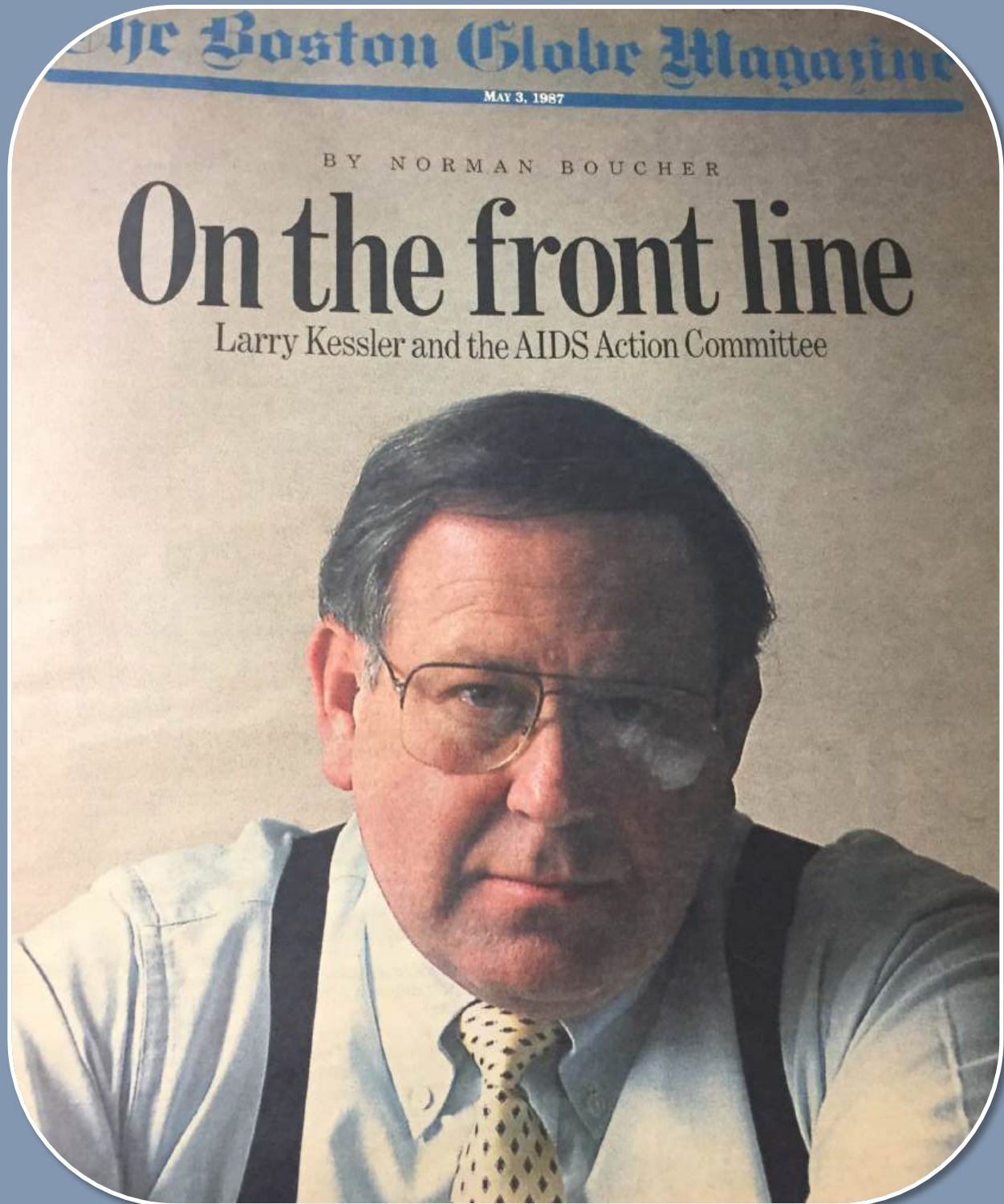


ACTION

LARRY KESSLER AND THE HISTORY
OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IN BOSTON
A DOCUMENTARY



UNIQUE ACCESS

A NOTE FROM PRODUCER NICOLE PASCARELLI O'BRIEN



LARRY KESSLER and I began our friendship in 2017 when we first met at the retirement party of a mutual friend. I knew who Larry was and had admired the work he did at the AIDS Action Committee (AAC). I was young at that time but remembered the chilling 1980's news stories.

Later in the mid-1990's, I volunteered at the Boston Living Center, a community center for people living with HIV and AIDS that Larry led before his retirement.

I asked Larry if we could meet for coffee to chat and that initial meeting sparked a renewed interest in learning more about the people who were part of AAC and the work that was done by Larry and so many others during the early days of the AIDS epidemic in Boston.

Surprisingly, there was not much to be found online, aside from some archival news articles and profiles, certainly nothing substantial enough to satisfy my interest or that seemed adequate to preserve the devastating reality of this period in history.

This discovery compelled me to begin audio recording interviews with people in Larry's orbit about their memories, starting with the people from the Boston Living Center who had connections to AIDS Action.

To date, nearly fifty people have recorded interviews, I've combed through boxes of personal files, and scoured library archives. Yet the best format to share all this history eluded me.

With Larry's recent passing in February 2024 and the reuniting of so many people from his past, the need to memorialize his lifetime of critical work and the legacy he left behind coalesced into this documentary – **ACTION**.

Having secured the blessing of Larry's husband and some of his closest friends, there is excitement for **ACTION** to share the story of a man who's work undoubtedly impacted more people's lives than we'll ever truly know.

Nicole Pascarelli O'Brien

STORY TO BE TOLD

LEADERSHIP • COLLABORATION • COMPASSION • ACTION

It's July 3, 1981 and *The New York Times* publishes a story citing the CDC's June 1981 Morbidity and Mortality Report. The headline, buried on page A20, reads "**Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals**" and tells of eight young "active homosexuals" who died within two years in New York and Los Angeles. Fear was growing in both cities, as well as in Boston, where many gay men knew those who were dying of this relatively unknown disease. **So began the story of AIDS in the United States.**

On November 5, 1982, **Fenway Community Health Center**, known as the expert in healthcare for **Boston's LGBTQ community**, held the first of two Boston forums about "the rising incidence of Kaposi's Sarcoma, Pneumocystis, and other diseases known as AIDS."

Larry Kessler, the small business owner of a stationery store in Boston's Prudential Center, was a board member of Fenway Community Health Center and volunteered to be part of an ad hoc committee set up in the basement of the young health center to address community concerns.

Less than a year after those initial Boston AIDS forums, Kessler closed his business and became the first employee of the first AIDS service organization in New England: **AIDS Action Committee.**

Kessler's background in social justice, anti-Vietnam organizing, volunteer recruitment and fundraising made him the right person at the right time to build the grassroots organization and become a lead organizer of Boston's response to the AIDS epidemic. He mobilized the LGBTQ community, worked with city and state officials, partnered with medical professionals, raised money and awareness and communicated with the public as the epidemic grew.

Boston's response to the AIDS epidemic differed from other major cities and Larry Kessler was a key reason. AIDS Action began with an information hotline and buddy program for people diagnosed with AIDS.

It quickly expanded to transportation and legal services, case management, and education.

At the height of the epidemic, over 200 people were employed by AIDS Action.

As the epidemic grew, more organizations began and AIDS Action partnered with them to provide services. Kessler was also part of an early group that formed the **Boston Mayor's AIDS Task Force** – a group that included medical professionals, public health officials, and city government representatives.

He went on to serve on the first **National Commission on AIDS under President George H.W. Bush**. While ACT UP staged protests and "die-ins" to raise awareness about the lack of resources in other cities and states, in Massachusetts, funding for research and services preceded federal funding – largely due to Kessler and his collaborators.

More than just services, advocacy and education, it was Kessler's steady tenure of over 20 years at the helm of AIDS Action – **the longest serving head of any AIDS service organization in the country** – that helped guide Boston through the AIDS crisis.

Those who worked with Larry have continued his legacy. This documentary is the **social history of the AIDS crisis in Boston**, told through the lens of the man who lived it and fought on the front lines.

**Larry Kessler's story is Boston's story.
It is a story of leadership, collaboration, compassion...
and the power of taking ACTION.**

INTERVIEWS

KEY INTERVIEWS PREVIOUSLY CONDUCTED

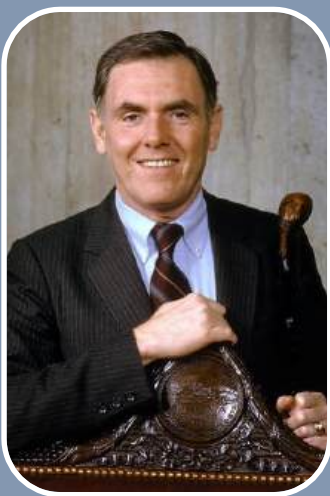


**LARRY
KESSLER**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
AIDS ACTION
COMMITTEE
(1983-2002)

DIRECTOR,
BOSTON LIVING
CENTER
(2013-2015)



**GOVERNOR
MICHAEL
DUKAKIS**
GOVERNOR OF
MASSACHUSETTS
(1975-1979; 1983-1991)



**MAYOR
RAY
FLYNN**
MAYOR OF
BOSTON
(1984-1993)

1. Dr. Larry Alberts (Fenway Community Health, 1977-1984)
2. David Aronstein (AAC Mental Health Services)*
3. John Auerbach (Boston Public Health Commission and Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health)
4. Dr. Gary Bailey (MSW Program Director for the School of Social Work at Simmons University)*
5. Heidi Bright (Healing Our Community Collaborative)
6. Jim Brinning (Education)*
7. Sandra Burchett (Children's Hospital AIDS Program)
8. Leah Camhi and Dan Curley (Boston Living Center)
9. Mary Clark (legal)*
10. Dr. Harold Cox (Associate Dean for Public Health Practice at the Boston University School of Public Health)*
11. Kevin Cranston (Department of Education and Department of Health)
12. Carissa Cunningham (Communications)*
13. Gary Daffin (Multicultural AIDS Coalition and Men of Color Against AIDS)
14. Pat Daoust, (Director of Nursing at the Center for Global Health/ Mass General Hospital)*
15. Sally Deane, Director of Fenway Community Health, 1980-1984)
16. Michael Dowling (The Medicine Wheel)
17. Jeff Epperly (Bay Windows)*
18. Dr. Marshall Forstein (Cambridge Cares About AIDS)
19. Lyn Freundlich (volunteer coordinator)*
20. Dawn Fukuda, (Director of the Office of HIV/AIDS in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health)*
21. Richae Giglio (AIDS Walk)*
22. Robert Greenwald (Clinical Professor of Law, Emeritus at Harvard Law School)*
23. Linda Guinee*
24. Lee Holmes (For the Love of Life)
25. Phil Johnson (Department of Public Health)
26. Ben Klein (GLAD, Senior Director of Litigation and HIV Law)
27. Linette Liebling (Education)*
28. Rhonda Linde (staff member of Fenway Health, 1980-2016)
29. Ann Maguire (Mayor Flynn's LGBTQ advisor)*
30. Julie Marston (Community Research Initiative)
31. Melba Martinez (Latino Health Institute)*
32. Dr. Ken Mayer, Medical Research Director and co-chair of the Fenway Institute (1980-present)
33. Bonnie McFarlane (Positive Directions)
34. Brian McNaught (Mayor Kevin White's LGBT liaison, 1982-1984)
35. Tom McNaught (Communications)*
36. Dale Orlando (Executive Director of Fenway Community Health 1986-1990) passed away February 2022
37. Liz Page (AIDS Action Committee, organizer of the first five Boston AIDS walks)*
38. Kristen Porter (AIDS Care Project)
39. Gary Sandison (Mayor Menino's LGBTQ and AIDS advisor)
40. Cheryl Schaffer (Operations)*
41. Jonathan Scott (Executive Director, Victory Programs, 1985-2019)
42. Annie Silvia (Department of Public Health)*
43. Ken Smith (Hotline)*
44. Jon Vincent (HIV.gov)*
45. Chris Viveiros (Communications)*
46. David Waters (Executive Director, Community Servings, 1989-present)

* Denotes staff member of AIDS Action Committee

FILMMAKERS

FOLLOWING THE RECENT COMPLETION OF THE NARRATIVE FEATURE FILM *ALL SAINTS DAY*, WE'RE PLEASED TO BE REUNITING FOR THIS DOCUMENTARY



NICOLE PASCARELLI O'BRIEN [PRODUCER]

has worked for two decades in leadership roles in operations, education and theatre arts program administration. She earned a New England Emmy® nomination for Producing during her stint in television production before shifting to education full-time and also oversaw the launch of the acclaimed Disney Musicals in Schools program into the Boston Public Schools.



MATT AARON KRINSKY [DIRECTOR/PRODUCER]

is a director, producer, and writer who has seamlessly shifted between stage, screen, and live event projects since founding Mogul Productions in 2002. He's produced and directed multiple short films, world premiere plays and staged readings, including one Off-Broadway. He previously worked as a production assistant at Quentin Tarantino's company, in corporate communications for The Walt Disney Company, and is proud to have worked as a Teaching Artist with the Disney Musicals in Schools program. He also helped to produce the 29th AIDS Walk Los Angeles in 2013. Through Mogul Productions, Matt is developing a diverse slate of feature film, television, animation, documentary, and stage projects.



SAM KRUEGER [DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY]

is an Emmy® Award-winning filmmaker who specializes in cinematography. Sam loves all aspects of bringing stories to the screen with a fondness for light, captivating images, epic framing, textures, and layers. Sam won an Emmy® as the Cinematographer and Editor for the PBS Documentary, *Orchard House: Home of Little Women*. Sam also works in various crew positions on many notable Hollywood productions.

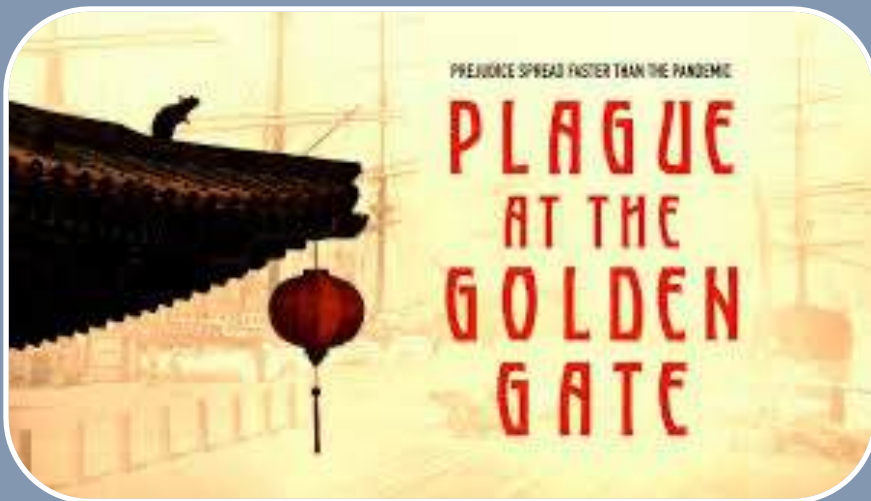
COMPARABLES

LIKE THE COMPARABLE DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS BELOW, **ACTION** BRINGS TO LIFE THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF LARRY KESSLER AND BOSTON'S GROUND-BREAKING AIDS ACTION COMMITTEE



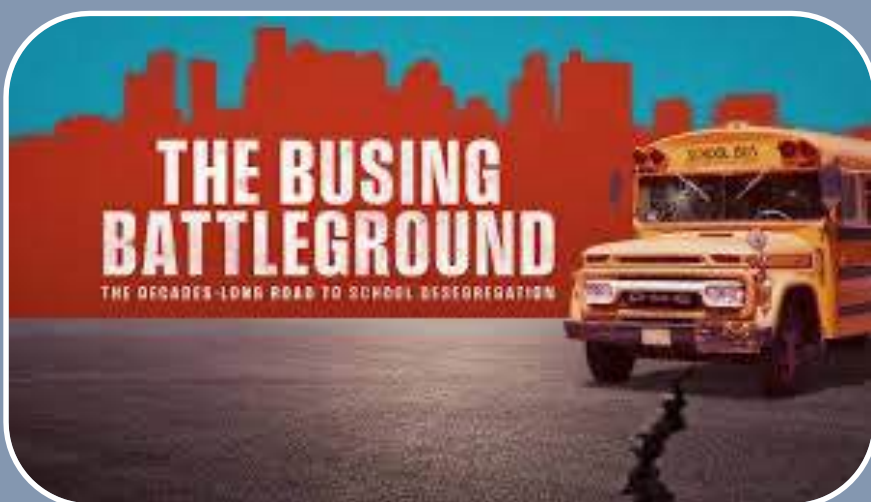
THE SUN QUEEN

Like Larry Kessler, *The Sun Queen* tells the story of an extraordinary, but lesser-known figure, who had a historical relevance and significant impact during their life.



PLAGUE AT THE GOLDEN GATE

In the same way that the LGBTQ+ community needed to combat hate and fear amidst an epidemic, *Plague at the Golden Gate* chronicles the 1900 outbreak of the deadly bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatown.



THE BUSING BATTLEGROUND

As *The Busing Battleground* uses a Boston-based historical incident to address the decades-long struggle to end school segregation, so too does the Boston-centric AIDS Action Committee reflect the nationwide fight for support at the outset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

MULTI-MEDIA

STORYTELLING ACROSS PLATFORMS & FORMATS

Over 50 hours of recordings
(with transcripts) already exist for
supplemental audio storytelling
via a podcast



PODCAST

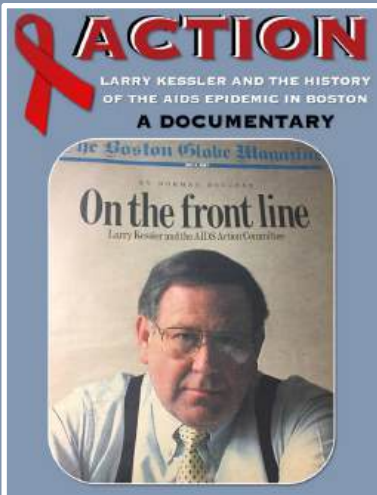
Partnership
opportunities with
the future Boston
LGBTQ+ Museum
of Art, History &
Culture and The
History Project



DOCUMENTARY



LGBTQ+ HISTORY



EDUCATION

Subject matter lends
itself to curriculum for
Grades 6-12 Social
Studies & Civics classes
and Collegiate courses



CONTACT

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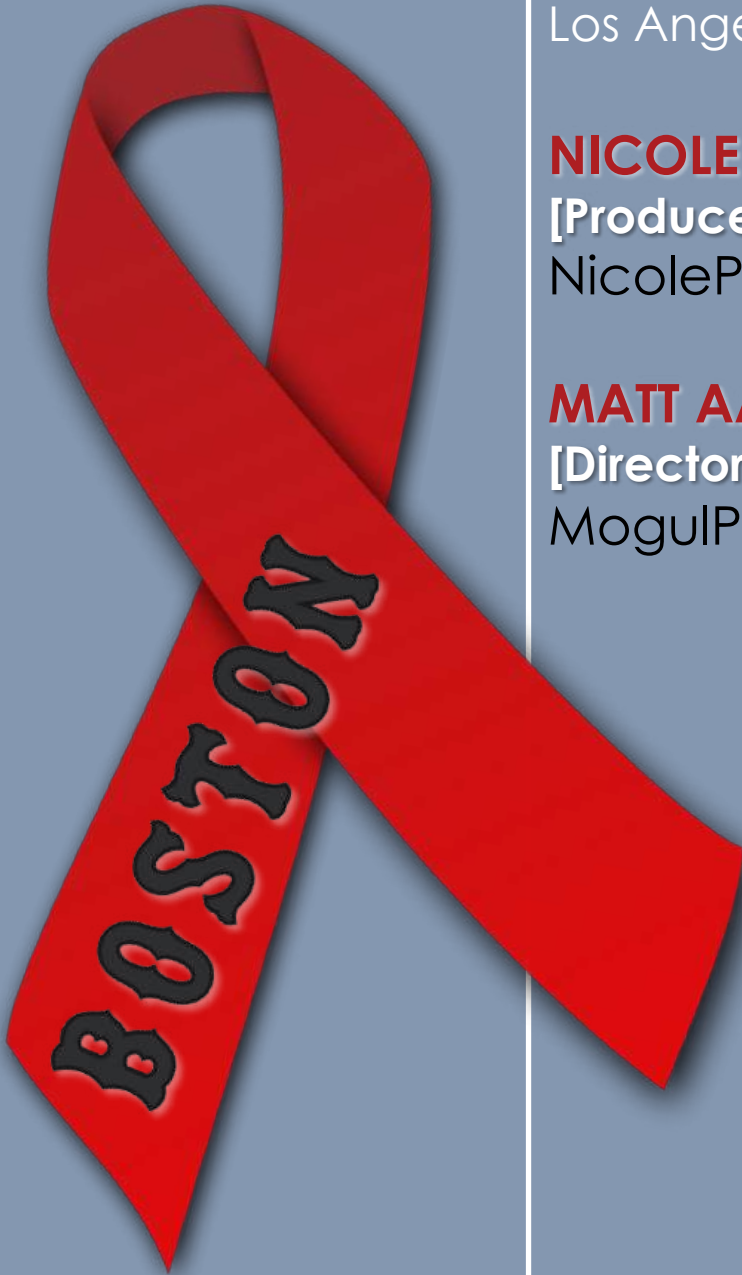
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