was stolen.

ALEX FIALHO: Bottom left corner.

NAN GOLDIN: This was at the commune. This was before we moved to the city.

ALEX FIALHO: Bottom left corner, too.

NAN GOLDIN: So, these were all taken at—when I was living with the junkie, and then this is one of the queens I was in love with.

ALEX FIALHO: Bottom right.

NAN GOLDIN: Okay. I just want to find out the years of these. So, Provincetown was the '70s. Oh, wait, sorry. So, '74 we were already going to that art school, and we were living at the place in Cambridge with a lot of us, and then '75 we moved to Provincetown. We went to Provincetown, and I stayed there, I guess, two years. And Cookie—the way Cookie—Bruce—the way Cookie and I became friends, originally, was Bruce would invite her over to the house where we lived in Provincetown, and she would come over with Sharon and her son, Max, and we would show the—Bruce would put together slide shows to show her, and it was his way of becoming friends with her—of us becoming friends with her. He would bring her in.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. When did you start photographing Cookie?

NAN GOLDIN: Right away, in—when was that party? That summer? Yeah, that's her party—that's Max DiCorcia, who was one—

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 24.

NAN GOLDIN: —of my close friends who died of AIDS. This is him, too. I lost him in '89, but he was contracted in '83. He was diagnosed in '83 as having GRID. That's all that existed then. In '83, there was no AIDS. There wasn't AIDS for some years because even Kenny—Kenny died in '89. He's the queen I was in love with. He died in '89.

ALEX FIALHO: Last name?

NAN GOLDIN: Kenny Angelico.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, of course.

NAN GOLDIN: And Max DiCorcia. So, they both died in '89, and Kenny—I had sent Kenny to my doctor in '86, and he had been diagnosed with GRID. And I kept saying to him, "But it's AIDS-related cancer. It's not AIDS." And that's one way we kept going. Also, Cookie, we used to say that too: "You don't have AIDS. You only have, you know, post—a pre-disposition to AIDS. You don't have it." And we said that right up until '86. So, Kevin—

ALEX FIALHO: How about Kenny?

NAN GOLDIN: I'm looking at Kevin though, because I want to get the years. Kevin, '77. David took the first picture, and then he took this famous picture of Kevin just before he died. So, Kevin—'83, he died.

ALEX FIALHO: What picture is this one?

NAN GOLDIN: ["Kevin at Avenue B, New York," 1983]. It's the best picture of AIDS up until now, I mean, up until the '90s. I don't know if there's a better, more respectful, softer picture, and more dramatic, than this picture that David took. That one.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 103 of *A Double Life*.

NAN GOLDIN: I think it's the best picture of this phenomena that we lived through. It's in there—

ALEX FIALHO: It's on the back of *Witnesses Against Our Vanishing* as well, right?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, and I think it was the big picture from that—that a lot of press was used to—yeah, that's a beautiful picture.

ALEX FIALHO: Why is it so striking for you?

NAN GOLDIN: What's not to be striking?

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

NAN GOLDIN: I mean, his shadow—his shadow of death and he's still beautiful, and he's still—he has that look that I've seen on Alf's face, I saw on Gilles' face—Alf Bold, Gilles Dusein—and lately, Glenn [O'Brien]. When they were dying. It's the same smoothness of the flesh that's almost like a mask. It's almost like baby skin again, and he had basically the death mask. I know when somebody sends me a picture of someone, I see that, and I know immediately that they're dying, like Glenn. I mean, I've taken pictures that striking in hospital beds and in coffins, but this is him still alive and still kind of modeling and still in his body and still proud of his body. It's magnificent.

ALEX FIALHO: It's incredible.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, I mean it's a cross between pride and anguish. He's still alive, not thoroughly vibrant, but he's still alive and still sort of modeling. It's still a perfect picture. Dramatic, you know, perfectly composed. But that's David. David maintained that fineness of image and perfect composure in image, and perfect framing, even when he was not totally—I mean, it could have been more perfect, but actually the space—people would crop it now or take it out with Photoshop now, but it's perfect because of the space also. David was big on analyzing pictures in a way that I never did, about that kind of thing, about just what I said about—I mean, I'm only realizing these things when I talk about them. I don't think like that. I still don't try to compose perfect pictures. I just like to be in focus.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: That's hard enough.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] What do you try to do, then, when you take a picture?

NAN GOLDIN: Show the person and the beauty. I mean, David's pictures are all about beauty, and I used to—at one point, I thought they were shallow because of that, and I told him and he was furious, but he doesn't remember it because he was such a drunk at the time. So when he sobered up, he didn't remember that conversation, thank God. But they're incredible. There was a guy named William Coupon who was photographing people at the Mudd Club, and his pictures were beautiful and superficial.

And at one point, I didn't thoroughly understand David's eye, and I thought it was a bit like that, like too much

about pinning the person like a butterfly, like the perfect specimen.

ALEX FIALHO: Hmm [affirmative].

NAN GOLDIN: And that's what I thought about William Coupon's pictures, and that's what I thought about David's at the early period. But you don't have to—maybe in some way David was looking for a certain type of perfection in his framing and in the person. So, there was something of that idea but it—they're just very quiet and very profound. I mean, he considered Peter Hujar, as many of us did, to be the best photographer. When we discovered him, which was late in the '80s—I mean '86—'88—'87—'86, '87 I discovered Peter and his work. I didn't know his work until I knew him.

ALEX FIALHO: How did his work resonate with you?

NAN GOLDIN: It's so deep. The more you look at it, the more you see. Whereas most people, the more you look at it, the shallower it is, really. I mean, somebody writing a review about his work and Mapplethorpe's said that Mapplethorpe was good on t-shirts and that Peter should have had the fame that Mapplethorpe did. And Mapplethorpe should have been anonymous or unknown like Peter was. But I mean, look at the light on—David was very concerned with lighting, and he used, like, clamp lights like that maybe, and—but he was very—actually David was pretty much obsessed with natural light from a long time ago, and I wasn't even aware of that—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: —until '90, '89, when I got clean.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your relationship to light in your photography?

NAN GOLDIN: My pictures were all taken at night or at clubs or the Bowery. You can see they're all flash, and *The Ballad* is all flash. I think there's one picture taken in available light in *The Ballad*. *The Ballad*? Oh.

ALEX FIALHO: What camera were you using?

NAN GOLDIN: Anything I could buy at the bar. People came in with stolen goods, and I bought cameras at the bar.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

NAN GOLDIN: I had an Olympus 2, an OM2, for some years, a very small camera. And then I started to get—it had no changeable lenses. It was a really small camera, but it was—it had good—it was said to have really good optics. I never paid attention to that stuff 'til later. And then, in '85 I had dinner with Gilles Perez, the famous documentary photographer, and he told me that—that's Kenny after drag.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 61 of *Ballad*.

NAN GOLDIN: And I'll show you another one of Kenny. You might know it's him. That's Kenny.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 53 of *Ballad*.

NAN GOLDIN: And this is Kenny at the Bowery.

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 62 of *Ballad*.

NAN GOLDIN: In the living room of the Bowery. That's what the Bowery looked like. So, a lot of these pictures—this is the only available light picture I took in those years. I'm talking about—

ALEX FIALHO: Page 50.

NAN GOLDIN: —the only one and maybe this in Mexico. Yeah, I guess in Mexico the light was so strong. This was available light, but I didn't think it was a good picture until—

ALEX FIALHO: [Page] 67.

NAN GOLDIN: —years later. This was '83, and those pictures—I mean, I didn't realize it until like, I don't know, '89, '90, in the '90s. So, all of these are the Bowery, and my whole relationship with Brian is flash, and it's almost all the Bowery or in Mexico where we traveled. I guess that might have been available light, but really there's a handful. This was Butch, or is Butch, Allen's best friend, Allen Frame—

ALEX FIALHO: Page 30.



NAN GOLDIN: —who we also disliked. Yeah, all of this is flash. That might be available light.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the gift from your father?

NAN GOLDIN: So, even if there were windows, it was night.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: The gift from your father of the camera early on, was that a gesture that had an impact on you?

NAN GOLDIN: No, I was in touch with my father pretty much the whole time I was—not in my adolescence, but once I became 18 and I was really, really skinny and cute, then we started almost dating. We started having lunch every week. My father had an obsession with thinness, which made my mother into an anorexic. She probably was already when he met her, but he hated women with weight, so he only liked—really liked me or appreciated me as pretty when I was skinny, and he made that be known to me.

So, I had gone to London, and I was a big punk and David wasn't into the punk movement at all. So, that was another period we didn't see each other a lot. I always had a best friend, but I wasn't always hanging out with David during that time. I had female best friends, sort of intense, serial best friends, since I was a kid. Then, when I got involved with Brian, I didn't see David much.

That's Provincetown, so that's '76. And what year did David take that picture of Kevin? '83? So, in '83, I went over to this—there was this meeting, a conference, in Washington Square Park, in a building, about AIDS, except it still wasn't called AIDS, I don't think.

ALEX FIALHO: No.

NAN GOLDIN: And it was all these researchers speaking, and doctors that were really involved, and scientists, I guess. And I went to the meeting, and I don't know why. I just went. I didn't really know why. I just kind of heard about it or read, you know, like something on the fire pole—or the—I mean the lighting pole where I used to advertise all my shows, and all the information we knew about the world was basically from [laughs] those posters on the telephone poles—or somewhere, maybe in *The Village Voice*, I don't know. So, I went and Max was there, Max DiCorcia, and he was—

ALEX FIALHO: Philip's brother?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, P.L.'s brother. Except P.L. didn't like him because he was gay.

ALEX FIALHO: Philip-Lorca diCorcia.

NAN GOLDIN: And P.L. is homophobic about those close to him at least. So, he really wasn't having his brother, and I think at the funeral, the memorial in New York, he said something like that, how he never liked him. But the people who were close to him, like Jimmy—you know Jimmy is very close friends with Jack? He's on the cover of *The Other Side*. He did drag for a little while.

ALEX FIALHO: Jack Pierson.

NAN GOLDIN: Jimmy Paul, a real beauty and considered one of the best hairstylists in New York. He and Max were best friends. And we were talking about Max about two weeks ago, and he was—he loved Max so much. Max was really funny and smart and creative.

So, I ran into Max [at the Washington Square Park conference], and he said, "Why are you here?" and I said, "I don't know." I said, "Why are you here?" and he said, "I have it." And in—that was '83. I think in '85 he moved up to western Mass. He got sober—or '86—and he moved up to western Mass., and he was living in this macrobiotic community that was famous for people living there and getting healthy and clean. And he stayed there, I think, five years. And we always said that's why he lived so long, because there was still nothing.

AZT came out some time in that period, but it was poisonous. I think everyone who took AZT died. And he lived because he got clean and went to the macrobiotic place. There was a queen named [International] Chrysis who was sober, that got so many people in the drag queen community of the '80s, even Tabboo! got clean because of Chrysis.

So, in '89, Max called me and I could tell he was high, and I was really surprised. It's after my treatment, so it's in the summer of '89, and I was staying with David, between a halfway house and David's, and then he died. I guess he was high because he was on pain management drugs, and he was at his sister's house where they grew up. And he died when I was still living in Boston—when I did this, so October '89.

ALEX FIALHO: [... -AF] When you did *Witnesses*.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. And that's the same month, I think, that Kenny died, and the same period when Cookie died. And my brother texted me the other day and said he had known one person who killed themselves that he knew 10 years ago that was a friend, and that's it. And I was shocked to think that people have lived until they're 60 and not known people who died because almost everyone that I was close to has died. And then Glenn died a few weeks ago—

ALEX FIALHO: Glenn O'Brien.

NAN GOLDIN: —from cancer. Yeah, and he was everybody's friend, but we had gotten really close that last year, particularly, about two years before he died. He wrote the text for *Diving for Pearls*. It's amazing. [Laughs.] The best thing I think ever written about me. So, back to the '80s—

ALEX FIALHO: How about *Witnesses Against Our Vanishing*? How did that come together?

NAN GOLDIN: I had gotten out of treatment, and I got a phone call one day from Susan Wyatt at Artists Space asking me if I would curate a show. And I hadn't been in New York for eight months or something, and the last two years in New York I hadn't gone out of the house. So—literally—'86, '87—'87, '88—until I went to treatment, I had hardly gone out except to cop, and even that, I paid people to cop for me.

So, I thought there had been a lot of shows about AIDS. I had no idea that this show—I didn't even know if this show would be anything because I thought there were so many shows about AIDS. I was sure. I assumed it. You know, it never occurred to me [laughs] that this was a pivotal show. I still find it hard to believe. Where were all the shows? No, I'm serious. The museums were all the '90s, and the group shows all over Europe were in the '90s. I don't get it. Where were people? They must have been living in a cocoon. There were no shows in the West Coast before that? No museum shows?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

NAN GOLDIN: I mean, Europe was really late to come to it, I think in 2002. I found the catalogue just now. There was the first show about AIDS in Italy that I invited a lot of people to show at.

ALEX FIALHO: What was some of your thinking around the artwork they included?

NAN GOLDIN: I just put my friends in like always—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] That's what I thought.

NAN GOLDIN: —I put a lot of people in who had nothing to do with the AIDS crisis, but I put them in because they were my lover or my friend or someone I wanted to be friends with. I mean, that's why there's too many people in it. And, you know, I would tell them it was about AIDS so they would try to make something about AIDS. I mean, Kiki Smith, Jane Dixon, whose work I've always loved, Janet Stein, their work has nothing to do with AIDS, but they tried to make work. And the last person I invited was Stephen Tashjian—

ALEX FIALHO: Tabboo!.

NAN GOLDIN: —and then Pat and Colin. Pat was really trying to get me to show Jack—

ALEX FIALHO: Pierson.

NAN GOLDIN: —and said his work was incredible, and I didn't even make a studio visit for another year. I didn't want to include any more people, and I had no idea how good his work was. [... -AF]. I also put in the work of people who died. Peter Hujar, David—well, David became a pivotal part of the show, but Peter, Cookie, Vittorio [Scarpati], Mark Morrisroe. I think Mark had died. Yeah, he died that year too, in '89. I think he was still alive when the show opened, but he was in New Jersey in a hospital.

ALEX FIALHO: [Sneezes.]

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, '89. God bless you.

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you.

NAN GOLDIN: Now, this was before January of—no, it might have been January '89. He died that year. Greer was —

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, it opened at end of November '88.

NAN GOLDIN: It opened in October or November. No, it opened the same day the Wall came down—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

NAN GOLDIN: —or that week, and November, yeah. And a few days after Cookie died. Cookie died the same day the Wall came down. So, I was asked to do this show, and I actually got the title from a friend who I was in the halfway house with, who I've never seen again. And he was a writer, I think at Columbia or something, but he was in Boston. And his teacher had written a poem with this in it. I don't know if it was even the title. I couldn't come up with a title, and now I would have a much better title.

ALEX FIALHO: I love the title.

NAN GOLDIN: You do?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: I don't know if anyone's ever said that to me.

ALEX FIALHO: I wrote a review of a Visual AIDS show [*Ephemera As Evidence for Artforum* -AF] a couple summers ago and kind of used the phrase [as a concluding thought -AF]—

NAN GOLDIN: Really? Thank you.

ALEX FIALHO: —referencing the phrase at the end, saying, "These works are witnesses against our vanishing."

NAN GOLDIN: Were they about AIDS?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: Good. So, Tommy is that boyfriend of David's. He died when I was in the Philippines in '92, I guess. He died of an overdose. Janet had nothing to do with it. Kiki had nothing—Kiki's sister died, but not from AIDS—or maybe it was AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: I think it was.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. I didn't know if it was an overdose or AIDS. I'm not—Janet had nothing—she was friends with Mark and Kenny, so that was her—this Perico [Pastor] was a friend of mine from Spain who got me my apartment [laughs] in New York. That's the only reason he was invited. James Nares, I love his work. Margo was an old girlfriend of mine. She was my first real girlfriend when I was 18. Vittorio was in the hospital. Jo Shane was around all the time, and she really wanted to be accepted. She was annoying, but she was a close friend of Max DiCorcia. Siobhan [Liddell] was my lover so she—

ALEX FIALHO: I love those pictures of Siobhan.

NAN GOLDIN: Thank you. I got to—I had to get her permission to publish a lot of them. She only let me publish a few. Darrel Ellis had AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: [Darrel Ellis is a -AF] great artist. [He should be better known -AF].

NAN GOLDIN: Allen was around, you know. He helped me when I was using a lot. He did help me. And I was impressed from Allen—I did learn one big lesson from Allen, which was his generosity towards other artists, and that was native to me about my friends. It was my nature, but to make visits and try to support and help other artists, I learned somewhat from—I mean, it was already native to me, but I learned how to do that more from, you know, how to make that real, more from Allen. He was incredible about his generosity. Dord Sippis [ph] had absolutely nothing to do with it. Tommy was in denial about it.

People who had been gay all their lives, who had a lot of sex, really didn't—Tommy was like that. They didn't want to look at it. But he had a terrible alcohol problem, terrible. [. . . -NG]. Jane Dixson had nothing to do with it. My friend Clarence [Elle-Rivera] had been really—I loved him. He had been—so, this is '89, and I got clean in '89 after, you know, 10 years or 20 years of using drugs and about, I don't know, a few years really being addicted. So anybody who had really helped me in the last years, [laughs] I put into this show like Clarence. He had nothing to do with AIDS whatsoever. He lived on Ludlow Street, which was a complete outpost at the time. And he was friends with the dealers and he didn't do drugs at the time, but he helped me get drugs, and I stayed with him. So I put him in the show.

ALEX FIALHO: I guess more so than AIDS, this becomes about community and those who are really right there with you.

NAN GOLDIN: No, it's about AIDS. It's very much about AIDS. I guess, he had known people—yeah, I mean, everyone knew people who died. There was nobody that I knew who was immune.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, of course.

NAN GOLDIN: Except Tommy who was still living in Boston and in total denial. But everyone who lived in New York was not—nobody was immune, but the main people in the show are the people who were most affected and who actually were the best artists in that show. Kiki's a great artist, but Shellburne [Thurber] was still in Boston and had nothing to do with it.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there any parts of the install that you remember—

NAN GOLDIN: Oh, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —that you think were great and particularly—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, I did save the front room, when you came in, for the best artists.

ALEX FIALHO: Well, who was there?

NAN GOLDIN: David; P.L., actually, who had a picture, some pictures of Max.

ALEX FIALHO: So, Wojnarowicz and Lorca diCorcia.

NAN GOLDIN: And David Armstrong, Peter Hujar. Peter had a really—the best wall, I think. And Vittorio—P.L. had a great wall because he had taken that picture of Vittorio in the hospital.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, wow.

NAN GOLDIN: And he's a great artist. Yeah, a great photographer. David, P.L., Peter Hujar, Mark Morrisroe, and Ramsey [McPhillips], Greer Lankton, and Vittorio Scarpati were in the front room. And Tabboo! held up the back room with some big paintings.

ALEX FIALHO: What was Peter's wall that you loved so much?

NAN GOLDIN: It was basically the best wall. Like, when you walk in, it's the wall you see. I remember it really well. P.L. was the running wall, if you walked in and you turned, so the best walls—but—oh, and Mapplethorpe was in it too. I don't know if he's in this catalogue. Maybe he wasn't in it because he was such a homophobe, but he was in the show at St. Lawrence I did after that.

ALEX FIALHO: What show was that? From this?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, basically from this, but all gay because it was about gay, being gay. And it was in the early '90s or somewhere between '91—either '91 or '93, because I mostly lived in Berlin '92 through '94. David and I stayed in—I lived in Berlin, and David came over and lived with me for a few years. Oh, you made a ribbon. I wonder why. I've been smoking a lot the last week. I wasn't and—around Glenn's death, I started smoking, which was only two weeks ago or something, three weeks ago. I never remember. I mean, time passes so—long days, short weeks.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the controversy around David's writing for the catalogue and everything that came after the show opened?

NAN GOLDIN: I asked my old—I was handled, represented as an artist by someone named Marvin Heiferman from '79 to '89, and we never sold anything.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: So, we stayed really close friends. We didn't sell much, and he—at the end he only had me I think. And I didn't—I wasn't a big presence in terms of the market, and again I'm not. But he had been the photo curator at Castelli Graphics, and he's the one who kind of invented the Pictures Generation, what they still make history about. I was in a group show at Castelli's with Barbara Kruger and I think Jenny Holzer and Cindy Sherman, and—you know, it was the pivotal show about AIDS in '89. And then, he left Castelli's, and I got thrown out.

ALEX FIALHO: What show was it? This is a Castelli show about—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, I think it was called *The Pictures Generation*. It's a famous show, I think. It's referred to as

*The Pictures Generation.*

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

NAN GOLDIN: I think that's the title of the show, and I couldn't get my own show there, and Ileana Castelli threw me out for chipping the marble on one of her tables. So—and Diane Keaton got thrown out at the same time, so I was in good company.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: Marvin left in '89 too, I think. And I was actually working with Marvin in '88—no, '79, I mean. And then he turned me over to Pace/MacGill. And I called him from Boston, and he was one of a few—he wrote *The Ballad* with me and Mark Holborn.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

NAN GOLDIN: And he and Mark were two people who did not understand sobriety, which was so strange because they were both really part of my bottom, as we used to call it. I don't know if they use that word anymore. They were a big part of my bottom. I didn't know there was a whole new language out there in the world and then another language at meetings that we used. I mean, all the things I learned, like I was telling this girl just now, aren't talked about now. And I managed to, you know, pass on my knowledge to the kids in treatment, and they were so grateful. Not just kids—the second months there were really smart people there. And I was constantly telling them things that I had been told, and they were so grateful because people don't—you know, I'm like an old-timer now, and so the things I say aren't necessarily what people—they're not what people are saying any more, I guess, except old-timers and maybe the Atlantic Group?

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.][... -AF]. So, Mark and—

NAN GOLDIN: So, Marvin and Mark both don't understand sobriety at all, and Peter MacGill did. And that's one reason I stayed with him as long as I did, because he understood, and I was so grateful to him because he really helped me when I was getting clean. Anyway—

ALEX FIALHO: They helped you with *The Ballad* book?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. I asked Marvin to write in '89 for this catalogue, and he said, "I don't have time. Why don't you ask David Wojnarowicz?"

ALEX FIALHO: For *Witnesses*. [Laughs.] Uh-oh.

NAN GOLDIN: That's how it happened. That was the best thing that ever could have happened.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

NAN GOLDIN: So, David called me in Boston.

ALEX FIALHO: Landmark.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, his writing more than the show. I guess the existence of the show, which I had no idea. I think I even referred to other shows. I didn't know any, but I was sure they existed. Robert [Mapplethorpe] had done something at the Artists Space a year before or something. He had curated a show there, and I think that there was, again, very little work, and it was—and I don't know how much work or how many artists, maybe five, and it was very perfect and nothing to do with AIDS. He didn't even want to talk about it at all. Did he ever give any interviews about it?

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know.

NAN GOLDIN: Not that I saw. He was really not good to other photographers, and at one point he was doing a slide show at the Danceteria, which I didn't know anything about my reputation in the '80s. So, I didn't think that he could have possibly been influenced by me, but obviously he was. But it didn't occur to me. Maybe *The Ballad*—no, *The Ballad* hadn't come out yet. But he was not supportive or helpful to Peter, and then when Peter was sick, he visited him once. And I don't think Peter was having him by that time. I mean, David had nothing good to say about him. But I don't know if Peter—Peter was pretty angry, and I think he had his share of people he didn't—that he wasn't having, but I only saw the gentle side of him when he was alive.

ALEX FIALHO: We've talked a lot about a lot of great photographers, and I'm curious to hear how you were thinking of your work and your stance and your stakes as a female photographer at this time, and a feminist and

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NAN GOLDIN: It never occurred to me that being female had anything to do with anything. Like I said, I was always a feminist so I just assumed everything was okay. [Laughs.] I mean, I dealt with a lot of misogyny in my life, but I didn't really keep up with the news. And I didn't keep up with what was going on in a bigger world, only in my world. So, in my world there was misogyny. There was gay misogyny. Women were called fish, and there was gay misogyny in the queens' world. There were only two of us hanging out with the queens, two women only. And some people's sisters, like Naomi's sisters, but—and mother—but I don't remember any other women except this woman that Naomi was with all her life, who is in the book in one picture. She's out cold because she did more pills than any of us.

But other than that—no, maybe there were one or two women around. Susan was around, and Suzanne [Fletcher] through me was around, but there were no women in the world then, in the gay world—in the queens' world. And I was—when I first moved in with them, I was still with Marcie I think, and they didn't have any take on her or any interest in her. But yeah, I knew a lot of gay misogyny. I don't think I—I was feminist because I was feminist. It never occurred to me to be otherwise, and I would be really irked by hearing Cookie say things like that. Have you ever read that pamphlet called, *We Should All Be Feminists*?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: It's so funny. When she talks about at the beginning. [... -AF]. It's hysterical. But that's what I experienced, like, feminists burned your bras. They all said that. And feminists hated men, and lesbian feminists were ugly and had no fashion sense. So, when I was working in this lesbian bar in Provincetown, Cookie and Sharon never went there. But the back of the Back Room where I photographed David and the gay beach where the tea dances were, were right—like, sharing land with the back of the Pied Piper, the lesbian bar. So, there was some—I used to walk between the Pied Piper and the Back Room all the time, back and forth, so I didn't keep—I kept those two worlds completely separate because the gay men weren't having—like David and Bruce—didn't have any place for that in their aesthetic or their lives.

I'm just looking at what—I was looking for some year, but I don't remember now. Anyway, at the beginning of AIDS I wanted to say—the beginning of gay cancer—what was GRIDs? Gay Related—

ALEX FIALHO: Immunodeficiency.

NAN GOLDIN: —Immune Deficiency. Yeah. We still didn't believe that that was fatal until everyone starting dying. I mean, Klaus died really early.

ALEX FIALHO: Nomi?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, he died first [in the art world in a sense -AF]. And this guy named Gordon Stevenson, this filmmaker who wrote that famous letter to Cookie that's in her text about AIDS. I don't think she was out about having AIDS until the end, just as she didn't like being gay. I mean, she was with Sharon for years but she was always looking for a man. But even after Sharon, she slept with women but, you know, only fabulous women.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: So, where was I?

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I think that's a good way to end today.

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[Track goldin17\_2of2\_sd\_track01 is a test track.]

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho, interviewing Nan Goldin for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Visual Arts and AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, day two on May 13, 2017, at Nan's home in Brooklyn, New York. So, Nan, from our conversations and your photographs, I have the strong sense that community and friendship is really central for you.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. It still is.

ALEX FIALHO: And I wanted to start, start us off today by talking specifically about your life, and I thought a way to do that would be through the photographs themselves.

NAN GOLDIN: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: So we're sitting here in front of the *Cookie Mueller Portfolio* from 1991. I wanted to just talk about

some of your photographs of Cookie.

NAN GOLDIN: For the record, it's not the portfolio. It's the little lavender booklet that has—that has the—that is the—goes with the portfolio. So it's a small booklet with beautiful printing of 13 images. Let me just count them; 14, 15 images.

ALEX FIALHO: It's an incredible series.

NAN GOLDIN: Thank you.

ALEX FIALHO: Maybe just—let's talk about a couple of the images in particular.

NAN GOLDIN: This is when I met Cookie, when I—I told you the stories about Bruce Balboni. So, this is one of the—she came over to my place in 1976. But I wasn't living with Bruce and David anymore, so I must have gotten the dates wrong of Bruce and David. It must've been '75 that we lived in Provincetown together. And I told you about the Back Room, which was adjacent to the Pied Piper, where I was working. No, let's see. Did I work? I'm sure [laughs] this is the wrong date. 1976. It seems later.

This was on the set of *Variety*, one of the first films by Bette Gordon. And she shot it in Tin Pan Alley, the bar I worked in. A lot of it was shot there. It's about the sex trade. And some of it is in real sites, like the Variety Theater on 14th Street used to be a porno theater. And we did some of the shooting there. And then in the Tin Pan Alley, it was not—it was not real. I mean, the people were given roles. So, it was there, and it was on set. And these are John Ahearn's sculptures, body casts. This one is of Maggie, who owned the bar, which is important to know to understand the bar.

ALEX FIALHO: The middle one—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —in the photograph?

NAN GOLDIN: Of Cookie at Tin Pan Alley.

ALEX FIALHO: Where was Tin Pan Alley?

NAN GOLDIN: On 49th between Broadway and Eighth. It was a really tough place. I told you about it—

ALEX FIALHO: Where you bought your cameras [—you bought your stolen cameras... -AF].

NAN GOLDIN: But did I tell you how I quit?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

NAN GOLDIN: In 1985, I really didn't want to work there anymore. It became a real painful experience for me. And also, I worked there, I met Brian there, and I went back there after Berlin, where I—and the operations. And I was scared to be in crowds of men at that time. So the job had gotten really hard for me. And I was also working on Lizzie Borden's film called *Working Girl*, about the sex trade, that was pretty accurate. So it was in 1985, I guess. Or late in '84, because I had worked there since 1980. Oh yeah, I worked there for five years. So, it was 1985.

And my slide show was at the Whitney as a one-off thing, but Lisa Robins, Lisa Robinson? Some critic, some great critic, who worked for the Art Forum, Lisa. Anyway, it will come back to me. She wrote about it as being the best thing in the Whitney, even though it was only shown a few times. And that really promoted, promoted me to fame, or began to. But anyway, prompted me being a name, say, in the art world. And so, I felt famous, because the slide show was at the Whitney, and I was working on this film. And the difference between that and the bar had become very, very profound. I mean, feeling that I was famous in the art world and going to that job every day was, like, a huge chasm in my life. Chasm.

And one day, there was a Native person drinking at the bar. He came in every day and ordered Heineken. So, all the five years I was there, I saw him daily. I came in—I was working the day shift for the last year or two, and I came in, and the Native guy had gone behind the bar, and there were these beautiful old, wood cabinets. And he had opened the cabinet and pissed on my cameras. And I screamed so loud and walked out. So, that allowed me to quit Tin Pan, and ruined some of my cameras.

In 1983, David used to come up with friends, and it was very homophobic.

ALEX FIALHO: Wojnarowicz?

NAN GOLDIN: Armstrong.

ALEX FIALHO: Armstrong.

NAN GOLDIN: And it was too homophobic for them to stay. I also worked at a restaurant on Great Jones or Bond. Yeah, Bond, I guess. I think it's still there. No, it's called the Great Jones Cafe. And I started working there, and David and all his friends came in from The Bar from Second Avenue, which I understand doesn't exist anymore. But it was one of the longest-lasting places on the map. It was really on the map of a gay bar since probably the '50s. There's another one on Second Avenue. They're the only ones I know existed. And he would bring all of them over after they had gotten drunk. And I got fired, because I brought too many gay men in. So, I'm proud of that little story.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

NAN GOLDIN: Next?

ALEX FIALHO: Let's see. Cookie laughing.

NAN GOLDIN: That's at a party.

ALEX FIALHO: I was saying today, I noticed her hand tattoos from your photographs.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, she got all this in, she got these in the '60s and early '70s. She was so far ahead of her time.

ALEX FIALHO: And the amazing bangle of bracelets.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. Numerous bracelets, which influenced Madonna. This is at her wedding. That was on the roof of John Heyes's [ph] terrace. No, on the terrace of John Heyes's [ph] apartment. But Rene Ricard—everyone was there, everyone we knew in the '80s. The mid-'80s was when I was closet to Cookie. And Vittorio she had met in Positano, Italy on the Amalfi coast. And his brother, I got involved with. And they're both dead. Vittorio died of AIDS, and he was in the hospital for a year and a half. And they told him he had months to live. And because he drew constantly these cartoons, he lived a year and a half.

ALEX FIALHO: The cartoons are amazing, too.

NAN GOLDIN: Peter Hugar was at that wedding, too. And we were standing next to each other [laughs] taking pictures.

ALEX FIALHO: Is that right in this moment, you're standing next to Peter, too, taking the photographs? Or throughout the ceremony?

NAN GOLDIN: Throughout the ceremony, throughout the party.

ALEX FIALHO: I love this one because it's so intimate. You're right there, of course. Were you—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, it looks like I'm marrying them.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: The wedding lineup was—the lineup of the men was funny. It was like Francesco Clemente and people from—a lot of people from the art scene. Philip-Lorca diCorcia took the best picture of Vittorio on his bed in the hospital.

And two years after Brian beat me up, almost exactly to the time, Cookie came with me to Baltimore—and Vittorio, and I think Sharon. And it was a really wild night. It was a photo convention. And I was standing on the bar—standing at the bar. And this photographer was taking a picture from below with his Leica. And at that time, I hated Leica photographers. And being shot from below is called a monster angle. So, I threw a drink on him. I asked him to stop. He basically said—told me to fuck off. So, I threw a drink at him, and he punched me in the face and broke my nose. And the—I was screaming I wanted police, I wanted—but the convention took his side, because I had punched—I had thrown a drink on him. It was okay that he punched me. And I got up on the stage, and I was screaming into the mic, and Cookie was really sweet with me. And then, we went to all these after-hours. It was still fun, but it was a crisis, which was kind of usual in my life.

Hawaii Five-O was a restaurant on First Avenue that my friend Rick Colon owned. He's an excellent chef. He cooks for Anna Wintour. He's not in that book. Oh yeah, he's in the last page of that book. So, there's slightly different pictures in this.



ALEX FIALHO: Since this—*I'll Be Your Mirror* also has a spread with Cookie as well.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, it's also a *Cookie Portfolio*, but this one is different. I like this better. Oh, yeah, that's at the Mudd Club. That's in here, too, I think.

ALEX FIALHO: Are you using the restroom at the Mudd Club?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that's a wonderful picture. During a fashion show, a friend's fashions—this was her lover for eight years, Sharon Niesp. So, when I met her, they were together. Then I went to—I got clean. And I hadn't—the last time I had seen Cookie was at—in my room on the Bowery. And then, I got clean, and I went to see her in Provincetown, and she had already lost her voice. It was so horrible, because she was so funny and so verbal. And she wrote things down in a notebook, but she couldn't write very well. By the end, her writing was scratch basically. And this is the most—to me, this is the meaning of life, the picture of Sharon nursing Cookie on her bed. She—they had been together eight years, and she left him for a man in '83, but she came back to take care of Cookie the last years. There's another version of this also that I use now, but the picture was so dark. When I saw it on my slides, it was the last frame of the roll of film, and I was screaming with joy that I could have hit that depth. But it didn't look like it was printable, so I printed it anyway. Yeah, very dark, but very—you can read the narrative very clearly.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, it's really personal.

NAN GOLDIN: And then, I went with her to be X-rayed, and she had to take off all her earrings and all her bracelets, which was a long—she still laughed, but her laugh was completely different. But she still laughed at herself.

That's the funeral of Vittorio, or the wake. His parents came from—his father came from Positano. That was a painful day, very painful. And then, right after *Witnesses* opened, Cookie died. And it was—the Wall came down, the show opened, and then Cookie died. And I wasn't at the hospital when she died. It was on the way to New York. And friends told me she winked at the last moment. She was in Cabrini Hospital, which is where Vittorio died also. She was in the hospice. This is her room after she died. This picture is by David Armstrong.

ALEX FIALHO: And the middle one?

NAN GOLDIN: And that's by me, from Provincetown in the '70s.

ALEX FIALHO: Where did she live? [... -AF]. Oh yeah, 285 Bleecker Street.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, the same apartment as Ron Vawter.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. [I've coordinated Tribute Walk readings through Visual AIDS at the address -AF].

NAN GOLDIN: They didn't hang out much. We saw Ron sometimes. Ron was in—he was very secretive about his diagnosis, or becoming ill. He just wanted it kept secret like a lot of people did. And then, the end is a text by Cookie that's so beautiful. It's a letter from Gordon Stevenson, and it's so beautiful. Have you read this text?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

NAN GOLDIN: It's really well-written. It's one of the most touching things written about AIDS. I think it's reproduced [... -AF] in this book, too. In that? Yes, it is.

ALEX FIALHO: It's reproduced in *Witnesses*.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that's when I first discovered it, I think. It was published in '91 by Pace/MacGill Gallery, by Peter MacGill.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Cookie's writing?

NAN GOLDIN: My memory is that it started on that same day in Fire Island we first heard about AIDS, which was—I thought it was '79, but it was '80. And she had started writing, but she hadn't published anything or shown anything to people. And my memory is that I helped her edit her first short stories before she put them out. And that was a big gift to me, to be able to do that.

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

NAN GOLDIN: She wrote a couple of books of her own. She wrote for *High Times* magazine as Dr. Mueller. And she used to prescribe vitamins and minerals. She had had an overdose from St. John's wort, which people take for depression.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: It's the only person I ever knew who had an overdose from St. John's wort.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: Her texts are so funny for *High Times*. And then she wrote for *Paper* or *The Early Interview*. I think *Paper*. And her art criticism would be, "I went to the show. He was my friend. The walls were white, and the room was a square. There was lots of wine." It was on that level. It was beautiful. It was the most sincere writing about the art world in the history. She got right down to the important part.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: She cut through everything. She was very funny and kind of relaxed and no stress, no crisis, just in the kind of flow. But she was the center of New York downtown life.

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

NAN GOLDIN: She was the star and everyone congregated around her. She was in films. She was in plays. But it was her personality more than anything that drew everyone to her. Also, she was—had a lot of coke.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: Which was an asset in those days.

ALEX FIALHO: I saw a great event at Participant of screenings of clips from her various films.

NAN GOLDIN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: She was really great.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And one thing I didn't realize was that she had a bit of a lisp—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. And a Baltimore accent.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

NAN GOLDIN: A strong Baltimore accent.

ALEX FIALHO: I had seen your photos of her, for instance—or David's photos, for instance—but I hadn't seen her move and speak, and that was really eye-opening, kind of revelatory.

NAN GOLDIN: Right, that's how you know people, is their voice.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

NAN GOLDIN: That tells me more about people than anything. And Peter Hugar had also photographed her. Her favorite picture was that one by David.

ALEX FIALHO: The black-and-white that's also in her living room.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah. And we used—she used pictures of us for her book *How to Get Rid of Pimples*. And she drew dots on our pictures—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

NAN GOLDIN: —and then in the next scene, the dots would be gone, and the person would be cured. And one of the stories is about me, called *Dora*, about a healer who works as a bartender. And there's a line along—around the corner to be healed by her.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. In what sense were you a healer for her?

NAN GOLDIN: That is what I did at the bar. I listened to people, really listened, and they weren't used to that. By the end, I was just, "Do you want a Heineken or a Miller?" And I was sort of the dominatrix of the bar. And I got tips, because people wanted to impress me, win me back. And I was such a bitch. I hated the job at the end. But when I first started, I loved it there. The first two years. And I would work until 4:00 in the morning, and then we

would go to the after-hours, and I would work there, or hang.

And then, at 7:00 in the morning or so, when the after-hours closed, we would go downstairs for breakfast and read the—the guy that I was most hanging with, this older man with a patch over one eye, because he had been shot—and these two mafia twins that were—he was a compulsive gambler from Queens, but I really liked him. He was very funny. So, we would go in the morning, and he would be reading the racing report and try to get to the racetrack or to the OTB. I don't know if they still have those. Off-track betting? No, I think they do. It's just not so present in the eyes of the country anymore.

ALEX FIALHO: You had mentioned Cabrini Hospital.

NAN GOLDIN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: I know you took a series of photographs.

NAN GOLDIN: Of hospice photographs, in relation to them. When I was asked to do the hospice project, I said I wanted to photograph there, because that's where my friends had died. And almost everyone I photographed for that was at their home. The hospice care was much more outpatient than inpatient. And I think I gave some photographs of Cookie there, because they did hang photographs. Does Cabrini still exist?

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know.

NAN GOLDIN: I don't either. What's the hospital on, that was, on Seventh Avenue and 12th?

ALEX FIALHO: St. Vincent's Hospital.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that closed. A number of my friends died there also.

ALEX FIALHO: We did a Visual AIDS projection project onto St. Vincent's, [inspired by Visual AIDS project *Electric Blanket* you coordinated 25 years prior -AF], projecting photographs—

NAN GOLDIN: Outside?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, onto—

OFF-MIC SPEAKER: See you later.

NAN GOLDIN: Bye, honey. Where are you going?

OFF-MIC SPEAKER: To the mall.

[Audio break.]

NAN GOLDIN: Ready?

ALEX FIALHO: Another series of photos of a person I wanted to ask you about was Gilles Dusein.

NAN GOLDIN: Gilles Dusein.

ALEX FIALHO: I have *The Other Side* here. Excuse me.

NAN GOLDIN: Did you look up that movie called *I'll Be Your Mirror*?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. [... -AF].

NAN GOLDIN: Because he's the person I filmed alone the best. I was alone with him and with Greer. The other ones, there was a crew. A small crew, but a crew. And he talks about after Gilles's death—I think I might've told you this, that Gilles said to him, "Now you'll be alone." And he said—he shared that, and then he said, "And I am alone." And he's a big, big—he was on, you know, a huge steroid queen. And he asked me to photograph him—oh, the mic fell, honey.

[Audio break.]

NAN GOLDIN: Okay, where was I? Oh, his lover.

ALEX FIALHO: What was his lover's name?

NAN GOLDIN: Gotscho. He was from Siberia, I think. Or family from Siberia. The only person I've ever known

[laughs] from Siberia. And we became very close after Gilles's death, during Gilles's death, because these deaths take a long time. That's Alf Bold, honey.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I know.

NAN GOLDIN: I want to look at the pictures of Gilles. That's a misprint. Wow, you have a copy with a misprint in it. There's a page that doesn't—this doesn't exist in the original book. See? You've got [laughs] a special edition.

ALEX FIALHO: This is *A Double Life*.

NAN GOLDIN: So, Gilles introduced me to this friend of his named Kim Harlow. And she was the most beautiful woman in Paris in an early sex change.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 331 in *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: There are three pictures of—in the other side, there's a spread of her. And I was—let me finish about Kim in her dressing room. And I was so attracted to her. Being alone with her in the dressing room with her naked was one of the more erotic experiences that I had. Gilles had been dancing with her at the Folies Bergère. Folies Bergère. And that's where he got the money to open the gallery, from dancing the can-can. But Kim told me he wasn't very good. She was so beautiful, and I didn't see her the last time that I could have seen her.

But she's an interesting story. She didn't—when I talked about Gilles's house, because he was dying, and these deaths didn't happen at one time. They were years coming. Gilles didn't tell me for years. And I asked Gotscho, and he said no, because Gilles didn't want anyone to know. And then, when he finally told me, he wanted only New Yorkers to know, because he felt they understood. And in Paris, there was absolutely no understanding of it at that time. I think there were 50 people at the gay rights march in those years, and thousands in London.

And so, I would go to see Kim, and she didn't want to discuss it. She's like, "I'm so tired of hearing about AIDS." And then, Gilles told me. And she went back to her mother's while she was dying. She was the queen of Paris, absolutely. The queen of the night scene in Paris. Her mother was very, very compassionate and loving to her, but her father was the chief psychiatrist of gender dysphoria in France. And he hated her, because of sex change, because he had had a son, and then he had a daughter. And that was unbearable to him, so he completely rejected her. I love that Gilles earned the money to open the gallery by dancing in the Folies [laughs] Bergère.

And Gotscho asked me to photograph him, because I was obsessed with Kim. There's another photographer named Bettina Rheims that photographed her constantly, and she was very jealous of my pictures. But Kim liked her pictures better, because they were set up. And when she was crying, it was fake, and she liked that one-step removal. My pictures were too real for her. And I brought my friend Joey to meet her, and she didn't want to meet her. Joey was the most beautiful queen I ever knew. She's still alive. So—

ALEX FIALHO: Can you talk about that realness? Because I think that's what attracts so many folks to your photographs.

NAN GOLDIN: And repels so many people, or disturbs so many people. But most important to me is how the subjects feels. And sometimes they completely supported it, and sometimes they wanted me to keep pictures out of publication, because they were too real. And people like to have a scrim between themselves and the world, protection. And the idea of people being so revealed as who they are is disturbing to them. They like photographs that are set up, that are somehow fake, that maybe deal with the same images now. Since my—since the book *Over the Ballad* [sic], there's so many pretenders to the throne, as you were, as it were. [... -AF].

So, you know, there's thousands of people taking pictures that are supposedly like mine, but mine are—they can't be replicated, because they're about relationships that were true. So, the most important thing to me is the look in the eyes, and the comfort people did or didn't have with me. And, for instance, Kim is a perfect example of feeling my pictures were too intensely her, or not as glamorous as Bettina Rheims.

So, Gotscho asked me at a party, when I was photographing Kim a lot at the party, "Why don't you photograph me?" And I wasn't very interested in photographing men at the time. And then, he said, "I'm like a drag queen, too," because he had completely changed his body, transformed himself. And he loved these pictures. He's also in that movie—

ALEX FIALHO: This is page 371 of *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: —a movie called *I'll Be Your Mirror* also came out with—it was a collaboration between myself—it was Gotscho who did that. Gilles Dusein was the gallerist. He was the first one to show the *Cookie Portfolio*,

because he was very interested in showing pictures of people that were real. And also, he was interested in work about AIDS. I mean, not very much. I mean, not extremely. He didn't do shows about that. Nobody in Paris would have touched that. But he did show the *Cookie Portfolio*. He did show my photographs of queens before anyone else did.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Gotscho approaching you to photograph him?

NAN GOLDIN: I think I recorded that?

ALEX FIALHO: [... -AF]. How did it develop?

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, and I started going to the gym with him, and photographing him at the gym. I don't know if that picture's in here. It's a kind of well-known picture of him with barbells.

When he came to New York, I would take him to Johnny Thunders, which was called the black iron gym, because it wasn't a health club at all.

ALEX FIALHO: Uh-huh [affirmative].

NAN GOLDIN: It was people shooting steroids. There were needles all over the floors, and the women were unrecognizable as women. They had totally transformed their bodies. It was the kind of people that are in weight lifter magazines, and people who had gotten furlough from Rikers' Island, if such a thing could happen. But it was a really tough place. And that's the kind of place that Gotscho felt really comfortable in. And I was working—he started me working out a lot, taking pictures at the gym. I worked out for years.

So, as I said, Gilles didn't want anybody to know he had AIDS. When this work was shown in New York, a number of French people were really angry at me, that I was showing this. They have a lot of feeling about discreetness in photography. You don't show your pain or somebody else's pain and death. Or, at least, they didn't then. I don't know about now. So, when Gilles died, it was like there was a huge hole in Paris. And when Alf died, there was a huge hole in Berlin for me for a while. When I would arrive in these places, I would feel the emptiness so profoundly.

They lived together, and there's pictures of their bed that aren't in here. Their bed had black leather pillows. And I was the only person they allowed to stay over. I think they were very much into sex games, nightclubs, and I don't know so well, but—

ALEX FIALHO: They're gorgeous, intimate photos.

NAN GOLDIN: Gotscho was so attached to Gilles. Gilles was his whole life. And he is an artist himself. He makes dresses with the big designers that are then shown as vases. They're lovely. He hasn't been shown much in New York. And the last time I saw him on the street in Paris, he was normal-sized. But he used to walk around with a cutoff t-shirt and mainly with a tank top in the streets of Paris. And people would react to him as if he was a queen. They would freak out when they saw him. And kids would go get their parents to clock him.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: So, this is after he died, and Gotscho's kissing him goodbye. And that photo was so moving to me. Gotscho allowed me to take it. He knew that Gilles would have allowed it, I think. I'd like to think so. And the picture of his arm is, to me, one of the most moving pictures about the crisis. I still can't believe—I still don't believe that AIDS even existed and wiped out our community in the '80s, just wiped off our community from the history. It's unbelievable to me. Everybody who held my—who carried my history is dead. And then, the Alf pictures, are they in here? This is an Alf [Bold -AF]. This is the hospital where he died, the same hospital.

ALEX FIALHO: Page 364, *I'll Be Your Mirror*.

NAN GOLDIN: [Pages] 364, 365. So, it's a double spread, and it was made specifically for the book. But this is the hospital where also Frank Wagner died. And they also gave me the Red Award, this hospital, the Victoria Krankenhaus, for the work I had done on AIDS. It was called the Red Award. And the mayor was there. It was a big event. And they gave me some ugly award, another metal sculpture.

But I was really honored to get it, and I made a slide show of AIDS. I showed a slide show of AIDS in Berlin at the same cinema that Alf Bold had started, with a few other people. He had started it, or he ran it. And people were really angry about it, the AIDS show I did. That must've been when he was in New York for a year. What year is it? No, the year he was at The Kitchen in New York was earlier than that. Bette Gordon invited him to The Kitchen for a year. I'm very touched about getting that award. I forgot about it. Maybe six years ago.

And this is—Alf lived in the hospital off and on for 16 months or so. Eighteen months. And this is him at home in

the hospital. He had an incredible CD collection, one of the biggest. He knew more about classical—Susan Sontag and he were friends. And she told me he had the most knowledge about contemporary composers of classical music in the world, but he didn't tell—he didn't pass it on. And he also knew more—an incredible amount about film. I first went to see him in 1983, and he presented the slide show *The Ballad*. And then in the—

ALEX FIALHO: In Berlin?

NAN GOLDIN: First in his cinema, and then later in the film festival. And during the screenings in the Arsenal, the theater he ran, he would be in the back talking through the whole thing to me, loudly—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

NAN GOLDIN: —about who he knew and stories about them. The slide show is much bigger than the book. It's got 750 pictures in it. Have you seen it?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, at MoMA.

NAN GOLDIN: At MoMA?

ALEX FIALHO: They just had the great display.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, more people saw it there, I think, than anywhere ever.

ALEX FIALHO: It looked great there.

NAN GOLDIN: Thank you.

ALEX FIALHO: Large projection.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, it was well done. This is the heart. This heart on the wall is in front of the men's lab, laboratory. And it's a heart shape of two young boys in very feminine dress, an old photo. This is the bar that the set designer owned, so it had a different set all the time. It's called Hafen [Bar in Berlin -NG], and it was the central gay bar. I think it still exists in Nollendorfplatz.

This is David visiting Alf, even though he hated him. Or he didn't like him. He didn't like the way he treated me. He thought I was stupid. He would scream at me, "Why are you so stupid?" But I still loved him. And one Thanksgiving we had with him, Susan Sontag and Robert Wilson came. And for him, that was heaven, because he had started out at a waitress school. They had, they have schools for—I mean, waiter school. They have schools for waiters, and that's where he had started in Bavaria. And then, he had ended up running this incredible movie theater and one of most knowledgeable people about contemporary cinema and contemporary classical music. And then, helping to—one of the central three people in booking, in programming the Berlin film festival, the Berlinale, the center of the—the part of it that's the program of new cinema.

This is after he died. I left the room. I went to see a child, a good friend of mine's newborn infant. And when I came back, he was dead. I had been there all morning, heard the death rattle. But he was too—the nurses said he was too stubborn to die when I was there. He would come out ever so often for a period, and I would think he was going to get better again. I have my own periods of denial.

When Cookie died—I don't know if I told you this. When Cookie Mueller died, I was in Provincetown, and Sharon was taking care of her where that picture was taken. And I was screaming, "We've got to find someone who can—who can cure her." She was dying, and it was—I couldn't bear it. It was the first time I was so close to it. I mean, I experienced the loss of all these people, but I wasn't always there at the period when they were dying. And I was screaming against the medical professional. I still thought somebody would come and heal her. I still believed that there was something we could do. And it was the most extreme wallop of inability to help, I would say, of my life. The most extreme.

ALEX FIALHO: How about these photographs now?

NAN GOLDIN: This is at somebody else's funeral. Piotr's boyfriend died of AIDS. His name was Patrick. That's at Patrick's funeral. And this is a Polish graveyard with the Jewish grave. It's a Jewish cemetery in Poland, in Warsaw. Or in Prague, I'm not sure.

So, one Thanksgiving, Alf invited Susan Sontag and Robert Wilson to come to my house for Thanksgiving. And Annie Leibovitz, Susan's lover, that famous photographer, sent us a huge basket of food. But she couldn't come, and I overheard Alf and Susan in the other room saying, "Well, they're both so stupid." Alf and Susan were saying this to each other. "They're both so stupid, but at least they're very visual, and they're good photographers." And they were talking about me and Annie Leibovitz. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

NAN GOLDIN: That's why David didn't like him, because he would yell at me. I mean, he was—by the end, Alf didn't have a lot of friends, because—or not German friends anyway, because he was very outspoken, could be looking down on people, and people weren't having him. A lot of people. There were only a few of us that visited him consistently at the hospital. But I found that to be true with so many people, that they don't go to see the person when they're dying. They feel too ineffectual, or it's too much time to spend. There is a sense of ineffectuality. You begin to feel like you have nothing to say, because nothing seems important to bring in from the outside. It's very, very—sense of incredible frustration and pain, because you feel so impotent.

ALEX FIALHO: How does photography or your photos relate to a sense of agency, or—?

NAN GOLDIN: I don't know what that means.

ALEX FIALHO: Memory and then—

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah, that's why I started, was so that I could ever remember—I could always remember. And it helps when you get sober, because you can look back at the years and find out what you did. You still have the photos for a while. But photos don't do it. The voices are so important. Body language, and the eyes. But for me, most of all, the voices. So, these photographs don't do anything in the end, but I thought they could save lives. So painful. I think that's enough between us, because that's the crux, to keep diary—every minute of every day and every night. I kept diaries of every minute of my life and every single thing people said on the phone, in person. I would write while I was having sex, just about. Kenny Angelico, who's in this book and who's in the drag queen book—what? Oh. And who's in the drag queen book, we were living—he was living with me, and he stole the diaries from—he found where they were hidden in my mattress, and he stole them and read them and said he'd never read more boring—anything more boring in his life.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: And they are boring. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Well, the photos sure aren't, so—

NAN GOLDIN: People think I'm going to—they're going to publish them after I die, and I want to burn them, because they're not for publication. I'm keeping them now, because they're material to use for writing, but I really don't want them to exist after me. And people have said to me recently there's no way. You can leave that in your will, but people will publish them anyway.

Anyway—oh, about Gilles, I wanted to say that he's the one who told me in '93 that people were saying about David Wojnarowicz, for instance, "Now, that he's dead, his work will be sellable. He'll be an important artist now that he's dead." And that seems unbelievably cynical to me, but now I know that that's what people think about artists. They prefer to work with dead artists. Peter Hujar was too difficult to work with. I had a memory—I mean, I ran into somebody last weekend who reminded me of something that happened with Peter. We were given a show together in '83 at Timothy—T. Greathouse.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, Tim Greathouse.

NAN GOLDIN: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: [An important photographer and gallerist -AF] who also passed from AIDS.

NAN GOLDIN: His gallery in the Lower East Side, and he asked us to have a show together. And then, he dropped me from the show and was just going to show Peter. And Peter refused, which is huge. I mean, who does that? The art world is all about, you know, climbing to the top on other people's backs, and Peter was so loyal. That's amazing to me.

Anyway, I realized that photography doesn't tell the truth. It doesn't tell anything. It's just a drawing, a quick sketch of a person. It's just another anecdote that I took pictures to remember, and they're like if you wrote—made notes to yourself. And they are all set up, as people sometimes told me. Other artists sometimes told me that my claim to nothing being set up, it was not valid, because I choose which pictures I show. I choose to edit them in a certain way. I put them in context that they weren't normally taken in. I find it really painful, and I live in a constant state of self-doubt about my work, as do many artists.

It seems like those who are really passionate and devoted to their work to a degree that people can't really fathom. I don't know about the new youngbloods, how much any of them are—live in a chronic state of self-doubt. But the people I knew who were or are great artists all did or do. So, I was realizing that the photographs are set up, and they aren't a real story of anything, of anybody's life. They're not the real thing. The real thing

isn't here anymore.

I think visits to the—talking about visits to the hospital are more telling than any pictures. I don't know if words are telling anymore. People don't use language in a way that I can respect anymore. And I certainly don't speak in analytical terms except maybe about art or theories or film. Whatever they're interested in, they analyze theoretically. People don't easily speak analytically about themselves in the world, I don't think. Doesn't seem to me. Maybe they do. Maybe people have gotten more open like I hoped, but it seems just more facile and superficial, the way language is used, not really more revealing.

It makes me so sad that photography, I crash into a dead end with it. Maybe film was more real. Maybe that's why I like film better than photography. Even narratives, scripted films can tell more maybe—but definitely documents of the people involved. As you said, you didn't know Cookie's voice. You didn't know her laugh. I think the voice tells the most about people. I think it's—I like that there are pictures of my friends and those who died, but it's gotten so I take very few pictures of people when they're sick now. It just feels like an intrusion. I have a real ethical involvement with my work. And I listen to my stomach most of the time about whether it feels right or wrong to take the picture. And then—and now, I've gotten to a point where I feel even more loyal to the dead. I'm pretty sure they go to my shows.

[They laugh.]

NAN GOLDIN: Some of them. Or look at my books. And I don't want to—I don't want to be disloyal.

ALEX FIALHO: What place does art have or did art have?

NAN GOLDIN: I think it was a cry out of the wilderness or something, cry out of the plague. You know, it was like World War II, that we watched everybody get wiped out, and there was nothing we could do. That's what it felt like. I don't know what part art has to do with it. Maybe straight photography doesn't have anything to do with it. I don't know.

I think David's writings are one of the most important documents of the crisis, certainly the most important written in words. And Peter's work was never about AIDS. David Armstrong's work was never about AIDS. I don't think that should be mistaken. Like I said, David was very discreet publicly most of his life. And privately, you know—he was very private. Privately, he had a big life, but not in public. And I don't think he would want to be remembered in the context of AIDS. A lot of people don't, didn't, even as they were dying then.

But in the '80s in America and in the '90s in Europe, people often didn't want anyone to know. They don't—I mean, I know people now who are so involved with their image. They don't want their lovers or spouses—they don't want it to be known what their lovers or spouses died of, even if it's cancer. But if you read, if you read obituaries in the '80s and early-'90s, they often said "died of complications due to cancer or tuberculosis," and you know that that's the way of saying—that's the code of saying people died of AIDS. But it wasn't really allowed by rich families or straight families. And there's also people like Robert Vitale.

NAN GOLDIN: Greer's—the man that Greer was so in love with her whole life. And the family took back the paintings. There's that whole way of censoring the work that an artist did.

ALEX FIALHO: That photo of Robert and Greer is so moving.

NAN GOLDIN: Thank you. It's nice to remember anecdotes of my friends. It's also very—it carried me into a place that's hard to talk from. I think that's it. I said a lot, right?

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Thank you for being so open with sharing.

NAN GOLDIN: Thank you. I don't know how to be any way else, because I don't remember anything. I don't remember things, what I read, well enough to make things up or quote other people—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]