

**Jules Friedmann  
Narrator**

**Samantha Aamot  
Interviewer**

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Jules Friedmann      **-JF**  
Samantha Aamot      **-SA**

**SA:** Can you just state your name and say you give me permission?

**JF:** Yes, my name is Jules Friedmann and I'm authorizing you to use whatever I have to offer here.

**SA:** Thanks. Just tell me a little bit about your connection to Women With a Point.

**JF:** It began with me working in a gay bar. I became aware of all the things that were going on in the 80s. HIV was just about to terrorize everybody. It got me involved in certain organizations that were around at the time including the Aliveness Project. I worked with them for about fifteen years.

**SA:** They were based in Minneapolis?

**JF:** South Minneapolis, yes. They're a drop in center for people living with HIV and AIDS. From there my name kind of got spread around a little bit and I got involved with a few other organizations, including with Sue Purchase who had just started Women With a Point. She was working with about a thirty thousand dollar a year budget for herself and all the product she was distributing. She asked me to help her get squared away. I think we may have had to file for a 501(c)(3) at that point. We wanted to grow the organization so she could draw a real salary and we could become much more helpful in the community distributing needles which had to be done in the dark of night. Everybody was looking for distribution points. We wound up doing quite well with distributing the needles. Sue was incredible at making contacts with the people who needed it and being available twenty four seven. We realized that we could really expand just on this basic vision that she had for the organization. I want to say hello to her.

[Side Conversation]

**JF:** So from a one man show that she was we turned it into, we found funding through the CDC. We had to jump through a million hoops there. We trained in Georgia; I think that's where the CDC is.

**SA:** Atlanta.

**JF:** We grew the organization up to about seven or eight people, maybe more. We were distributing needles like crazy. Information, not just needles. It was the information and the education portion.

**SA:** She was in charge of bringing that all together.

**JF:** Right. At one point we had so many people we were able to designate different roles for people. It worked out a heck of a lot better than having everything on her shoulders. It amazed me that we went from servicing, so to speak, a couple dozen people in the beginning to hundreds maybe thousand. It was just incredible. People were very happy to get the education and to try to move on with their lives.

**SA:** You mentioned another organization but wasn't it one of only a few that were really modelling harm reduction.

**JF:** Yes. The Aliveness Project was more based around HIV but as that grew from a volunteer organization, I think '85 it was started, to a several thousand dollar organization with all kinds of different services that they offer to people who get to come there for free. But you have to have HIV or AIDS, that's a high price to pay. They get free services and education. It's been a great thing for them. I really enjoyed working there and I still volunteer for them periodically just because it's a place where it's empowering them to get back into life. That's kind of what went on with Women With a Point as well. We had some people who were on the outskirts of society and it helped.

**SA:** Just talk a little bit about what exactly you did with Women With a Point.

**JF:** Just administrative work. I did their accounting for them. I can't remember if we had to go through the 501(c)(3) filing. Any of those processes were long processes, the same with the CDC in determining whether we would be funded by them and then how the funding worked and the reporting. They were just going online at that time themselves. It was learning all new systems too.

**SA:** The funding was mainly for HIV and not...

**JF:** I'm not completely sure about that. Sue would be a better resource. I was just on the outskirts of everything.

**SA:** It sounds like you really did a lot of work though, you were part of it. You say you were working at a gay bar and that got you involved in harm reduction or needle exchange or what exactly? What exactly brought you to the organization?

**JF:** Interesting question. I don't know where to start or stop. I'm not gay but there was a bartending job there. I was the only straight guy in the place in the 80s. The place where I worked was jam packed. Thousands of people came through the doors every night. Somehow

they accepted me and I certainly accepted them. I loved the fact that they were so open and accepting about all the different varieties of people that were in there. That was my introduction to the gay lifestyle. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Becoming friendly with quite a few of the customers there took me off in different directions. A couple of customers wanted to open a hair salon. I helped them get involved in financing and administrative. I seemed to understand that, I don't know. I don't have a degree in it. I helped. That led to my working there for eight years, I started seeing more and more people missing periodically. There was a huge problem in the 80s; there was this mass murderer who was going around strangling people. There were the people who developed HIV. It was pretty bizarre. They would come in one day and they're okay and they come in the next day and there's something wrong obviously. They'd tell me about it. They'd talk it through and see if there was any information I could get. I started picking up information on where to settle which I thought was pretty good. It was helpful to them and it felt good to me. Over the course of time I lost a lot of friends to AIDS, dozens and dozens. It was a godawful time until they finally figured out the drug situation. It also seemed to start affected people outside of just the gay community.

When I got involved at the Aliveness Project they hired me for two dollars an hour to do their bookkeeping for them. I started to discover they only had a couple hundred members and as I stayed there and as everything grew there, there's a thousand, fifteen hundred members now. Of those members the landscape changed completely from an all gay group to African Americans, Hispanics, straight people, kids, entire families with kids. It was created to become a drop-in center for people to get them out of their house. Otherwise they get this diagnosis that they've got HIV or AIDS...

I was actually the executive director temporarily there. I had this one guy come in and he couldn't even talk when he first came in the office. He was in tears. They sent him down to me because nobody else could deal with him. He had just been told by his dentist that his blood test came back and he was positive. That's all they said to him. They called him back on the phone to tell him that. He figures, "I'm a dead man." He couldn't deal with it. We just talked through it with him and let him say whatever he wanted to say. That story really kind of sticks with me as well as one other I can remember. A guy was very straight. He just got his diagnosis. He was healthy as can be and then within a week he died. He essentially worried himself to death. He was so stressed out by it and couldn't handle it at all. The Aliveness Project was a drop-in center for people to get them out of their house and back out in society. We'd feed them. We had meals there, massage therapy, acupuncture, dog grooming, and haircuts.

**SA:** And needle exchange.

**JF:** We didn't do needle exchange there but through them we would get referrals. We had quite a few addicts we would refer to Women With a Point. That's how I got connected with Sue.

**SA:** It sounds like as a bar tender and with those stories that talking to people is a huge part, just listening and supporting.

**JF:** It just sucked me into the group. I fell in love with the people that I worked with, the customers. I just thought they were so open and appreciative that everybody that came in. There

was very little prejudice. There were spats of course but there was no prejudice there. It was the best world I'd ever been in. I think way back then I decided I just wanted to give something back.

**SA:** What's your educational background?

**JF:** Two and half years of college and then I dropped out, so not much.

**SA:** And you're from Minnesota?

**JF:** I'm originally from Missouri.

**SA:** What brought you up here?

**JF:** After I dropped out of college I was roaming around the country, especially in the Midwest. I got to Chicago and lived there for about six months. I finally decided it was too dirty for me and I had to leave. I started driving and I wound up on the freeway that brought me here. It was the middle of winter and I should have been scared stiff of it but it was great.

**SA:** Anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

**JF:** You got me talking about more things than I thought I'd be talking about. I was just on the periphery of all of this. I was trying to help from the outside.

**SA:** You really did. It sounds like you did a lot.

**JF:** A very feel good part of my life.

**SA:** What do you do now?

**JF:** I still do administrative work and accounting work. I work for a private firm. I couldn't care less if I got fired or quit tomorrow. It's a job.

**SA:** Thank you so much.

**JF:** Thank you.

[End of Recording]