

Marty Davis

SR 11443, Oral History,

by Gregory Goodapple, Corinna DePonte & Bryan Jones

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

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DAVIS: Marty Davis

GG: Gregory Goodapple

CD: Corinna DePonte

BJ: Bryan Jones

Transcribed by: Gregory Goodapple, Corinna DePonte & Bryan Jones, ca. 2012

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This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Spring Term 2012, with Instructor Pat Young.

## Introduction

Marty Davis was the owner and publisher of Portland's gay newspaper, *Just Out*, from 1998 through 2011.

**Session 1**  
**2012 March 13**

CD: Okay, we're recording.

GG: My name is Greg Goodapple.

BJ: My name is Bryan Jones.

CD: My name is Corinna DePonte.

DAVIS: And my name is Marty Davis.

GG: We're conducting an interview for Portland State University, for the senior capstone class, LGBTQ History. We can start with some questions here. So, when and where were you born?

DAVIS: I was born in Redding, California, in 1949.

GG: So what lead you to *Just Out*?

DAVIS: . . . Between 1949 . . .

(Laughs)

GG: Yeah, it's kind of a big gap.

DAVIS: By the time I arrived there, let's see. Well, I arrived at *Just Out* at a mid-life point. I was not the founder of the paper. I was the second publisher. And I had had a previous career – a near 20 year career – with a subsidiary of General Electric. And in 1995 I had

just come to the point where that was just soulless work, and I didn't want to do it any longer. I was a late-life comer-outer. I mean, I knew I was gay my entire life, I just didn't get around to do anything about it until 1992. And then was, you know, making up for lost time. So in 1995 I quit my job with GE. I'd been there, like I said, for a long time, so I had a good amount of money coming. I'd made a good income for many years, so I didn't have to make immediate career choices. And for some reason I decided that I would work part time at *Just Out* selling ads. Because at that particular moment in time the then-publisher and founder had taken it into her mind that she was going to start a *Just Out* in Seattle – that Seattle needed a different newspaper than the one they already had. And I had spent my previous near-twenty years working in Seattle, so I felt that geographically and economically, and I almost felt I knew that community better than I knew the one in Portland, even though I lived in Portland forever. So I signed up for this grand adventure, and within like three months she gave up on that.

And so then I just stayed around and started selling ads in the Portland market. And at that point in time she had had the paper for 13 years, and even though I'm sure she'll go to her grave and will refuse to admit it, she was burnt out. She was running out of energy. She had nothing to put into the paper at that point in time and in turn nothing was coming out. It was just a lifeless publication. She in fact had bought another business and moved off to the coast and was – she'd gone off to another publication and was sort of just letting it self-guide itself. And even though I had vowed never to get emotionally involved, because it was a very dysfunctional place, I couldn't stand to see it faltering. So I just started taking on some of her responsibilities and duties. She bumped my title up to assistant publisher.

And then one day, in about September, - okay I started there late in '95 – and in September of '98 I had had enough of it. And I said this “this is silly, I'm out of here”, and I was getting ready to tell her. And I got a phone call from her saying “You need to buy the paper, you need to buy it now.” And I said yes.

I owned my home at that time. So I refinanced my home, took all the money from the house, gave it to her, and bought the paper. And she and I never once sat down – she never taught me – she taught me how to do payroll over the phone. And that was how I came to own a paper. I had not an iota of background other than sales, largely.

GG: So what motivated you to buy it, then? You mentioned that the place felt kind of dysfunctional and you didn't want to make an emotional attachment.

DAVIS: Because ... there's many, many stories in Portland about *Just Out*, and one of the central themes you would see if you were going to the Rose garden or something and if you were interviewing ten thousand people about what *Just Out* meant to them it would generally say "It was there for me when I was coming out." And that was the same for me so I felt a strong emotional attachment.

BJ: Well, you said that you felt that by the time you were getting to the point where you were asked to purchase the newspaper that you felt that it was starting to die, so what direction did you want to take it from there?

DAVIS: Well, it was thirteen years ago, and I'm old now so my memories aren't clear. I wanted it to be vibrant and energetic and I wanted it to tell the stories of the local community. At that point in time she was just buying lots of syndicated stories that were just lifeless, still writing stories about aids that would appear in twenty-five different gay papers across the country. It didn't have much original content left.

It didn't focus on its own community. It was a paper in search of purpose. I don't know, I guess I wanted to give it that purpose. The truth is I probably don't know that I ever sat down and thought it out very well. I think it was just a very impulsive move. I

didn't do like every economics professor in this building would tell you; there was no business plan. There was nothing. I didn't know dilly squat about running a business.

BJ: You did feel that it should focus on this community?

DAVIS: I did. It very much needed to be completely and totally Portland. At that point in time and for many years – in the early years I actually wanted it to be Portland centric without being Portland centric. I tried for the first many years to reach out to Salem, to reach out to Eugene. At that point in time I still paid hundreds of dollars a month to deliver the paper to Salem, to deliver it to Eugene. And we tried to write – I wanted to be all things to all people around the state. So that was I set out to do initially.

GG: And did you have much community interaction then, with those groups outside of Portland? Either initially or later on.

DAVIS: Never was I ever able to make any head row in Eugene. Eugene, you know, is another planet in another universe. There's a women's community there, I know that, but there's no – Eugene is just this homogenized hippy type culture, and, no, we couldn't find advertisers, we couldn't find community leaders. There was an aids organization, but there wasn't anything to plug into. To do some of these things, you put a hand out, and somebody has to reach back. Nobody ever reached back in Eugene.

GG: How about in Portland, how did people reach back? Were they relatively receptive?

DAVIS: Well, I was a complete and total unknown. So ... some parts of the community, there was resentment over that, like the established women's community. The community that the publisher was a part of – I wasn't her and therefore there was no point. And so I had to start from scratch. I had to meet everybody. I mean, the paper never really reached out to many organizations in the community. Nobody had being out

into the community, so I started doing all of that. Intuitively, I knew the paper needed to have a face. It needed to have a voice. It needed to have somebody recognized with it. And so I just made that me. For thirteen years I was just everywhere.

GG: How much of the actual management would you say you handled? Did you have much assistance, or did you do most of the work yourself?

DAVIS: Well, I micromanaged to the point in some cases of detriment. But, no, there were some parts of it I never understood from the beginning to the end, and I entrusted it to employees – I never participated in any of the graphic design or the layout or the artistic portion of the paper. I was very heavily involved in the editorial content and the editorial management. I was very heavily involved in the sales content.

The paper probably could have been broken down into three categories: editorial, production – well editorial, production, sales, and then administration. I handled all the administration. I was very involved in managing sales. And I worked very closely with my editors at all times because I had very strong opinions about what I wanted the content to be. But I did not get so involved in the graphic parts because I don't have an iota of skills there. But I knew what I didn't like or what I wanted. But yes, I was very hands on, very much a working publisher.

GG: And you mentioned that this was kind of – well, that you didn't have a lot of experience going into it –

DAVIS: I had no experience.

(Laughs)

GG: How much did you know, I guess not about the business of print media before, but just as on the consumer end of print media? Did you read much-

DAVIS: Oh yeah. I mean, I always read newspapers. Even as a child and a teenager, whatever, growing up down in the Redding area, I mean – we had a paper, the Redding Socialite, and I was probably the only kid that would wait each day for the paper to come. I mean I just grew up reading newspapers. I know, a strange concept. I cherish newspapers. Where we lived, the big thing on the weekend was you'd get the Sunday paper from either Sacramento or San Francisco and it was that big and had the color cartoons wrapped around the outside. It was this giant, massive package of wonderness. The Sunday paper on its own. I mean, that's one of my childhood memories, the Sunday paper. So, yeah, I've always read newspapers.

GG: So going into, say, high school, did you have – was there much involvement in your high school with the community?

DAVIS: The community?

GG: I guess print media, was there much going on that way?

DAVIS: My high school had a class newspaper and I remember I took like one term of journalism, but I can tell you in high school I was a non-entity. I was one of the kids that would have been bullied, but I was lucky, I was just ignored instead. So, high school for me was just four years that I have not a memory of.

BJ: So being that you felt that the newspaper should focus on the local community, how would you characterize the unique needs and qualities of the Portland community?

DAVIS: Well, there's so much uniqueness, there's so many little spinning circles of ... I mean, okay, you've got say – you've got the Rose Court, you got the ISRC. They are a world unto themselves. You got the Oregon Bears; they're a world unto themselves.

You've got the Rose City Softball Association. You've got bowlers. You've got some people – used to be, in 1992, when I was coming out, the women's community lived breathed and died for softball, so there was a big component of that, they were unto themselves. So all these spinning circles and they very rarely ever linked together at any part and time. So I felt that the paper, *Just Out*, was to be the link to all these circles. So I went out and I embedded myself literally in every one of these circles.

Thirteen years ago the transgender community didn't really exist as a community. So I mean, it's grown in leaps and bounds, and *Just Out* tried to keep pace with that and grow with the transgender community, and tried to keep pace with the gender queer community. You had traditional GLBT community, you had the new, evolving – I mean nothing stayed constant. There was change and growth and evolution in the community and it was just incredibly important that *Just Out* stay on top of all of it while maintaining firm relationships with our traditional readers too. And then tied into all of that is the fact that nobody really cares about every other group – everybody wants to see a reflection of themselves, and that was the biggest problem I would face. I mean people would say "Why do you always have drag queens on the cover?" and I would go "We had two drag queens in the last two years. Shut up." (Laughs)

And what's wrong with it anyway? What, you want me to put a picture of you on every issue, you know? So it could be – not everybody shared my joy or my task of wanting to the community. Sometimes it could get a little narrow minded. Our world's become narrow.

GG: Do you think that division changed with time at all? Did the people become more or less united in any way?

DAVIS: I think so. We became much more mainstream. I mean, the world is changed, in 1992 ... people say progress is slow, but we've gone from 1992 when there was a ballot

measure literally making it almost illegal, immoral, unheard of to be gay and now we're on the precipice of gay marriage. I mean today the Maryland governor signed a law, there's eight states that allow gay marriage. It wasn't that long ago that gay marriage was – I mean, nobody even said the words. Gay marriage? All you wanted to do was maybe not get beat up if you went out to a bar on a Saturday. And we've gone from that in twenty years to gay marriage. So, in many ways, the progress rate is phenomenally fast. And I don't know where I was going. I don't remember the question. (Laughs)

BJ: What would you say about the structure of the community made it so decentralized?

DAVIS: Well, when you look at the history of the community, the originating sort of like glue that started was in the Rose Court, was one of the first really structured organizations within the community. And that came out – that started in San Francisco. And Portland was one of the first cities to have to have a court too, you know, with an empress and emperor. It's very complicated. It's a fantasy world, you know, like Harry Potter and Tolkien and that sort of stuff. But that was – from the bars – that was the first roots of the community. And then in Portland, right at the same time as that was happening, was the gay bowling league, was formed. So that was the only places people had to come together, was in those things, and then as things would spin off you would have this one little conclave that – this place that you would go to that – but the Rose Court didn't bowl, and the bowlers weren't part of the Rose Court. But twenty, thirty years later, now if you want to bowl you don't need a bowling league. You just go any place you want to. Because in Portland, it's the promise land now. People don't stop to think that thirty miles outside of Portland in different directions it's not quite like that. You could say, for the most part, Portland has made it. For the most part.

GG: Now I imagine a lot of those smaller groups that were there at the start had their own publications or their own media. Did you interact much with any of the other media sources out there, or end up incorporating any of them?

DAVIS: By the time that I came around in 1998 – *Just Out* was started in 1983, and I know that prior to that there had been other publications, that the founders of *Just Out* came from another publication. I don't remember what the name of it was. The archives know about this, and Pat knows about this, more so than I do. But there's always been an attempt at papers in Portland. But when *Just Out* started in 1983 it was able to lay a strong enough foundation that even in the time that I had the paper, every couple three years someone would come along and try to start another paper, because there was always somebody who didn't like what we were doing. But nobody ever made it past like three issues.

The city's not big enough to really economically – it's probably big enough but it would not choose to afford to support two papers. So, yeah, if you look back to the forty-two years since Stonewall there's probably been ten assorted different publications excluding what's called the bar rags – those have popped up many times over the years – they never really had content, they would just be ads for bars or horoscopes or something like that. And no one has even tried doing one of those for several years.

GG: How about the time around Measure 9, how did you feel things changed around then?

DAVIS: Well, Measure 9 was 1992, and that was when I was just a novice to the community, so I wasn't involved with *Just Out* at that time. That was when my own personal experiences and things were going. Are you talking the original Ballot Measure 9 in 1992?

GG: Yeah.

DAVIS: Like I said, I didn't come to *Just Out* until late 1995, so – I've always heard tales, stories that the paper felt endangered, felt threatened from threats of violence, threats of harm, that they had been on a ... I think lots of people, lots of gays in 1992 felt threatened and in danger of harm, but I wasn't one of them because I didn't have enough sense to know that I should be. I mean, I literally, the first public event that I went to where I was self identifying as a gay person was a giant rally in opposition to Ballot Measure 9, in November, right before the election, at Pioneer Square. And thousands and thousands and thousands of gays and lesbians came to that, and there hasn't really been an event like it since. That's twenty years ago, almost.

GG: So personally, would you say that influenced you much – that event?

DAVIS: Well, yeah. It was my wakeup call, and I'm sure I didn't know it at the time, but it was the catalyst for interest in the Portland political scene and everything, yeah.

GG: So at, I guess, to stay on the personal note for a moment, just a bit, after you did end up taking over *Just Out*, how do you feel that it influenced you through time? I mean, you obviously made very big contributions to it.

DAVIS: Well, I mean, it molded me and shaped me and gave me personality. It gave me and identity and function, which I had not had before. All I had previously focused on in the twenty years prior was a successful career and loving my dog. I hadn't stopped to become a person. So buying the paper, I mean it didn't happen overnight, but in one essence it was work. Everything I did for the next thirteen years was for the benefit of the paper.

GG: So did the work follow you home often, then?

DAVIS: Well, it was twenty-four/seven. It never went away. Never went away.

GG: Did it ever cause problems for you, do you think?

DAVIS: Well, problems? It probably wasn't the most healthy thing to do. I still never – did it cause problems? I don't know. I don't know. It turned me into a person. Was it still the best person I could be? Probably not. Was it the healthiest lifestyle? While other people were thinking about dating and partners and stuff like that I was probably out restocking papers and stuff like that. So, did I have a balanced, healthy lifestyle? No. Is that a problem? No, because not everybody is meant to have a balanced healthy lifestyle. Some people are just meant to be neurotically focused on their business.

CD: Well let me ask you this, did you enjoy it? I wanna say that you probably did—

DAVIS: I did up until...I did, yeah. Yeah, until towards the end, yeah. Then it was killing me.

GG: When you say "up until the end," what was the experience like there?

DAVIS: Well, have you heard of this thing called the recession? Well, okay, in November of 2008, it was *Just Out's* 25th anniversary. And we had a 25th anniversary party that was...amazing. Ron Mitchell was the manager of the Red Cap bar...um, he just left so he's not now; he put on the *Just Out* 25th Anniversary party and it was an amazing success. It was just an amazing event. And at that point in time, that was November so Sam (Adams) had just been elected...so at our party we had the Mayor-Elect, the current mayor, all the city commissioners. Everybody who was everybody was at that party.

But, you know, this was like a TV show or movie or something where you could see that while we were at that party, you know, the wolf was at the door. Or at the office. Because in the next month...I mean, things were already happening...but you didn't, you

know, sometimes you can only see things clearly when you look back. You didn't know what was going on then. And then in um, December of 2008, Portland was hit by a giant snowstorm. And the city was inundated for days and it ruined the holiday shopping season. And for three years Portland never came back. I mean, it wasn't because of that snowstorm, but the recession . . . in some places, the recession crept up on people. In Portland the recession came armed and attacking and it just took the city . . . captive . . . in December of 2008.

So we started the first quarter of 2009 with no income. Because all over everybody panicked . . . in January of 2009. There had been no retail. Some people had money, the people who did have money weren't going to spend it . . . our incomes just dropped precipitously. January's always a bad time, even in the best of times. So, um, immediately I was in trouble with money. I wasn't able to pay bills, I was getting behind with my payroll, my staff was, you know, nobody knew that it was a recession then. My staff was unhappy. I was frantically trying to do everything I could.

I came to work one day in March and three of my key staffers had quit overnight, because I was behind with payroll. So the paper almost died in March of 2009. I mean, staff had walked out. And in retrospect, for me personally, financially, it would've been best if I had let it die then, but, and for five minutes that day I probably thought that, but no... I decided okay, I can do this, we can make it. People came to help, we put out a couple really crappy issues, I hired new staff...I cut my overhead, I hired one person to do the job of three people. Ah...blah blah blah, long story short, we had a rough couple of months, and then we sort of got back on track, we had a rhythm, kinda making it. I mean, the money was still bad but we were limping along okay in 2009 and 2010 and everyday it was like, "it's going to get better." "Next month it'll get better." And I was making it. And then I literally thought, "okay, I'm gonna make it. I think we're gonna make it." And then October of 2011, *Just Out* of the blue, we had no sales.

Just, with no explanation. I mean I can give you a partial explanation, it'll be a long explanation, we had no sales. And so then I had to go into defensive mode. You know, two choices, fairly simple model: you have to cut your overhead, you have to increase your income. So I had to go to announce that I was only going to do one issue a month for the next couple of months, and that would solve--that reduced overhead but it also decreased income because we only had one issue to sell for instead of two. So my sales were bad in October, they got worse in November, they were nonexistent in December. And on December 26, I just had to realize . . . that's it. I can't go anymore. I had put every personal cent of my own in there. And even if I had been able to beg, borrow, or steal, in three months I was sixty thousand dollars in the hole, which is a lot of money. Even if we're, you know, if I had gone out and gotten sixty thousand dollars in cans and bottles, that would've taken me to January, which is the beginning of the bad time of the year. That would've just taken me to the gates of hell. I had no place to go. So, again I don't know if that answered your question because I started talking and so the whole thing was that last three years was...it was hard. It was very hard for me. It was stressful...I mean, everyday, it was just worry about money, worry about money, worry about money.

GG: And before the recession did the financial ebbs and tides make much of a . . .

DAVIS: Looking back, oh my god! It was nice. A rollicking success compared to what it was from 2009 on. No, the paper flourished the first few years after I had it. I mean, yeah, it was a wonderful paper from, you know..'99 through 2007, 2008. I mean I was never flush, I never had too much money. I always had problems finding sufficient salespeople. But I was always able to pay all the bills. And I never got behind. Until 2009, the first time, then again at the end of 2011. So yeah, there were years when I could look and I could project and I could see, okay we're getting real close, we're gonna be a million-dollar company! By the time it was over . . . I don't have my bank issue from 2011 but...we'd fallen far. We'd fallen very far.

And people you know, will hear “all newspapers are dead; no need for newspapers.” That wasn’t what killed us. There wasn’t even so much to--I mean the recession was the big factor, but the thing that really killed me was in a state with a ten percent unemployment rate, I could not find salespeople. I could not find anybody that would work and sell ads. And uh, you don’t have enough time for me to start talking about that. [Laughs]

GG: As far as finding people for jobs...though the salespeople were difficult to find, how were the other roles--filling the other roles?

DAVIS: Oh no, anything creative, I mean you almost just wanted to do word-of-mouth because if I put it on Craigslist, or if I put it anyplace I would just be inundated. So if I needed editors or if I need writers or if I needed an art director, if I needed a production assistant, the city is rich in those people. But for somebody to...work... [laughs]...work! No, nobody wants to do that.

GG: Did you do much with hiring employees? Did you have many people coming in or going.

DAVIS: I did it all, yeah. I hired everybody for thirteen years. Um, we would--the biggest turnover would be in the sales department. That was it. Other people would come and stay for two to three years, you know, which is pretty much the average, you know. There was a time in American history when you would, you know, stay your 25, your 30, your 40 years and that would be a badge of honor. Now there’s...now you would be considered stagnant or stale. Now people move on. The first people I lost was within the first couple of years. I lost my news editor because the New York Blade came in and took her. And then I lost an art editor because the Washington Blade took him. So that’s when gay papers were still flourishing, in the end of the 90’s and talent was in great demand. And I had good people that other papers came and enticed them away. It’s

hard to compete with New York and Washington. So yeah, creative people . . . the writers, the editors, the good people . . . they have many choices of job and that's really what a good paper should be. You should be an incubator, 'cause you wanna grow talent. And I grew some good freelance writers and some of the people that started with me have gone to have great careers...Marcus Sedo (spelling?) wrote a column and he's in New York now with an off-Broadway play that he's writing. Thomas Lauderdale wrote at *Just Out*, Peter Zuckerman who's um . . . he was an intern with us and he's got a fantastic book coming out in June. It's going to immediately make him a bestselling writer. A book about the sherpas on Mount Everest . . . you're gonna be hearing about it everywhere. He did a stint at *Just Out* so, um, we did good work in teaching and training writers. The best thing a writer can have is a good editor on their side. And I always had good editors.

GG: So in the time they were there do you think you got a good chance to get to know your employees? Any of them specific . . .

DAVIS: My greatest weakness was as a manager. I was never a--I was not a good boss. I was not a good boss, I always kept too much distance between myself and my employees. And um, because in some ways, you know, you're supposed to, then on one hand you'll have your lawyer telling you "you should do that," but on the other hand, I probably could have had better work -- I probably could've done better. I could have done much better. I never did, never will get any "Best Boss" awards. I was focused too much externally and not enough internally. I would do everything I could to grow relationships, you know, out in the community and not put enough nurturing back into my employees. And there's a lot of people that will tell you that . . .

CD: Um, do we wanna talk about-- we just heard about *Just Out* being bought.

DAVIS: Yes, because there's a lot of misnomer there. On December 26th, when I had to -- when I threw up a blog post saying *Just Out* is done, it was dead. I mean, there was nothing left. And then I immediately had to start disbanding it because the landlord wanted me out and things like that. So *Just Out* as a business, you know, it doesn't have inventory, it's a concept, it's an intangible sort of thing. So when I left, like I said, I was sixty thousand dollars in debt...And this is the painful part, the debt is one thing, but the worst part was I was left with prepaid advertisers. Because there's no way -- you couldn't plan for failure. It was like a car wreck. A car wreck I couldn't plan for. So when I had to close the paper the people in the weeks and the months before had bought ads in advance and paid for them.

So, that was the worst part: I'd left people with unfulfilled obligations. So I was approached the day or two after I made the announcement by a former writer for *Just Out* many years back and he wanted to buy the paper. In essence he just really wanted to take . . . there was nothing really to sell him. So all I did was sign over the name to him. The amount of money is too embarrassing to even mention, I mean there was no real money. It didn't even pay for the lawyer's cost. But in return, he publicly stated and is on record that when he starts printing the paper which will simply carry the name *Just Out* that it will be a brand new-- that he's starting from scratch. The only thing that's the same is that he got the name *Just Out* but he has stated that he will honor my commitments to my advertisers. So that was very important to me.

CD: So I'm guessing you must have concerns about what the newspaper's content is going to be like . . .

DAVIS: Well I believe him to be a decent man and that he has good intent, and he has -- I'm not sure he understands this, but it's not what he wants to do with it, he's going to have to learn it's what the community wants. And if you don't do what the community wants you won't have a paper because they won't support you. So it's not about you, it

can't be an ego thing. It's not a "oh, this is what I'm going to do with the paper," no, you go out and say "what do you want? What's your expectation?" And you do what the community wants.

BJ: And what does the community want?

DAVIS: The community wants to see itself. It wants its stories told. It wants...it wants the paper to be a reflection of itself.

CD: Are you still going to be involved in any part?

DAVIS: No. In no way, shape, or form.

CD: What's next for you?

DAVIS: Well, half of me is retired, because I'm 62 and I had to take my Social Security because I'm flat-ass broke. In the thirteen years I lost half a million dollars. I lost everything I put in to buy the paper. I had no income the last three years. And it just is what it is. I'm broke. I lost everything so I had to take my Social Security at 62 when nobody wants to take their Social Security. You wait until you're 66. So what does the future hold for me? Well half of me's retired, half of me hopes to compliment that with part-time freelance writing work because I can write a fine press release. And I want to become an advocate for small business people and help them promote businesses through media management, Facebook management. I'm an obsessive, maniacal Facebooker. I do excellent Facebook so I'm going to try and find a career in doing Facebook for business that don't want to do their own pages, writing press releases, doing advocacy and stuff for small businesses because I still believe -- One my mantras at *Just Out* during my tenure was "Shop Local, Buy Local." And that remains a very firm business philosophy of my own. That said I may not be able to afford to live in Portland

because it's an incredibly expensive city to live in as far as utilities and just the cost of living is very high in Portland. I have IRS debts that I will lose my home to so . . . I don't know.

CD: What would you describe your attitude is . . . like are you hopeful?

DAVIS: Well it's been two months now, the first month was hell. Oh my god, the first month was hell. All I did was cry. Yeah I got the Social Security last week so that's helped but I wasn't sure I was going to get that because it was complicated because I owned a business and they wanted so much paperwork. And then I walked into the building last week and I was just ready to start over and I found the one Social Security agent in Portland that knew who I was. And that was on Wednesday of last week and on Friday I got my Social Security check. So it was amazing [Laughs].

Yeah no, now I'm hopeful. The trouble is going to come in waves. The first big wave is over, I had to announce that Portland no longer had a gay paper, that was fun. So like I said it's been two months. I got to watch my own funeral, that was kind of weird because you know, Facebook had memorialized--but there's also a lot of anger too. And so the next wave will be -- I'll file all of my tax reports. I did everything honestly and ethically except for the part where I wrote the check to go with the big numbers because there was no money to write. So the next wave is number one, I'll have to file for corporate bankruptcy, that's not going to be pleasant. And then bankruptcy doesn't protect you from IRS obligations so I owe one quarter taxes. So they will come after me like piranhas on a floating body. And then whatever's left after they're done I'll go off to see whatever's there for me.

GG: A bit different tack but you mentioned that you use Facebook a lot. How do you feel social media and things like Facebook or Twitter or those type of things have interacted with *Just Out*?

DAVIS: I never got into Twitter, but now I'm going to have to. And like many newspapers published--I remember in 2000 when it was Y2K and they said "the world's going to end, computers are going to fail!" And I was just sitting there going "God, I hope so!" Because then, you know, newspapers were going to come back to the top of the pack. I had to make peace with the internet and ultimately we did. And a couple, three, four years ago I remember walking in and telling my staff, "okay, we're going to have a blog now, I'm going to blog right now and we're going to be the best." And so within like a week we'd added a blog to our website, set a schedule to figure out what we were going to do. And I can tell you with great honesty and sincerity that up until the day before we closed down we had one of the best newspaper blogs on the planet! I'm sure. I mean we had original GLBT content; it was an incredibly good blog. We had two publications: we had a print publication that came out twice a month and we had an internet publication that we worked at daily. And it was good. So I made peace with that. We were good, we were skilled, I did our Facebook page...

Our Facebook page was a very good way to interact very one on one with our people. We'd have trivia contests, we could sit there and talk back and forth, which, even though the blog had some capability, we had a blog post and we'd link it back to our Facebook page. So people would go to the Facebook page, see the blog post, jump over to the website and read it, and then come back to the Facebook page to talk about it. And so we integrated social media. I could have done it a little bit sooner, but we mastered it. We were doing good. Far better than The Oregonian or the Willamette Week.

CD: Are you going to continue..do you have a personal blog at all?

DAVIS: I have my personal Facebook page which has a lot of followers, I'm probably going to start a blog not because..I'm very good with the Facebook format because I can be very brilliant in that much space but one of my passions at *Just Out* was photography.

DAVIS: I'm very good with the facebook format, because I can be very brilliant in that much space. But what I have—one of my passions at *Just Out*—was photography and for the last few years I took almost all of the pictures, because number one: I could afford me, and number two: I mean, I just loved it. So I would go to all the events. So, I have my archives' photographs, so that wasn't something I could just turn over to the Gay & Lesbian Archives, because it's in media cards around my house, on my computer or stacks of CDs. So, I probably should, would, will set up a blog but it will largely be for the purpose of gradually transferring over my photo archives, because we lost a bunch of them on the *Just Out* website. We had to do a rebuild, we weren't able to transfer it over, and the plan was that we would always go back and gradually add back our old photos, and then that plan kind of went south. So, yes, I want to, it's very important to me to maintain the photos that I've taken since I went digital about six years ago.

CD: I think it'd be interesting if you started, like this is just my idea, little photo blog of just events around the community—

MD –Oh, I do, like yesterday I went down and watched the demonstration and I managed to get myself right smack-dab in the middle of it.

CD: The Occupy...?

DAVIS: Yeah, the Occupy Portland thing. So yes, so photography's very much an interest of mine, so I'm going to continue with the photography. And I didn't lose any Facebook people, I mean, it comes and goes a little bit, but I still have some close between twenty four or five hundred, so and I, you know, that's a good amount of people to have a

sphere of influence over, and I can attempt to keep that and grow that, and yeah, I still have my followers.

CD: I'll like you on my Facebook.

DAVIS: Oh, I'm very interesting, you should.

CD: I want to. I want to see it [laughs].

DAVIS: We have news, and we have wonderful conversations, and dialogues and stuff like that.

CD: You should work for Facebook.

DAVIS: Well, I've... I'm in, and in an around about way, I mean, there's a big seminar gonna be in Portland on May 2nd, to learn Facebook management skills. So, I'll be going to that. And then all you have to do is google "teach me about Facebook." I mean I spend an hour or two every night learning new things, so I have one client already, and another in the loop, and then Facebook changes every ten minutes just as soon as you learn one thing, it changes it. The new Timeline is going to change the whole configuration for the business pages, so, yeah. And a lot of small companies, they don't have people on staff. If you've got eight employees, you don't have anyone dedicated to Facebook management, so now I can learn it, and I can charge somebody to just, you know, if I've got a few people paying me a hundred bucks or so a month to keep their Facebook pages up, I just have to remember, I've got to disguise my voice so that all the pages don't sound like "Oh, that's a Marty page, I can tell where she is anywhere." So I have to learn different accents or something.

[Laughter]

GG: How are we doing on time?

DAVIS: I have a three-hour parking ticket, so I'm good.

CD: We got here an hour ago.

GG: Well, I guess I'll give you an opportunity... is there anything you were hoping that we would ask?

DAVIS: ...No.

[Everyone laughs]

DAVIS: There's probably a few things that I was hoping you wouldn't ask.

CD: Oh, did we ask those, too?

DAVIS: No, I went over the list. No, I guess I'm... what happens again with this? It's just... nobody's going to ever really...

CD: Well, we are literally going to just transcribe it and give a copy to the Oregon Historical Society, and it's going to be in the Gay & Lesbian Archives. Just an oral history.

DAVIS: Okay.

CD: Yeah.

DAVIS: I mean, basically, like I've said I've been... I've lived very transparently for thirteen years. And along the way I learned, no road rage, nothing like that because everywhere you go someone's going to see you. So, I mean, there's really not anything that I wouldn't answer and tell you about, because I would get, you know, every two weeks I would write a column that I would expose my weaknesses, my flaws, my whatevers . . . and people like that because there's nothing you like better than seeing somebody in worse shape than you. I'll always be remembered—as long as I'm remembered (which in this current society and day and age would be, I'd say, maybe another two weeks and then no one will remember me)—but, I'll always be the person that wanted Sam Adams to resign. That would be the big thing.

GG: Yeah, I was curious, actually, if you were going to make mention the Sam Adams issue. What, there was, of course, a lot of controversy about that.

DAVIS: Yeah.

GG: So what was your perspective on that?

DAVIS: Well, you know, if you're asking traditional questions like: “If you could do it differently, would you do it differently?” Nope. No, I wouldn't. I would still, to this day, feel that for the best, for the city at that time and, actually, for the best for him at that time that he should have resigned because, well, a great, large part of the gay community wants to say “Oh, it's just about sex. You shouldn't have to lie. You shouldn't have to, to... No one should have asked him the questions in the first place.” Well, that's not what it really was about. It wasn't about the actions, or it wasn't about that. It was the fact that he did choose to deliberately lie to the entire city and it wasn't like just Did-you-take-the-last-cookie?-kind of-lie, it was calculated, it was planned, it had depth. It was a lie. And, and he brought people into his office, myself including, and he sat down and he just lied to us. And I know his motivation, I mean, I know he was scared, I know he was fearful. I

know Sam, we're friends before all of that. But that doesn't justify what he did, and I will deeply never understand how so many people in my community are able to say "I'd rather have a gay mayor than an ethical mayor." I don't know why 'gay' trumped 'ethics.' And why there's not being books written about that. Why that's not being studied because that was really a dark, dark spot on the history of Portland's GLBT community.

I had death threats against me, I had, I had more hatred shown towards me... and at the same time I would go places and I would hear "[whispering] Psst! Psst! Over here," you know, and I'd go back behind the door and somebody would say "[whispering] I just want you to know that I agree with you, but could go go away so that no one sees me talking to you." You know, people agreed with me but they saw what happened to me and they weren't... our community was under attack. You were either with Sam, or you better just shut the fuck up. And it was not a good time in our community. And it really should be studied, researched, and written about. Portland showed bad behavior.

GG: Did you have much of a relationship with the mayor before all that happened, or...?

DAVIS: We were not buddies, but we were friends. One of my best memories of Sam, right after I, I remember, okay... Renee announced that I had bought the paper at the 15th anniversary of *Just Out*, and it was an event that we held at the Hollywood Theater. And I remember at that time Inga coming up, she was the then-reporter, and I made news editor, and she said, "Oh, this is great. Sam Adams is up in the front row." And I turned to her and said: "Who is Sam Adams?" I didn't know. I mean, I was that green in the community in that point in time he was still Mayor's... "Mayor's" [scoffs] Mayor Kat's Chief of Staff. But I didn't know who he was. And a couple weeks later, I got a phone call: "Sam Adams wants to have lunch with you." And at that point I knew who he was, so I met Sam. We met down at Higgen's Restaurant and he just wanted to know: who is this person? You know, that was going to own the Paper. And so, we met. We talked. And I must have been approved, because I never got called for lunch again. But, you know, he

was Chief of Staff, then he ran for Commissioner, then he ran for Mayor. We supported him. I was out.

I often felt my job was like I was running for office, because I was like, everywhere I was going: "Read us. Support us." It was like running for office, so everywhere I was, Sam probably was. And we became friends over the course of time, and then after that, then after the incident, we... I never felt uncomfortable around him. We've had dinner since a couple of times. I never apologized, because I don't feel it was necessary, it just was what it was. And he probably could have retaliated... no, he was never really a strong Mayor and it would have been so obvious. I kept that in mind: you know, if he hurts me it's going to be so obvious. And in a couple of months he won't be Mayor anymore, but he can't do anything to me because he can't do anything. But, I think he's going to have, you know, Sam's beat up and worn down. Both of us are beat up and worn down, so we don't have the energy to fight each other. And I don't think either of us ever wanted to.

CD: As you were saying... when talking about whether they would rather have a gay Mayor than an ethical Mayor, and it's like I want to almost play devil's advocate, not that I was saying "Oh, yeah. That makes sense." But I think it was, like you said, was that they want to see themselves in the community. It's never happened before, so...

DAVIS: Oh, it's very much that. And because Sam was so out there. I mean, and everywhere you'd go... "Oh, I'm going to a party." "The Mayor's there!" And you'd get to drink with the Mayor, and you'd get to party with the Mayor, and you'd have your picture taken with the Mayor. So it's a validation, just like, you know, our community still to this day, although it's starting to linger a little, if some, you know, athlete comes out as gay or some second-tier movie star comes out as gay, it's just like: the community is validated because Lance Bass is gay? Really? Yay, there's meaning in my life, Lance Bass is gay.

[Laughter]

DAVIS: But yes, it's a big part of that, because everybody felt invested in Sam, because we knew him. He was our friend, he was our buddy. He was who we knew, and that's what made it so very complicated, and we couldn't or weren't willing to separate out... the ethics and the integrity of the whole thing. It was just too much for people. And you know, every time there's... and, you know, I'm not making light of this, but something happens like at a school, and then the news reporters will always end the report with: "...And grief counselors are being brought in to deal with the students and the staff." You know, because little Jimmy got grounded or something like that. Grief counselors should have been brought in for Portland after the whole Sam debacle. And we never... the city was never given a way to deal with any of that. The city as a whole, the gay community, I mean, so much damage came out of all of that. So somebody... PSU needs a class. A dedicated class, to dealing with Sam Adam's Mayoral Term.

CD: You should be the professor.

DAVIS: I'll, four years ago, yeah... Sam Adam's legend. And I hope that he finds a great job in environmental activism or something like that and lives happily ever after. Because nobody could live under the stress that he's had to be under the last four years, too. And I also... once, we were having dinner, and I said "The comments... do you read the comments?" And he said: "Yes. I read them all." And no living human being could survive reading the Sam Adams comments on Oregon Live and things like that. I mean, he has not been treated as a human being for four years.

GG: Do you read any of the comments, then?

DAVIS: No. Oh, about myself?

GG: Albeit, about either.

DAVIS: Oh, I didn't . . . No, after in Oct . . . in December, well, I kind of got it by the way things happened. The Mercury was on vacation that week, so Sarah Merk didn't get a chance to come after me, and then, by the time she came back from vacation it was old news. And they just decided not to do anything with it. So, and Willamette Week was, you know, it was the death of a comrade, so they were actually fairly respectful, so there wasn't really an opportunity for negative comments this time around. I did not look at the ones up on Oregon Live. I was already in bad enough shape. So, yeah, I did not read the comments this time around. I just stayed on my Facebook page where I knew I was safe, because I don't let mean people in there. [noise] What's that?

GD: Is a vacuum, I think, I don't know.

DAVIS: That's the worst aspect of the Internet world, is the anonymity and the culture of hatred that lies in the minds of "commenters."

CD: Yeah, it's because they're so safe behind their monitor, they're so...

DAVIS: Yeah, they're safe. They just get to hide. They're just wretched, meaningless, numbing little lives where they just attack things that nobody would ever in their right mind say out loud or in public, and they just type them, and then they get published.

GG: Well, I guess on a bit brighter note, [laughter] what would you say was the best part of your experience?

CD: Let's end on a positive. Positive note.

DAVIS: The best part of my experience... I grew a personality, I'm not shy, anymore. Yeah, I grew, I turned into a person. I did find community. It does still exist. Even though I'm not

the leader of it anymore. There is still a place for me out there. And so now I get to decide, you know, I just want to take pictures still. And I do. I'll be going out tonight and I'll be taking pictures at Drag Race, you know, that's what I do. I'm the city's leading photographer of drag queens. And I take damn good pictures. And, so, yeah, the first two months, first few weeks were hell. Hell. And there's some triggers, and, and you know. And it'll take so long to get over that. But ultimately, you know, I was killing myself with the stress and the worry. And it was hard on my staff, we were overworked, underpaid, the... we never knew when it was going to happen; when were going to go broke. And then, that's not a happy work environment for people. So, my staff, actually, they all did fine. Half of them, most of them, went off to work for the new gay publication in town that started: PQ Monthly. My editor had just met a guy, and she was hankerin' to take off after him, anyways, so she did. So, the only one who got hurt... was me! But my staff, they were all able to find new work. And my freelancers all migrated over. Are you familiar with PQ Monthly?

[indeterminate sounds]

DAVIS: Oh, it's gonna be a monthly gay publication. So, there's going to be *Just Out* and this other paper. So now I just get to sit back and watch them battle head to head. Because there ultimately can only be one. But yeah, my staff, so, I'm happy my staff was able to bounce back. And my columnists, that... whom I found and raised and mentored... Their voices will remain on for a little while. So, I forgot the question again. Oh, we were looking for a happy note? Yeah, you know, pretty soon it will be spring and it wont be so darn cold and I will have more time this summer, and my dog and I can go do things and wont be on such a short leash. So, I guess that's the happy note. I'm retired, I didn't want to be retired; I lost my paper, I didn't want to lose my paper. But hey, I've got my Facebook.

GG: Anything else you'd like to wrap up with? Any other thoughts?

DAVIS: No. No, that's about it, I guess. If you ever start your own business, you know, just watch the warning signs. And, and, and you have to accept that at some point you have to put logic and sense ahead of emotions and passion. Because business ultimately has to be about business, and if I had shut it down a little bit sooner, I wouldn't be facing pauper prison. But I served a lot of people for a long time, and the paper meant a great deal to a great many people. So, maybe that last three months, if we helped some kid coming out, if, if we were able to give a life ring to somebody, then we were doing what we were supposed to do. And we would get those messages. We would get those notes. And it would be good. Somebody would actually take the time to say: "This meant something to me, thank you." And so now I learn how to write press releases. And find a new career at 62. Didn't want to be finding a new career at 62, but you know, hey, I'm still alive.

GG: Well, you certainly have our best wishes—

DAVIS: —Well, Thank you.

GG: And I guess that concludes the interview. Thank you very much.

BJ: Yes, thank you.

CD: Thank you.

DAVIS: And thank you for letting me be a few minutes late. And I shall go home and take care of my dog and I will be at Red Cap Garage tonight.

CD: Taking picture of drag queens...!

DAVIS: Taking pictures of drag queens: it's Genderfuck Night!

**[End of Session 1]**

**[End of Interview]**