

INTERVIEW WITH JASON & ROBERTA MACINNIS – MAY, 1995

Jason (born December 1956 in Denver, CO) and Roberta (born April 1958 in Fairbanks, AK) were Dave's landlords at his garage apartment at 1406 Kipling from the late 1980's until Dave and Scott moved to the Heights in late 1993. The Macinnis'es lived in the "big house" on the property, and rented out the two apartments over the garage.

Roberta): We were actually the big bad landlords. At the time we were advertising for the apartment we had a sign in the yard I think. Jason was actually the first one to meet Dave, when he showed up in the fall of '87 to rent our apartment. He said he might be coming back. So he returned and he knocked on the door and he said, "Well, I'd really like it but I have to get my mover over here ... " And I thought, "Mover?", and he said, "My piano mover." So I figured that would be the end of that, because it's two garage apartments next door to each other on top of a garage. You go up a real narrow stairway and then make a left hand turn into Dave's apartment. I thought, "There's no way there's a piano going in there", but he had his mover come over and he said it would fit and they got the piano in so ... I say that's why he stayed so long; once he got that piano in he could never get it out. This was down in Montrose.

We're pretty casual landlords, and Dave was the first person who came along who we liked. It's funny; you get a real sense of people just from talking to them for five minutes. Sometimes that will tell you, "No, I don't want this person living in my backyard," and other times you say, "Oh yeah, he would be fine." Dave struck me immediately as a nice guy. He was very funny. He owned more tuxedos than anybody we ever knew, because at the time he was doing his lounge act down at the Four Seasons downtown. One Christmas my mother was in, and we took her down there so we could say we saw Dave *when*. He was doing solo piano down there. But he was always just a real upbeat, friendly guy. Over the years Dave became a friend. He was just that kind of guy. When you saw him you didn't ever say, "Hi Dave", and continue on your way, unless he's already in the car and moving, in which case you're just trying to get out of the way. He was kind of a free-form driver. Like jazz improvisation, he drove the same way. We would always meet and talk in the driveway. Jason would run back to our garage to get a tool and he'd come back thirty five minutes later, and I'd say, "Where've you been?", and he'd say, "Talking to Dave." He was that kind of person.

Jason): Once Dave started talking, you were there for a while!

Roberta): Especially on the telephone. He would call us. We lived in front of his apartment, and he would call us and tell us he was coming down. He was always borrowing coffee in the morning. He would call us first to see if we had any before walking down the stairs. This was long before he was ill. It was just a phone thing I think.

Jason): He *would* make his own coffee. He did go that far.

Roberta): We would leave the keys with him when we went out of town, and he would just come in and borrow food as well. We'd always tell him, "Help yourself", and sure enough he would. Kind of a jazz musician thing. It was always just a day in, day out, hanging out on the porch, talking with your neighbor type thing.

Jason): I'll always remember Dave with that futon. He used to lay that futon out. The area between the house and the apartments was concrete. It was all paved, sort of a general parking area, and Dave used to drag this old futon he kept in

the garage out and lay it out on the concrete. He'd get out there with his music and his sunglasses and sunbathe on this futon. It was pretty funny actually.

Roberta): In Houston at 95 degrees a futon's not the coolest thing to be out there baking on.

Now I'll be gracious and say that as an artist type, Dave's apartment was always a wreck. Not necessarily dirty, just cluttered. He attracted stuff. He had tapes stacked up and sheet music and tuxedos and clothing.

Jason): I think he did laundry sort of on an annual basis.

Roberta): Maybe once a year he would decide, "I can't live with it this way anymore...", because he was spending too much time finding things. So he would clean out, and we'd see all these things come flying out the windows, flying down the stairs, and it would be clean for a week or so. And then it would be pretty much the same way as it was before. We had this Toyota Tercel that I had been back-ended in, and Jason had front-ended someone in, and we sold it to Dave. And he did the same thing with his car. It was all rusted. I had done lipstick on it one time for Valentine's Day for my husband, and it said, "I love my wife". Things like that. And Jason didn't rub it off right away, so it still had all these vague Valentine hearts all over it. So Dave took it over. It was already a junker, and he took it to new levels, where the McDonalds bags and the sheet music and the music equipment on the front floor was even with the seat, so that if you were able to sit in that seat your legs would stick straight out.

Jason): He turned it into a one-seater.

Roberta): After Scott came along things got better.

Jason): Scott improved things dramatically because Scott was always cleaning up his place for him.

Roberta): We joked that after he died we said, "Well, did you have to die to get out of cleaning the garage?" Because we still have a garage full of his stuff; old sheet music, equipment, clothes

Jason): It was easier for him to buy clothes, I think, than to wash them.

Roberta): I remember him always running off to the one-hour cleaners to get a tuxedo to wear to a gig that night.

Jason): And he always had like six tuxedos. He had more tuxedos than anyone I know.

Roberta): The two apartments over the garage are very close quarters. The front doors are just four feet apart. They face each other. And we've had some bad tenants: just noisy, up all hours, selling drugs, with all these cars coming and going ... So Dave finally took over the job of renting the other apartment for us, and we stopped advertising and everything. When it would become open he'd say, "I'll find someone for you." He actually rented it for a while and used it as a little rehearsal hall when he was putting a trio together. But we went through a series of bad tenants. One who was a writer was taking creative writing at the University of Houston in their masters program and she was writing surfing novels. She'd been a surfer for a couple of years. She and Dave got along like a cat and a dog. He couldn't imagine that he was really a professional musician. She thought he was kind of a band/garage guy who just played his music and practiced his piano to

annoy *her*, the true artist who needed silence to create. They worked out a system, or I think Jason actually worked out a system wherein she would tie a blue stocking on her doorknob whenever she was writing, so he would know not to play his music. But it got to the point where we found out that she was tying the blue stocking on the door when she was baking chicken. She just did not like jazz.

Eventually they had it out in the garage one night. They would come and each try and bribe us: Mary would say, "I don't know how long Dave's been here, but I would stay a long time if I had a lease, if you could get him to move ... " And Dave would come along and say, "I don't know how long she's going to be in there. I can't take much more of this ... " Mary finally moved out. Dave moved out at the end of '93. We moved into the house that we now live in the week before Christmas, and he and Scott moved out the week after Christmas.

Jason): Jumper was a cat who came with the house. When we bought the house-it was really funny-we were talking to the guy who owned the house before us, and near the end of the negotiations he says, "Oh, by the way, the cat stays. She's been here a long time and she's not moving." We said, "That's fine, because we like cats." So she essentially pre-dated all of us, and is still there of course, living at the property as an outdoor cat. Just over time she started to gravitate toward Dave. We all fed her, but he started feeding her more than we did, and after a while she sort of became his cat.

Roberta): She did live indoors for a while.

Jason): He would let her indoors sometimes.

Roberta): She was kind of a--still is--a bitchy little cat, so the fact that she took to somebody at all said a lot. She had an attitude. She didn't like to be held, at least by anybody else. We had a cat of our own, and they would be forever battling each other. She would be on Dave's car, and he would be driving down the driveway and she wouldn't get off.

Jason): He'd get all the way to the street, and she'd still be sitting there. Most cats will jump right off.

Roberta): She'd sit there on the hood looking at you as if to say, "Where are you taking my bed?"

Jason): At one point we hadn't been seeing much of Dave, and he hadn't payed the rent for like four or five months. Of course by that time Dave was a friend so we didn't really push the rent thing very much. He came down to talk to me one evening. I didn't know what about; I assumed it was about the rent. I assumed he was having financial problems and I was going to tell him not to worry about it. We had a glass of wine, and I was standing up, and he told me that he was HIV+, and I sat down. It was very much of a shock. I was completely flabbergasted. I think this was when he first started getting ill. That was why he told us, I think. This was in winter, and I know it was before he went into the hospital and all. Dave basically explained his philosophy about the whole thing, which at that point was that he felt that at least to a great extent he had a certain control over how his life was going to be and how long it was going to be. He was taking a very pro-active attitude about the whole thing. And of course in a discussion like that with Dave we ended up discussing politics and religion.

Roberta): He was never much of an activist. I think a lot of people, when they get a disease--whatever it is--they will start fighting for it and representing it, but Dave very much focused on himself. I'm not saying that in a negative way. Although I

do remember there was some ultra-conservative type person passing out flyers saying that AIDS was a scourge and God's wrath, so Dave started a campaign flurry that went on for two or three days and he faxed all these people and had people fax things and do all this stuff. That upset him. He ended up inundating the source of these flyers somewhere in Kansas with letters and things.

Jason): But that was unusual, in general. I don't think Dave ever thought of himself as part of a great plague or anything. This was very much a personal thing for him. In fact for a long time he was very careful even, when we knew him, he would not tell a lot of people he was gay because he had faced incidents professionally which were negative when people found out he was gay. And then to be a gay musician with *AIDS*. "

Roberta): This may sound odd because the two situations are so totally different, but I was pregnant when we were still living there together on Kipling, and Dave was pretty ill oftentimes. And we would often sit there and talk for hours on the phone about the same thing, because I was feeling weak or sick, or about just how the medical community would treat you. How I would be treated as if I were sick, but I wasn't; I was pregnant and just being tired... He'd say, "I have to go rest now", and I'd say, "Yeah, I have to go rest too." Which is actually very sad when you think of it: I was making a life, and he was losing his. But there were a lot of similarities there surprisingly. Dave never really complained much. He would always say, "Yeah, I was in the hospital", or "I'm getting these shots", or "I'm having this problem", or things like that.

We used to go to brunches with Scott and him. And one time we were going to have a big party together, and he was going to play and invite a bunch of his friends and have a big jam. One thing led to another, and I think he got a gig two days before. We had invited all our friends, and he had invited 3/4 of his, and I said, "Well Dave, you can get on the phone and try and tell everybody we're not going to do it, but we're just going to go forward with it." So a lot of Dave's friends showed up on our porch looking for Dave. He eventually did make a star appearance, like he did at our garage sale after we all moved ... We were going to have a garage sale because we had all this junk. Scott and I had all this stuff. And Dave says, "Yeah, let's do a garage sale. Do a garage sale." Finally we just set a date and drug everything out there. And no Dave... No Dave.... No Dave... Hours went by. Finally Dave shows up, looks around with his hands on his hips: "How much of this stuff did you sell? How much money have we made?"

Jason): It was basically me and Scott. Scott and I did the garage sale.

Roberta): Yeah. He negotiated a couple of things. Scott was selling--at that point--everything for a dollar. "You want this gas grill? It's a dollar." Dave bartered a couple of things and then just left again. He couldn't be bothered with such details.

When Dave moved in to the apartment he took the stove out. He just completely removed the stove from the apartment because he never cooked. Couldn't be bothered with it, and put in a little microwave, I think. Kind of just customized it to his needs.

I do miss that. I used to go to work afternoons and evenings so I'd be home during the day when Dave was home. I would always get jazz in my shower in the morning... Jazz with my coffee... And I'd always think it was a record playing. The first time we went and saw him at the Four Seasons we said, "Oh, this is going to be so embarrassing ... " We just had no idea how good he was.

Jason): You know how you know somebody but you don't know certain aspects of them? I knew Dave could play the piano but I didn't know him that way. We'd known him a couple of months, and he was playing down at the Four Seasons, back when he was doing his lounge act thing. We went down to see him, and he sat down at the piano, and I just got this rush of fear that... "No Dave, don't! You don't know how to play the piano ..." And of course he did, superbly. But we sort of knew Dave independent of his music. His music was something else.

Roberta): Although he did drag us into it. We're certainly very familiar with it now. You just can't be around him and not be exposed to jazz. I kind of have him to thank for that. In fact I remember I had a friend in town from San Francisco--it was right after the first time Dave had gotten out of the hospital and he was still playing very regularly at Cezanne--and my friend is a jazz lover. We had just really found out that Dave was sick and it was still very much on our minds; "How are we going to deal with this and live with this?" But I took my friend to hear him play. And as someone who really never followed jazz and didn't appreciate it that much, that night--and maybe it was because he'd just gotten out of the hospital--he just took off; I can't even remember what song it was--and started free-forming, improvising, and the whole room went with him. I've never seen anything like that, in any kind of music. It was like going off into a starry path in the sky, and taking you around, and then bringing everybody back down and gently plopping them back in the room. It was just amazing. My friend is still talking about it!

But Dave could just submerge himself in the music. There's a time he told me he got so involved--he'd get totally unselfconscious of what was physically going on, and his jaw would go slack--he leaned his head way over the keyboard down close to the keys and had his head to the side, and he actually drooled onto the piano keys. He said he looked down and saw the spittle and was sort of trying to get it off the keys without damaging his art. It was probably one of the most embarrassing moments he'd ever had while performing. Of course when Dave told it, it was hysterical.

We went to his memorial service and I said to Jason, "Here was somebody who died more than destitute because he had a lot of financial problems with the big bad IRS and everything, but he was true to his art and pushed himself to that and was just Dave. And there were, I don't know, how many hundreds of people there. It was just very moving to see that. Even people who didn't know him all that well, even people who met him casually would feel attracted to him.

Jason): Dave would have appreciated it. It was standing room only.

The last time we saw him was about a week before he passed. It was the second to last time he was in the hospital, just before he went home. We talked to him for a long time--a couple of hours--about how he was dealing with the situation, how he felt about it. He had had a powerful spiritual experience, and we spent a lot of time talking about that. It wasn't entirely coherent because some of the drugs he was on were fairly powerful, and ...

Roberta): He would skip around a lot.

Jason): Conversation with Dave was not linear...

Roberta): Even without the drugs.

Jason): He had had a powerful experience. He described it as a spiritual experience, and because of it he felt very much at peace. He was clear about saying that he didn't necessarily think that he was going to die right away but that if he did, that was OK. Whatever would happen was OK. Dave was a very driven person. He always had a list of like eight million things. He was one of these people who was always *going*, and all of that was gone. He felt that he didn't have a bunch of stuff left that he needed to do.

Roberta): He had let go of some things. He said, "You know, I can't drive anymore. That part of my life is over. I accept that."

Jason): He'd given up having to worry about a lot of things, I think. For Dave, he seemed very peaceful.

Roberta): We saw him the Sunday after the Thursday or Friday when Rick Mitchell read his speech about Dave at the Houston Music Awards. Dave said, "I have full-blown AIDS. This may sound crazy,"--and we agreed that it did--"but I wouldn't trade this experience for anything in the world." Because he got to hear some of these things that people felt toward him and about his music, and he was very grateful for that.

Jason): Even with that I was still completely shocked because he looked good to me. I mean he had AIDS and he was in the hospital and despite the medications he seemed relatively healthy actually. So I was kind of shocked when he died.

Roberta): We fully expected to see him again when we went to the hospital that day.

Jason): We figured we'd see him at brunch.

Roberta): I remember once when our son was about four or five months old we were just desperate for a baby sitter one day. We had gone through all of our friends and no one was available, so we just pleaded with Dave one night. Actually it was supposed to be Dave and Scott, but Scott somehow managed to just become very scarce. And Dave being the sport he was, said, "Sure, I'll do it", and he also dragged Linda into doing it. So they were doing pretty good. The baby was a little bit sick and had a little diaper accident, so Linda was dealing with that. Dave went upstairs to his apartment and hid basically, and the baby was crying and crying and crying. So they said, "Well, let's give it a bottle", and they're trying to give it the bottle, and the baby's crying, crying ... This went on for forty five minutes, and they finally discovered that there are these little plastic disks that you put inside the nipple and the bottle to keep it from leaking when you're not using it, and they had neglected to take that out. So basically what they were doing was giving the baby the bottle, but the baby couldn't get any of the milk out. This incident so traumatized those two that they were still talking about it months later. I mean Linda was still talking about it at his eulogy! I guess it was quite an evening. We came home and the baby was sound asleep, but they were just sort of sitting back on the couch, hair askew This was only a five month old baby. He couldn't even really crawl at the time. But he survived. Everybody survived that. Dave made an excellent babysitter too. He would tackle anything.

He was very philosophical. It was funny because there's that little show on TV, *The Dinosaur Things*, and one of the baby dinosaurs has a mother--"Mama"--and then the daddy is "Not the Mama." Dave always thought that was really funny--Not the Mama--and I was always telling Dave about this show. And so he'd seen this little funky dinosaur character at a drugstore, a Walgreens or an Eckert, and presented it to us; this little baby dinosaur in a diaper. I had just found out four

days before that I was pregnant. We hadn't even told anybody yet, and Dave said, "Here Jason, you can be Not the Mama..." The timing was rather odd. So when we told him finally that I was pregnant, he says, "Ohhhh, you two are going to make *interesting* parents ...". And I thought, "Well, you're one to be talking..."

We're actually in, we made one of the early liner notes (*First Flight*), along with three hundred of his other closest friends ... The recording with *Jumpers Way* on it.

Oh, he passed a defensive driving course. I don't know how that ended up in our papers, but we have some little "Safe Driving Certificate" of his that he got from some school up in North Houston, which is just really funny, because he drove like a maniac.

Jason): He was a maniac; Dave was probably the worst driver I've ever seen.

Roberta): In fact we would see Scott--when he finally moved in--we would see Scott backing up with this disgusted look on his face. "Where you goin' Scott?" "Oh, to get Dave. He's out of gas again..."

Jason): He drove that little Tercel which didn't use any gas and he was always running out of gas. He couldn't be bothered to put gas in.

Roberta): Or do any maintenance.

Jason): My dear mother was in town one time and she's a grocery store fanatic. She's retired. She goes every day. Since we weren't around she made Dave take her to the grocery store. So even she has firsthand experiences. I think she wasn't so much afraid of his driving as the piles of junk in the car.

Roberta): She was afraid of the roaches, which are always a problem in Houston. As far as his driving, I actually spotted Dave at his worst. I was out in my own car and I spotted him coming from Cafe Express, this kind of upscale place. He was coming, and I was going, and it was on a back road. It was a two lane road, and he was passing on the left--this was on a city block--honking his horn at this blond woman in a Mercedes who was just going probably twenty miles an hour too slow for him, meaning about forty five. Then he nearly took me out. I sort of waved at him, and he was sort of waving as he went flying by...

Jason): Driving as an existential experience. He always wanted to be *there*. That was Dave.

Roberta): Well, he always needed to be there. He was forever. ..

Jason): Yeah, he was always late.

Roberta): He would stop on the porch and he'd say, "Well, I'm supposed to be there ... ", and stand there for a minute. And I'd say, "Is everything OK?" He'd say, "Yeah, it's just such a nice day, I just come out here and enjoy the rays..." Then he'd get in his car and leave. He was probably an hour and a half late by that point but he would just take that moment to do that.

Jason): Dave wanted a doorbell so people could ring his door. There were stairs leading up to the two apartments, and we ended up putting up a metal gate down at the bottom just for security. But once that was there, you couldn't really knock on the door because you couldn't just go upstairs, so Dave wanted a doorbell. I said, "OK, I'll put one in", but being a typical landlord I put it off. So Dave and Scott drilled a hole in the floor and ran a string downstairs and then tied it to a little bell. You could pull the string and ring a little bell in the apartment, and they'd go down and answer the door.

Of course Dave had phone lines going all over the place. The apartment is probably about five hundred square feet, and he probably had six phone jacks in that place! The whole apartment's the size of a modern living room, and he had six phone jacks. Pretty amazing. The rent at the apartment was very reasonable. I never raised the rent on him; it was always the same. Plus, near the end he wasn't really paying the rent. We made it real clear to him. We sat down and talked to him once and said, "You know, the rent should be the last thing you pay." It did not make a big difference to us, and it may have made a difference to him.

We definitely thought of him as a good friend. It's funny. I don't really remember how that happened because I always had this rule that you don't become friends with your tenants and I was always pretty good about that, except for Dave. Dave was special and he ended up living at that address almost as long as we did.

Dave affected people. He definitely stood out. You know you meet a lot of people in your life, and I don't know what it was, but he had something. He was so dynamic. And very intelligent, but it was more than that. He had this tremendous spirit. It's hard to come up with the word ... Life force or something. That's one of the reasons I still can't believe he's dead, to be honest. He was always so alive. He always seemed to be *living* when you met him, if you know what I mean. So many people go through life and they don't even seem to be aware of what they're doing, really alive. And that was one thing about Dave; he was always *alive*.