



# We Were Here

*a film by David Weissman*



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# We Were Here

*Director & Producer*  
David Weissman

*Editor & Co-director*  
Bill Weber

*Cast* Ed Wolf, Paul Boneberg, Daniel Goldstein, Guy Clark, Eileen Glutzer

2011 | USA | HDCAM | Stereo | 90 min.

## SYNOPSIS

WE WERE HERE is the first documentary to take a deep and reflective look back at the arrival and impact of AIDS in San Francisco. It explores how the City's inhabitants were affected by, and how they responded to, that calamitous epidemic.

Though a San Francisco-based story, WE WERE HERE extends beyond San Francisco and beyond AIDS itself. It speaks to our capacity as individuals to rise to the occasion, and to the incredible power of a community coming together with love, compassion, and determination.

Filmmakers David Weissman and Bill Weber co-directed the 2001 documentary, *THE COCKETTES*, chronicling San Francisco's legendary theater troupe of hippies and drag queens, 1969 – 1972. WE WERE HERE revisits San Francisco a decade later, as its flourishing gay community is hit with an unimaginable disaster.

## ABOUT THE FILM

WE WERE HERE documents the coming of what was called the "Gay Plague" in the early 1980s. It illuminates the profound personal and community issues raised by the AIDS epidemic as well as the broad political and social upheavals it unleashed. It offers a cathartic validation for the generation that suffered through, and responded to, the onset of AIDS. It opens a window of understanding to those who have only the vaguest notions of what transpired in those years. It provides insight into what society could, and should, offer its citizens in the way of medical care, social services, and community support.

Early in the epidemic, San Francisco's compassionate, multifaceted, and creative response to AIDS became known as "The San Francisco Model". The city's activist and progressive infrastructure that evolved out of the 1960s, combined with San Francisco's highly politicized gay community centered around the Castro Street neighborhood, helped overcome the obstacles of a nation both homophobic and

lacking in universal healthcare. In its suffering, San Francisco mirrors the experience of so many American cities during those years. In its response, The San Francisco Model remains a standard to aspire to in seeking a healthier, more just, more humane society.

2011 will mark 30 years since AIDS descended. Like an unrelenting hurricane, the epidemic roiled San Francisco for two decades and only began granting some reprieve with medical advancements in the late 90s. The death years of AIDS left the City ravaged and exhausted, yet, as in most of the developed world, the worst seems past. Though thousands are still living with HIV, and new infections continue at an alarming rate, the relentless suffering of the 80s and 90s has given way to a kind of calm, and, understandably, a degree of willful forgetfulness. WE WERE HERE utilizes San Francisco's experience with AIDS to open up an overdue conversation both about the history of the epidemic, and the lessons to be learned from it.

WE WERE HERE focuses on 5 individuals – all of who lived in San Francisco prior to the epidemic. Their lives changed in unimaginable ways when their beloved city changed from a hotbed of sexual freedom and social experimentation into the epicenter of a terrible sexually transmitted plague. From their different vantage points as caregivers, activists, researchers, as friends and lovers of the afflicted, and as people with AIDS themselves, the interviewees share stories which are not only intensely personal, but which also illuminate the much larger themes of that era: the political and sexual complexities, the terrible emotional toll, the role of women – particularly lesbians – in caring for and fighting for their gay brothers.

Archival imagery conveys an unusually personal and elegiac sense of San Francisco in the pre-AIDS years, and a window into the compassionate and courageous community response to the suffering and loss that followed. And it also conveys in a very visceral sense the horrors of the disease itself.

As a filmmaker and political activist who arrived in SF in 1976 and was deeply impacted by the epidemic, director David Weissman brings a unique personal understanding to this history.

## Q&A WITH DIRECTOR DAVID WEISSMAN

*You lived through this time in San Francisco as a political activist and were impacted by the epidemic. What eventually inspired you to document the beginnings of the disease?*

I think I understood even in the midst of the epidemic that there would come a time when these stories would need to be told, for the benefit of the tellers as well as the listeners. It never occurred to me that I might be the one to facilitate that process until a younger boyfriend who'd heard me speak of those years many times suggested that I make a film.

*How did you find the interviewees and what were your main criteria in "casting" them?*

It was very organic. Most of them were people I'd known in one way or another over the years. I'd run into them somewhere and in the course of conversation it would occur to me that they might be good for the film. What I was looking for were people who'd lived in San Francisco prior to the coming of AIDS – having a pre-existing relationship with the City – and whose lives were dramatically changed by the epidemic. In terms of character, I was looking people with warmth and a welcoming presence, people who were ready and willing to revisit those years in an emotionally open and inquisitive way.

*Both WE WERE HERE and your 2002 documentary THE COCKETTES focus on the city of San Francisco. What is your relationship with the city and why did you choose it to be a sixth "character" in the film?*

San Francisco is in many ways my muse. The combination of its extraordinary physical beauty and its legacy as a haven for freedom seekers and creative adventurers captured my heart at a very young age. The cultural revolutions represented by the Haight Ashbury neighborhood in the 60s, and the Castro district in the 70s have deeply impacted my sense of identity and purpose. I believe strongly that the type of people who emigrated to San Francisco in the 60s and 70s had a big impact on the humane, creative ways the City responded to the epidemic.

*2011 marks the 30th anniversary of the AIDS epidemic, and despite the ongoing education about the virus, there is still a sense of ignorance about the disease. Do you think this film is important to see for people of all different backgrounds, sexual orientation, religion, and political views?*

I think there are lessons, and inspiration, in this film for everyone. There is a pretty strong likelihood that each of us will be confronted with some unexpected crises in our lives – possibly enormous ones. I think that the individuals in the film are inspiring reminders that we do have inner resources that we can access, and that in creating community we can do beautiful things under terrible circumstances.

*What was your biggest surprise in making the film?*

The biggest surprise was that I made it at all. I had been very ambivalent about making another documentary under any circumstances, certainly not one that would be dealing with such painful subject matter.

*What does the film represent to you personally, and what do you hope people take away from it?*

For me, the essence of the film is embodied in the beautiful nude self-portraits in the film that my friend John Davis took of himself shortly before he died. What AIDS had done to John's body is horrifying and heartbreaking yet the photos are exquisite. The courage those photos embody, the devotion to art and the capacity to find beauty even under such horrible circumstances – I really wanted the film to capture and express that.







Ed Wolf



Daniel Goldstein



Paul Boneberg



▲ Guy Clark  
▼ Eileen Glutzer



## THE CREATIVE TEAM

### **David Weissman** — *producer, director*

Active in San Francisco's indie film scene since the mid-1980s, David is best known as the producer/co-director of the feature-length documentary, *THE COCKETTES*. Recipient of the LA Film Critics Award as Best Documentary of 2002, *THE COCKETTES* premiered at Sundance, was released theatrically, and was licensed for broadcast by The Sundance Channel, Logo, and the BBC. David was the first recipient in 1990 of the Sundance Institute/Mark Silverman Fellowship for New Producers.

### **Bill Weber** — *editor/co-director*

Bill shifted into documentaries after more than 20 years as a high-end editor of groundbreaking commercials and music videos. Beginning with *THE COCKETTES* (co-director/ editor) Bill's documentary credits include the HBO films *LAST LETTERS HOME* (Emmy nominated), *THE FINAL INCH* (Academy Award nominated), and *THE ALZHEIMERS PROJECT*. Bill also edited the 2007 Telluride-premiere documentary-feature *HATS OFF*, and for The History Channel Bill edited *SEX IN 69* and the Emmy-winning *GOLD RUSH*.

### **Marsha Kahm** — *director of photography*

Marsha was the cinematographer on Weissman and Weber's film, *THE COCKETTES*. She has been freelancing as a Director of Photography in the Bay Area for over 25 years. Her shooting, both domestic and international, has included documentary and promotional work for HBO, WNET, KQED, MTV and the Movie Channel, as well as for independent producers. Marsha's documentary work has been shown at the Sundance Film Festival and PBS, garnering awards at the New York, Chicago, Berlin, Toronto Film Festivals and the San Francisco International Film Festival.

### **Holcombe Waller** — *music*

Holcombe is an American composer, singer and performance artist. He has performed across the United States and Europe, both solo and with his ensemble, *The Healers*. In addition to releasing 4 albums, Holcombe has also focused on commissions for multidisciplinary performance, dance scores, collaborations, and film scores. He has recently completed "Into the Dark Unknown," an album of music from his touring theatrical folk concert by the same name.

## CREDITS

*Produced and directed by*  
**David Weissman**

*Editor/ co-director*  
**Bill Weber**

*Director of Photography*  
**Marsha Kahm**

*Location Sound*  
**Lauretta Molitor**

*Music*  
**Holcombe Waller**

*In Order of Appearance:*  
**Ed Wolf**  
**Paul Boneberg**  
**Daniel Goldstein**  
**Guy Clark**  
**Eileen Glutzer**

*Additional Music*  
**Doug Hilsinger**

*Post Production Supervisor*  
**Bill Weber**

*Audio Post-Production*  
**James LeBrecht - Berkeley Sound Artists**

*Color Correction*  
**Gary Coates**

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**Gail Silva**

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**Alex Cherian**  
**San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive**  
**Rebekah Kim**  
**GLBT Historical Society**

*Budget Support*  
**Sophie Harris**

*Editorial Intern*  
**Jared Morgan**

*Humanities Advisors*  
**Jonathan Katz**  
**Paul Boneberg**

*Grantwriting (CCH Grant)*  
**Jeff Jones**

*Legal Services*  
**Fenwick and West**

*Producer's Representative*  
**Jonathan Dana**

*Distribution Consultants*  
**The Film Collaborative**

*Publicity*  
**MPRM Communications**

*Archival Footage*  
**Many thanks to these amazing filmmakers who so powerfully documented the AIDS epidemic in the early years:**

**Fighting for Our Lives: Facing AIDS in San Francisco**  
**Dir: Ellen Seidler**

**Living With AIDS**  
**Dir: Tina DiFelicianantonio**

**Silverlake Life**  
**Dir: Peter Friedman and Tom Joslin**

**Chuck Solomon: Coming of Age**  
**Dir: Marc Huestis and Wendy Dallas**

*Additional Archival Footage*  
**Chuck Roseberg**  
**Ellen Seidler**  
**KQED San Francisco**  
**KPIX San Francisco**  
**Network for Continuing Medical Education and other sources**

*Archival Photos*  
**Crawford Barton**  
**Robert Pruzan**  
**Marie Ueda**  
**Henri Leleu**  
**(all the above courtesy GLBT Historical Society)**

**Greg Day**  
**Marc Geller**  
**Rick Gerharter**  
**Sibylla Herbrich**  
**Jim James**  
**Hans Kwiotek**  
**Dan Nicoletta**  
**Mariella Poli**  
**Alon Reiningger**  
**Rink**  
**Yeli Sanchez**  
**Frank Yamrus**  
**and many unknown photographers**

*Nude self-portraits by John Davis*  
**(courtesy of Terri Davis and J. John Priola)**

*Special Acknowledgement*  
**to Tom Burtch, for digitizing all the obituaries from the Bay Area Reporter**

*Major funding provided by:*  
**California Council for the Humanities/ The Skirball Foundation**  
**Silva Watson Moonwalk Fund**  
**Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation**  
**San Francisco Foundation Bay Area Documentary Fund**  
**The Small Change Foundation**  
**Frameline Completion Fund**  
**Nathan Cummings Foundation**  
**San Francisco Film Society/ Film Arts Foundation**  
**Fenwick and West**  
**Furthur Foundation**

*Individual Donors*  
**Alvin Baum**  
**Cynthia Lovelace Sears & Frank Buxton**  
**Joseph Garrett and Spike Lomibao**  
**Robert Dockendorff**  
**Susan Shaw (in memory of Nicholas Vance Zuckerman)**  
**Darren Star**  
**Rudd Canaday and Gerard Walker**  
**Howard Roffman and Duane Waters**  
**Murray Edelman**  
**Ann Jeffries**  
**Stephen Martin and Douglas Schmidt**  
**Julie Benello**  
**Dennis Chicola and Ron Newman**  
**Karl Christiansen**  
**Michael Ehrenzweig**  
**Elizabeth Katz and LeeAnn Thompson**  
**Tom Kelley**  
**Thomas Lauderdale and Philip Iosca**  
**Thomas Mills**  
**Adam Berman**  
**Adam Blum and Gary Lang**  
**Robert Croonquist**  
**Mark Garrett and Eric Smith**  
**David M. Helbraun and Boone Callaway**  
**Dr. Jay Lalezari**  
**James Mattingly**  
**Michael Ritter and Peter Toscani**  
**Rebecca Westerfield**  
**Ron Zuckerman**  
**and many more!**

*Fundraising Support*  
**The Incomparable Ron Zuckerman**  
**Brenda Larabee**

*Special Thanks*  
**David Cohen,**  
**for suggesting that I make this film**

**Rich Aranow**  
**Al Baum**  
**Linda Blackaby**  
**Christian Bruno**  
**David Boyer**  
**Alex Cherian**  
**Lenore Chinn**  
**Karl Christiansen**  
**Pam David**  
**Rob Epstein**  
**Jeffrey Friedman**  
**Russ Gage**  
**Mark Garrett and Eric Smith**  
**Donnie Gayer**  
**Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine**  
**Daniel Goldstein**  
**Mark Holmes**  
**Sharon Johnson**  
**Lori Joseph**  
**Steve Keith**  
**John Killacky**  
**Brent Kirsten**  
**Vivian Kleiman**  
**Jason Lahman**  
**Brenda Larabee**  
**Gene London**  
**Dawn Logsdon**  
**Jimmy Loyce**  
**Kevin M. Lyons**  
**Chris Martin**  
**Joey Plaster**  
**Stephen Pullis**  
**Kirk Read**  
**Myke Reilly**  
**Clayton Robbins**  
**Danny Sauro**  
**Veronica Selver**  
**Matthew Simmons**  
**Alan Snitow and Deborah Kaufman**  
**Aaron Starr**  
**Peter Stein**  
**Strange de Jim**  
**Sam Tucker and Lewis Nightingale**  
**Michele Turnure-Salleo**  
**Louise Vance**  
**Natalia Vekic**

*Photo Credits*  
**front cover: Robert Pruzan**  
**inside front cover: unknown**  
**inside back cover, top: Rick Gerharter**  
**inside cack cover, bottom: Crawford Barton**  
**back cover: Marie Ueda**

*Press Kit Design*  
**David Averbach, The Film Collaborative**





