

LGBT in Detroit Oral History Project
Detroit, MI

Tim Zazo

Interviewed by
Molly Banes
December 11, 2018
Detroit, MI

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Information Sciences
Kim Schroeder, Instructor
Fall 2018

Brief Biography

Tim Zazo was born on November 12, 1965 in Taylor, MI. He spent most of his childhood and into his teens in Taylor until relocating to live with his father upon the death of his mother. He recalls moving out of his father's home and back to the metro Detroit area, coming out as gay, and his subsequent work life in the gay bars and clubs of metro Detroit, as well as Atlanta. He is currently the general manager of the historic Menjo's Complex in Detroit and has been managing and promoting for most of his adult life.

Interviewer

Molly Banes is a master's candidate at Wayne State University pursuing a master's degree in Library and Information Science with a focus on Archival Administration. This interview was conducted as a part of one of her classes, but she hopes to continue giving a voice to the voiceless and opening up history for more than those in the textbooks.

Abstract

The interview discusses Tim's childhood and coming out during the summer of 1984. Tim talks about spending the summer at the Dunes campground in Douglas, MI and of his entrance into the glamorous and excessive world of the gay bars and clubs in Detroit upon his return. He discusses the wild, fun stories as well as the other side, the AIDs epidemic and the LGBT community's response to it. Tim talks about the rise and fall of the "gay bar" and the community's fight for acceptance and all that has come with it.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on the audio interview or transcript.

Original Format

Digital WAV audio file, 1.33 gigabytes.

Transcription

Banes: Okay, so now we are recording in both, in all three, locations. Okay, so we are here today with Tim Zazo and can you tell us when and where you were born and

here today with Tim Zazo and can you tell us when and where you were born and where you grew up?

Zazo: I was born in Detroit, Michigan on November 12, 1965. Um, I grew up in Taylor, Michigan all throughout my childhood until my mom died when I was 16 then things kind of got moved around.

Banes: Okay...

Zazo: Um, I ended up moving uh out to Carleton, Michigan when my mom died to stay with my dad to stay with dad which wasn't necessarily a good thing because I was basically a momma's boy. My dad was a good guy, but basically, we were just not compatible or whatever and, uh, the minute I was 17 and a half or something like that, I moved out and back to Taylor. Uh, but the year I came out was the summer of '84. The first time I ever met a boy. Uh we ended up dating for a few years. Um, that relationship ended because he was a drinker and he was abusive and because I'd never been with anybody, I just figured this must be normal. So, but then I, I was somewhere...where was I? I was somewhere out in public like a gas station or something like that and I remember a guy...I'm clueless, even today, if somewhere were to hit on me or something like that but if people were to hit on me it would go right over my head. I don't read body language or gestures, it's just *gestures overhead*, you know?

Banes: Right, right. *laughter*

Zazo: So, I remember this guy he was standing there at one pump and I'm standing at the other pump and I'm just pumping my gas, you know. And this guys just staring at me and staring at me and I'm thinking, this guys a serial killer or whatever, and so but anyway so I ended up getting together with this guy. Well, this guy had a whole group of friends. There was, uh, their names were Ron and Jack, Ron recently passed away. He worked for Kelsey Hayes down in Belleville and they had a big beautiful house in Belleville, and it was tucked back in the woods, so it was like the perfect gay oasis. And they had a, they were like older men. Ron just passed away, he was 73. So, I'm 53, so yeah, so they were like 20 years older. So, they were like middle aged men at the time, we were like twenty-nothing. We were running all over their houses all of the time, they had a hot tub and just a house that's huge with rooms all over the place. It was a lot of fun, there was like a whole group of every year or two this, uh, new wave of friends would all of the sudden just pop up. Like somebody would bring somebody else that had just come out and blah, blah, blah. I remember that year we went to, uh, there's a gay campground over on the other side of the state called XXXXX? We went over there, they had a trailer over there. Now remember, it was the 80s, so everything was mauve. The campsite only consisted of ten trailer slots, now it has several hundred. Uh, but it was very primitive because it was like a Christian campground at one time and there was like a little playground and stuff like that. But we ended up staying there for three months. So, my entire summer I spent at that gay campground, but then at night we would go into Douglas, which is right up the road on Blue State Highway, and we would just party our life away at the Dunes resort. So, I remember that because, I wasn't even old enough to get in, but because the doorman thought I was cute, he'd let me in. I was, oh, maybe like 19 maybe? Yeah, I wasn't really old enough for bars.

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Banes: And this was the summer that you came out?

Zazo: Yeah, this was all in the same summer. I spent that entire summer at the gay campground. And it was just like bustling with activity and all kinds of stuff. But then I remember, at this point, I'd still never been to a gay bar. The first gay bar I went into

was actually located about a mile from here. It was at & and Woodward. Now I'm not sure if you're familiar with the configuration of things, of how things around here, where they were located. This actually was a very, this was the gay hotspot.

Banes: In Palmer Park...

Zazo: The year I came out in 1984-85, there were 51 gay bars in the city limits of Detroit. We had more than Chicago. And they were thriving. I mean you could go to a gay bar on an afternoon like this, every gay bar was packed. Now, just what everybody does is they go out and drink and have food, because that's what Mothers Against Drunk Driving started 30 years ago, which is fine, but it also had an alternate effect on the nightclub industries and stuff like that. But now, I bet you are your friends, that's what you do. You might catch an occasional concert at St Andrew's Hall or something like that, but not in the 80s. In the 80s, everything was excess. Lots of drinking, lots of drugs, lots of sex. All that stuff happened and what anybody has told you thus far, whatever they said multiply it by 10 and then you're closer to how much shit actually went down. So, um, the first bar I ever went into was at 7 and Woodward and it was a gay bar called the E-ring. Because of security issues for gay people, because think about it, this was a time when gay bashings were quite regular, no bar had windows and you didn't enter through the front of the bar, you always entered through the back. So that way they could keep it more self-contained and you know keep an eye on that kind of thing. But I remember walking into the E-Ring and it was like this cool, how do you put it? It has like rafters and looked like a saloon and it just like old, but old in a cool way. And it had like this really high ceiling, this big vaulted ceiling, with wood beams everywhere but as soon as you walked in the hallway through the backdoor, as soon as you got into the bar and it like opened up, right there to your left was a Peterbilt truck, a cab of a Peterbilt truck. And there were stairs leading up to the truck, so what guys used to do was walk up the stairs and go into the truck to have sex.

Banes: Why not? It was there!

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Zazo: Absolutely! But that was the first gay bar I ever walked into, but the second gay bar I ever walked into was the R & R Saloon, on Michigan Ave next to the McDonald's. That place, that family, *laughter* maybe the brother, probably Edward you'd have to talk to. They opened that place in '77 but anyway that family, that bar was something else. It was a hodge podge, it was like the divest of dives, where nothing was judged. It didn't matter what you did.

Banes: Was there judgement at the other bars? Or the clubs?

Zazo: Yeah, like this one here. This bar used to do some horrendous things, like anytime black people would try to come in here. They'd go, 'okay, show us 27 pieces of ID' yeah, they'd pull that stuff. This was Bougie. You've got to remember, all the people that now populate Royal Oak and Ferndale, all those people lived here. All of this historic area, all of Palmer Park, all 3300 units was all gay people from like the late 60s up until about the, the fall off really started to happen about 87, 88, 89, right around there. There was a killer, that, uh, the violence was increasing because the auto-industry was in the shitter, so uh people were just leaving the city in droves. There was no money to be had so the crime just skyrocketed, and it was crime against the gays. It got bad, and it was like you know, not just the break-ins. This was a very walking-friendly area and given the fact that it was like all gay people, there was no problem.

Banes: Right, it was safe.

Zazo: You know, from here to where I said the first bar I walked into at 7 and Woodward, there were more than 20 gay businesses, just in this area. This is where everybody spent their Sundays, starting with the end of this structure. That used to be, back in the 70s, that was Don's Beef and Ale, and then in the 80s and 90s it was the Glass House. We're talking about guys in Polo shirts, flipped up collars, all their little pleated pants. You know, we're talking about that kind, their hair's all puffy and stinky cologne, you know, bougie bougie bougie, that kind of thing. But they did used to have a wonderful brunch. They had live pianists, and there was a big patio just blown out with flowers. It was very high end, you know bottomless mimosas and spinach quiche. But yeah, no, it was very, very bougie. But the R & R was just like the armpit of hell, it really was. But it was never uninteresting, ever. I actually, years later, I actually ran the R and R.

Banes: Really?

Zazo: Yes, I was the manager there for four years? Four years, I think. That's about all I could take. Well, the owner was a crackhead. Well, the owner is actually Ruby Neferatis, she was not a crackhead but she overindulged her son, Billy Neferatis, who was a crackhead and still is. Anyway, but that place was just...they used to do, if it was your birthday. What did they call it? I never wanted to participate in it, because I thought it was just a nasty habit. I saw someone do it once and just thought, "yuck." But what they would do was they would take somebody, they had a downstairs...has anybody else talked to you about the R and R?

Banes: No...

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Zazo: So, the R & R was a leather bar. Leather, hardcore, fetish, whatever. But it was just like "bring your sideshow, whatever you've got, bring it." So, for people's birthdays, what they would do was bring you downstairs, take a bottle of champagne, shake it up, pull your pants down, stick it in your ass, and just *pop* let it go. Well you'd instantly become drunk, you know. And then they'd do things to you. And it was just like 'well, that's no way I want to celebrate!' Seriously, nobody's talked to you about the R and R? My god...

Banes: No! No...

Zazo: Well, I ran the R & R, it was three years. From 2007 - 2010. When I took it over, it was almost dead because they'd closed down Michigan Ave. There was like a two-year period where they literally closed down Michigan Ave from 94 going up towards like Rosa Parks or something. They decided to fix the tree, which is a good thing, but they tore up the whole street at once, so it was just like a nightmare for customers to get to any of these businesses. They were, I think, they said at least half the businesses on Michigan Ave closed when they did that. And the R & R was not far behind. It wasn't that people didn't want to go there. They couldn't get there. Well as it happened, the timing of when I got there was also when they completed road construction. So now they needed to have some kind of comeback of sorts, or something.

Banes: Right, to make up for those years.

Zazo: Right, well like Tempest is a drag queen, Torchy is a performer, and there's historians or whatever, my strength is promotion and that's what I did. I brought that bar back through the strength of promotion. Hmm...the things I saw in that bar. Well I mean, the owner, the owner's son Billy Nefaratis, I mean to give you an example, I told

you he was a crackhead, but he mugged me probably 6 or 9 times or something.

Banes: What?!

Zazo: Well, when you're a crackhead you're trying to get money! So yeah, he mugged me in the bar. But that was always an ongoing thing, uh Ruby, she was a woman like no other. Nobody gave her nothing, she worked for everything she had, and I think that if she were a man, they'd be patting her on the back going "Great! You're a great business man!" But because she's a woman, she a "bitch." Do you know where the Marble bar is at?

Banes: No

Zazo: Okay, it's on Holden St right about where the college is, there's a Henry Ford or something. I think it's like 94 and Holden. But that used to be the original, The Eagle, that was Detroit's leather bar. Detroit had probably four significant leather bars, of any real measure and they would have been, in this order too: First and foremost, Interchange. Second, the Eagle. The Interchange and the Eagle were the same building, just at different time periods, so in the 60s and 70s, it was the Interchange and then, uh, early 80s until 2010, it was The Eagle. Then put R & R, then Chains. So, those were your main bars. But that takes me back to a story about the Interchange. I remember one of my first times every going in there, now if you go in there now, you can look it up online, The Marble Bar, has these huge ceilings because there's like an upper nest. It looks very elegant and that kind of stuff, but when it was the Interchange and the Eagle, it had this rustic, manly, like Railroad Crossing signs and there were pictures of half-naked guys on the wall, that kind of thing. But there was a great way to tell when somebody was local, or they were from out of town.

Banes: How was that?

Zazo: Because there was a trapeze above the bar and then there would be various young men that would get up on the trapeze and they'd be swinging back and forth. Now, the locals, would take their cocktail glass and put their hand over the top of it. Well, the visitors from out of town would be "oh, cute little show...guys swinging around" but what he was doing was, he'd start swinging and going back and forth until almost where he was going to completely touch both sides. He would start masturbating and if you didn't know what was about to happen, well the out of towners eventually would hear like a little *plop*!

Banes: In their drink!

Zazo: Yes, oh! And here's something for history. He was a sideshow, and probably nobody else remembers him. He was exclusive to the Eagle. There was a point in the 80s where it was almost like the light switched. There was point when I first came out and it was like, didn't matter. Do whatever you want. Live life, have fun, do as much drugs as you want, have as much sex as you want. Nothing bad happens, just keep going, have fun, you know fun, fun, fun. Well this guy, his name was Tic Tack. He used to come to the Eagle and the Eagle was like a wood bar, you know, like an old rustic looking wood bar, and he would sit up at the bar and start drinking shots of whiskey and then, nobody really paid attention to him, he didn't really talk to anybody, he wasn't that kind of guy. So, we're all over there talking, laughing, bullshitting, that kind of thing. As the night wore on, you'd look over and see him, he'd be over there *slumped* but then you'd look down, like down the side of the bar and what you'd see was...what am I looking at? So, you'd get top off your stool, you'd back up, walk behind him to see what was going on. What he had done was took roofing nails and a ball pin hammer that he'd brought with him, and he'd nail his nut sack to the side of the bar.

Banes: Oh my god...

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Zazo: This is no joke, this is what they called him Tic Tack. And he didn't bother nobody, but it was just the time. At the time everything was intense, so nothing was off bounds. So, it was like, okay, whatever. But the funny part is, so after we'd close up the bar. When you close up the bar you don't just automatically walk out the door, you've got to wind down from your night. So, by the time we'd walk out it was 4, 4:30, 5 whatever. We'd since sent him home, pried his nuts off the bar or whatever. We'd come out to lock up and there he would be, nailed to the side of the building. Yes, Tic Tack. But the reason I ventured off on that, I just had to mention that because I'm sure nobody else remembers him, but he existed. He was a real person.

Banes: What happened to him?

Zazo: He eventually passed, yeah. But I don't know if I can say this, a certain bar owner and her offspring used to...there was a building across the street from the Eagle, and they used to run hookers and guns out of this building. Yeah! You know, I'll tell you what. The owner, Ruby, the owner of the R and R, it wasn't the only bar she owned. She owned Ruby's Flaming Star, which became the R and R because her son, Billy, at 16 walked in and said, now she had this bar for 20-25 years as a hillbilly straight bar. He walked in and he goes, "alright, all you motherfuckers out of here. This is now a gay bar."

Banes: Sure! Was he gay, or why did that happen? #00:24:43-6#

Zazo: He was gay and the baby and she overindulged him, right. That's why he is the way he is today. But, she uh had another bar called Cock Trap, and that was located at Greenfield and Tireman. Was it Tireman? No, not Tireman. Joy Road. Greenfield and Joy Road. So, but that place also a hole in the wall, interesting, but she used to...she owned the building and she would lease it to whoever wanted to have their own bar or whatever. She would have people come in to lease the bar and they would lease it and they would be so excited, and they'd make all these renovations, all this new stuff. Well Ruby always put this thing in all of her leasing agreements, of "Rent is due at midnight," or whatever the time was, but I believe it was midnight. And then, what she would do was, she would wait until the money was due and she'd come in at 12:01, she'd walk into the build, "Got my rent?" "No, let me get it to you tomorrow." "No, no, no. I've got a lease, it says rent is due at midnight. You ain't got my rent, get out." She did that 32 times.

Banes: Over the span of how long?

Zazo: Over the span of probably, probably about 10 or 12 years. Yeah, I mean, every person that took over that bar, they'd put in new fixtures, new bar, new sound equipment, all that stuff. That's what I'm saying, were it a man, it would be "Wow, that's a shrewd man. That's a shrewd businessman." But she was a woman. She wasn't accepted like that. There's a legendary list of bar owners from the 70s and 80s and you can go down it, there was Carl from Backstreet. Tony Garneu from Gigi's. Bruce Detloff from the Gold Coast. You had Andy from the Woodward. You had Laura, she was like the power lesbian. Who am I leaving out? There were tons of bars, but not every bar owner was legendary. But there was a small group of them and they literally ran the city. They had like their own, the Detroit Bar Guild. Okay, how much tape do we have? Basically, what it was, it was a small group of people that made the decisions for a large group of people...like it was a cartel. That's what it was. So, they all got together

in a room and they divided up Detroit, of what they wanted. Oh, and Bookie Stewart. Bookie Stewart is the grandfather, The Godfather of everything here in Detroit. He started the gay stuff in the 50s and 60s and moving forward. All those people that I mentioned previously were all about Books Stewart. He's the one who laid the groundwork for everything. So, he got everyone in a room and decided, "okay, there's a lot of money to be made here, who wants what?" So, they started chiming in. Bruce said, I've got a license for strippers, so I'll take strippers. Tony Garneu said, well I like young boys. I'll be the chicken bar. Chicken, drag, whatever. Then you had somebody chime in, I want the leather, I want this, that kind of thing. But, the Bar Owner Guild, they weren't nefarious or nothing like that. They didn't do evil things or whatever, but make no mistake, they were no joke. I mean, Bruce Detloff and Laura...there's been more than a couple of people that ended up dead on his front lawn, and he'd call the cops and go "There's some dead guy out on my lawn." Then they'd come question him and it'd be "I don't know anything about it, I woke up and maybe it's the neighbors or something? He was just there." "Well, okay" I think he did that three or four times, right.

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Banes: How many dead people show up on your lawn?

Zazo: Right, you've got some weed killer or something on there. But now that's got me thinking of other things. Nobody has ever asked me about this stuff, so I never think about it. I know it's there but... the Detroit Bar Owner Guild, what they did do, one of the big positive things that they did, was they used to hold a big annual production. And all the bar owners would get in drag and all their friends, employees, all their everybody would just throw money at them. Well all the money that all the bar owners brought in, you've got to remember this was the 80s, it's not like today. Like this business is still profitable but you've really got to crunch the numbers and watch what you spend. We're talking about a time, like 1985, when it was \$5 or \$10 to walk in the door here. On a Tuesday night there'd be 500 people in here. I mean bar owners, I've seen them walk out with just *thick hand signal* Tony Garneu from Gigi's, which by the way is the third bar I ever walked into and that's the one I stayed at. It fit me, it was west side. I grew up in Taylor, this was on the edge of Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, stuff like that. So, it was like all the people I knew from downriver, that's where we all went. It was just, we were all young. We were enamored with the drag queens, we wanted to be go-go boys or waiters, we just wanted to be a part of it. So, but they would do, basically it would be all these bar owners would have all this money. Just gobs of money, it was insane how much money they would make. But the show, they would take the money and then they would donate it to like children's charities and stuff like that. Nobody benefitted from any of it, except the charity, every penny. Because they had so much money, it was like fuck it! But it was also a way of bringing the community together, it was not uncommon back in that day...see now a days, nobody knows who owns a gay bar nor does anyone care. But there was a time in the 70s, 80s, up into the 90s, it was like a prestige thing. It was like you were rockstar and these guys, most of them were not much to look at and so on and so forth but I mean, they welded. Some of them wielded power, but like Tony Garneu was a very very down to earth, understated man. He could basically do whatever he wanted but he didn't act like that. But there were other ones, I don't want to say who they are because you don't want to talk negative about people, but a contrast would be Bruce Detloff. Bruce Detloff, he was a character in himself. I would say he was probably about 6-foot, 6 foot 1. Totally bleached blonde, there's a picture of him over at the Gold Coast now that hangs, one side is called Gold Coast the other side is called Sin. If you walk in on the Sin side and look up to the left, you'll see a huge picture of a platinum blonde guy with hands like this *props under face* diamond rings on every finger, because that was also a mark of the time. Now not all bar owners did it, but most of them did it. Again. Tony G didn't get into it but all the rest of them did and it's like they thought it made them look

like big shots, like Liberace! We're not talking a nice little tasteful ring, we're talking about big diamonds, like the Pope ring. So yeah, he was that guy. I don't think it's any secret, so I think I can say it now because he's been gone now for almost 30 years, uh, that he was a major supplier of cocaine, to a lot of the clubs in town. It was the 80s, everyone was doing it. Everybody had glass coffee tables and it wasn't because they were pretty. I mean they were pretty, but that's not what it was for. It was more, you were more likely to have many people in your life that either did cocaine either casually or to some extent or greater rather than to have friends that didn't do it at all. It was just what you did, just like today everybody does Red Bull, back then everybody did cocaine. Nobody thought anything about it. Made you feel good, gave you energy, lost a little weight...ba da ba ba, let's go dance. And the sex was great! I'm going to stay on my own timeline here, so I went to...I remember walking into Gigi's for the first time on a Monday night. When you walk in, they have like a...have you ever been there before?

Banes: I have not...

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Zazo: Well first of all, if you ever want to see a true, like really classy drag production, nobody does it better in the state than they do. I mean they, that is their bread and butter, that's what they've been doing for decades.

Banes: Forever? Yeah.

Zazo: That's a good show. But so, you walk in and there's a hallway and at the end of the hallway there's a curtain sitting there. So, you get to the end, you walk around the curtain, and it's like the whole room...on a Monday night, was just packed. Just packed beyond belief. The music's going, it's just like people, every kind of person you couldn't possibly imagine everywhere. I mean, I was all of like...at first I didn't think I was going to get in because I was like 19 but it just so happened that the owner, Tony G was walking by and saw me and, even thought I was 19 I probably looked like I was like 16 or 15, you know what I'm saying? And so, there's a heavy dose of perversion going on here with these old men, but so I was at the door and they're asking for ID and I'm like stammering, going slowly to pull out my ID, and Tony says, "Oh just let him in." And I just remember when I rounded that curtain, it was like a utopia. It was like all the legendary performers of the period, Tempest, Vanessa LaSalle, Renee Peters, you know just all of these different and wonderful, amazing people, and everything was just so vibrant and just like any other time I could ever imagine. But that ended up becoming my "home bar" but I was always looking for like extra gigs or whatever, so I went down to I was offered a job as a bartender at uh Roscoe's Junk Town Saloon and that was, you could see the ambassador bridge, it was that close.

Banes: Oh wow, was it in Southwest?

Zazo: Uh it was Junction, Fort and Junction...right on the corner. I don't even know if it's still there anymore, I haven't driven past that in years or whatever. But then I got an additional job at a bar in '88 that was way, way ahead of its time. That was Times Square, that was at Bagley and right off the people over station. Literally walk off the people mover and that's where we were.

Banes: And why was it ahead of its time?

Zazo: Because it was, it was a very Avant Garde, art nouveau, kind of design to it. It would be like something you'd expect to see in New York, not here and not in the 80s when there's nobody in Detroit, when Detroit was going in the crapper. But it was very cool in the fact that the walls were kind of like this silver paint that you've got on our

cool in the fact that the walls were kind of like this silver paint that we've got on our walls here, but then like half the wall was like decayed or broken away or whatever but there were huge floral sprays. It was just very, like the dance floor, like we have this here, they had like a four-sided corral and it was all like brushed stainless steel and stuff like that. The front of the bar had a two-story single paned glass window, which remember at the time we were all just kind of like *shocked look* *gasps*

Banes: A window!

Zazo: Well because it was just such an uncommon thing, I mean does it ever strike you as an oddity to walk into any business and go, they have a window? No, but that's what it was for us, it was an oddity, which by the way, when we did the grand opening night there...I was the second bartender ever hired there, but what we did on the grand opening, we put up a scaffolding on the window and closed the back so you couldn't see anything from the street and we had muscle dancers up on the scaffolding. The DJ was spinning, and it was just cram packed. But that was amazing, the owners of that club were Keith and Sandy and they both have passed, I think Sandy passed right around 1990-1991 and Keith probably about 5-6 years after that. I don't know, it's kind of like, it's an unusual thing to be able to reflect and talk about it and to talk about all the amazing, wonderful, crazy experiences and everything but then there's the other side of it was, I remember the first person I ever met that died of AIDS was actually the owner of this place. His name was Matt, Matt, Mike Crawford, I'm sorry. As a matter of fact, our 45th anniversary is this weekend and I've been doing a lot of research, pulling up photos and things like that. Yeah, his name was Mike Crawford. *long pause* It's weird because the way that AIDS hit the community, it was very gradual at first. It was kind of like, you know, this person was sick or all of the sudden this person isn't here. But then it started picking up speed and, I would say I don't know officially how or what time frames or whatever as far as like from a scientific standpoint, but I recall reading [about it]. I remember at the time that it seemed that first wave really hit around 1987, that people were infected, and they didn't know it because there was no test for it. You know we were all just having a good ole time and didn't know anything was wrong. That's when you first started noticing, there was this like by '87 it was clear. That's when it became a "national promise" and Reagan refused to mention the word and all these types of things. The it became, uh, I mean *long pause* in 19 months, I went to 22 funerals. And I, I would imagine anybody that any of you talk to will tell you very similar stories. None of us wanted to pick up our phones, because every time the phone rang somebody else had died. Funeral homes wouldn't bury us, dentists wouldn't see us, even general practitioners (said no).

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Banes: So, what did you do? What did you do for those services?

Zazo: The community, the community did what it was really good at. We figured nobody was going to take care of us, so we took care of ourselves. Now I'm not no pioneer or nothing like that, so don't get me in anything like that, but everybody pitched in. You know, like we used to do quilts. We used to do panels at Gigi's downstairs for the AIDs quilts. We'd get out the sewing machines that were used to make costumes and start making panels. We'd have people stitch and we'd talk about the person we were making the quilt for. It was kind of like a therapeutic thing. We'd find funeral homes, there were a couple that didn't have a problem. So, we were funneling everybody through that. Things like, the hospitals were just turning people away or dumping them out on the street or whatever. This was the time too when it was more often than not, that's why Michigan is still so closeted. Michigan has the oddest gay community, in that because they're just like, how do I put this? They're openly gay closeted?

Banes: Uh huh. Is it because, do you think acceptance in Michigan is lower than everywhere else?

Zazo: Yes. Religion here is very strong. Anyway, my friends and I call it a "Michigan gay." A "Michigan gay" is not like a "Chicago gay" or a "New York gay," it's a "Michigan gay." There's like this duality, it used to exist years ago and I, I'm clearly baffled as to why it still exists. But, for a lot of people, especially guys like my age and older their minds are just set in that, that thing. If they don't talk about it, people don't know. Well, I don't know how to break it to you, but your family's not stupid. You've had the same roommate now for 30 years! Hmm, hmm. But yeah, the first wave, it changed. I mean, people still kept doing things, like still acting like they did in the mid-80s, but I guess people had a sense of like 'oh, I'm invincible, that's not going to happen to me.'

Banes: Was there any decline in the clubs and the nightlife and things like that from fear of that? Or was it just still kind of going strong?

00:49:56

Zazo: No, no, no, the clubs were still pumping the thriving. I mean, the bar owners really stepped up. They were throwing money at all kinds of AIDS benefits. Bar owners were paying for funerals, they were doing all kinds of stuff. So, it wasn't, they were proactive. Uh, lesbians have always had something of like a contentious relationship with gay men. In the end, you know when it was gay men that were dying, it was the lesbians that we're taking care of us. But there was something in it for them, too, because they were looking.... gay men were getting all the attention, they were sucking up all the gay oxygen. You know, here's the whole gay spectrum, okay? Oh, the queer spectrum, we'll say that. Here's the whole queer spectrum, lesbians got about *that* (motions to a half an inch on the scale of 2 feet) much, gay men got THAT much. So, but they needed a voice. So, by them helping, taking care of dying men of AIDS, that brought them more into the conversation, which is backed up by actual facts and stories and individuals and stuff like that. But, uh, now for me, I moved out of Michigan in 1991.

Banes: Okay, where did you go?

Zazo: I moved to Atlanta, Georgia.

Banes: Why did you move there?

Zazo: I moved because, because that's the absolutely stupidest thing you do when you can't handle your drugs or your alcohol. So, I figured, a different location will be great! Well, it wasn't the location that was the problem, it was the abuse that was the problem. But I went to Atlanta, great city, and Atlanta was...I was there for about a year and it was great, thriving nightlife, all kinds of stuff, you know. It was like a new Oasis, obviously my habits went along with me. Then '92 came. '92 and '93 and that was when the second wave hit. So, to give you context, as a 53-year-old man, I am now on my third round of friends.

Banes: From the waves of AIDS?

Zazo: Right, so yeah, and it just became heartbreaking. I mean if I looked back and it's just like, there's...it's like everybody, your whole high school graduating class, they all went off somewhere and out of like those 500 people, there was only like 20 that came back. I mean, that's what it was like. I mean, it was just eerie. When I was in Atlanta, I remember there was this little guy, his name was Clicker Ron. Clicker Ron, he used to fan dance. You know, you see the gay guys get the fans out and start, all of that. He used to do that and he'd *click* so we called him Clicker Ronnie. I think he at the time

used to do that and he'd click so we called him Clicker Ronnie. Oh, he at the time there was something like AZT and AZT was toxic, it's pure poison, but it was extending, it was holding back the virus to some extent, so it was basically extending the life a little bit, but it was extending it to the point where it wasn't like, there wasn't any kind of quality life. It was just, you know, basically when your immune system breaks down...to see somebody, you know you can say "oh, the immune system...the immune system" but it's like saying you know, "the nerve endings in my body" well yeah you can say "nerve endings" but nobody really knows what those look like, unless you come from a science background. But, to say, to talk about an immune system you go okay, immune system, got it. But then you get to see what an immune system is, or what it isn't. That was probably one of the most horrifying things because they, you could see, in my mind it was like "okay, if this is what it's doing to you on the outside, what is it doing to you on the inside?" And I remember, sweethearts, just sweethearts, they were nurses, Bruce and Gary. They lived at Tireman and Greenfield, right around the corner from the Hayloft Saloon. Great guys, I mean I...Gary had been positive for years and he was kind of just chugging right along and his body just kept going. Bruce, perfect health. They would, but they were still engaging in the same...practices. Well, eventually, Gary, still kept chugging along but Bruce got sick. And I remember going over to their house one day, and uh, I can't remember what it was, I think it was a mutual friend who said, "you might want to stop by," so I'm like okay. So I swung over and knocked on the door and they let me in, well a friend of theirs let me in, Johanna, who was a friend of all of ours, but she let me in and she goes, "they're in the living room" and I walked in and I saw Gary, "Oh you know, hi how are you doing?" And I remember they had a little divider wall that you passed and then you were in the entirety of the room, but when I walked in, I saw Gary sitting over there and I walked towards him and then as I got in there, I looked over and there was Bruce on the left. To give you a, Bruce was probably about my height, very robust, you know nice blonde hair, great big smile. I remember as I walked in and I looked over and I just, the only thing that popped into my head at that moment was like "please don't look startled" and I said "hi, honey how you doin?" And he said something like hanging in there or whatever, and the reason I was so startled is because this robust man, I would say probably weighed about a hundred, a hundred and ten pounds when he was probably about two hundred pounds. But that wasn't even what shocked me because I had seen that was the typical trait was, when people with AIDS were that thin it wasn't that they were losing fat, they were losing muscle. But the part that startled me, that he had jaundice to the point, I can't, I don't even see anything as yellow as he was. I mean, he was almost like, like a fluorescent yellow his entire, his whole body and it was just, I just remember after I stayed for a while and I visited, and you know, chatted and everything like that. I remember walking out of the house, getting back to my car, and I just started crying and I don't know, it was just a thing. But going back to Clicker Ron, and that was in Atlanta, I mean, he got his social security/disability check at the beginning of every month. Well he had gotten some bad news from the doctor, and he told me ahead of time, he goes "this is what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna come in here on whatever day it was, because that's the day I get my check. He goes, 'we're gonna have a good time, were all gonna party!'" I think the doctor told him he had cancer or something...and he goes, I just want to let you know, I love you, you've been a good friend, but when I go home tonight this will be the last time you'll ever see me. So, what he did was, he did, he partied his ass off. He got, sucked some guys dick in the bathroom, he told me he did, that's why I threw it in there. He just, he...so the whole evening was weird because I knew how it was gonna end. So, it was, it was...we were closing up, it was probably about 4 o'clock, everyone was gone and David, one of Ron's closest friends, was working with me that night, we called him Dooreen, and I remember the phone ringing, David was downstairs or something like that. And I answered the phone and, um, the plan was that Ron was gonna go home after his night out, he had a friend that was gonna sit with him, he was going to take some pills, make sure nothing went wrong and that he just went to sleep. Once he went to sleep, he was told to call me. So, when the phone rang, asked for me. "Well yeah, this is me.

What's up?" "Just letting you know, he's gone, he's out of pain." And it was just, I yelled out for David, who called him over and I let him talk to him as well. Um, that wasn't the only time that ever happened.

Banes: That's what I was going to ask you next, that happened multiple times?

01:00:02

Zazo: Mhmm. Because even before, if you go back to like the years of like when I was, what I call my Gigi's years, from about 85-91, that 6-year period, a lot of the people that, a lot of the gay population from the 70s, I mean, they...none of these people thought they were doing anything wrong. They were doing what everyone was doing at the time, so it was normal behavior. So, these guys that, the sexual behaviors of the 70s and 80s, it was just an offshoot of the sexual liberation from the 60s, that's all it was. But what happened was, these guys that were like, were they alive today they'd be like 10 years older than me. But they were like teachers and firemen and whatever, um, there was...they started getting these diagnoses. I remember I have a picture and there's like 7 of them all sitting there smiling, just looking like normal guys. Every one of them were gone within a year.

Banes: Wow...

Zazo: Yeah, but I remember one of them, his name was Tommy. He was an elementary school teacher, his approach and a lot of people took it differently, his approach was "well fuck it, if I'm going to die, I'm going to die my way." He sold everything, cashed in everything, and I mean it was just one big party right up until the very last second. But that's how he chose to go out.

Banes: How did you perceive that? What was your feeling about these people deciding that they were going to be the masters of their own fate and they were going to do that?

Zazo: Because there was no other mechanism. I mean, I mean first of all I think it's your life and HIV or not, you know, it's your life live it however you want to. Just be a decent person, don't hurt nobody else. I think that's a basic rule to live by. But really, you know...

Banes: Was it hard for you knowing that they were going to do this?

Zazo: Well yeah, because you knew it was coming. It's almost kind of like, uh, kind of like premeditated murder. You know what I mean? But they were killing themselves.

Banes: But they were going to die anyways.

Zazo: uh, I mean I guess it was them, I mean, I guess we all want to go out on our own terms. I mean, how many times have...I'm sure everyone's sat around and said, "when I die, I hope I go quick" and stuff like that. It does something to you, it does something to you when you're a young, twenty something and you see your contemporaries repeatedly over and over and over again just, just I don't know, just like being erased. I mean I had a friend of mine, his name was Joe, and a gorgeous man, just a beautiful man, but a really nice person, and one of the ailments that he got was that there was some kind of infection that attacked his ankles, where it literally ate the bone of his ankles. That's what this is, that's what HIV is. Nobody dies from AIDS anymore, what you die of is your immune system drops to some level that opens your body up to any and all infections, even stuff that's been eradicated for decades, centuries. That just *snaps* brings it back, but what had happened was that it deteriorated both of his ankles to the point where he would just go like that and like a little floppy toy (with his

...to the point where he would just go into that and into a little happy toy (with the ankle skin). He couldn't walk, obviously. But it was, uh, things like that. Then the realism started sinking in, then you'd look around and I remember being paranoid, because I would like get out of the shower and I would turn all the lights on and I'd be checking everywhere because Copsey Sarcoma was like the one big noticeable thing that everybody was looking for. That was like the signal that that person had it. That was another weird layer too, because there was a lack of knowledge about it even amongst gay people, that while a lot of us were rallying around...it'd be like yeah, I'll buy the raffle tickets to support the thing or whatever, but I don't want to touch them. There was a lot of that, within the gay community. It wasn't like a huge number of people, but it was a certain amount of people. But, yeah, it's just they didn't change. Everything became purposeful from that point. I mean, I guess that there was still fun to be had but now it's just like a drag show wasn't just a drag show. Now every drag show was a benefit. You know, uh, going out to the leather bar on a Saturday night, there was always raffle tickets being flown around the bar because we had to raise the money for this person's funeral or that person's medical costs or keep that one in their home, all these different types of things. You know, we were delivering meals to each other and, just, I don't know. It was just, it just like shifted the gay culture. Like I said, when I was in Atlanta in 91, I mean, because they had already had their first wave. So, everybody was kind of like "okay, well maybe that was the worst of it" then in 92 when the second wave hit, then everybody was just freaking out all over again because they knew what they had already been through. After the second wave, then I think it was 95 or 96 that they came out with the first cocktail drug and I think that's when actual attitudes and hopefulness started to return. I think that turned the tide.

01:10:09

Banes: And when do you feel like the whole "safe sex" then kind of, was that at that point that it was like "okay, we need to be doing this?" Is it even today? Where did that play into everything?

Zazo: Oh, "safe sex?" Uh I remember the ad campaigns; did you ever see the ad campaigns? I always thought there was one that was really hot, there was this really good-looking guy, kind of a beach guy, standing there in a white Speedo and he had a condom (crooked in his mouth) biting on it or whatever, like condoms are sexy or something like that. I can't remember that what the slogan was at the time, but they wouldn't even let them advertise them on tv because it was so controversial. I'm sorry, what was the question?

Banes: So, did you see that kind of change in the community?

Zazo: What, condom use?

Banes: Yes!

Zazo: Yes, well...I tell you what, what would be a good representation. Have you ever seen the movie *Long Time Companion*? I recommend you see it, for a multitude of reasons. It does, it accurately and entertainingly, but accurately in a broad view, it really does cover the span and how things happened. It shows like you know how everybody was having a great time and it was super cool to be gay and everybody was beautiful and young and vibrant and all this other kind of stuff, but there was something looming and, it just, watch the movie. It's a really good, really good movie. Uh, it was kind of, I remember when condoms first started coming about, there's an organization in Dearborn and it's in Ferndale as well, called Access, and they started handing out condoms to all the bars for free. So, anybody could have access to a condom and I knew a lot of people, a condom was like a foreign concept. Remember, up until that point, a condoms primary use before that was to prevent getting a woman pregnant. It

wasn't, so gay men...

Banes: Didn't need that...

01:13:03

Zazo: Right, we weren't worried about getting prego. So, it was something of a sell, hence the marketing campaigns. They were trying to get gays, "hey save your lives!" "Slow the spread" or whatever, but then you had gay militants that were jumping up, which was.....*break*

Banes: Okay.

Zazo: I'm sorry, where were we?

Banes: We were talking about the gay militants and condoms.

Zazo: Oh, um...hmm...

Banes: And condom use...

Zazo: Oh, condom use. Oh, some people took it like you know, they're trying to stop us from having, the government is trying to prevent us from having sex or stop us from having fun. Looking back on it now, it's kind of a juvenile approach, you know. Nobody saying you guys can't have sex. You know, the government didn't know what to do so this is what they were trying to do. In some circles it was perceived like "oh the government's trying to stop us from having sex." Just like that bar I was telling you about, The R & R? That bar was closed down for two years because the Health Department went in there, there was so much sex going on in there. They went in there with those black lights and there was just semen everywhere, and they closed it down. They literally went in there with hazmat suits and all this other kind of stuff. They deemed it a health hazard, they closed it down. She sued the city, re-opened. She couldn't re-open at that location, so she bought a place down the street and opened there. But yeah, condoms were not like automatically embraced. I know some people just stopped having sex, or they'd like have sex but not touch, like you know what I'm saying? Mutual masturbation or something like that. But everything got very, you found yourself like negotiating, which is also a weird thing.

Banes: A new concept.

01:15:55

Zazo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know. It's, I think AIDs is heartbreaking for many reasons but for what AIDs did to the creative community of Detroit was absolutely devastating. We lost so many people and every community did, but I mean it's just like, like the theatre community here? Devastated. Drag queens, legendary drag queens, just gone. Just performers of all kinds. I want this one in the history, my best friend, him and I, we came out the same summer. He was 16, I was 18. His name was Darren Hough. We both, our first summer, we spent that whole summer together.

Banes: Okay, at the campground?

Zazo: At the campground, at the Dunes resort, at Gigi's. We were like glued to each other, it was our first year, everything was super exciting. Darren died when he was, let's see if he were alive today, I am 53, he would be 51, Darren died when he was 28 years old. It's a very unnatural thing to know, could you imagine knowing 100 22-year old's dead? It's just, unless it's a freak accident or something like that, it's very

unsettling. See now, at the other end of the spectrum t 53, now people are passing because we're getting older and things like that. But at that time, it was just...

Banes: You didn't expect to deal with death on that large of a scale.

Zazo: Yeah, I guess if you're looking at it like a split-screen, it was like a dual thing. Over here you had all the crazy wild parties and nightlife, and over here you had this very somber, serious epidemic that's just wiping us out and they were somehow coexisting at the same time. It was a very weird thing.

Banes: I can imagine that would be.

Zazo: Yeah, uh I'm not sure if that answered your question.

Banes: It did, yes.

Zazo: I have a tendency to drift. Because as I said, these are things that I have not talked about in years and years and years, and I hope that my friends that they've interviewed, they didn't paint themselves as some kind of saints. Those same people were also doing a mountain of drugs. I mean, I used to live with Tempest, yeah.

Banes: Really?

01:19:06

Zazo: Yeah, when I came out. Because remember, I told you my mom had died when I was 16. I moved out of the house I was 17 and a half, by the time I was 18 that's when I was taken to a bar or whatever. At that time, what everybody did was, people gravitated, literally moved in close proximity to wherever a bar was. There was no Ferndale, there was no Royal Oak. The only thing we had were the bars. That's the place that we were safe, we could be who we wanted to be, nobody judged us, we didn't have to worry about being attacked. None of that kind of stuff. So, all these little, like this place, Gigi's, and all the other bars were like their own little cities. As long as you were inside there you were safe. Uh, oh damn it, what was I going off of?

Banes: When you were 18? And Darren?

Zazo: Yeah, I'm trying to think.

Banes: Living with Tempest?

Zazo: Oh yeah, but oh so that's how it was. You know how as an adult you have two families? You have the family you're born with and the one that you collect along the way. Well, I mean, my family didn't really have an issue with me being gay, but I just didn't feel comfortable and safe enough with telling them, so rather than say anything, I just pulled back. So, what I did was, I got a job at Gigi's May 8, 1985. That was my first night, I was a waiter/go-go boy. I was a real career-gal! I don't even remember how it came about, but Tempest, she had a house that was maybe a half a mile from the bar. That was Warrendale, which was like Warren and Southfield. That whole area, it was a combination of Polish and gays, tons of gays. Because like I said, that's what people did back then. Gay people, because we didn't have like a gay specific district for the various sides of town. Well I mean over here was Palmer Park, so over there it was Warrendale. So, all the gays clustered in the Warrendale area, that was you were close to the bar. It wasn't just a bar, it was like gay church. You know, it's like you know with Black communities, churches are the important prominent things in their communities? That's what gay bars were to gay people. It wasn't just about getting laid or doing drugs or being crazy or stupid or whatever, that was a part of it absolutely, it was a big

drugs or being crazy or stupid or whatever, that was a part of it absolutely, it was a big part of it. But it was also a place where we came to commune, to grieve, to mourn the dead, to have benefits, to do socially active things. So, I mean, it's not as, you can't compare a gay bar to the local corner pub. It was so much more to the people that it served.

Banes: Like a hub of the community?

Zazo: Absolutely.

Banes: Do you think that has continued in the age of smartphones and apps? Everyone's in their own thing? Where do you see that community existing and upping up and coming back?

Zazo: They're not coming back. When I had that history (History in the D) thing earlier this year, I had another one in the Fall. I did one in June and focused on the Queens. I sat back, and I looked at it, and uh, I won't go on about who said what or who was in it or whatever. But the tone of it, to me, as I was sitting back as an audience member, that it sounds like old people bemoaning days gone by. The bottom line is, the whole... AIDs gave use a national face, whether it was a good one or a bad one. Smart PR people, most of those were gay-led, took the PR once there was a cocktail, they took the PR from that and they spun it into the national consciousness about just gays in general. Well that's where they first latched on to marriage and pounded that drum for 20 years until it became the law. So, I don't know, is it gonna come back? no. is there still place for gay bars? absolutely. Just like there's always going to be places where women want to call their own, a hangout for women. An African American leather organization that will be here this weekend, they want to be waited on, served, deejayed, they want the whole staff to be Black. Well I don't have that many, but you can take what I've got. The point is, we all want our little clubhouse or whatever, there's nothing wrong with that I don't think. Not unless you're excluding somebody because of their color or something like that, that's just wrong. I don't know, I get this question a lot and I mean a lot of the bar owners in this town hate me because basically what I've done is taken the size of this structure and used it to my advantage. So, and I've been consolidating the gay bars. There are 310,000 gay people that live in the metro Detroit area. Of those 310,000 I would imagine a fair number of those people go out maybe once a week. Roughly around 7-10,000 given the time of year, gay people go to a gay bar in the Detroit metro area and there are 12 of them. And that's not a lot of people. So, what? Did gay people disappear? Did they stop making gay people? And I've talked to I don't know how many Millennials, one: the Queens that were bitching that Grindr this and this and that or whatever, it's like it's not that. For years and years and years, this is all they had. Now, through all the fights, and all the getting gay politicians elected and laws and all this other kind of stuff. We fought for all this stuff, this is now the end result. The end result is now gay people feel comfortable going anywhere. You know, the tradeoff I...remember Michigan gay, you can go out and be gay in public and that company will cater to you, just don't act gay. And Michigan gays, they have no problem, so they'll absolutely do that. Will they come back? They do come back, through a lot of research that I've done on marketing and statistics and demographics and things like that. The two original reasons that people used to go to gay bars: one was to experiment with new music, which remember we're talking about the 70s and 80s so if you wanted new music, you had to go to a club!

Banes: You had to go find it!

01:28:39

Zazo: Or hopefully a record pops up on the radio! But I mean, we're talking like club music. Now you can just pull it up on your phone. The other was to meet men. You

don't need a gay bar to do that anymore. So, what's left? Well they did a survey of Millennials that said the two main reasons were that they wanted a chill environment where they could hang and talk with their hangs and the other was, they'll go out for events, big events. Have you ever noticed, how old are you?

Banes: 27

Zazo: Alright, so you're actually a Millennial. Alright, have you noticed how like a Tuesday is no longer a Tuesday anymore? A Tuesday is an event. Everything an event, it's just an oddity. I don't know what that is. I don't know why Tuesday can't just be Tuesday. You know what I'm saying? Like Saturday used to be an event and people use the word, there's two words that I wish people would stop using. Because every time they use them it just makes them less. It just, quit using the word "event" because not everything an event. Some things are an event, most things are just a party. That and "legend." Not everyone or everything is legendary. Did you ever watch that show "The Brady Bunch"? There was Alice. Now I'm sure she was a perfectly nice lady, I don't recall ever seeing her in anything else before or after that show. She was fine on that show, you know whatever. When she passed away, they referred to her as a legend. It just struck me like, she was a perfectly nice lady, but she's not a legend. Elizabeth Taylor? There's a legend. Bette Davis: legend. Ann B. Davis? Not a legend. You see the word slung around, like Tempest? Legend. She has been performing since 1976, oh god you got to talk to Torchy. The stories, the stories, the stories. Because he's older than Tempest by a shot, he could take you back and tell you some stories. One of my favorite stories from Tempest is that when she'd perform, one of the clubs she performed in, because they were men, but they were dressed as females they couldn't use either bathroom. Because you're not really a woman, so you can't be in the woman's room. But you look like a woman, so you can't be in the men's room. So, the club owner gave them a coffee can and put it in a corner and said, "that's your bathroom." Yeah, they had to pee in a coffee can. So, it's like okay, but yeah no they've got trippy stories. I'm sorry, I wander off.

Banes: No, that's perfectly fine! We're getting all these side stories!

Zazo: Well that's what I do, my brain just bounces all over the place!

Banes: Right, I mean do you? I guess we'll wrap up here, but do you see this, we've kind of touched on all the fighting, all the fighting garnered this acceptance and spread the community out, do you feel like there has been a loss to the community hub?

Zazo: I think what it is, is the people that have been in the community a long time or let me rephrase that, been in the gay bar business a long time, they see a certain, I detect a certain amount of resentment from them. And it's like, well wait a minute, you're the one that performed at all these political fundraisers and benefits and sold tickets and got on microphones and blah blah blah. They did what you said and, you know, if you didn't think, let's see I have the choice of spending my entire life existing in four walls, the same four walls, or I have the option of anything in the world. So,

Banes: That's what you're going to choose.

Zazo: So, people want options and gays are no different. Right now, what you're seeing is, if you want to see a perfect example of this have somebody talk to someone in the Black gay community because right now, they're going through what the white gays went through 10-15 years ago. They gay bars were doing fine right up until the internet, the social media stuff started popping up, right up until about 2005. About 2004-5-6. Talk to anybody from any bar or whatever, they'll tell you that's right about when everything started falling off. That's when the social apps popped up. Gay bars will never hold the prominence that they once did, so that's why I think it's cool that

will never hold the prominence that they once did, so that's why I think it's cool that you guys are doing that. Because a lot of these people that we're talking about, they didn't have kids. You know, once we're gone, their stories will be gone. Darren Hough, I don't know if anybody else will think to mention his name, that he was an amazing dancer, literally he would do somersaults *pew, pew, pew, pew* he was just amazing, he was incredibly athletic, amazing go-go boy, just he was just a bubbly little, I don't know, just an amazing person but nobody will ever know that.

Banes: Do you see, has a new community hub popped up or is it just kind of like all these resources that are out there? Like how now it's "outsources" to this or that, Like Affirmations or the resources in Ferndale? Do you feel like there's a loss of the sense of community with all of those resources?

Zazo: I get, the feeling I get...well first of all, there's not a whole lot of millennials that come in here. I'm not saying that it's like all a bunch of grandpas, but I mean I'd say 30-50 is probably our typical ages or whatever. But I mean, younger gay people, they just don't go to gay bars. They go to, do you have gay friends?

Banes: I do...

Zazo: Where do you and your gay friends go?

Banes: we go everywhere, there is not I mean...we go out to eat.

Zazo: How often do you go out to a gay bar?

Banes: Maybe once every other month.

Zazo: Right, see those gay people 30 years ago used to go to a gay bar 5,6,7 times a week. That's not the story now, so yeah there's still a place here but I, my friends, I keep telling them to quit pissing and moaning about "what was." You can still have an incredible time, you can still make a decent living, and you can still do things for the community. I mean this thing right here *motions to the building around us* is a 15,000 square foot structure. You know what? Do you know any of the history of this building? I'll give you a quick history lesson. Okay, at the end there, which is now The Eagle, in the 60s and 70s that was Don's Beef and Ale, then it became the Glass House in the 80s and 90s. On the other side of this wall, there is the theatre. In the 80s and 90s, that was a lesbian bookstore called, Chosen Books. In the late 60s and 70s, that was a bath house called the Scorpion Baths. Okay, this *motions to where we are* Menjo's has been here since 1973. Um, the name Menjo's is derived by the Jewish couple that opened it as a supper club back in the 30s. Their names, because this used to be a very affluent area, you've got all these mansions over there. Palmer Park, behind us here, this is where all the servants lived that took care of all the people in the mansions. But this was a very Bohemian Jewish couple and they came up with the name Menjo's by combining their names, so it was Mendelson, who was the husband, and Josephine. So that's how Menjo's got its name. Menjo's anniversary is 12/12/73. There's this thing next store, it's called Michigan's Gayest Mile and it started down there and took you all the way up Woodward. What was the next question? I drifted off, I'm sorry.

01:40:22

Banes: Well we were talking about community and finding a new sense of community and things like that.

Zazo: Well I think what it is is that people find what they need now, but they find it in micro spaces.

01:44:21

Banes: What do you see as the future, or what's next for the gay community in Detroit?

Zazo: I think, like everything else, it's going to break down into these little micro pockets. Let me tell you what I did and then you tell me if this answers your question. Five years ago, I took over this bar, it had shuttered. The Saturday night before I took it over, we had a \$1000 deejay playing and at midnight there were 12 people in the entire building, including the staff. Alright, so everybody keeps trying to fill a room, fill a room with you know "I want 500 leather people" or "500 bears" or whatever. Well, because everything was so fragmented, you know you've got two people that share an opinion on one thing and all of the sudden you've got a group. Everything a group. So...well then, I started thinking about it the other way, well if it's a puzzle and then the pieces are scattered, you just need to make a new puzzle. So, what I did was, I ain't got 500 leather guys or 500 bears, but what I do have: I've got 75 leather guys, I've got 80 bears, I've got 30 puppies, and I've got 40 people over here that like drag and so on and so forth. So then once you cobble all these people, these separate groups together, now you've got 500 people! And that's how I did it and I think that's going to be the way forward, in my opinion.

Banes: It's not a "leather" bar or "this" or "that" nothing is specialized anymore.

Zazo: Well if you were to go and check any of our social media right now, you will not see the word "gay" anywhere. I can't understand why anybody wants to use the word "gay" to promote a business. Entrepreneur magazine in 2012 named gay bars one of the worst 19 businesses to be in in the US. Right on the cover. The Worst 19 Businesses to be in in the US. And gay bars were one of them. You can't keep serving up the old Fairies gay bar from the 70s and 80s and still expect it to resonate with people your age. You guys have different tastes and likes and wants. Are gay people still fun? yes. Are they still fabulous? Yes. Are they great to be around? yes. I mean right now, part of what I did was part of my puzzle is when I took over this place, it had like no customers, after about 2 or 3 years in my running average with female clientele was like 2-5%, now its 22%. It dawned on me, you know straight businesses have done a great job of peeling gays away from us. Why can't we do the same in reverse? So, I mean, that's what I did. That's part of my business model, I actually have included straight people into the mix. So yeah, that's really what the point of the matter is for me anyway. I don't care what kind of people are in this room, it's an enormous structure, it costs a lot of money to run, it has a huge staff. That's it. What I can't figure out is, in the face years I've been here...before here I ran the Hayloft Saloon, before that it was the Diamond Jim's Saloon, before that it was the R & R, wherever I've worked but, in the five years I've been here, I've put five other bars out of business, brought their customers into the fold, bought their merchandise, their lights and stuff are having all throughout this place and whatever. It's a big enough structure to, like this Saturday I have 6 different parties going on this weekend. So, Saturday night there'll be a hipster party at the Eagle, there'll be an African American leather group at the theater, and then over here there'll be Shi Shi La Rue with porn star go-go guys, tell your gay friends about that! You can come too! I think it's a different approach because it used to be you could just have a business, a singular theme if any theme, and just people would like flood in. The problem is that a lot of times, especially with older bar owners, they do not get the concept that just opening the doors doesn't do it anymore. Everybody has Bud Light, you can get a Bud Light anywhere. It doesn't matter if you, you don't have to be gay or straight or whatever to go to the corner bar to have a Bud Light. We already determined if you want to get laid, you go online.

Banes: You've lost both of those things.

Zazo: Right, so like I said, what I do is a few different things. One is just doing a composite of different sections of the community and involving them in one party and then I come up with some big over the top theme. If I'm remembered for everything, I'll be known for I was the "party guy." There's always an event here, always. We're not going anywhere, it's just changing. Millennials have to decide, as gay consumers, first of all: do they still want to consume? And if so, how? In 2016 CNN did a report asking like a thousand or so respondents, asking gay people, of all the respondents, how many times in a calendar year do you step foot in a gay bar? Of the respondents, 8% said that they step foot once in a calendar year. So, it's a good thing and a bad thing. As times change, things fall by the wayside. I don't think all bars will fall by the wayside. I think it will be, like anything else, it will become a special thing. Just like, I'm getting ready at the beginning of the New Year, I'm taking (because we do a lot of sexually themes things like bears, leather, that kind of thing) all of those things are going to be moved next door. So, this space becomes more general in nature, it's a dance club, come hang out. If you want something with a little more kick, you can go explore that next door, but you're certainly not obligated to. That kind of approach. I dint know, I think part of its gay bars' faults. Quite honestly, for so long they had it so good and then when it did start falling off the map, nobody knew how to fix it, so they just kept lowering the prices, lowering the prices, lowering the prices. Well if you lower the prices, you can't afford to do anything and then bars become boring. Nobody wants to hang out there because it sucks. That's a big part of the problem right there, so you know stop making it suck, quit giving away everything for free because that's what pays the bills. Charge people for shit, but if you're gonna charge people, give them something. That's what I'm trying to do. Who knows? Maybe the millennial that takes my job someday will turn it into whatever they want.

Banes: Well thank you very much for talking with me today about this and sharing your history and your knowledge of the community, I really appreciate it and I think it will be really beneficial.

Zazo: I'm telling you talk to Torchy!

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

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